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Critique for what? Fortunately, some of the most provocative self-critical intellectuals, from the postwar period to the postmodern present, have wrestled with this question. Joel Pfister criss-crosses the Atlantic to take stock of exciting British cultural studies, American studies, and Left studies that challenge the academic critique-for-critique's-sake and career's-sake business and ask: critique for what and for whom? historicizing for what and for whom? politicizing for what and for whom? America for what and for whom?

Pfister's historical research convenes New Left revisionary socialists, members of the unpartied Left, cultural studies theorists, American studies scholars, radical historians, progressive literary critics, and early proponents of transnational analysis in what amounts to a lively book-length strategy seminar. British political intellectuals, featuring Raymond Williams, E. P. Thompson, Stuart Hall, and Raphael Samuel, and Americans, including F. O. Matthiessen, Robert Lynd, C. Wright Mills, and Richard Ohmann, help readers reconsider what links the critical project to social transformation, activism, and organizing. Eager to prevent cultural studies from lapsing into cynicism studies, this book thinks creatively about the possibilities of using as well as developing critique in our new millennium.