



The Conscience of a Liberal

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With this major new volume, Paul Krugman, today's most widely read economist, studies the past eighty years of American history, from the reforms that tamed the harsh inequality of the Gilded Age to the unraveling of that achievement and the reemergence of immense economic and political inequality since the 1970s. Seeking to understand both what happened to middle-class America and what it will take to achieve a "new New Deal," Krugman has created his finest book to date, a work that weaves together a nuanced account of three generations of history with sharp political, social, and economic analysis. This book, written with Krugman's trademark ability to explain complex issues simply, will transform the debate about American social policy in much the same way as did John Kenneth Galbraith's deeply influential book, *The Affluent Society*.

The Conscience of a Liberal Details

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From Reader Review The Conscience of a Liberal for online ebook

Bill Kerwin says

It can be interesting--and often a little sad--to look at political books written three presidential elections ago, and see what they predict about the future of America. Here Krugman--less prophetic in sociology than economics--predicted an end to movement conservatism and race-baiting. Now in the era of Donald Trump, we see that, although movement conservatism may be mortally wounded, it still thrashes about mightily in its death throes, and racism--alas!--is still alive and well.

Paul Krugman, in 2007, argued that the New Deal led to a lessening of inequality In America which in turn fueled our postwar boom which resulted in a relatively non-partisan political atmosphere until the '70's. Since then, movement conservatism's methodical dismantling of the social safety net has led to an ever-widening income gap and an ever-increasing partisanship in politics.

Krugman thought, however, that movement conservatism had had its day, since the race-baiting that has helped it win close elections is rapidly losing its force as America becomes less white and less racist.

He also argued that a strong push for some form of universal health care during the next administration (Obama's first term) could restore confidence in government itself and--like the New Deal's Social Security--help form a liberal consensus for years to come.

Well, we see how the push for health care turned out. Whatever you think of Obamacare (I like it myself, although I would prefer a single payer system), it certainly did not help form any sort of "liberal consensus."

And as far as how demographics may alter the power of movement conservatism (and demagogues like Trump), I think we may have to wait another two presidential elections cycles to find out. Which brings us to 2024.

Me? I think the "liberal consensus" will triumph. But I'm certainly not going to write a book predicting it.

Peter Mcloughlin says

I like political books. Especially ones I agree with. Even if their message is that you dear citizen are screwed you still get the satisfaction of having your views vindicated. It is being able to say "see, I told you so." that genuinely feels good. It is why there were bumper stickers in New England around the time of Watergate that said "Don't Blame me, I'm from Massachusetts" (antiquarians of the election of 1972 will get it). It is the bird's eye view of the social forces around you that political books provide that make you feel above it all even if you are being squeezed by said forces. I don't expect people of a different political bent than me to enjoy Krugman's brand of politics but his explanations of the travails of liberalism are a balm to a wounded political animal and his calls for policy changes and political action keep you in the game. I am sure it is the same for my political opponents. So instead of extolling my political ideology in the post (yay liberals) I just thought I'd express the reasons why people get into political books. It is like sports for opinionated people. By the way Krugman is a good writer and explains liberalism and current politics very well.

Lucas Rodrigues says

In this book, Krugman starts to note that, under democracy, in a country with high level of inequality the victory in elections will always belong to the candidate with more progressive views about taxation. That's a result known as "Median voter theorem". But why this doesn't happen in the United States? Krugman went to the end of nineteenth-century to show that in the Gilded Age America was unequal and still elected politicians associated with the interests of elites. Then he explains that it is possible because the candidates focus on the questions which divide the poor as customs, traditions and other things that opposed the Catholic (in urban areas) and Protestants (in rural areas).

The time goes and the politicians are making the same strategy, but in nowadays the main tool to divide the poor is the race. Krugman claims that the Republican Party establishment build a movement through think tanks and a heavy use of dog-whistle politics in order to advance the conservative agenda in tax and public spending. Therefore, you vote for law and order and obtain tax cuts for the riches and small spending in public education and health.

The solution raised by Krugman is the recovery of liberal agenda in the form of FDR's New Deal. The challenge for Americans is creating, as Roosevelt did, a middle-class society with less inequality and more opportunities. The model was post-war America, not Gilded Age.

