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The Uncertain Future of American Politics, 1940 to 1973

MEG JACOBS

For many years, conventional wisdom held that a stable New Deal Democratic coalition and a liberal consensus defined postwar American politics until the 1970s. Beginning with Arthur Schlesinger, Jr.'s *The Vital Center* (1949), most journalists and scholars believed Americans broadly shared an ideology of New Deal liberalism. Focused on the cold war split between Soviet communism and American democracy, contemporaries saw domestic politics through the prism of consensus. American political culture, according to this view, centered on a commitment to individualism, private property, and representative government, which now tilted in a liberal direction. "During most of my political consciousness," Schlesinger wrote, "this has been a New Deal country. I expect that it will continue to be a New Deal country." If Americans had more work to do to improve civil rights and social welfare, a strong Democratic Party would shepherd the country through those changes. So, too, would the Democrats lead and prevail in fighting the cold war. In 1952, Democrat John F. Kennedy's defeat of Henry Cabot Lodge for U.S. senator from Massachusetts seemed more portentous as a sign of the triumph of cold war liberalism than Dwight D. Eisenhower's Republican presidential victory.

The dominance of New Deal liberalism rested on several assumptions. First was the idea of a broker state in which the federal government managed the interests of organized groups. Economist John Kenneth Galbraith, in *American Capitalism* (1952), referred to these organized interest groups as countervailing powers, and he saw the government's job largely as a referee in this organized competition. Rather than pitched warfare,

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for example, unions and management would resolve their differences at the bargaining table instead of on the picket line. The second pillar of New Deal liberalism was a shared commitment to liberal values, including anticommunism, cultural pluralism, and even incremental racial progress. Finally, the phenomenal economic growth of the period sustained this political order.

Whereas public intellectuals like Schlesinger championed the New Deal order, praising its social accord and stability, beginning in the 1960s a younger generation of New Left scholars criticized its tepid nature, pointing to the limits of New Deal reform. Harvard Sitkoff wrote powerfully of the origins of civil rights struggle in the Depression years, with an eye to what the New Deal failed to achieve for the poorest, most disenfranchised members of society. As much as the New Deal state could champion liberal progress, there were fundamental limits to the redistribution of wealth and power, as Nelson Lichtenstein and other labor historians made clear in their New Left accounts published in the 1970s and 1980s. But the critics did not challenge the idea of the dominance of New Deal liberalism from the 1930s through the 1970s.

Yet, from the point of view of 2011, and of the scholarship of the last twenty years, the idea of a New Deal consensus seems untenable. The past generation of historiography has raised profound questions about the consensual nature of politics during these postwar decades and the character of the New Deal liberal political culture that defined the period. The scale of the intervention brought about by the New Deal was much more extensive than earlier historians had suggested. The New Deal was not simply a pragmatic program to save capitalism but a bold institutional experiment that changed basic elements of political culture and political economy. Because its impact was so great, the New Deal triggered an immediate reaction from opponents who, from the 1930s on, mobilized to limit, delegitimize, and dismantle its program and legacies. As a result, it is unclear whether a coherent postwar New Deal "order" ever actually existed. In some ways, the New Deal state was more expansive and enduring, yet in others it became subject to challenge much earlier than previous scholars realized. Thus the postwar years were both more liberal and more conservative than we previously thought. This chapter looks at key developments in the historiography, which have opened up a new understanding of the postwar years and have helped reveal the roots of post-1970s politics—the so-called Reagan era—in this earlier period of American history.

Three trends help explain this shift in the historical literature. First, scholars have a new understanding of the role of the state in twentieth-century politics. In the 1960s and 1970s, New Left scholars had largely eschewed political history, looking to the social and the cultural as important sites for historical investigation. But in the 1980s, political scientists and historical sociologists such as Steven Skowronek and Theda Skocpol suggested that the American state functioned as more than just a neutral broker of interests. Instead, American political institutions were in and of

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themselves worthy of investigation. Through detailed studies, they showed how bureaucracies, federalism, and the separation of powers worked to enhance as well as limit the power of the modern state. In the 1990s, scholars such as Ira Katznelson and Julian Zelizer returned to the study of the state and helped to reinvigorate the field of American political history. They discovered new explanations for why postwar political institutions were both more enduring and more constrained than previously thought.

Second, since the era of Ronald Reagan, historians have looked for the historical roots of the rise of the right before the 1970s. These recent investigations into conservatism suggest that New Deal liberalism never went uncontested. In some of the earliest accounts of the right, Richard Hofstadter and Daniel Bell saw conservatives as outliers, part of a radical fringe standing outside mainstream culture. But more recently, scholars have treated conservatism as less of an aberration, motivated not by psychological concerns, but rather by serious convictions. As scholars of conservatism such as Leo Ribuffo and Lisa McGirr have shown, Americans divided over the question of how much government was good for the country. In part, conservatism became such a powerful political force in the 1980s and 1990s because it had been building strength for several decades.

Third, in the wake of the deindustrialization and globalization that transformed the economy in the 1970s, scholars have returned to a focus on political economy and regional development. Rather than seeing the period from 1945 to 1973 as a golden age of American capitalism, scholars now appreciate the ways in which economic growth masked structural changes in the economy. An entire deregulated, nonunionized, and nonmanufacturing political economy, primarily in the Sun Belt South and West, existed alongside of, and often in competition with, the Detroit-centered, heavy manufacturing, unionized economy of the North. As Nelson Lichtenstein has recently shown, Wal-Mart became the template for American capitalism toward the end of the twentieth century. But the roots of this low-wage, decentralized service economy lay in the postwar years, posing a challenge to the New Deal political economy.

