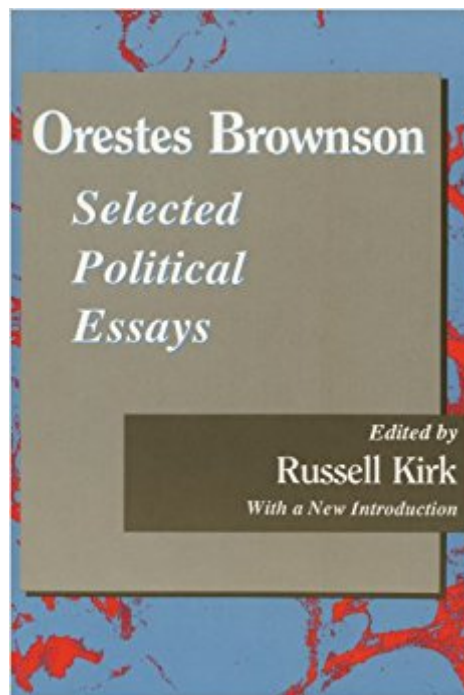




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Orestes Brownson : Selected Political Essays (Library Of Conservative Thought)



Synopsis

Born in Vermont while Thomas Jefferson was president, and dying in Detroit while Rutherford B. Hayes was president, Orestes Brownson knew practically everybody and wrote about practically everything in the nineteenth century. Called by some a "Marxist before Marx," he travelled from various forms of radicalism and religion to political conservatism and religious orthodoxy. His socialist roots made him a formidable adversary to Marxist thought in his maturity. In his first principles, Brownson came to stand at the opposite pole from Ralph Waldo Emerson; among his friends was John C. Calhoun. He set himself against both Abraham Lincoln and Jefferson Davis, arguing that authority and liberty both are necessary for a commonwealth. Brownson maintained that pure democracy and social equality are death to civilization and liberty; that the moral principles taught by the Church deny the rectitude of leveling egalitarianism; and that those who would preserve the justice and freedom of the American Republic must resist the degradation of the democratic dogma. With force and penetrating intellect, Brownson reminded Americans that they must respect the wisdom of traditional values. By calling for restraints on American materialism and individualism, he did not make himself popular in his time. But as Russell Kirk makes clear in his new introduction, Brownson's ideas ' have had continuing influence, just as his thought has reentered American political discourse. Publication of his essays as part of the Library of Conservative Thought is particularly timely.

Book Information

Series: Zoryan Institute Survivors' Memoirs

Paperback: 230 pages

Publisher: Routledge; 1 edition (February 1, 1990)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 0887388256

ISBN-13: 978-0887388255

Product Dimensions: 6.1 x 0.5 x 9 inches

Shipping Weight: 8.8 ounces (View shipping rates and policies)

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“Brownson’s main thesis is that society must live by religious values. There are eternal laws to which we must be obedient as individuals and governments, he said, and, for this reason, was opposed to the democratic principle asserted in 1776 that ‘Governments derive their just powers from the assent of the governed.’ This asserts the purely human origin of government and rejects all law enjoined by any authority above the people. Government is reduced to conventionalism and becomes a government of force where might makes right. The separation of religion from progress in society has sapped the foundations of society by taking from law its sacredness. Ultimately, I believe Brownson would say, the separation of religion from the foundation of society destroys law.” • “Angus MacDonald, St. Croix Review

Russell Kirk (1918–1994) was the author of twenty-nine books in several fields. He was the founding editor of Transaction’s Library of Conservative Thought series. • Russell Kirk (1918–1994) was the author of twenty-nine books in several fields. He was the founding editor of Transaction’s Library of Conservative Thought series. •

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