The book was written in 2007 but is still relevant. Unfortunately, the left in the West is totally lost in questions about gender and race while the economic issues are forgotten. As a result, liberals can't talk in the same language of working class and the consequence of this alienation is the association of low-income voters with far-right politicians. This is happening in Brazil and in some countries of Europe. Apparently, it's happening in the United States too.

Dwight says

Krugman really makes the case (and he's well qualified to do so) -- a case he says he wasn't willing to make when he started to write the book even -- that the wild swing in our economy that favors the rich and creates more and more filthy rich while leaving the middle class largely stagnant hasn't been just something that happened as a result technology-driven changes in the nature of our economy (as is often posited) but rather the result of very deliberate policy changes. The lesson is that these policy changes can also be reversed, undone, tweaked, whatever.

In case you didn't think '08 was a good time for a change ;-)

Vannessa Anderson says

I found Chapter 8, Politics of Inequality, the most informative. The chapter outlines how George W. Bush and Dick Cheney came to lead the country and how it's tied to William F. Buckley defending the right of the South to prevent blacks from voting— *the white community is so entitled because it is, for the time being, the advanced race. And how they praised Generalissimo Francisco Franco, who overthrew a democratically elected government in the name of church and property.*

Another passage that caught my attention was, *Latter-day hagiographers have portrayed Ronald Reagan as a paragon of high-minded conservative principles, but he was nothing of the sort. His early political successes were based on appeals to cultural and sexual anxieties, playing on the fear of communism, and, above all, tacit exploitation of white backlash against the civil rights movement and its consequences.*

For me, there was so much new information in *The Conscience of a Liberal* that it was mind boggling!

The Conscience of A Liberal was well written, flowed well, and an easy and informative read.

Matt says

Inequality and American politics according to Krugman. Unlike Barry Goldwater's *Conscience of a Conservative*, from which this book took its title, *Conscience of a Liberal* is not really a manifesto of "Liberal" principles or values. Instead the book tries to convey two main ideas that are more political and historical: 1) Inequality in America is driven more by political and social forces than by market forces. 2) Republicans owe their political success purely to greed and bigotry (oh and cheating). To make these arguments, Krugman devotes most of the book to his version of economic and political history.

On the first point, the book basically serves as a good survey of the liberal explanation of the changing tides of inequality in America. In its crudest form, his argument is that the rise of unions combined with high marginal tax rates and changing social norms brought about the great compression (the narrowing of the gap between lowest and highest incomes that lasted from the late 40s to the 70s). The reverse (caused by Reagan and the conservative ascendance in the 80's) caused the great divergence, more or less. In other words, market forces were not decisive, but rather political and social forces (political in the form of tax rates and treatment of unions, social in the form of changing attitudes toward exorbitant executive pay).

For the most part, Krugman doesn't argue for the truth of this narrative as much as he presents it as fact. He devotes very little space to competing explanatory candidates. He plows over a couple of straw men from time to time on his way to the conclusion, but there isn't much serious engagement with opposition. As a conservative with an amateur interest in economics, I didn't find Krugman's narrative very convincing, but it did challenge some of my assumptions (I think non-market forces probably have played a larger role than I previously granted). Three stars for this part of the book. One-sided, but quite readable.

As far as his treatment of Conservatives, you get the kind of one-sided, selective history you would expect from Krugman. Anyone who has read his columns knows that he doesn't give his political opponents a shred of charity in terms of motives or intelligence. The same holds for the book. If you think Conservatives are all some combination of greedy, racist, and dumb, then bon appetit! This book has plenty of red meat for you. If you want a careful examination of the competing values and priorities of liberals and conservatives, look elsewhere.

Nick says

My book club outvoted me--I didn't want to read this book, because I figured a regular reader of Krugman's

columns would not get much from it. I guess I thought this was a compendium of the columns or something.

Boy, was I wrong! This is a great book, must reading for anyone who cares about the direction we have been moving in. Krugman makes a good case for political action now to get a universal health care plan in place, let the tax cuts expire, reverse the government's attacks on unions and so forth. I particularly liked that he put all of this in historical context as well as in comparison with other OECD countries.

Really, I think, a must-read book!

Pete Sikora says

What's with the well-reasoned arguments and incontrovertible facts, Paul? Enough with the "evidence" and "studies". I mean, why do you want to show that your arguments are correct with actual data. Jeez.

