

The premature death in 1991 of the Brazilian essayist, thinker and diplomat Jose G. Merquior robbed the international intellectual community of a gifted friend of reason and a defender of modernity. Several essays in this volume, directly or indirectly, broadly or personally, pay tribute to the life and work of this politically engaged intellectual. Part I examines Merquiorian thought itself and--aptly enough--begins with his own incisive review of the rebirth of the liberal idea. Part II ranges more widely: here, such distinguished contributors as John Hall, Ernest Gellner and Norberto Bobbio develop some of Merquior's favourite themes - liberalism as it relates to social cohesion, political stability, morality, republicanism and democracy, and the relativism and scepticism that characterize postmodern thinking. The book's application to two regions of the world is direct and obvious: to Merquior's own Latin America and to Central and Eastern Europe, where rapid political change and economic transition have brought debates on liberalism to the forefront. But in Merquior's thought there are also lessons for Western Europe and the United States, where the very familiarity of the liberal tradition can lead to a certain sterility of ideas. If this book can help to introduce a new perspective into Western political intellectual circles, then this alone would constitute a fitting memorial to Jose G. Merquior.

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