

Peet, Richard (1991) *Global Capitalism. Theories of Societal Development*. New York, Routledge, 208 p. (ISBN 0-415-01315-1)

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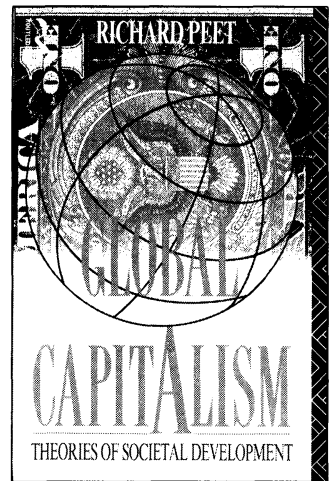
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With state socialism now dead, if not quite buried, the need to articulate strategies of societal development that provide an alternative to the capitalism "new world order" is more urgent than ever. This challenge will stretch the minds and hearts of all who maintain a vision, whatever its source, of societies free from alienation and it will necessarily involve them in a reflective reevaluation of the contribution of marxism to that project. This, in principle, is the thrust of Peet's introductory textbook. It sets out his defence of the continuing "centrality of structural marxism to theories of global development", taking account of feminist, environmental and other critiques of this position. The publisher claims that it offers "complex material in an understandable form" (p. i).

Unfortunately, the book fails to live up to these ambitions either in content or style. The first four chapters get it off to a good start, providing crisp and clear reviews of the alternative theoretical thrusts of environmental determinism, modernization theory and dependency theory. Where Peet should shine, reviewing historical materialism in chapter 5, he is likely to lose the novice reader. He provides a terminologically dense yet frequently unconvincingly cryptic treatment of material which should have been elaborated at considerably greater length if it is, indeed, the core of his thesis. The following three chapters, focusing on pre-capitalist social formations and on the origins and global expansion of capitalism, are intended to make concrete the theoretical power of the articulation of modes of production as a basis for interpreting societal development.

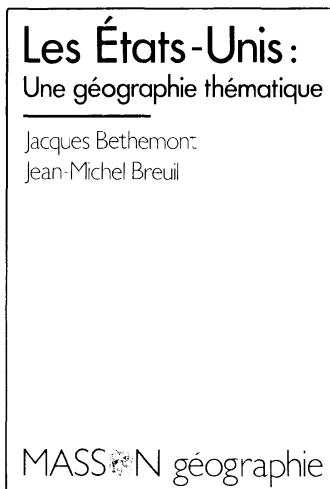
The final two chapters and a brief epilogue constitute a fascinating display of intellectual gymnastics! Peet accepts (p. 145) the accuracy of the dependency school thesis of the development of underdevelopment yet, three pages later, he embraces Warren's analysis of the progressive character of capitalism industrialization, only to dismiss it as an "optimistic generalization" on page 158! Indeed, chapter 9 is suffused with an ambiguous and ambivalent assessment of the emergence of the NICs and its implications for a socialist model of industrialization. Students will gain n° clearer sense of Peet's preferred

development strategy from his synopsis of Thomas (1974), which better exemplifies a vacuously idealist than a materialist structural marxism.

In his final chapter, Peet responds to critiques made of marxist development theory in recent years by writers such as Booth and Corbridge. Much of his argument, however, is shaped by a domestic marxian squabble with Hindess and Hirst which, however justifiable, is totally counterproductive in this context if *Global Capitalism* is really intended as an introductory textbook. Then, as if student readers are not confused enough already, the author ends his defense and restatement of the merits of structural marxism with an epilogue which extols the virtues of a freely chosen altruistic ethic as the true basis for development. This is all very laudable, but it is not intellectually coherent!

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BETHEMONT, Jacques et BREUIL, Jean-Michel (1991) *Les États-Unis: une géographie thématique*. Paris, Masson (Coll. «Géographie»), 272 p. (ISBN 2-225-82320-0)



Deux ans après la livraison d'une géographie régionale des États-Unis, J. Bethemont et J.-M. Breuil proposent une géographie thématique: un livre jumeau qui invite à une lecture croisée facilitée par un astucieux système de renvois. Le minutieux découpage régional trouve ici un solide complément, d'autant plus adéquat qu'il procède d'une même inspiration.

Le livre s'ouvre sur les potentialités et les pratiques d'un espace abondamment et souvent inconsidérément sollicité. La population est ensuite mise en scène avant que soient analysées «démographie, crise et vitalité» des villes. Un intéressant chapitre sur théorie et pratique du capitalisme à l'américaine précède l'examen des différents secteurs de l'économie des États-Unis, qui est située face au monde extérieur dans la dernière partie.