But seriously, folks. Krugman writes like the really good teaching economist that he is. This book rocks.

He's got a great - if not entirely original - dissection of the right wing movement's growth. Ditto arguments on income inequality and health care. He's got this great teaching manner that is just so dang reasonable - makes for good reading.

Besides the excellent writing and analysis, the most heartening thing about the book is how liberal elitists like Krugman have concluded that income inequality is American society's greatest challenge. Thinkers like Krugman now support unions and income redistribution. Indeed, unions are central to their policy prescriptions.

It didn't used to be this way. Krugman hadn't been a fan of labor unions in his earlier career. I saw someone ask him about that at a forum I was at. He said "Sometimes you don't know what you had until its gone." Well said.

The book shows how the right wing movement systematically targeted labor unions in order to advance their agenda. Meanwhile, the democratic party is only now just beginning to realize that selling labor down the river is a suicidal electoral strategy.

Krugman still won't say that NAFTA was a giant mistake, but his views are evolving - fast. It's only a matter of time.

Anyway, the shift in liberal elite thinking is great... there's only one problem: factual arguments aren't what wins. It's all about political/movement power. Being right helps, but it's not a necessary condition to winning policy change. I'm happy that the thinking is shifting, but it's going to take a whole lot more than books.

And Krugman knows it. He's all about building our movement. His book will certainly help. Great read.

Bobby says

Krugman already has one Nobel (for economics); he should get another for writing about economic policy in a way that's actually easy to understand and enjoyable! In this surprisingly fast read he explains--among other things--the fundamental goals of "movement conservatism," the historical context of FDR's era and the New Deal, and the worsening social inequality that has been going on for the last few decades. It's refreshing to hear intelligent arguments backed up with data, though Krugman doesn't go over the top with statistics etc (rightly so IMHO since this is meant for the lay public). Though Krugman's left-of-center beliefs clearly come across, I think people from all political backgrounds should be able to appreciate his evidence-based conclusions and recommendations.

Dylan says

In the 1990s Paul Krugman famously asserted that 70% of the wealth that had been accumulated between 1977-1989 belonged to the top 1% of the population. Those facts still remain, but history has distorted the legacy of President Reagan, turning an actor and communicator into a great policy maker. The truth is that for the average American, Ronald Reagan was anything but a great policy maker. In fact, he was the ultimate creator of the income inequality that we live with today.

In 2007, with a critical presidential race underway Krugman has written a must read book. I must confess that I have been searching for this book for a long time: a book that traces our country's modern economic history, is written by an expert, but is accessible to the general public. Especially in 2008, as we are all scrambling to choose the next President it seems important to return to the basis of nearly everything: money.

Krugman begins with a description what he calls the long gilded age. Beginning in the 1870s with reconstruction and through what many call the progressive era in the early 20th century up to Franklin Delano Roosevelt's New Deal policies that began in the 1930s. The long gilded age was defined by its lack of income taxes and the large gap between the rich and the poor. At its peak, in the 1920s, there were 32 billionaires (billionaires are calculated by the Berkley Economist J. Bradford DeLong as people making more than the combined output of 20,000 average American workers), the top 1% of the population held over 17% of the nation's wealth while the top 10% accounted for 43.6%. Krugman's central question is discovering why it is that this gap was so prevalent during the long gilded age, all but disappeared under the presidency of FDR and the men that followed him in the 1950s, 60s and 70s, and, beginning in the 1980s has re-emerged at levels equal to or higher than the long gilded age.

Today there are 160 billionaires (a twelve hundred percent increase from 1968), the top 1% of the population holds over 17% of the nation's wealth, while the top 10% accounts for 44.3%. The output value of the average American worker has risen nearly 50%, in real dollars, since 1973. Yet in 2005, the median American male had seen his income drop slightly in the intervening 32 years. Moreover, for males in the beginning to the middle of their careers (those ages 35-44), median income has dropped 12% since 1973. One might say that those numbers aren't all that bad, but the United States is far richer today than in 1973, so where has all of that increased GDP gone? The answer is, to the top few wage earners. Perhaps the least deserving group being Corporate Executive Officers who have seen their incomes raise from 30 times the average worker's wage in the 1970s to between 200 and 300 today. In a 2006 Pew Research poll more than half of all American's surveyed said that the average worker "has to work harder to earn a decent living" today than a generation ago.

