



The Cause: The Fight for American Liberalism from Franklin Roosevelt to Barack Obama

Eric Alterman , Kevin Mattson

[Download now](#)

[Read Online](#) 

The Cause: The Fight for American Liberalism from Franklin Roosevelt to Barack Obama

Eric Alterman , Kevin Mattson

The Cause: The Fight for American Liberalism from Franklin Roosevelt to Barack Obama Eric Alterman , Kevin Mattson

The definitive history of American postwar liberalism, told through the lens of those who brought it to life.

Liberalism stands proudly at the center of American politics and culture. Driven by passion for social justice, tempered by respect for the difficulty of change, liberals have struggled to end economic inequality, racial discrimination, and political repression. Liberals have fueled their cause with the promise of American life and visions of national greatness, seeking to transform the White House; the halls of Congress, the courts, the worlds of entertainment, law, media, and the course of public opinion. Bestselling author, journalist, and historian Eric Alterman, together with historian Kevin Mattson, traces the history of liberal ideals through the lives and struggles of fascinating personalities. *The Cause* tells the remarkable story of politicians, intellectuals, visionaries, activists, and public personalities battling for the heart and soul of the nation.

The first full-scale treatment of postwar liberalism, *The Cause* offers an epic saga driven by stories of grand aspirations, principled ambitions, tragic flaws, and the ironies of history of the people who fought for America to live up to the highest ideals of its history.

The Cause: The Fight for American Liberalism from Franklin Roosevelt to Barack Obama Details

Date : Published April 12th 2012 by Viking

ISBN : 9780670023431

Author : Eric Alterman , Kevin Mattson

Format : Hardcover 576 pages

Genre : History, Politics, Nonfiction, North American Hi..., American History, Social Movements, Social Justice

 [Download The Cause: The Fight for American Liberalism from Frank ...pdf](#)

 [Read Online The Cause: The Fight for American Liberalism from Fra ...pdf](#)

Download and Read Free Online The Cause: The Fight for American Liberalism from Franklin Roosevelt to Barack Obama Eric Alterman , Kevin Mattson

From Reader Review The Cause: The Fight for American Liberalism from Franklin Roosevelt to Barack Obama for online ebook

Steve says

This is a political history of liberalism from Roosevelt to Obama, its successes, its internal struggles, its failures, its changes and modifications, its war with a new breed of opponent-- the modern tea party-influenced conservative, whose only political goal is to win regardless of the cost in human terms. Alterman's focus is on the figures who have tried to turn liberalism into political action: Franklin Roosevelt, Eleanor Roosevelt, John Kennedy, Martin Luther King, Jr., Jimmy Carter, Bill Clinton, Hillary Clinton, Barack Obama; and on its major thinkers, Richard Hofstadter and Arthur Schlesinger, Jr., each of these individuals trying in his own way to achieve liberal goals and each having varying degrees of success. Rather than on trying to explain or justify the underlying philosophies, they have tried political action intended to make our political life more equal.

Liberalism's great strength is that it is not an ideology, but that is also its greatest weakness. It's a philosophy, a way of viewing and understanding the world and taking action to make a better world for all of us. Because it is a way of understanding, it invites differences of opinions, even when those differences are destructive to the main thrust of contemporary liberal political policies. Because it is not ideological, it "has few emotional rewards; the liberal state is not a home for its citizens; it lacks warmth and intimacy" (p. 471), whereas the catchphrases and taglines of the opposition, combined of libertarianism, jingoism, fear mongering, distortions, racism (and in the south, romantic evocations of the "lost cause"), and other easily pushed buttons provide emotional release and a sense of tribal belonging. The emotional appeal of the opposition's ideology has created voting patterns in which voters end up voting against their own best interests, while liberalism struggles to find a message which counters that emotionalism and the politically self-destructive inclinations which stem from it. Liberalism's internecine battles, especially in the 60s and 70s, have split American opinion, often turning public opinion against the very ones the liberal spirit is trying to help achieve major political goals. Those battles have given the opposition opportunity to take hold of the political vocabulary and bend it to its own purposes, even to the degree of using "liberal" derogatorily to push emotional buttons. That split in opinion, fueled by a well-financed and well organized opposition party which craves ideological purity, has moved the basic tenets of political liberalism rightward in search of answers and public appeal to meet the opposition's oppressive assault on the middle class.