For too long, the cold war blinded historians to the deep divides that existed within American politics, culture, and society in these years. Indeed, his ideological commitment to the cold war led Schlesinger to minimize differences on the American political scene. One of his contemporaries, the political journalist Samuel Lubell, however, painted a very different picture in *The Future of American Politics* (1952). Interested in the daily experience of Americans, Lubell went around ringing doorbells and conducting interviews. He discovered ambivalence, anxieties, and tensions. Americans disagreed on foreign policy, worried about their economic future, and held onto their prejudices. Whereas Schlesinger saw a vital center, Lubell wrote of the "dead center of stalemate." The Democrats would remain the dominant party, Lubell predicted, but the postwar era would witness electoral instability, as Americans routinely rethought their political allegiances. In addition to this instability, Lubell already saw signs of significant splits

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within the Democratic Party, which made the New Deal coalition all the more unstable. After interviewing thousands of voters, Lubell saw only mixed evidence for an ascendant New Deal liberalism. “This conflict over the proper limits of government has intensified until it has become the sharpest single divider in the country,” Lubell wrote. He might have done well to call his book “The Uncertain Future of American Politics.”

This chapter reexamines the postwar period to look for the cracks and strains in the New Deal order. To explain what they saw as the eventual collapse of a cold war consensus and the unraveling of the New Deal coalition, historians had traditionally pointed to the backlash against the 1960s civil rights movement and Great Society liberalism, the fight over the Vietnam War, and the stagflation of the 1970s. But that literature concealed the deep divisions and tensions that shaped this entire period as well as the fragility of the New Deal coalition. As scholars now appreciate, from the economy to race to regional differences, fundamental fissures within and challenges to the New Deal order existed throughout the postwar period. The late 1960s and early 1970s must thus be seen as the culmination of a three-decade struggle and the untangling of a tenuous political coalition rather than the sudden implosion of liberalism around Vietnam and race in the 1960s. This approach gives us a different understanding of the three critical decades that followed the presidency of Franklin D. Roosevelt.

In three key areas, historians now offer a more complex picture of the so-called postwar New Deal order. First, the period of post–World War II reconversion, which lasted through the early 1950s, witnessed intense partisanship and fighting over the extension of New Deal liberalism at home and abroad. Acceptance of the New Deal did not define the period from the 1940s onward as the consensus school and New Left scholars once thought. Rather, recent literature on the wartime state, organized labor, and the cold war makes clear that the period of reconversion proved an important moment of debate over the future of New Deal liberalism. Second, as early as the 1950s, the questions of civil rights and of how the South would align politically came to the fore. As Republicans sought to disrupt the Democratic coalition, the South, especially the Sun Belt suburbs, seemed the most likely region to join the GOP. Third, in the 1960s and 1970s, an antigovernment deregulatory agenda drew support from both the Sun Belt service economy and the conservative mobilization that was taking place in think tanks and at the grass roots. By the end of the period, the fractures within New Deal liberalism had become stronger than the glue that held it together.

Had Enough?

In 1946, congressional Republicans ran on a simple platform: Had Enough? After more than a decade out of power, they were asking voters to consider whether “the Roosevelt Revolution” should come to an end. Since the 1990s, New Deal scholarship has captured the transformative nature

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of reform in the 1930s, especially in popular attitudes about the positive role of government. By creating new labor rights, providing benefits to out-of-work Americans and pensions to the elderly, and bringing rural electrification to the South, the New Deal had stitched together a political coalition of urban workers, organized labor, northern blacks, white ethnic groups, Catholics, Jews, liberals, intellectuals, progressive Republicans, middle-class families worried about unemployment and old age, and southern whites. The impact on the political culture was powerful, as social histories of the New Deal by scholars such as Lizabeth Cohen, Gary Gerstle, Elizabeth Faue, and Robin Kelley make clear. For example, paying a black tenant sharecropper federal relief disrupted traditional social relations and raised expectations of what ordinary citizens, including the least powerful members of society, could hope for from the federal government. "The gover'ment is the best boss I ever had," said a black WPA worker in North Carolina.

Like most revolutions, this one was inherently unstable and plagued by factions, and triggered its own counterrevolution. Roosevelt was masterful, his 1936 reelection overwhelming. But studies of the New Deal state stress its limitations as politicians had to navigate complicated political waters and work within what was both politically acceptable and institutionally possible. As Ira Katznelson and Robert Lieberman have shown, the Democratic Party was split between its southern white conservative members who opposed labor and civil rights and its northern urban counterparts who favored them. To get his bills passed, Roosevelt had to strike compromises with powerful southern committee chairmen, who dominated Capitol Hill, agreeing to local administration of many programs so as not to disrupt regional race relations. In the 1938 congressional elections, Roosevelt unsuccessfully tried to purge eight conservative Democrats by campaigning against them in the primary. From that point on Republicans, who regained some of their power in Congress, began an alliance with southern Democrats to limit the New Deal on issues involving race relations and unionization.

