

President Bush turned towards intense partisanship, “going public” and “governing by campaigning.” The upshot, for the United States and for Bush’s historical reputation, was fairly disastrous. Wroe and Herbert conclude that American “soft power,” military power, and economic power were all damaged under Bush. They suggest that the Bush years may presage a real shift away from free-market ideology, though the editors are cautious about proclaiming the end of conservative dominance. The essays in this book follow up the “tale of two terms” theme in an original and analytically sophisticated way.

As Wroe and Herbert emphasize, and as the essays in the collection illustrate, this was a strange “conservative” administration. The Bush foreign policy, after all, was largely devoid of the caution which one might suppose to be a conservative characteristic. On the domestic front, Eddie Ashbee concludes that Bush largely failed to deliver on the political agenda of the Christian right, which ended the first decade of the twenty-first century in some disarray. Maurice Vile shows that Bush was no friend of states’ rights. Bush was a big-government, big-spending conservative, who (as James Pfiffner argues) claimed “to be able to ignore the law” (42). Debates over foreign policy, like the Bush and Cheney claims to expansive executive power, will be more familiar to many readers – especially in Europe – than controversies surrounding domestic policy. Partly for this reason, it is the chapters on domestic policy which really catch the eye. Jonathan Parker, for example, neatly summarizes the inherent importance of the No Child Left Behind education reform, trenchantly noting its failure to deliver positive results. Alex Waddan notes the irony of Bush leaving as his “headline” legacy in social programmes for the elderly “an expensive new benefits programme” (178). This is a fine collection, the best available account of the presidential politics of the day before yesterday.

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Lawrence Jacobs and Desmond King (eds.), *The Unsustainable American State* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009. £17.99). Pp. 343. ISBN 0 1953 9214 0.

In the wake of Scott Brown’s election as the junior senator for Massachusetts, there was a flurry of talk about the “ungovernability” of the US. The Senate Republican Conference had, with the acquisition of its forty-first member, seemingly stopped the Obama agenda in its tracks. Although the President had secured the largest margin for a Democrat since 1964, and Congressional Democrats controlled both chambers, it appeared just over a year later that all the “hopey, changey stuff” (as the former Alaska governor put it) would have to be abandoned.

In *The Unsustainable American State*, Lawrence Jacobs and Desmond King go beyond these proximate considerations (indeed, the volume was published at a time when many still entertained high hopes for the Obama administration), and instead draw upon the deeper and broader approaches associated with historical institutionalism. The fourteen authors consider the contemporary economic crisis, but at the same time reflect upon much longer-term shifts and processes. In particular, the

editors “point to deep-rooted dysfunctionality in the operation of the American state’s administrative institutions and the regeneration of its legitimacy” (5).

Although they rightly reject notions of a weak state, both the editors and many of the authors attribute the cause of this dysfunctionality to the limited character of US state capacity. Almost thirty years ago, Stephen Skowronek (who contributes a concluding essay to this volume) described the American state as “hapless giant.” There are, the editors suggest, particular reasons for this. The strategic power of capital is a constant, although lobbying and the appointment of figures such as Hank Paulson (or Timothy Geithner) have allowed it to advance its interests still further. The byzantine structures that characterize the federal government bureaucracy further inhibit the process of policy implementation. Those responsible often lack professional skills (“Brownie, you’re doing a heck of a job”) and policymaking is “persistently compromised” by external interests. The failure of the state to identify risk in the years that preceded the subprime mortgage crisis is symptomatic.

Against this background, there have inevitably been feelings of frustration and disappointment. Indeed, the editors speak of state legitimacy coming under strain. In particular, they suggest, pressures have arisen because of growing economic inequality, vast government subsidies to bail out corporate finance, and the pursuit of inherently contradictory policies.

Many of the essays are situated, at least loosely, within this framework. Larry Bartels considers the extent to which inequality shapes and structures political representation. Benjamin I. Page and Lawrence Jacobs survey attitudes towards inequality and the ways in which mass attitudes bring together philosophical conservatism and a degree of “operational liberalism.”

There are inevitably some difficulties. The ties between some of the essays and the issues raised at the beginning of the volume are not always readily evident. The editors’ plea for the use of approaches derived from “situated functionalism” remains frustratingly underdeveloped. Most importantly of all, it may be a step too far to talk at this stage of a “legitimation crisis.” As the authors argue, and as the “Tea Party” movement colourfully demonstrates, there is widespread disaffection with officeholders. However, all of this does not, in itself, make a case for the “unsustainability” of the state.

Nonetheless, this is an invaluable collection. Commentaries on political processes in the US are often narrative-based (particularly in Europe) or are a subbranch of mathematics (particularly in the US). In place of this, Jacobs and King are bringing theory back in.

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Robert Teigrob, *Warming up to the Cold War: Canada and the United States’ Coalition of the Willing, from Hiroshima to Korea* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2009, \$55.00). Pp. viii + 288. ISBN 978 0 8020 9923 5.

Since the mid-1960s, nationalist historians in Canada have beavered away on an interpretation of postwar Canadian foreign policy that has become deeply rooted in