



# Positivist Republic: Auguste Comte and the Reconstruction of American Liberalism, 1865-1920

*Gillis Harp*

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The reconstruction of American liberalism is of enduring interest to historians. Gillis Harp gives us a truly different way of looking at it. The advantage of his interpretation is that it explains, better than earlier studies, the derivation of certain characteristics of Progressive thought such as social solidarity, state activism, professional elitism, and a dedication to the service of humanity.---Charles D. Cashdollar, author of *The Transformation of Theology, 1830-1930: Positivism and Protestant Thought in Britain and America*"Harp's study supplies a missing chapter in American intellectual history, and one essential to the emergence of twentieth-century liberalism. He identifies one wing of the intellectual ferment of the 1870s and 1880s, deriving from Auguste Comte, which must be understood in order to fully grasp the character of Ward's, Bellamy's, and later Progressive thought. This book bears the best marks of good intellectual history. It is important, exciting, and well-written."---R. Jeffrey Lustig, author of *Corporate Liberalism*Historians have long recognized the influence of Darwinism and German idealism on late Victorian intellectual discourse. In *The Positivist Republic*, Gillis Harp argues that, in America, Auguste Comte's positivism constituted another formative influence-one that has not been fully appreciated. In fact, according to Harp, Comtean positivism was critical to the transformation of Anglo-American social and political thought during the last third of the nineteenth century. Harp identifies a thread of Comtean ideas running through the writings of Lester F. Ward, Edward Bellamy, Herbert Croly, and several lesser-known individuals, all of whom played a significant role in Gilded Age and Progressive reform. By highlighting this Comtean thread, Harp furnishes a fuller, more complex picture of the fabric of American political thought in this key transitional period and enhances our understanding of the emergence of modern, corpor

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