Mobilization for World War II led to another dramatic expansion of the federal government. Rather than seeing the war as spelling the end of reform, political historians have discovered how the mobilization effort created opportunities for the development of greater state capacity and an even more robust rights-consciousness. As Nelson Lichtenstein and Steve Fraser have shown, labor used its wartime strength to claim new rights and increase its numbers. By the end of the war, almost 15 million unionized workers (30 percent of the nonagricultural workforce) stood poised to use their organizational might and the power of the wartime state to preserve their wage gains and shop-floor rights. African Americans, too, sought to use the wartime state to fight racial inequality as part of what scholars such as Jacquelyn Dowd Hall and Thomas Sugrue see as an important moment in the "long civil rights era." Activists pushed for the creation of the Fair Employment Practices Commission set up by Roosevelt and were willing

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to mobilize at the grass roots to press their cause. As my own work shows, consumers also became politically involved in enforcing wartime regulations such as price controls as a way of keeping inflation under control and preserving their purchasing power. In this era, according to new histories of the left-liberal alliances by Michael Denning and Douglas Rossinow, activists looked to the state to promote liberal causes from economic redistribution to civil rights to interracial solidarity.

As much as the wartime state conferred rights, it also could reinforce patterns of discrimination. As part of the New Deal, the Federal Housing Authority had created a system of federally guaranteed, long-term home mortgages, which made homeownership a possibility for ordinary Americans. After the war, the GI Bill gave government loans to millions of returning veterans for down payments, which further facilitated buying homes. Yet, as recent scholarship on the wartime state demonstrates, government programs like low-interest mortgages, school tuition, and business loans for veterans compounded racial inequality when the federal government delegated implementation to states and localities. At the state level, as Ira Katznelson and Kathleen Frydl show, African Americans faced unequal treatment and discrimination, and as a result, government programs entrenched racial divides and widened the economic gap between the races. Margot Canaday argues that the same also happened between homosexual and heterosexual citizens. Neither African Americans nor homosexuals could take as much advantage of the GI bill as heterosexual white men, who came to see these government programs as an exclusive privilege rather than a universal benefit of citizenship. The absence of universalistic welfare benefits had the effect of inscribing gender differences into public policy, a pattern illuminated in the scholarship of Alice Kessler-Harris, Linda Gordon, and Eileen Boris.

If state capacity and existing racial and gender attitudes constrained the New Deal–wartime state, still the Roosevelt-era public policies proved enduring and far-reaching. In his widely praised narrative history of the Roosevelt presidency, *Freedom from Fear* (1999), David Kennedy has shown that both the New Deal and the mobilization for World War II changed American attitudes about government, creating a belief that the national state had a fundamental obligation to provide for the basic economic well-being of its citizens. The creation of a new sense of entitlement set in motion new expectations about government obligations, even if many were not fulfilled. "Citizens witnessed the national government working on their behalf," as political scientist Suzanne Mettler writes about the New Deal–World War II generation. My own work argues that this vision of government-backed security required leadership at the top and also political mobilization at the grass roots among the beneficiaries of government's growth. This liberal political culture and the expansion of the state, in turn, set in motion contestation in the postwar period.

The end of the war set up a confrontation between liberals who wanted to preserve and expand the New Deal and conservatives who were hop-

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ing to restrain and roll back the expansion of government. By 1945, New Deal opponents, especially businessmen, were in a strong position to fight against what they saw as an intrusive government. Contributing to the war effort not only was lucrative, particularly for the largest corporations, but also enabled businessmen to rehabilitate their public image, severely tarnished by the Depression, and to claim they had successfully defended the nation as their factories became, in Roosevelt's words, the "arsenal of democracy." With the help of their Republican allies in Congress, they lobbied to remove price controls, roll back the power of organized labor, and reduce federal regulations governing workplace conditions. Instead of government-guaranteed full employment, businessmen promised postwar prosperity through free enterprise, as Elizabeth Fones-Wolf and Howell John Harris have shown. Recent studies by Alan Brinkley and Robert Collins reveal how businessmen and policy makers accepted Keynesian tools of fiscal management as an alternative to more heavy-handed forms of state intervention.

The opponents of the New Deal scored a decisive victory in the elections of 1946. Labor histories of reconversion by scholars such as Robert Zieger, George Lipsitz, Rick Halpern, and Joshua Freeman capture the disruptive nature of the strike waves in auto, steel, coal, meatpacking, and countless other industries. Amid this unrest, the 1946 slogan "Had enough? Vote Republican" gained traction.

The other election issue was anticommunism, which Republicans invoked against the party that had led the nation to victory in World War II. In November, Republicans scored a decisive victory, winning majorities in both houses (245 to 188 in the House and 51 to 45 in the Senate) and controlling Congress for the first time since 1930. A new generation of conservative young Republicans such as Richard Nixon of California, John Bricker of Ohio, and Joseph McCarthy of Wisconsin came to power. Greg Mitchell and Steve Gillon reveal the challenge of anticommunism for liberal politics in this early cold war moment. Conservatives had attacked the New Deal as communistic in the 1930s, and in the context of the cold war, their arguments found a wider audience. They feared communist subversion at home and opposed any extension of the state as a form of socialism. Once in office, these young conservatives allied with more traditional Republicans like Senator Robert Taft and southern Democrats.

Their victory would shape the contours of American political economy for the postwar period. The most significant accomplishment was the Taft-Hartley Act, passed in 1947, which as Christopher Tomlins and Kevin Boyle demonstrate, imposed serious limitations on organized labor. The act gave the president the authority to order a cooling-off period before workers went on strike, prohibited the closed shop, and enabled states to pass "right-to-work" laws, all of which made union organizing more difficult. It also banned supervisors from joining unions, which meant that millions of white-collar and managerial jobs would fall outside the union orbit. Finally, the act required labor leaders to sign noncommunist affidavits for

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union certification, a provision that had the effect of purging many officials from union ranks. The measure, which its liberal opponents dubbed the "slave labor law," passed over President Harry S Truman's veto. Labor historians of the South such as Barbara Griffith and Michael Honey show how racial divides between black and white workers also contributed to the failure to extend the union movement beyond the North and Midwest. As a result of legislative constraints and racial tensions, the South would remain a nonunionized haven for low-wage employers.

