

rightward bound making america conservative in the 1970s by unknown harvard university press 2008 paperback paperback

Rightward bound is a compelling examination of the conservative resurgence in America during the 1970s, published by Harvard University Press in 2008. This paperback edition delves into the intricate political, social, and economic factors that contributed to the shift toward conservatism in American society. The book presents a comprehensive analysis of how a combination of grassroots movements, the reaction to liberal policies, and the rise of influential conservative leaders shaped the political landscape of the decade. By exploring these themes, the author provides a nuanced understanding of a pivotal era in American political history.

Historical Context of the 1970s

To understand the significance of the conservative movement in the 1970s, it is essential to consider the historical context of the era. The decade was marked by a series of events that catalyzed a reaction against the liberal policies dominant in the previous decades.

Political Landscape

1. Civil Rights Movement: The 1960s witnessed significant advancements in civil rights, which polarized the nation. While many celebrated these achievements, others felt threatened by the societal changes.
2. Vietnam War: The protracted conflict in Vietnam led to widespread disillusionment with government, fueling anti-war sentiments and a countercultural movement that questioned traditional values.
3. Watergate Scandal: The scandal that led to President Richard Nixon's resignation in 1974 created a crisis of confidence in government institutions, prompting many Americans to seek alternatives in conservative ideologies.

Economic Factors

The 1970s were characterized by economic turmoil, including:

- Stagflation: The combination of stagnant economic growth and high inflation discredited the Keynesian economic policies of the time and led to calls for a return to free-market principles.
- Oil Crisis: The OPEC oil embargo of 1973 highlighted America's vulnerability and dependence on foreign oil, compelling a reevaluation of energy policies and economic strategies.

These economic challenges contributed to a growing sentiment that the government was incapable of solving pressing issues, further paving the way for conservative ideologies that emphasized individual responsibility and free-market solutions.

Grassroots Movements and Organizations

The conservative movement of the 1970s was not merely a top-down phenomenon but rather a grassroots effort that mobilized a diverse coalition of groups.

The Role of Religious Organizations

One of the most significant forces behind the rightward shift was the rise of the religious right. Evangelical Christians and other religious groups became increasingly politically active, advocating for issues such as:

- Opposition to abortion: The landmark Roe v. Wade decision in 1973 galvanized pro-life activists, who organized campaigns to restrict abortion access.
- Family values: The conservative movement emphasized traditional family structures, often positioning them against perceived moral decay.
- School prayer: Many conservative Christians lobbied for the reintroduction of prayer in public schools, framing the issue as one of religious freedom.

These religious organizations not only mobilized voters but also provided a moral framework that appealed to many disillusioned Americans.

Think Tanks and Intellectual Foundations

As conservatism gained traction, several influential think tanks and intellectual movements emerged to provide the theoretical underpinnings for the movement:

- The Heritage Foundation: Founded in 1973, the Heritage Foundation became a leading conservative think tank, producing research and policy recommendations that championed free-market principles and limited government.
- The American Enterprise Institute (AEI): AEI played a crucial role in promoting conservative economic ideas and policies, particularly in response to the challenges of stagflation.
- National Review: Founded by William F. Buckley Jr. in 1955, National Review served as a platform for conservative intellectuals, shaping public discourse and providing a rallying point for the movement.

These organizations contributed to the establishment of a cohesive conservative ideology that appealed to a broad audience.

Key Figures in the Conservative Movement

The 1970s saw the emergence of several influential leaders who played vital roles in advancing conservative causes.

Ronald Reagan

Ronald Reagan, who would later become the 40th President of the United States, was a central figure in the conservative movement. His rise to political prominence during this decade included:

- Governorship of California: As governor from 1967 to 1975, Reagan implemented conservative policies that emphasized tax cuts and reduced government spending.
- Political Rhetoric: Reagan's ability to communicate conservative values effectively resonated with many Americans, positioning him as a charismatic leader of the movement.
- Presidential Campaign: In 1976, Reagan challenged incumbent Gerald Ford for the Republican nomination, signaling a shift within the party toward a more conservative platform.

Other Influential Leaders

In addition to Reagan, other key figures contributed to the conservative resurgence:

- Barry Goldwater: Although Goldwater's presidential campaign in 1964 ultimately failed, it laid the groundwork for the conservative movement by articulating a vision of limited government and individual liberty.
- Phyllis Schlafly: A prominent conservative activist, Schlafly mobilized opposition to the Equal Rights Amendment and became a key figure in the growing conservative women's movement.

These leaders helped to shape the conservative agenda and provided inspiration for a generation of activists.

Impact of the Conservative Resurgence

The conservative movement of the 1970s laid the foundation for significant political changes in the following decades, particularly in the 1980s.

Electoral Success

The culmination of the conservative efforts in the 1970s was evident in the electoral successes of the Republican Party:

- 1978 Midterm Elections: The Republicans made significant gains in Congress, marking a turning point in American politics.

- 1980 Presidential Election: Ronald Reagan's victory over Jimmy Carter was a watershed moment for American conservatism, ushering in a decade of conservative governance.

Shifts in Policy and Ideology

The rightward shift of American politics during the 1970s resulted in lasting changes, including:

- Deregulation: The conservative emphasis on free markets led to widespread deregulation in various industries, including transportation and telecommunications.
- Tax Cuts: The movement advocated for tax policies that favored individuals and businesses, fundamentally altering the role of government in the economy.
- Foreign Policy: The conservative approach to foreign policy emphasized a strong military presence and the promotion of democracy worldwide, shaping America's role on the global stage.

Conclusion

Rightward bound serves as a critical resource for understanding the conservative movement in America during the 1970s. By examining the interplay of political, economic, and social factors, the author elucidates how this decade set the stage for a conservative resurgence that would dominate American politics for years to come. The emergence of grassroots movements, influential leaders, and powerful think tanks all contributed to a transformation that reshaped the political landscape of the United States. As a result, the 1970s remain a vital chapter in the ongoing narrative of American conservatism, with implications that continue to resonate in contemporary political discourse.

Frequently Asked Questions

What is the main thesis of 'Rightward Bound: Making America Conservative in the 1970s'?

The main thesis of 'Rightward Bound' is that the conservative movement in the 1970s was a significant force in reshaping American politics and culture, highlighting the strategies and ideologies that contributed to its resurgence during that decade.

Who is the author of 'Rightward Bound' and what is their academic background?

The book is authored by an unnamed scholar associated with Harvard University Press, whose academic background typically includes expertise in American political history and conservatism.

How does 'Rightward Bound' address the role of grassroots

movements in the conservative shift of the 1970s?

The book discusses how grassroots movements, including the rise of religious conservatism and local activism, played a crucial role in mobilizing voters and shaping conservative policies during the 1970s.

What impact did the Watergate scandal have on the conservative movement as discussed in 'Rightward Bound'?

In 'Rightward Bound', it is argued that the Watergate scandal disillusioned many Americans with liberal governance, creating an opening for conservative ideologies to gain traction as a response to perceived government overreach and corruption.

What are some key figures mentioned in 'Rightward Bound' who influenced the conservative movement in the 1970s?

Key figures discussed include politicians like Ronald Reagan and grassroots leaders such as Phyllis Schlafly, who were instrumental in articulating and promoting conservative values during this transformative period.

How does 'Rightward Bound' relate the conservative movement of the 1970s to contemporary politics?

The book draws parallels between the conservative strategies of the 1970s and contemporary political tactics, suggesting that the foundations laid during this decade continue to influence modern conservative thought and policy-making.

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