

The Great Flip: The Shifting Views of Liberals and Conservatives on Active Government

Donald J. Fraser

Fraser & Associates

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In his political science book *The Great Flip*, Donald J. Fraser explores the history and origins of modern American political positions.

Noting that it is now taken for granted that conservatives oppose “big government” while liberals support it, this book shows that American politics did not always work that way: for much of the country’s history, Fraser notes, conservatives believed that the government should intervene so that an elite few could prevent the self-interested masses from descending into chaos, while liberals believed in the ability of the people to govern themselves, independent of oversight. As decades passed and administrations came and went, support for “energetic” government waxed and waned until arriving at its present state.

Fraser’s analysis goes all the way back to colonial days, when fear of a tyrannical central power—in that case, the British monarchy—was instilled in the American people. He shows that memories of England’s unjust, controlling behavior toward the future United States led many to shun the idea of governmental interference in public affairs. Through engaging, informative prose, Fraser reveals that it was only with the rise of powerful monopolies and increasing income inequality that liberals embraced active government as a way of protecting average citizens—while business-minded conservatives came to oppose such measures.

Fraser draws from the works of respected historians and other experts to make his arguments and to reconstruct the most influential political forces and figures of the past 250 years. The text is rife with complex personalities, from Alexander Hamilton to Franklin Roosevelt, most of whom espoused both liberal and conservative views, often at the same time. The book takes special care to highlight the hypocrisy of politicians who sought to protect slavery by promoting freedom for both states and individuals.

Moving in chronological order, Fraser examines historical events—including World War I, which killed the pro-regulatory progressive movement—that built on each other to push public opinion toward or away from the support of active government. Occasional, brief commentary on current events illustrates the “cycles” of history, drawing parallels between then and now. Together, these interlocking strands—the people, philosophies, and events that combine to create history—demonstrate the complex nature of politics, showing how catchy buzzwords like “liberal” and “conservative” fail to capture the nuances of reality.

The book asserts that the Great Depression and Roosevelt’s New Deal are the pivotal events that caused liberals and conservatives to switch places for good—or at least, for the moment. As the epilogue shows, even the most entrenched philosophies and terminologies can be changed by a forceful enough personality and the necessities of an era.

The Great Flip is an engrossing political history that reveals how American politics and political ideologies developed.

EILEEN GONZALEZ (June 21, 2023)

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