Just as important as the challenges from the GOP, Truman's liberal internationalism exposed the cracks within the New Deal order. Recent evaluations of the Truman years by Alonzo Hamby, Steve Fraser, and Nelson Lichtenstein reveal the difficulty he had in holding together a liberal coalition. In 1948, Truman faced opposition from his left and right. Former Secretary of State Henry Wallace, who had resigned from the administration in opposition to Truman's cold war policy of containment, argued that it would engender greater hostilities with the Soviet Union and require cutting social spending in favor of military spending. Wallace ran as the candidate of the Progressive Party. To undercut Wallace's appeal among liberals, Truman vowed to repeal Taft-Hartley. He also campaigned hard for the protection and extension of such key welfare measures as Social Security, the minimum wage, and health care. To hold blacks in the North, whose votes were critical to winning in large cities, Truman supported the inclusion of a civil rights plank in the Democratic Party platform. Truman called for a permanent Fair Employment Practices Commission, a federal antilynching bill, and the abolition of the poll tax in the South that, along with more aggressive forms of intimidation, had long disenfranchised blacks.

These moves to the left, especially on civil rights, triggered a defense of white supremacy predicated on legally enforced segregation, a largely agricultural economy, and a single-party Solid South. They inspired Strom Thurmond to run for president on the segregationist Dixiecrat ticket. The usual story of massive resistance begins with the 1954 Supreme Court ruling of *Brown v. Board of Education*. But recent political histories of local southern communities by scholars such as Kari Frederickson and Bryant Simon stress the complicated and deep-seated racial attitudes of the white working class that preceded the Brown decision. Thurmond's successful appeal to segregationist white Southern voters made sense, as these works show, only after the failure of a class-based New Deal agenda and the emergence of black activism in the 1940s. After the Supreme Court declared the all-white primary unconstitutional during World War II, a million African-American southerners registered to vote.

Although Truman squeaked out an unexpected victory in 1948 and Congress returned to Democratic hands, the conservative coalition was growing in strength. The cold war enhanced their political power. The recent scholarship on the cold war by historians such as Melvyn Leffler, Michael Hogan, and Michael Schaller demonstrates how powerful the fears of communists were in these early cold war years. Announcing the Tru-

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man Doctrine in 1947, the administration committed the United States to defending non-Communist governments around the world against Soviet aggression. Truman established permanent intelligence and defense institutions, and through the Marshall Plan, the United States sent economic aid to rebuild the democracies of Western Europe as a bulwark against communism. Still, conservatives attacked Truman for not doing enough. In contrast to bipartisan consensus, historians now emphasize the fractious and political nature of foreign policy in this period. The work of Julian Zelizer, Fred Logevall, and Campbell Craig shows that politicians used foreign policy for partisan advantages, at times even exacerbating cold war tensions.

The conservative attack on Democrats came to the fore in the age of McCarthyism. After China fell to communism and the Soviets detonated their first atomic bomb in 1949, Democrats became even more vulnerable to Republican charges of weakness on defense. The stalemate of the Korean War also undermined support for Democrats. By this time, the Republican right, under the leadership of Senator Joseph McCarthy, had launched a successful anticommunist campaign that reinforced the partisan attacks on the Democrats. New literature on the Red Scare, including works by Ellen Schrecker, Steve Whitfield, and Steve Rosswurm, captures how wide-ranging anticommunist attacks were, playing out in arenas from Congress to college campuses to union halls to Hollywood. If an older generation of scholars saw Truman's vigorous pursuit of domestic communism as limited and necessary, the recent trend demonstrates how the administration in effect sanctioned the more extreme efforts to root out subversives. By giving legitimacy to the actions of his political opponents, Truman was unable to thwart attacks on the Fair Deal as communistic, and in the end he saw none of his reforms enacted by Congress.

As the Fair Deal died a political death, organized labor sought to protect the interests of its members. Whereas old studies of labor saw its leaders as complicit in a liberal compromise, new literature shows the political and institutional challenges of constructing a public welfare state. Only when it became clear that labor could not secure public benefits did it become more accepting of private benefits offered at the bargaining table by employers. In their 1948 negotiations, union leaders accepted cost-of-living agreements in their annual contracts. Instead of holding out hope that the government could moderate inflation, labor accepted the offer from their employers to adjust wages upward to keep pace with inflation. When the United Autoworkers signed a five-year agreement with General Motors in 1950, with built-in cost-of-living adjustments, contemporaries hailed it as the Treaty of Detroit. As Nelson Lichtenstein writes, "The Treaty of Detroit proved a milestone from which there was no turning back." Indeed, in the same year, Robert Taft won reelection as senator in the heavily industrial state of Ohio, positioning him for a serious run for the Republican presidential nomination in 1952.