Nevertheless, the liberal spirit has its roots in the the Enlightenment, which means "standing firm on behalf of the foundational freedoms of thought, expression, and the necessity of individuals to take hold of their collective fates and shape them according to the values of liberty and equality, while being fully aware that the two must always coexist in tension with each other" (p. 472). "Liberalism has pledged itself to rationality in a political culture in which anti-intellectualism runs rampant" (p. 471). This is an important history with which all liberals should be familiar; it tells of a vision of American society as a "more free and equal place for all its members" (p. 473). Alterman shows the reader that liberalism is ultimately "the only honest place to be" (pp. 461-473).

Stephen Embry says

A random walk history of Liberalism from FDR through BHO. The story is told as it more or less happened, people of a particular persuasion reacting and responding to events of their day. This provides for a glide

through numerous personalities with transitions so subtle that often you do not notice them. This stylistic device and eloquent voice alone would make for excellent reading, with the analysis an excellent frosting on the story. However, the analysis is so good and intriguing that it could carry the book alone.

The basic structures are race, war and economics, the trinity of the human story. Unfortunately for the human story these are often competing and clashing forces for conservatives as well as liberals, and it is the political balancing act which real persons engage in that produces our histories before they are written.

In this particular story it is the collapse of classical capitalism which took place in 1929 which provides the birthing force of Liberalism, and the rise of FDR and the New Deal. Alterman paints a picture of FDR which is more nuanced than most, noting that many of his actual new deal policies were tentative and less radical than others have painted them. The difference being the glow of the Man in the White House, which provided for the resurrection of hope and an inspiration for change. As is often the fact, inspiration gave way to perspiration as war intruded into poverty.

The story then shifts to the post war concerns which strangely enough involved war by other means, and the poverty of originality which trapped liberals in relatively ineffectualism, as they sought to prove that they were as tough as the other cold warriors. The portraits of Kennedy and Johnson marching off to war are worthy of a read by themselves. Equally interesting is the story of the tensions of the political realignment of this decade as Civil Rights played a more pivotal role in the national psyche.

The theme of the President being the leader of the Free World, at a time when many Americans could not vote, and suffered from organized isolation and discrimination prodded the left to raise some questions which were unfortunately uncomfortable and destabilizing of the political structure. The book does a wonderful job of exposing those conflicts, and criticizing some of the Great Society policies and programs, particularly the unsettling effects of maximum feasible participation.

This of course segues into Vietnam and the efflorescence of the counter culture, which combined with the civil rights issues gave rise to the Great Realignment as labor and the south moved out of the Democrat party and into the GOP. The story here as always is the lag between change and its perception with analysis lagging reality.

The final section of the book is largely a critique of Obama, with whiffs of Hillary. Alterman suggests and mourns lost opportunities, and the failure of the President to grasp and respond to the Great Realignment. It could act as a mini course on the rest of the book, painting a picture of liberalism which in its belief in the perfectibility of man often finds it difficult to deal with man's imperfectibility, and thus being left to respond to harsher realities than it wishes to believe.

It is partly a birthing story, of the creation of the modern world following the collapse of the old after World War I, and births are rarely without pain even if the result is in the long run joy. We await the outcome.

David Bales says

A chronicle of the difficult struggle for liberalism in America, since the New Deal; with interesting portraits of major figures in American history such as Eleanor Roosevelt, Henry Wallace, Bayard Rustin, the Kennedy brothers, George McGovern and many others all the way to Barack Obama. Liberalism in America was deeply derailed by the war in Vietnam, (the motivations of the Johnson Administration summed up nicely here) and the backlash over civil rights. The excesses of the right wing compounded over the decades have led us back to the promised land, but the future is not guaranteed. Excellent analyses of the Truman, Kennedy, Johnson, Carter, Clinton and Obama administrations and the ever-present struggle between left and right elements in the Democratic party--and the radicals.

Shawn says

A good book on how liberals have ebbed and flowed with the societal changes from 1945 to the election of Obama. The book does not confine itself to politicians alone, but incorporates philosophers, historians, and writers who helped shape the changing definition of liberal. I would recommend this book to anyone who already had a basic understanding of how the democratic party has changed as this book will help build on that understanding and allow for a more in-depth analysis of the factors that went into the change.

judy says

Apologies, Mr. Alterman. As I've surfed around the Web, I've been drawn to Jon Meacham and Howard Fineman. I scanned you but was really too quick to give you the attention you deserve. This book is amazing. I am old enough to have read extensively on FDR and actually remember Truman being discussed over the dinner table--including all the messy parts. My dad worked on the Hill. I cannot imagine what you went through to ferret all this out. You explained everything so well--especially when the intellectuals (Podhoretz, Kristol etc.) decided to take liberalism on. They obviously had a great time and delighted academe--but did it do anything meaningful? Did it ever play in Peoria? Forgive me but ever so often I'd take refuge in Will Rogers famous quote "I'm not a member of an organized political party--I'm a Democrat" To me, this book has everything a person would want to know about liberalism. I can't see a smart little poly sci type taking on a sequel. That would be suicide. You are honest--a good thing until the end of the book. You made me look at Obama (a man I adore) through the proper frame. I was reminded of some things I wish I didn't know. Plus I'm sure there was some new information in there too. Given what we're learning about the educational level of many of our citizens, I have no idea where this will end up. Thank you for an excellent read.

