



All in the Family: The Realignment of American Democracy Since the 1960s

By Robert O. Self

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In the 1960s, Lyndon Johnson's Great Society and War on Poverty promised an array of federal programs to assist working-class families. In the 1980s, Ronald Reagan declared the GOP the party of "family values" and promised to keep government out of Americans' lives. Again and again, historians have sought to explain the nation's profound political realignment from the 1960s to the 2000s, five decades that witnessed the fracturing of liberalism and the rise of the conservative right. The award-winning historian Robert O. Self is the first to argue that the separate threads of that realignment—from civil rights to women's rights, from the antiwar movement to Nixon's "silent majority," from the abortion wars to gay marriage, from the welfare state to neoliberal economic policies—all ran through the politicized American family.

Based on an astonishing range of sources, *All in the Family* rethinks an entire era. Self opens his narrative with the Great Society and its assumption of a white, patriotic, heterosexual man at the head of each family. Soon enough, civil rights activists, feminists, and gay rights activists, animated by broader visions of citizenship, began to fight for equal rights, protections, and opportunities. Led by Pauli Murray, Gloria Steinem, Harvey Milk, and Shirley Chisholm, among many others, they achieved lasting successes, including *Roe v. Wade*, antidiscrimination protections in the workplace, and a more inclusive idea of the American family.

Yet the establishment of new rights and the visibility of alternative families provoked, beginning in the 1970s, a furious conservative backlash. Politicians and activists on the right, most notably George Wallace, Phyllis Schlafly, Anita Bryant, and Jerry Falwell, built a political movement based on the perceived moral threat to the traditional family. Self writes that "family values" conservatives in fact "paved the way" for fiscal conservatives, who shared a belief in liberalism's invasiveness but lacked a populist message. Reagan's presidency united the two constituencies, which remain, even in these tumultuous times, the base of the Republican Party. *All in the Family*, an erudite, passionate, and persuasive explanation of our current political situation and how we arrived in it, will allow us to think anew about the last fifty years of American politics.

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Bibliography

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Editorial Review

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Even though the idealized nuclear family has hardly ever fit the reality of American life, conservatives have won back the power to define the mythological American family, asserts historian Self. And they've done it with the help of the liberal retreat on ideals of seeking to socialize public goods and achieve social equality for others besides white males. Self contrasts breadwinner liberalism of the 1960s, which relied on government programs to assist families, and more recent breadwinner conservatism, which promises to keep the government out of the lives of families. In examining social and political trends since the 1960s, Self traces how liberalism morphed from an ideal of an economic helping hand into constituting a threat to the nation's morals and how conservatism came to be seen as a defender of the family and protector against the sexual revolution and coarsening of American culture. As Self analyzes the major social movements since the 1960s, from civil rights to feminism to gay rights, he explores distinctions between private and public life, the tension between liberty and equality, and the challenge of identity politics to developing national policies. --Vanessa Bush

Review

"Self . . . has heroically researched the history of the culture wars from the early 1960s to the present. He offers a provocative analysis that accounts for today's alliance between small-government and social conservatives, on the one hand, and welfare-state and social liberals, on the other . . . *All in the Family* tells us a great deal about recent political history." *The Wall Street Journal*

"[A] powerful, well-researched account of how the efforts of marginalized groups to assert their rights as citizens ran up against the resistance of entrenched privilege, setting the stage for the polarization that grips US politics today . . . [Self] reminds us that our democracy is an imperfect thing, only as noble as the people who constitute it." *The Boston Globe*

"*All in the Family* is meticulous, convincing, and engaging . . . Self has written a book that should become the authoritative social history of the U.S. since the 1960s." *Library Journal*

"Most of the stories we have told about American politics in recent decades have tended to divide the world between social issues and economic issues . . . In his new book, *All in the Family: The Realignment of American Democracy Since the 1960s*, Robert O. Self . . . rewrites this story from its most basic assumptions . . . brilliant." *Mark Schmitt, The Washington Monthly*

"Robert O. Self has done a remarkable thing: he has persuasively reinterpreted the rise of conservative politics in the last third of the twentieth century as rooted in the battle over gender and sexuality. In short, disputes over the 'state of the family' became as much about the nature of the state as about the morality of the family. Self makes many new and fascinating connections between the public and private spheres of American life." *Lizabeth Cohen, author of A Consumers' Republic: The Politics of Mass Consumption in Postwar America*

"In this breathtaking chronicle of American politics over the last half century, Robert O. Self points to sexual politics as the source of the shift from liberalism to conservatism. He takes a fresh look at the 'rights revolution' to offer sweeping new interpretations of the rise of 'family values,' the culture wars, and neoliberalism. Another tour de force from a brilliant historian." *Elaine Tyler May, author of Homeward*

Bound: American Families in the Cold War Era

“Complex, elegant, and persuasive, Robert O. Self's *All in the Family* is an extraordinary achievement. It's the best account yet of the challenge to the central icons of gender identity--breadwinner, soldier, heterosexual, wife, mother--and of the powerful countermovements that arose to defend them. Self's magnificent book offers a bold new interpretation of America's rightward tilt and the triumph of free-market capitalism.” *—Dorothy Sue Cobble, author of The Other Women's Movement: Workplace Justice and Social Rights in Modern America*

“Robert O. Self's *All in the Family* is a fresh and compelling synthesis of modern American political history, one that puts gender, sexuality, and race at the core of its analysis and overturns simplistic dichotomies between culture and economy. Indispensable for understanding our own times, it recounts the journey from equal rights to family values on a sweeping scale and in perceptive detail. A masterful account.” *—Margot Canaday, author of The Straight State: Sexuality and Citizenship in Twentieth-Century America*

About the Author

Robert O. Self is an associate professor of history at Brown University. His first book, *American Babylon: Race and the Struggle for Postwar Oakland*, won numerous awards, including the James A. Rawley Prize from the Organization of American Historians.

Users Review

From reader reviews:

Charles Jones:

The book untitled *All in the Family: The Realignment of American Democracy Since the 1960s* contain a lot of information on it. The writer explains the girl idea with easy means. The language is very easy to understand all the people, so do not worry, you can easy to read this. The book was authored by famous author. The author provides you in the new age of literary works. It is possible to read this book because you can read on your smart phone, or gadget, so you can read the book with anywhere and anytime. In a situation you wish to purchase the e-book, you can open their official web-site along with order it. Have a nice examine.

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Gary Farrell:

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