The labor accord benefited well-organized union workers but left out the unorganized. As James Patterson has written, "Well-established interest

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groups ultimately agreed to accommodate each other while giving lip service at best to the needs of the unorganized." The number of white-collar workers, who received a salary, would soon exceed the number of blue-collar workers who bargained for inflation-adjusted wages. "Inflation has become the breaking point of the Roosevelt coalition," observed Samuel Lubell, exacerbating tensions between different interests. As the journalist put it, "No new economic gains could be promised any group of Democrats without threatening the gains of other Democrats." As part of this private welfare state, workers also received benefits, including health care, life insurance, paid vacations, and old-age pensions. These advances for organized workers created rifts between union and nonunion workers, the skilled and unskilled, full-time and part-time employees, male and female, manufacturing and service workers, and whites and blacks. New work on the private welfare state, including studies by Jennifer Klein, Jacob Hacker, and Colin Gordon, makes it clear that the institutionalization of private benefits sapped support for further advances in public welfare.

Political rifts among the working classes were exacerbated at the local level, especially between the races. Traditionally, scholars have seen the phenomenal growth of the postwar years as forestalling conflict. But even in Detroit, the home to automobile manufacturing, there was still competition over jobs, housing, and public amenities. Both white and black workers came out of the war with what James Patterson calls grand expectations. But those expectations could fuel tensions, as individuals and groups pursued their own interests. In the 1940s, Detroit had grown quickly, with manufacturing jobs increasing by 40 percent, and the city's employers paid its blue-collar war workers the highest wages in the country. The percentage of African Americans in Detroit went from 10 percent in 1940 to 25 percent by 1960. Along with this growth in minority population came an expansion of regulations to ensure equality of opportunity in hiring. Although President Truman failed to get a federal FEPC bill passed, states and counties passed their own laws, with the result that nondiscrimination fair employment rules covered 25 percent of the total population by 1952.

As Thomas Sugrue argues in *The Origins of the Urban Crisis*, at the local level competition over resources triggered an urban antiliberalism, even among Democratic voters. Sugrue, as well as scholars such as Jonathan Rieder and Robert Self, show how white working-class Americans defined their security and sense of entitlement in conservative and individualistic terms, specifically as the right to a private home often in a racially segregated urban neighborhood or suburb and a good job. The New Deal had created a new kind of rights-based liberalism for whites predicated on black exclusion. In Detroit, those political sentiments translated into the defeat of a Democratic liberal candidate for mayor in 1949 at the hands of a conservative who made good on his promise to dismantle public housing, largely intended for African Americans. As Sugrue explains, "White Detroiters expected the state to protect the privileges associated with property ownership and race." Above all, those who had taken to the streets

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in the 1930s now wanted to preserve what they had achieved. "The inner dynamics of the Roosevelt coalition have shifted from those of *getting* to those of *keeping*," Lubell noted.

From the beginning, it was clear that different parts of the New Deal Democratic Party sat in uncomfortable tension with each other. As each group developed political muscle, the friction only increased. Moreover, voters were not blindly committed to the Democratic Party, and a shift in economic or diplomatic circumstances could undermine their loyalty. In 1952, the Republican Dwight Eisenhower won a decisive victory, including winning four southern states, and Republicans retook Congress. They were not strong enough to roll back New Deal programs like Social Security and minimum wages, nor did Eisenhower, a Republican moderate, advocate such steps, and provisions actually became more generous over time. Still, as recent studies of the period show, Eisenhower's fiscal conservatism revealed continued resistance to an activist liberal government. Thus, by the early 1950s, challenges to the New Deal order were already strongly in evidence.

The South and the Suburbs

Traditionally, scholars have written about the South as exceptional, a backward region shaped by the legacy of slavery and white backlash to the civil rights revolution. In those narratives, the central cast of characters included liberal northerners and heroic southern blacks, both of whom were willing to risk their lives and livelihoods to break down the barriers of segregation that had ruled the region since the end of the Civil War. Recent scholarship has shifted the discussion away from southern exceptionalism and instead sees a more complex array of political, economic, and social forces at work. Moving beyond a story of reactionary racism, these studies explore the impact of the growth of the military-industrial complex, economic development, and suburbanization to better understand the region.

The result has been to show that the South not only reflected larger national trends, but even established the template. If Roosevelt's New Deal coalition had its roots among the urban masses, what would become Ronald Reagan's conservative coalition grew up outside the cities. In the Sun Belt suburbs and rural areas, it was not only the issue of civil rights and race that motivated voters to leave the Democratic Party. Just as significant, if not more so, demographic and economic changes challenged the New Deal order and led to a Republican resurgence.

As part of the return to political history, recent scholarship has explored the role of public spending as an important influence on the economy and regional development. Jordan Schwarz, Jason Scott Smith, and most importantly, Bruce Schulman demonstrate the role of government funding in the economic expansion of the Sun Belt beginning with the New Deal. During World War II, fifteen million Americans, one-third of the workforce, moved into new jobs in war production centers, many of them

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located in the South and Southwest. Besides Detroit, the other major center of defense production was California, as studies by Marilynn Johnson, Roger Lotchin, and Gerald Nash demonstrate. Overnight, Los Angeles, with its factories, refineries, military bases, and ports, became a major manufacturing center. Between 1940 and 1945, California received almost $20 billion from the federal government for defense contracts; half of the area's income came from federal spending. After the war, federal highway construction and military spending spurred continued growth in the Sun Belt. For the two decades following World War II, as Schulman has shown, defense spending accounted for one-third of the area's jobs. Many of these jobs were in high-tech industry, which reinforced the racial divide between white middle-class professionals and poor African Americans.

