
Reviewed by Daniel Macfarlane (Western Michigan University)

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Commissioned by Daniella McCahey (Texas Tech University)

Jay Hakes’s *Energy Crises* offers a comprehensive history of the evolution of US federal energy policy in the 1970s, punctuated by the two oil crises of the decade. The book focuses on the role of presidential and executive-level decision-making during the Richard Nixon, Gerald Ford, and Jimmy Carter administrations. Hakes, a former US government official, whose positions have included assistant to the Interior secretary during the Carter administration and director of the Jimmy Carter Presidential Library, combines a firsthand insider’s perspective with archival research. The author uses the Foreign Relations of the United States (FRUS) series heavily as well as primary sources from the Nixon, Ford, Carter, and Reagan presidential archives. His connections also provided him with access to such sources as Carter’s unpublished diaries.

Emphasizing domestic energy policy, economics, and foreign policy, Hakes provides an overview of all aspects of energy whose policy reins were at least partially held by presidents—including deregulation, pricing, imports, diplomacy, efficiency standards, and speed limits. *Energy Crises* is primarily a narration of political and economic history that hews to a strict chronological timeline. Indeed, most chapters cover fewer than six months, and many address just a few months at a time. Consequently, the twenty-seven chapters are generally short, with short sections within each separated by a line. I am of two minds about the utility of these short sections and breaks. On the one hand, it allows the author to quickly switch between subjects within a chapter and aids the prose; on the other hand, the lack of transitions means that the author frequently does not signpost the significance of his arguments or findings. Fuller conclusions at the end of chapters and longer sections would have been welcome.

Unlike most academic histories, this book does not feature a lengthy introduction laying out central arguments and relevant historiographies. This
too is both a strength and a weakness. It makes for a fairly easy read but will be less satisfying for researchers. Hakes does offer an engaging narrative highlighted by efficient prose and deftly navigates and explains complex and detailed material. Still, non-policy wonks will find some detail dense as the writing does get bogged down by unnecessary minutiae at times: we do not need to know at precisely what time Henry Kissinger called Nixon, for example. The level of sometimes encyclopedic detail might put off some readers. That said, this precision could well prove a boon to scholars who want to know the relevant contextual and policy climate surrounding a specific issue or theme they are personally concerned with (such as the wide range of alternative energy forms and conservation approaches that were under consideration, including ethanol—then referred to as “gasohol”). In this vein, the book could profitably be used as a textbook that provides the narrative spine for an undergrad class focused on modern US energy history or the energy crises or as a reading for a graduate-level class on energy.

Though *Energy Crises* lacks a central argument, some key arguments are apparent: the important role of individual presidents; the contingent, reactive, and complex nature of US energy politics in this period; unintended consequences of different policies; and the continuities, rather than sharp breaks, in energy policy across the Nixon, Ford, and Carter presidencies. All three presidents tried to balance a pursuit for more energy with efforts to minimize damage to the environment, at least to some extent. Hakes contends that there was *not* a sharp break in policy continuity in US energy policy from Ford to Carter; rather, this transition represented an intensification of previous Republican responses to the first Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) oil embargo. The three presidents had supported a windfall profits tax, a 55 mile per hour speed limit, energy conservation, the creation of a federal department focused on energy, investment in research and development on alternative energy types, and some federal control over energy pricing and allocation. Carter took a harder line on gasoline taxes, but the difference between Carter and his predecessors has been exaggerated, so too have the differences in approach to nuclear power, synthetic fuels, and the strategic petroleum reserve. These assertions at the end of chapter 24 are one of the few times that the author makes larger arguments clear outside of the short conclusion chapter. Perhaps since he knew firsthand the challenges of responding to the oil embargoes and other linked energy issues of the 1970s, the author tends to be more sympathetic than critical of the three presidents.

Moreover, in the areas of clear policy divergence across administrations, the actual differences conflict with traditional assumptions about regulatory preferences of Republicans and Democrats. For example, Nixon established, albeit reluctantly, price controls on oil, whereas Carter removed them in favor of market-based energy pricing. Congress did not obstruct Carter’s energy policies as has often been claimed. There is evidence here to support the argument that others have made about Carter being the first neoliberal president, paving the way for Ronald Reagan (though the author does not directly make this argument). Hakes does indirectly take issue with arguments that contend that the oil crisis was “invented” or made much worse by the oil majors.

The political economy and presidential history approach used here might not satisfy environmental historians, since energy resources are treated as passive resources without much agency or materiality, and the federal environmental legislation of these first green decades receives relatively little attention. Many environmental historians may well find the author too sympathetic to neoliberal energy policies and supply side economics, especially in the realms of pricing and deregulation. But they will profit from the deep and informative dive into the politics of energy.
Hakes is generally on surer footing when he discusses domestic energy policy, as compared to foreign affairs. Nevertheless, he effectively shows how much domestic energy policy was tied to international politics and diplomacy. None of these three denizens of the White House fully comprehended the complex politics of the Middle East, which exacerbated energy shortages (though Hakes, perhaps rightly, questions the extent to which any American political leader at the time could have correctly understood Middle Eastern politics). As is so often the case in the historiography on American foreign energy relations, however, a significant lacuna is Canada. Considering that Canada was well on its way to becoming the major foreign supplier of fossil fuels—as well as other energy types, such as electricity and uranium—to the United States and was already in the 1970s the United States’ largest trading partner, the lack of detailed attention to the northern neighbor and its expanding network of cross-border pipelines is an unfortunate oversight.

That said, through its fine-grained analysis, *Energy Crises* offers a corrective to standard narratives and received wisdom concerning US presidential and federal decision-making during these energy crises. Hakes puts in proper perspective and context many of the clichés surrounding the energy crises, complicating simple dichotomies about the Republican and Democrat leaders. This includes Carter’s installation of solar panels on the roof of the White House. True, Carter did have these installed, but Nixon and Ford had also been friendly to solar, while Carter strongly promoted increased coal usage. These Republican presidents also publicly pushed for energy conservation—speed limits were reduced to 55 miles per hour under Nixon, for example—and the image of Carter wearing a cardigan was more about trying to mimic Franklin Delano Roosevelt’s fireside chats than suggesting that Americans should bundle up with sweaters. In fact, Ford and Nixon had made similar overtures to the American public about turning down thermostats. Turning right at a red light, to reduce idling and thus save gasoline and time, began with the 1975 energy package in reaction to the Arab oil embargo.

Furthermore, Nixon’s and Ford’s energy efforts were more consequential than has been recognized. Contrary to what many have argued, the presidents of the 1970s did do a lot to respond—beyond just rhetoric—to the oil crises, and many of their efforts were eventually implemented. No energy initiative of the 1970s became, by itself, an immediate game changer. But the policies collectively led to energy consumption well below earlier predictions. Indeed, the reduction in imported oil, and reduction in American fossil fuel consumption in general, during the Carter administration was a major achievement and one that was as much the result of the two previous Republican administrations.

Though Reagan cut budgets for solar and renewables and other energy programs, many energy conservation and efficiency measures survived or rebounded after his administration. Thus, US production of energy in the twenty-first century, both fossil fuels and renewables, was built on foundations created in the 1970s. Many of the policies of the three administrations continue to have impacts today: nuclear energy; ethanol; unconventional oil and gas from tight and shale formations; new energy efficiency standards for consumer products, vehicles, and buildings; and new urban mass transit.
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