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Gary W. Reichard. *Deadlock and Disillusionment: American Politics since 1968.* The American History Series. Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell, 2016. Illustrations, graphs. x + 367 pp. $27.95, paper, ISBN 978-1-118-93435-7.

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On October 24, 2017, Arizona senator Jeff Flake forfeited his candidacy for reelection. He declared that he could not run with a clean conscience. Citing the toxicity of the American "state of our disunion," Flake expressed regret about the "disrepair and destructiveness of our politics" and the "indecency of our discourse."[1] In *Deadlock and Disillusionment: American Politics since 1968*, Gary W. Reichard sets himself the task of explaining how and why the federal government has suffered from this political paralysis. What forces, he asks, have contributed to this gridlock?

Many historians consider the rise and primacy of the Right's agenda in Washington to be the key political development of the last fifty years. Reichard disagrees, arguing that the ascendancy of gridlock and the public's attendant disillusionment with politics characterized the majority of postwar governance. According to Reichard, increasingly biased media, a growing rivalry between Congress and the president, and deepening partisan polarization explain how deadlock took hold in the capital. But the ultimate blame lay with the electorate who wittingly delivered divided government for over half a century. Says Reichard, "such deadlock was the result of purposeful, continual imposition by voters of 'checks and balances' to limit either party's potential to govern effectively" (p. 3).

Deadlock and Disillusionment is a declension narrative. The New Deal era is Reichard's Eden. In the years after Franklin Delano Roosevelt's election, the public believed in the democratic process, held their officials accountable, and elected united government. Congress and the president in turn acted to pass moderated bipartisan policy. The fall from grace began in 1968. With the assassinations of Martin Luther King Jr. and Robert F. Kennedy, moderation, comity, civility, and compromise across party lines in the name of the public good vanished. The resultant deadlock and policy failure generated public disillusionment, leading in turn to elections characterized by a see-saw, knee-jerk reaction to current administrations. By 2016, "deadlock and disillusionment" had taken such a hold on American politics that Congress regularly failed to fulfill routine functions, like passing a budget.

Reichard tells his story chronologically, highlighting the causes of the gridlock plaguing each successive presidential administration. Each chapter focuses on a discreet administration. The Vietnam War and Watergate initially produced public distrust of and disillusionment in Washington. Richard Nixon embodied the cynicism of the

era in building his ***southern strategy*** and embracing partisan pragmatism. Congressional "Watergate Babies" refused to work with their Republican colleagues and Gerald Ford in an attempt to score political points on the scandal. While Jimmy Carter was elected as an outsider who would bring back accountability to the office, the partisan gridlock over which he presided deepened the public's distrust in the federal government's ability to pass meaningful policy. The public had a "crisis of confidence" in Carter himself. Frustration about the status quo inspired Ronald Reagan's election, a hard shift to the right in politics, and deepened partisan division as the culture wars intensified, the ***moral majority*** staked their political claims, and the Iran-Contra affair came to light. Reichard contends that Reagan's "deft public relations skills made him seem a winner even when he was not" (p. 134). Congressional Democrats pounced on the perceived faults of "Reaganomics" to oppose George H. W. Bush's agenda. Despite Bill Clinton's moderating reforms to the Democratic economic platform, Newt Gingrich's factionalist congressional Republicans refused to cooperate with the White House as ultraconservative pundits gained steam in broadcast media. Ultimate deadlock reigned in ***Bush v. Gore*** (2000), and Democrats acted to block George W. Bush's every move after Iraq. The Tea Party's vitriolic attacks on Barack Obama's technocratic policy agenda did not bode well for a return to comity in governance as the 2016 presidential election loomed. Throughout ***Deadlock and Disillusionment***, Reichard also considers how presidents' personalities promoted or assuaged deadlock in government.

Reichard relies on a comprehensive reading of the secondary literature on gridlock to construct his narrative, and a sweeping tour of political history results. For that reason, ***Deadlock and Disillusionment*** would fare well in an introductory political history course as a textbook. Reichard quotes liberally from such giants as Michael Schaller and George Rising (***The Republican Ascendancy: American Politics, 1968-2001*** [2002]), Kenneth S. Baer (***Reinventing Democrats: The Politics of Liberalism from Reagan to Clinton*** [2000]), and Sean Wilentz (***The Age of Reagan: A History, 1974-2008*** [2009]), among others. His inclusion of a bibliographic essay lends him credibility as a scholar and is of great use to any political historian of the United States. However, there is scant use of primary sources in his account of gridlock, and the text mainly employs photos and graphs to enhance the literature he surveys. Indeed, there are no footnotes that point to congressional records. Reichard's account is more a synthesis and new interpretation of secondary sources.