In addition to federal spending, the political economy of the South attracted capital to the region. In their work on manufacturing centers, Thomas Sugrue, Jefferson Cowie, and Tami Friedman examine the deindustrialization of the North and capital flight to the South. Between 1948 and 1967, Detroit lost approximately 130,000 manufacturing jobs. In the same period, the Sun Belt was expanding at a rate twice that of the Rust Belt in the Northeast and Midwest. In response to the strength of unions in the North, many firms decided to relocate to the South in search of cheaper, nonunionized labor and low taxes.

The shift to metropolitan suburban living within the Sun Belt typified the patterns of growth elsewhere. Suburbanization, which began in 1920s, accelerated after World War II. By 1950, the suburbs were growing at a rate ten times faster than the cities. The application of mass-production techniques to building homes made mass ownership a real possibility. Ten percent of the construction firms built 70 percent of postwar homes, enabling speed, efficiency, and low cost. At the peak of production, the Levitt Brothers, famous for their creation of Levittown as one of the first planned suburbs built entirely from prefabricated housing, put up thirty homes a day. Between 1945 and 1955, builders erected fifteen million new housing units. These were modern suburban homes with indoor plumbing, central heating, appliances, and telephones, and, by 1960, most had televisions.

Government policies, which favored private homeownership over renting and public housing, made this growth possible. Favorable tax deductions made it cheaper to pay for a mortgage than to pay rent. The Federal Highway Act of 1956 also furthered this demographic trend. As Kenneth Jackson has explained, suburbanization resulted not just from geography, technology, and culture, but also from specific government policies, which taxpayers subsidized. Other government policies, including the exemption of the transportation of food from regulated trucking rates, facilitated suburban living. As Shane Hamilton has shown, Americans ate well and cheaply in the postwar years because agribusiness and factory farmers employed the labor of nonunionized long-haul rural truck drivers to deliver cheap food to America's suburban supermarkets.

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In the 1950s, public intellectuals offered unflattering portraits of postwar suburban culture, seeing it as stultifying, suffocating, and isolating. According to critics such as Vance Packard, David Riesman, and William Whyte, as Americans moved away from urban centers, they traded the richness of strong ethnic, family, and community bonds for middle-class conformity. Influenced by the work of sociologists and behavioral psychologists, earlier studies of suburban culture focused on psychological interpretations rooted in notions of status anxiety. Betty Friedan offered the most scathing portrait of domesticity for suburban women in her 1963 *The Feminine Mystique*. Indeed, some of the early social and women's histories of the postwar years saw this period as one of conservatism and constraints, wedged between the opportunities of the war years and the activism of the 1960s. In her work on suburban culture, Elaine Tyler May explained how Americans embraced suburban living and nuclear families as an antidote to the stress and anxiety of the cold war.

More recently, however, scholars have emphasized the diversity of experiences, especially for women. The work of Joanne Meyerowitz, Jacqueline Jones, Cynthia Harrison, and Sara Evans suggests that women, especially working-class women, were more active politically than previous portraits suggested. In her study of "the other women's movement," Dorothy Sue Cobble shows how even if female union activists did not challenge the sex segregation of employment, they continued the activism of war years for workplace rights.

Even the cold war itself could spawn liberal reform. From the Fair Deal to labor policy to civil rights, scholars had traditionally painted the cold war years as a moment of conservatism in domestic politics. Amid the Red Scare, many liberal campaigns became suspect as communist inspired. But the recent civil rights literature offers a different view. Even as the cold war made redistributive programs less accessible, the international struggle for democracy lent legitimacy and momentum to civil rights struggles. Mary Dudziak, Penny Von Eschen, and Thomas Borstelmann explore how American commitment to anticolonialism abroad created political space for civil rights reform at home. Historians such as Charles Payne and John Dittmer are rewriting the master narrative of civil rights by focusing on local movements.

If some have rediscovered political activism on the left, other recent studies see the emergence of a new conservatism on the right, especially in the South with the growth of a new suburban middle class. To be sure, a nationwide political realignment depended in part on how white southerners responded to the Democratic Party's commitment to civil rights, a reaction that would become even more pronounced after the *Brown v. Board* decision. But just as important to the decline of the Democratic Party in the South, as Earl Black and Merle Black write, were shifting demographics within the region, specifically the growth of a new professional urban middle class, Republican in political sympathies. Between 1940 and 1948,

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the number of southerners who voted for the Republican presidential candidate increased by 50 percent, with gains coming in the most urbanized states. "It is this new middle class," wrote Samuel Lubell, "the branch plant managers and their college-trained supervisors, merchants, doctors and lawyers, newspaper publishers, and realtors, all seemingly so conservative, who are the real political rebels in the South today."

This demographic shift to the Sun Belt suburbs represented what Lubell identified as early as 1952 as the beginnings of a "conservative revolution" in the South. In 1950, the defeat of Senators Frank Graham (D, North Carolina) and Claude Pepper (D, Florida), two liberal New Dealers, by conservative foes signaled the change. These two lost support not only among poor whites, but also among the rapidly expanding middle classes in the cities and in the suburbs, among whom racial integration could be presented as an attack on their rights as homeowners, taxpayers, and school parents. As Kevin Kruse and Joseph Crespino show, even in the Deep South racial appeals were steeped in an ideology of middle-class privilege and individual entitlement as much as in outright racial hatred. This new work on the Sun Belt suburbs explores the mixture of racial moderation, economic entitlement, and commitment to law and order that made these regions tilt rightward, laying the basis for the death of the solid Democratic South and the emergence of the GOP in the region.

