



The Communitarian Moment: The Radical Challenge of the Northampton Association

Christopher Clark

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It used to be virtually unquestioned that history belonged to the successful. Individuals and movements deemed "failures" were usually disregarded or entirely forgotten.

Communitarians of the 1840s set forth a variety of radical critiques of contemporary American society, based both on their own experiences and on their visions of a better world. Their attempts to realize these visions met with strong opposition and practical obstacles. Even as they began to retreat, they were cast by their opponents as insignificant or as fanatics, and those views have influenced most subsequent historical accounts of them. This book joins other recent studies that have sought to reevaluate the efforts of communitarians on their own terms, to locate them in their social and political contexts, and to understand the dilemmas that they faced. The Northampton Association provides an ideal opportunity for a study of this kind. It is easily the most obscure of the main New England utopian communities of the 1840s, so its story remains unfamiliar even to many specialist scholars. In his book, Clark aims not to celebrate the men and women of the Northampton community, but to understand them better, to trace how their vision was formed, and how it came to fade again into something less radical, less ambitious, and more forgettable.

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