So where did the reemergence of inequality come from and why aren't all American's sharing in the growing GDP pie? The author begins by admitting that he had always believed, even as he began writing the book that as a rule the economy drove policy. When income was distributed evenly, for example, a populist

legislative agenda was allowed to flourish. Conversely, while the rich hold all the purse strings, policies that keep the rich rich remain legislation du jour.

But what Krugman discovered was something far more empowering. The economy, he argues, is driven by policy and the norms it produces. He supports this thesis by citing the emergence of the middle class in the 1940s. The middle class explosion was due in large part to war time wage controls, but even after the wage controls were removed the middle class did not disappear. Because, Krugman argues, the politics of equality had taken root in the norms and institutions of American society (an example of this is the strong labor laws of the time, as well as corporate acceptance of unions).

So if the politics of the New Deal led to a shift in norms that allowed the middle class to flourish and reduced the number of billionaires to 13 by 1968, how is it that America finds itself, once again, mired in the depths of economic inequality. Thomas Frank famously argued, in *What's the Matter with Kansas*, that the voter shift was due to the religious right's marriage with the Republican party, which resulted in its ability to carry the south. Krugman, while not discounting the merit of Frank's argument, contends that something much more sinister is at work in the politics of inequality today, namely, the white backlash against the politics of the civil rights era. To emphasize this point, Krugman highlights Ronald Reagan's kick-off speech to his 1980 presidential campaign, a states right's speech outside Philadelphia Mississippi, where in the 1960s 3 civil rights workers were murdered.

The politics of race have dogged this country since its inception. From George Washington's decision, first to exclude free blacks from military service and then to include them as a matter of necessity; Benjamin Franklin's last public stand for the abolition of slavery; the free for slave state compromises of the mid 1800s; the emancipation proclamation; the right of African American's to vote; *Brown v. The Board of Education*; to the civil rights acts of the 1960s, this country has long struggled to properly address questions of racial equality. It is therefore naïve of us to assume that race would no longer play a significant role in politics.

As Democrats became the party of civil rights in the 1960s, it quickly became clear that the coalition of southern and northern Democrats could not survive. A movement began amongst conservatives to fight for the repeal of New Deal policies. This movement was largely a reaction to the acceptance of the New Deal by moderate conservatives, such as Dwight Eisenhower. Thus began movement conservatism, from the founding of the *National Review* to Barry Goldwater's usurpation of the 1964 Republican convention and Karl Rove's ascendancy to President of the college Republicans in 1972. Richard Nixon, a sort of hybrid between the Eisenhower moderates and the burgeoning movement conservatives, campaigned on fear and race but also raised taxes and proposed universal healthcare. Not until 1980-- when Ronald Reagan, the man who had begun his political career with a now famous speech in support of Goldwater's 1964 presidential bid-- did movement conservatives have a real chance at success. In office, Reagan created a strong coalition by cutting taxes, fighting unions, rewarding the rich, and catering to voters angry over the income and racial equality policies of the 1960s. And thus began the politics of inequality that continue to this day. Bill Clinton managed the country in a fiscally responsible way but with a Republican majority for 6 of his 8 years in office, he was forced on many issues to govern to the right of even Nixon.

To reverse the tide of inequality, Krugman's policy solution, or beginning to the new New Deal, is universal healthcare. Like social security under Roosevelt, Krugman argues that universal healthcare is the policy catalyst that is needed to change the norms and institutions that maintain inequality at levels higher than even the long gilded age. The United States spends nearly twice as much per person as Germany, Britain, France and Canada and has a life expectancy lower than all four.

But, while the history of income inequality is painful the policy solutions are evident and the electorate seems ready for change. According to most recent polls it seems likely that, come January of 2009 a Democrat will be sworn in as the 45th President of the United States. Finally, even where the politics of race

seem to pose a difficult barrier to progress, hope exists in an electorate that is becoming less white and increasingly tolerant of differences. With the policy changes that such a demographic shift brings about, the norms that have robbed the worker of his or her share, and protected the rich through corporate greed and civil rights backlash are quickly fading.

Mark says

The weakness of this book is that it is largely preaching to the choir. Yes, the national Republican Party is run by a bunch of lying bastards who hate minorities, the poor, democracy, and Christianity. BUT...you've either accepted that or you've closed your eyes in denial. Writing a partisan tract isn't going to change anyone's mind.

