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Auguste Blanqui and the Politics of Popular Empowerment

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Few individuals made such an impact on nineteenth-century French politics as Louis-Auguste Blanqui (1805-1881). Political organiser, leader, propagandist and prisoner, Blanqui was arguably the foremost proponent of popular power to emerge after the French Revolution. Practical engagement in all the major uprisings that spanned the course of his life – 1830, 1848, 1870-71 – was accompanied by theoretical reflections on a broad range of issues, from free will and fatalism to public education and individual development. Since his death, however, Blanqui has not been simply overlooked or neglected; his name has widely become synonymous with theoretical misconception and practical misadventure.

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Empowerment offers a major re-evaluation of one the most

controversial figures in the history of revolutionary politics. The book draws extensively on Blanqui's manuscripts and published works, as well as writings only recently translated into English for the first time. Through a detailed reconstruction and critical analysis of Blanqui's political thought, it challenges the prevailing image of an unthinking insurrectionist and rediscovers a forceful and compelling theory of collective political action and radical social change. It suggests that some of Blanqui's fundamental assumptions – from the insistence on the primacy of subjective determination to the rejection of historical necessity – are still relevant to politics today.

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