Rightward Bound

Between the landslide elections of Democrat Lyndon Johnson in 1964 and Republican Richard Nixon in 1972, changes in liberalism and conservatism both accelerated, building on trends from the earlier period. Traditionally, scholars have counterpoised a radical sixties with a conservative seventies. In fact, as the essays in Bruce Schulman and Julian Zelizer's *Rightward Bound* argue, the two periods reflect much more continuity, with liberal and conservative impulses present in both. The forces pushing in a rightward direction had deeper roots than simply a reaction against the liberal advances of the 1960s; at the same time, liberalism had enduring accomplishments.

One of the greatest liberal achievements of modern state building came with the creation of Medicare, a program for health insurance for the elderly. In the absence of a system of public health care, Americans depended on private insurance obtained through their jobs. As a result, half of the population over 65 did not have health insurance. As life expectancy increased and medical expenses grew, the nation faced a serious health care problem. Under President Johnson's leadership, Congress designed a program to allocate Social Security taxes for the public provision of elderly health care. Like Medicare, which benefited a large portion of the population, including white middle-class Americans, the Elementary and Secondary Education Act won support once congressmen realized that their districts would receive tangible benefits. Histories of the decade have tradi-

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tionally been consumed with issues of civil rights and the war in Vietnam. Scholars of the state such as Julian Zelizer and Gareth Davies have only recently begun to explore this moment of governmental expansion.

Other aspects of Johnson's Great Society generated more opposition. Unlike Medicare, Johnson's War on Poverty became associated with welfare for the undeserving poor. Recent work by Michael Katz, Alice O'Connor, Jennifer Mittelstadt, and Felicia Kornbluh explores the political and policy limitations for this kind of liberal reform. Building on new notions of community participation, many programs circumvented the Department of Health, Education, and Welfare to dispense welfare and instead recruited neighborhood networks to deliver legal services, secure welfare payments, fight evictions, and obtain medical services. Many of the programs came into conflict with local political establishments, who found equally problematic how civil rights activists sought to use community action programs to mobilize the poor, march on city hall, and file lawsuits against the city.

If poverty programs ran into political trouble, civil rights reform fared better and had more staying power. Hugh Davis Graham and John Skrentny have stressed the importance of legislative and judicial change in Washington in destroying the legal edifice of white supremacy in the South and creating a new legal framework for a rights-based liberalism. The notion of legally enforceable rights through new government agencies like the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission set an important precedent for powerful new forms of identity politics, social movements, and political activism. Paul Frymer has documented the emergence of a legal apparatus, which African Americans used to challenge unions on questions of civil rights and discrimination. As Nancy MacLean demonstrates, the civil rights movement, with its focus on the vote and public accommodations, gave way to a new rights-based mobilization as different classes of citizens made demands for compensation and regulatory protection based on special claims rooted in race, sex, ethnicity, religion, language, age, physical handicap, or sexual orientation.

Yet, at the same time, recent work on civil rights in the North reveals the limits of reform for African Americans. The legal scholar Risa Goluboff argues that the civil rights movement, with its demands for equal access to public accommodations and the vote, precluded a more expansive vision of reform that embraced economic distribution and structural poverty. Those limitations became evident in the North when deindustrialization led to the disappearance of jobs and competition over scarce resources just as blacks were migrating by the millions. Recent scholarship makes clear that the problems of the inner-city ghettos transcended the demand for voting rights. Martha Biondi, Matthew Countryman, and Thomas Sugrue explore the complicated story of white flight, municipal politics, and other patterns of structural and racial discrimination, which led to the creation of what some saw as a permanent underclass. Instead of voting rights, in the North, the struggle was over far more intractable issues such as poor housing, police brutality, and urban decay.

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The latest work on activism of the 1960s places it in an international context. What had started as a movement in support of civil rights and for free speech on college campuses erupted into an antiwar movement of the young with global dimensions. That phenomenon occurred in many western industrialized democracies, as new work by scholars such as Jeremi Suri, Martin Klimke, and Jeremy Varon on the global student movement demonstrates. The baby boom of the postwar years, along with economic growth, resulted in a generation increasingly critical of the affluence in which they grew up.

At exactly the same moment, the New Right was also sprouting a grassroots network of conservative organizations. These emerged not simply in reaction to the social upheaval and liberal reforms of the 1960s, but dated back to the 1950s when conservative intellectuals founded new outlets for their anticommunist ideas, including journals like William Buckley's *National Review.* In her work on southern California, Lisa McGirr writes about the grassroots origins of what became the American New Right, a movement that emphasized the evils of communism as well as the dangers of liberal permissiveness and social welfare. By the 1960s, the Young Americans for Freedom had a presence on some college campuses to rival the New Left. In his work on conservatism and Phyllis Schlafly, Donald Critchlow lays out the antifeminist aspects of this new rightward trend.

The appeal of the New Right was so far-reaching, recent scholars argue, precisely because it was grounded in neoliberal, market-based language. In 1968, Richard Nixon employed what Republican strategist Kevin Phillips dubbed the southern strategy, by which Nixon promised to ease pressure on integration as a way of attracting the South into the GOP fold. But, as Matthew Lassiter argues, Nixon won not by making outwardly racist appeals to white southerners but instead by appealing to a sense of color-blind middle-class entitlement rooted in a culture of work and reward. He was particularly successful in winning support among white middle-class Protestants, especially in higher-income suburbs that had already been trending Republican. In appealing to these voters, as well as to their suburban counterparts outside the South, as Robert Self argues in his study of Oakland, California, Nixon played to their identities as homeowners, taxpayers, and school parents, or as he put it, those who worked, paid taxes, and did not demonstrate, picket, or protest loudly—what he called the Silent Majority.