The best part of the book is a history of the evolution of the Republican party in the twentieth century. Krugman layers this with comparisons of how the economy is doing through the years. So, for example, he examines how Republican politicians say high tax rates are bad and compares this with how the economy in high tax eras was actually quite good. He also examines how the modern Republican party success since the Civil Rights Act passed is heavily based on wooing the racist Southern voter, and he obviously spent some time researching this particular area.

I think that history is the strongest thread, but Krugman talks about other things as well. He spends some time on the Democratic party, some time on health care, and he interweaves a sense of what being a liberal means to him.

Deborah says

Nobel Prize winner Paul Krugman takes us on a journey from the New Deal's advent to its creation; relates the resulting three-decade era of relative prosperity, equality, and bipartisanship; navigates the rise of "movement conservatism" and the assaults on the New Deal (and thus on equality) which occurred from the early 1970s through the present; and finally prescribes an agenda for the (predicted) Democratic congressional majority and presidency in 2009, with a focus on socialized health insurance.

Although some of the premises felt somewhat disjointed at times, Krugman managed tie them all together in the end. A few of the hard-to-swallow, yet well-supported premises are:

1. Government policies, rather than "market forces" are most responsible for the balance of equality in a population.
2. Racism has played a decisive role in the direction of (and in the strength of) both of our major political parties.

I found this to be an especially interesting time to read Krugman's book, as it was written after the Democratic congressional gains in 2006, yet before the 2008 election.

Marcel says

The first 100 pages is the best history of the two party system that I have ever read! I first became interested in Klugman when I read an editorial in the NYTimes about universal health care. The article reflected how I felt about the subject exactly. When I heard he had written a political book, I had to read it.

Klugman is an economist who teaches at Princeton, and writes a weekly column for the Times. He is an accomplished writer, and this book is an easy read and real page turner.

I highly recommend this book for anyone with any interest in politics, and especially anyone who wants to know how the two parties differ today, and how they got to where they each stand today, from a historical perspective.

Carl says

I remember Paul Krugman once remarking that his NYT editors would consistently cut down the length of the columns he submitted so he started submitting columns below the mandated word count. Being so economical with his words has helped him craft a clear and concise treatise on why espousing liberal ideas consistently makes economic and, just as importantly, moral sense. Krugman displays courage in unabashedly defending progressive ideas despite being a professor and author in a field that generally frowns upon anything that smacks of even a hint of partisanship. Anyone who ever wondered whether their liberal ideas could ever hold up to the scrutiny of economics should give this energizing book a read.

Kathy says

Paul Krugman is, hands down, the most thoughtful and reasonable economist I have ever read. He just won the Nobel Prize in Economics but that is not what makes him readable. He has written a LOT and many of the things he has written are, and are intended to be, quite accessible to the general audience. He also writes an Op-Ed for the New York Times.

He has convinced me that Barack Obama should draft him to give advice on the economic catastrophe. He has written extensively on The Great Depression and predicted almost exactly what is happening now.

I have been doing everything I can to get the two of them together (if they are not already together). If anybody who might read this knows a way to play "six degrees of separation" better than I do, I would love the help!

Trevor says

It is interesting to read this book, which was written a couple of years before Obama was elected, now that it is a couple of years after his election. This is an important book and one I would encourage you to read.

There was a time when America was a country that was interested in equality and was not really a ‘class’ society – but more a ‘middle-class’ society. There were rich and poor people, but mostly there was a kind of extended middle. That is no longer the case. Now the US is perhaps best described as a kind of caste society – it has very limited social mobility (let’s put it this way, it has arguably less social mobility than Britain) and income distribution places it on levels comparable with Latin American countries, rather than European ones. Inequality is the order of the day – but how did it get to be this way?

The answer is that ‘movement conservatives’ have bought themselves a political party (the Republican Party – which, purely for the sake of brevity, we shall hereafter refer to as The Repugs). They have been so successful in this that they have effectively made America a deeply partisan country – apparently, and for perhaps the first time in American history, no Democrat is to the right of a single Repug in either chamber of government.