Gordon says

I should start by saying this book is encyclopedic and helped me to understand the Truman and Roosevelt administrations and their relationship to liberalism. The middle stuff is OK, but predictable for anyone who has followed the movement. King is good, the Kennedys are good, and Johnson is misguided. OK, I get it. The last stuff is confused. I like Alterman. I like his prose. His research is good. I get it.

James Trent says

I can think of no book that better recounts the achievements and failures of American liberalism than this

book. The authors take as their period of analysis the decades from Roosevelt's New Deal to Obama's "Yes we can." Filled with cultural markers as well as expected political changes, the book develops a picture of American liberalism that has sometimes over-reached, sometimes promised more than it could deliver, but nevertheless has changed America into a more just, equal, and compassionate nation. The authors remain gloomy for the future. With checks written by billionaires and multinational corporations to an increasingly irrational Republican Party and an increasingly pusillanimous Democratic Party, the warning of Louis Brandeis, "We can have democracy in this country, or we can have great wealth concentrated in the hands of a few. But we can't have both," is ignored by politicians and the public alike. With humility, the authors remind us, people who consider themselves children of the Enlightenment can bring liberalism back from the state of distrust and disrespect that it now owns. But to do so, liberals must regain confidence in the ability of free men and women to build through trial and error social arrangements that are more just, equal, and free; and at the same time they must travel beyond mercenary individualism to build a more compassionate social fabric.

Todd Thompson says

Good history about the genesis of American liberalism and its proponents.

James says

The author is able to put into historical perspective the evolution of liberal thought from FDR to Obama.

John Draxler says

Dense, but highly informative history of the post-FDR progressive movement. Alterman's take on the last few decades may hold a cynical lense, but also offers important lessons and thoughts for the future.

Demi Abromaits says

I picked up this book seeking an in-depth, critical analysis of the last century of American liberalism, assaying various figures leanings and cited policy decisions. Eric Alterman delivered.

This book recounts the achievements, failures, and frictions of American liberalism from FDR to Barack Obama with an affectionate, but sharp eye. The Cause provides great detail of the various cultural and political figures which contributed to liberal thought throughout the 20th and early 21st century, including Eleanor Roosevelt, Reinhold Niebuhr, and Ted Kennedy among others. While extensively researched and informative, Alterman's has produced a book which is lively in its portrayed cast of characters. The chapter "Eggheads in the Wilderness" is steeped in the candid humor of Adlai Stevenson: "Senator, you have the vote of every thinking person!" Stevenson reportedly called back "That's not enough madam we need a majority!" Alterman ultimately presents a flawed portrait of liberalism in a way only its most deeply rooted supporters could: highlighting how liberal ideals have overall positively affected the course of the nation (through the trial-and-error of political progress) and therefore pushing to increase confidence in the liberal movement in years to come.

I loved this book and am guaranteed to find myself referencing it from my shelf in the future. However, I do

wish Alterman had included more information during the periods of conservative presidencies and specifics of the dismantling of the New Deal rooted policies and the policy decisions behind the economic backtracking that he references in later chapters. Overall I would recommend this book to those looking to extend their knowledge of American history and those seeking to educate themselves in the philosophical influences of modern liberal thought.

Michael says

Round One (8/12): I made it to page 11. Freedom from fear, and freedom from want. Good luck with that, dude.

Round Two (3/16): a long, dense book of political history written in 9 point font and exacting detail. I. Just. Can't.

Anni says

This book was an interesting history of liberalism from FDR to Obama. However, it was a very dry read and the author has a habit of going off on to random historical tangents that have little to nothing to do with the main narrative. He also skipped over things that should have been better addressed (for instance, the Bush Years) while giving far too much time to things that were on the whole rather irrelevant. I also feel that the book should have been a little heavier on analysis as this is exactly the sort of book where understanding the 'whys' is more important than understanding the 'whats' and 'whens'.

Still, it was an informative book and well worth the read.