Deadlock and Disillusionment's key contribution is its sweeping account of the political history of the post-Nixon era. That being said, the text's idyllic characterization of pre-1968 congressional politics forgets the violent, antagonistic partisan episodes of the past. Reichard argues that public disillusionment with the political system mushroomed after 1968, when Washington began to pursue partisan self-interest over the public good. Debuting with its tax cuts for the wealthy in the Republican platform in 1980, supply side economics represented a clear shift away from valuing the public interest. Experts, including the nonpartisan Congressional Budget Office, agree with economist Thomas Piketty's assertion that income and wealth inequality rapidly worsened in the decades since 1968.[2] Piketty's frequent coauthor Emmanuel Saez demonstrates that the top 0.1 percent richest Americans in 1968 owned around 8 percent of the total US household wealth; their share in 2013 was about 22 percent.[3]

Clearly, neither Democrats nor Republicans have dealt with this issue. Such stark inequality, contends presidential historian Julian E. Zelizer, could also be fueling resentment of the political system.[4] Robert Reich, a scholar of inequality, traces the public's frustration with government (in one of Reichard's graphs from Pew, we learn that in 1968, 77 percent of Americans had faith in

government; by 2017, it had shrunk to 20 percent) to the Powell Memo of 1971 (p. 332). Since the 2004 presidential election and particularly since the ***Citizens United*** (2010) decision, one-billion-dollar presidential elections funded by proxy political action committees, many of which are scarcely more than corporate lobby groups, have become the norm.[5] Reichard recognizes the failures of the theoretical antecedents and descendants of "Reaganomics" but does not definitively name the inequality that ensued as a cause for "disillusionment and deadlock."

The author's frequent citation of Donald T. Critchlow's ***Conservative Ascendancy: How the GOP Right Made Political History*** (2007), along with Geoffrey Kabaservice's ***Rule and Ruin: The Downfall of Moderation and the Destruction of the Republican Party, From Eisenhower to the Tea Party*** (2011), raises important questions. Both of these authors contend that the rise of the primacy of conservative social and economic ideology since the 1950s characterizes political history since the war. Historians are certainly no less vulnerable to this partisan mentality, but scholars of the Nixon era will note that Reichard's periodization of the rise of deadlock corresponds neatly with the national mainstreaming of southern segregationism, anti-government sentiment, and its obstructionist politics. The repeal of the Fairness Doctrine by Congress in 1987 does not appear in Reichard's book. Indeed, Reichard admits that conservatives have been the beneficiaries of the liberalization of campaign finance, the polarization of the media, and the financialization of the economy. One might make the argument that these developments have frustrated the electorate as much as the decline in comity that Reichard cites as the core problem of deadlock. Flake gave up his candidacy because of challenges from his extreme right. Reichard contends that both parties have become politically polarized. But could it be that the rightward shift in politics (evidenced in the historical record and the literature from which Riechard pulls) contributed to deadlock itself?

In the end, Reichard hangs his analysis on the assumption that divided government means less productive politics. However, such scholars as David R. Mayhew challenge this logic. Landmark legislation passed during the unified governments of John F. Kennedy and Lyndon B. Johnson continued to flourish throughout the Nixon and Ford years of divided government. Political scholar Leon D. Epstein wrote that Mayhew's work confirms the view that "broad social forces, not transient political arrangements, are responsible for waves of innovative governmental policy making."[6] Reichard would do well to recognize that politics plays out in the social realm, not just on the Senate floor. Tuning into the social histories of race, gender, and economics in the twentieth-century United States might elucidate the causes of the deadlock Reichard documents in ***Deadlock and Disillusionment.*** While Reichard masterfully traces the minutiae of deadlock's development within the Beltway, his argument might better satisfy the goals he set out for himself in his introduction had he elucidated its causes outside of Washington, DC.

Reichard concludes his book with the admission that the way forward amid "deadlock and disillusionment" "is not clear, but it will need to be found if the United States is to survive as an effective democracy" (p. 334). One would be inclined to agree. Implicit arguments abound in ***Deadlock and Disillusionment***, but Reichard would have done well to be explicit about the causes of knee-jerk electoral politics. The United States needs answers more than ever.

Notes

[1]. "Full Transcript: Jeff Flake's Speech on the Senate Floor," ***New York Times***, October 24, 2017, https://www.nytimes.com/2017/10/24/us/politics/jeff-flake-transcript-senate-speech.html?_r=1.

[2]. For an excellent (and refreshingly readable) discussion on this acceleration of wealth inequality, see Thomas Piketty, ***Capital in the Twenty-First Century***, trans. Arthur Goldhammer (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2017). For a discussion of the Congressional Budget Office's concurrance with Piketty, see Julian E. Zelizer, "Zelizer's Book Corner: Larry Bartels' Unequal Democracy," ***Huffington Post***, December 6, 2017, https://www.huffingtonpost.com/julian-e-zelizer/izelizers-book-corneri-la_b_134666.html.

[3]. Emmanuel Saez and Gabriel Zucman, "Wealth Inequality in the United States since 1913" (lecture, University of California at Berkeley, October 14, 2014), http://gabriel-zucman.eu/files/SaezZucman2014Slides.pdf.

[4]. Zelizer, "Zelizer's Book Corner."

[5]. Jacob S. Hacker and Paul Pierson, ***Winner-Take-All Politics: How Washington Made the Rich Richer—and Turned Its Back on the Middle Class*** (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2010), 116. To learn more about the Powell Memo, read "The Powell Memo: A Call-to-Arms for Corporations," Moyers & Company, September 14, 2012, http://billmoyers.com/content/the-powell-memo-a-call-to-arms-for-corporations/.

[6]. Leon D. Epstein, review of ***Divided We Govern: Party Control, Lawmaking, and Investigations, 1946–1990***, by David R. Mayhew, ***Journal of American History*** 79, no. 3 (December 1, 1992): 1242-1243, https://doi.org/10.2307/2080938.

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