But this has not been achieved by money alone. One of the great questions of our time is why do people consistently vote against their own interests. Here in Victoria we have just gone through an election where the people of Frankston have voted in a Liberal (Liberal is a confusing name – in Australia that is the right of the political spectrum, i.e. a life form that would be referred to as a conservative elsewhere in the universe). Frankston has no right voting in a Liberal – it was just lucky it wasn’t 2012 or I would have believed the world really was coming to an end.

The answer, of course, as it is with most things, is racism. Tell a white person that supporting any measure might just make a single black person better off will have them hacking off their nose as quick as you can say, ‘spite your face’. We white people are reflexively racist and it is this somewhat less than endearing trait that has helped very strange people come to power in America. Did you know, for example, that Reagan’s first speech after winning nomination as Repug Presidential candidate was the Neshoba County Fair – just a couple of miles from the town where the Good Ol’ Boys in 1964 killed three Civil Rights workers. Reagan, of course, didn’t say he didn’t like black people – that would be rude – but he did say he loved state’s rights, which everyone understood meant the same thing.

Racism is the most deeply repugnant of all human traits. After a century like the 20th one might think there would be cause for pause by politicians before letting that particular genie out of the bottle – but in America and in Australia the right wing always know it is a sure-fire winner. And so they don’t hesitate.

This is a positive book and one that offers much hope in being able to move America towards being more egalitarian, before it is too late. He makes it clear that universal health care is the last best hope for the progressive forces to shift the US towards a fairer society. He was hoping that this could be virtually cost neutral on the basis of not extending Bush’s tax cuts for the rich beyond 2010. Unfortunately, every step forward is met with two steps back.

Oh, and if you don’t think inequality is a problem – and before you tell me that because I live in a ‘socialist’ country I don’t understand ‘freedom’ perhaps you should look at <http://danariely.com/2010/09/30/wealt...> or <http://extremeinequality.org/> or even this <http://www.pbs.org/unnaturalcauses/>

Thanks for recommending I read this guy Richard.

Kaethe says

Krugman is a rare thing: an economist who makes good predictions. He's also one who cares about how

economics affects people.

I was reading along, getting an overview of income inequality at the turn of the 20th century, and I just couldn't take any more. Over my lifetime it's gotten steadily worse until we are once again in a time of Gatsbys, and it pisses me off so much I want to scream. Every time anyone says anything good about Reagan I want to point out that real wages have been falling since him, and this is not a good thing. It's morally wrong to make the poor poorer, but it's also economically and socially bad to make the middle class poorer. Wal-mart's wealth is not a social good: it enriches a very few while decreasing employment, lowering wages. It is a drain on the resources of the communities that house it. When you don't pay your employees enough to keep them off food stamps, you require more money from the community than you pay in taxes. And jobs that don't lift people out of poverty aren't an improvement, particularly for those many people who will require child or eldercare or public transportation to get to those worthless jobs.

I had to put it down because of all the rage I was building up.

Library copy.

Matt says

A well argued book.

Krugman essential argues that the Republican party has been taken over by extreme conservatives who favor a dismantling of the welfare state which began with the New Deal.

He recommends a Single payer health care system as the center of a "new New deal" to repair the damage done to the welfare state by 30 years of far right political dominance.

Single Payer is, Krugman argues, both cheaper and more effective. Not to mention the moral imperative to ensure that everyone actually has health care.

I really enjoyed reading this. It's clear and easy to follow, and in particular is a fantastic source for the economic data and reasoning relevant to our current political debates.

Robert says

The Conscience of a Liberal by Paul Krugman plays off the title of Barry Goldwater's The Conscience of a Conservative.

Although Krugman's book was published in 2007 (Goldwater's back in the 1960s), it remains worth reading. In fact, it is prescient in two major ways.

First, Krugman focuses hard on income inequality, which is a hot topic in 2014. His argument is that over the last 30+ years, taxes on the wealthy have gone down, social programs have been constrained, unions have been busted, and the middle class has shrunk. He shows that in the 1950s and 1960s, when CEOs made less relative to workers than they do today, the U.S. economy performed better. The thesis is basically this: the more people in our economy who make a decent wage, the more we spend and the more we save--while also insuring good education and other public services.

So Krugman focuses tightly on superrich CEOs and money managers (Wall Streeters) and the benefits they enjoy as a result of fierce efforts by what he calls movement conservatives, these being the conservatives who are determined to hamstring government at every turn, cut the deficit, and oppose things like Obamacare.

