

Editor's Note

The decade of the 1970s, as David Robertson aptly observes in his introduction to this volume, offered profound disillusionment within the polity accompanied by significant policy change. The loss of confidence in American political and economic institutions became increasingly apparent as the nation experienced political scandal in the White House, unabated inflation and high unemployment, oil shortages, and a sense that the nation had lost its moral bearings. Although Richard Nixon easily won reelection in 1972, he was forced to resign from office following the Watergate scandal. His successors to the presidency, Gerald Ford and Jimmy Carter, failed to win public confidence. By 1980 many Americans believed that the “American century”—the promise of continued American prosperity and international leadership—had ended in dismal failure.

Nonetheless, even in the midst of this disappointment, important policy changes occurred that revealed the vitality of American democracy. Minorities, women, environmentalists, and consumers gained new access to power both in national politics and the private sector. Proposals for economic deregulation, welfare reform, controlling budget deficits, military downsizing, and returning power to state governments gained in currency and provided the foundation for subsequent policy changes that occurred in the subsequent two decades of the 1980s and 1990s.

This volume captures this seeming paradox of a nation's confidence at loss, even as the nation underwent important political and structural reform that strengthened democratic governance. Furthermore, contributors to this volume reveal another set of apparent paradoxes: adminis-

trative hierarchy recast as an “agent for democracy,” conservative intellectuals reshaped as “populists,” welfare reformed by eliminating the welfare system, and economy managed by rejecting macroeconomic management. As the decade drew to a close, the world of policy had appeared to have been indeed turned on its head. The election of Ronald Reagan in 1980 only confirmed this shift in public policy and political thought.

This volume should be read as an accompaniment to Brian Balogh’s, *Integrating the Sixties: Origins, Structures, and Legacy of Public Policy in a Turbulent Decade*. The continuity between the two decades, while by no means consistent, is apparent in the movement toward democratization of political structures, the emphasis on individual and group rights, rejection of past policy prescriptions and practices, the breakdown of hierarchical authority and tradition, and increased ideological polarization. Yet it was from this period of flux and even chaos, that America’s confidence in its political and economic institutions would be restored, albeit with wariness and at high cost.

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