These color-blind appeals provided a new rhetoric for even the most racially charged campaigns. Segregationists like Alabama Governor George Wallace, who ran as the American Independent candidate for president in 1968, traded traditional arguments rooted in states' rights and white supremacy for a populist rhetoric that exalted the little man, both the small business proprietor and the blue-collar worker. As Dan Carter and Michael Kazin have shown, Wallace successfully appealed to working-class voters

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outside the South, winning 34 percent of the primary vote in Wisconsin, 43 percent in Indiana, and 43 percent in Maryland. In a new book on the working class in the 1970s, Jefferson Cowie demonstrates how Nixon employed a deliberate strategy to attract lower-middle-class ethnics and blue-collar workers in the North who were disillusioned with the Democratic Party in 1972. Democratic candidate George McGovern won only 18 percent of the Southern vote and 38 percent of the urban Catholic vote.

In the 1960s and 1970s, the rapid expansion of a Sun Belt service-oriented political economy would push American politics in a rightward direction. General Motors, with its hundreds of thousands of unionized workers, factory assembly lines, and modern corporate organization, offered one model of postwar political economy. But recent studies of political economy have explored how the rapidly expanding suburban malls, supermarkets, fast-food restaurants, and discount stores followed a different path. In 1962, Wal-Mart, which, as Nelson Lichtenstein argues, would become a template for an anti–New Deal political economy, opened its first store in rural Arkansas. Reliance on low-wage, part time, nonunion workers was a crucial ingredient to its success. Similarly, as Eric Schlosser has shown, McDonald's built its success on the shoulders of cheap, teenage, nonunionized labor. In 1972, the fast-food industry lobbied successfully for what became known as the McDonald's bill to allow employers to pay teenagers 20 percent less than the minimum wage. Lizabeth Cohen makes the point that the shopping malls, too, relied on workers who, as a part-time, female nonunion labor force, fell outside many labor regulations.

These new industries provided fertile ground for an antiregulatory counterattack on the New Deal state. From the 1930s on, as Kimberly Phillips-Fein and Elizabeth Shermer have shown, business organizations mounted a collective assault on unions, regulation, and government spending while defending profits and large corporations as social goods. Their efforts bore fruit in the "right-to-work" campaigns launched by conservative politicians throughout the Sun Belt where labor was more local, decentralized, nonindustrial, and service oriented. In Phoenix, Arizona, Barry Goldwater got his start as a spokesman for the antiunion right. He won his first campaign as senator in 1952 and built a reputation by attacking organized labor, especially after the AFL-CIO merger in 1955.

In addition to these political campaigns, leading American businessmen helped to proselytize the free-market arguments put forward by economists like Frederick Hayek and Milton Friedman. In the 1960s and 1970s, corporate executives founded organizations, foundations, and think tanks to advance a probusiness agenda. In the same year that Sam Walton opened his first store, free-market economist Milton Friedman published *Capitalism and Freedom*, which would serve as a foundational treatise for market-oriented policies. The connection was not just incidental, as Bethany Moreton argues. As Wal-Mart expanded, it recruited managers from the

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region's Christian colleges, many of which had established business courses with donations from Sun Belt industries. These colleges then educated the next generation of college students about free-market ideas.

Just as the so-called liberal era was not as united and consensual as historians once thought, neither was the conservative period that followed. This fact became clear right from the start of what Sean Wilentz calls the "Age of Reagan." Beginning with the presidency of Richard Nixon, conservatives found it hard to shift the country to the right. It was easier to run as a conservative than to govern as one. New work on the 1970s demonstrates the competing pressures Nixon faced between liberalism and conservatism. As Nixon understood, New Deal programs such as Social Security and Medicare retained their popularity and proved hard to scale back. In a time of economic troubles, Americans still looked for government's help. As the country began to experience stagflation, Nixon imposed wage and price controls to tame inflation while increasing government spending to stimulate the economy. He also agreed to tie increases in Social Security to the rate of inflation, which institutionalized enormous amounts of future government spending.

In addition to expanding these liberal programs, Nixon also supported new kinds of government social regulation, including the creation of the Environmental Protection Agency. By the end of the 1970s, New Deal–style price controls and Keynesian tools of fiscal management became vulnerable in the wake of the decade's economic troubles and the collapse of the international political economy. But recent studies, including work by Joan Hoff and Judith Stein, map out the ways in which Nixon put in place a vast expansion of government regulations. In foreign policy, too, Nixon came under pressure to moderate his approach, initiating a program of détente with the Soviet Union, including the signing of a Strategic Arms Limitation Treaty, and softening relations with China.

The legacies of détente and the expansion and further entrenchment of liberal programs under Nixon and his successor Gerald Ford would impel Ronald Reagan to challenge Ford from the right in the 1976 Republican primary. A political mobilization of conservatives in the 1970s and 1980s would enable the next generation to try even harder to push the country to the right.

As recent scholarship has amply demonstrated, these challenges to liberalism were not simply a product of post-1960s America. Indeed, the divisions and the basic lines of political battle had been evident almost from the moment the New Deal was born. The New Deal coalition and its policy agenda were always more contested than we remember. That contestation resulted in part from the far-reaching agenda and institutional strength of liberal reforms, which, in many ways, expanded and grew in the decades following F.D.R. As much as the New Deal order defined the postwar period, so, too, did the tensions between liberalism and conservatism that existed within it.

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