Secondly, Krugman predicted Obamacare as the coming social policy innovation that would match, in some ways, FDR's Social Security initiative. Remember, this was in 2007, before Obama was elected. His demographic analysis still pertains: the committed conservatives, though wildly well funded, are a shrinking minority. Not just African-Americans but Latinos and Asian-Americans are more sympathetic to the Democratic party than the Republican party.

Since movement conservatives don't like immigration, either, they have a problem they can't fix at the polls with recent immigrant groups and long-standing minorities. Krugman's analysis of national health programs in France, the U.K., Germany, Canada and other highly developed nations shows quite clearly that if we work together we can have more and better health care for less. In fact, we're hugely overinvested in our old system, and Obamacare is the first step toward the better health outcomes and lower expenses our peer competitors enjoy.

This is a refreshingly straightforward book. The few tables are easy to read. The anecdotes are pertinent and persuasive. Most disturbing, but not surprising, is the emphasis Krugman places on racism in the south as a reason for the Republican resurgence there since 1968.

But again, things are changing. We've re-elected a black president. Here in Virginia, where I live, a bastion of the south, we're purple, not red or blue.

The way income inequality retards our national competitiveness and productivity is easy to see and understand. When you ship jobs off-shore and lower wages at home (partially through union-busting), you've got a population that struggles with basics, not with ambitious socio-economic advancement.

In the meantime, of course, we had the colossal debacle of the Great Recession right after Krugman's book was published. But he's written a lot about that, too, and we all know his general thesis: the Obama administration and Congress probably spent about half what it should have in helping people out of work and facing foreclosure. And in the meantime, we ran up a \$3 trillion unfunded debt fighting in Iraq and Afghanistan. Obama didn't start either war, but he did well to get us out of Iraq and not as well continuing to waste treasure and lives in Afghanistan.

Krugman likes to season his brew with reminiscences about the social consensus that Eisenhower accepted on the part of the Republicans. That's when Krugman was a boy, and we had far less income inequality. I was a boy then, too, and I recall quite clearly that Krugman has it right. We had yet to go through some bitter social struggles, including civil rights, feminism, and gay rights, so we were far, far from the perfect nation, but we still felt more committed to good national outcomes than we have since then. Warren Buffet is on the same wavelength. As he puts it, he doesn't need all his billions and he doesn't see why he should pay lower taxes than his secretary.

In closing, just another word on Buffet. I was coming out of the Russell Senate building one day when Buffet walked past me and hailed a cab. He got in the cab and drove away. The point? Where was his limo? Where were his aides? Where was the press his P.R. department had cooked up? They didn't exist. It was just Warren Buffet being a sensible man. Taxis are a good way to get around Washington, D.C. They put you in touch with a lot of immigrant drivers who likely will affect our future a great deal.

sheena says

You want to understand how the two major political parties came to be what they are today.

You're curious about how racism and the history of slavery play an uncomfortable but undeniable role in America's resistance to provide her citizens with the care and basic support other wealthy nations deem fundamental.

Also you're an elitist baby-killing commie.

Well, that means you want to read this book.

Krugman demystifies the surge of movement conservatism and calls on liberals to be progressive in their demand for universal health care and immigration reform, lest the nation be dragged back to the inequality of pre-New Deal America.

In accessible language with credible and accessible examples he defeats lies the opposition uses to thwart the growth of an equal America, and reveals the disgusting reasons why the Republican Party's economic agenda, which hurts the majority of Americans, has been successful. You'll vomit. Undressed a few of those elephants turn out to be more undemocratic than even the most skeptical of us feared.

(I know I sound like an ignorant propagandist, but Krugman doesn't and isn't. Promise.)

ANYWAY this is one of the most insightful and important books I've read on the fundamentals and drawbacks of our political system in its current state, and because my opinion is GOLD I urge you to secure your own copy muy pronto. There's a lovely argument that the reason conservatives are afraid of health care reform is because it WILL work.

Blah, blah, blah. Krugman calls for a return to middle class America, and I'm eager to meet him there. To note: this is not a book about eliminating the Republican party or anything ridiculous, but it is about minimizing the power movement conservatism has, and preventing extreme levels of wealth and poverty from destroying what lies at the heart of the American dream. Swear the book is not as cliché soaked as I make it sound.
