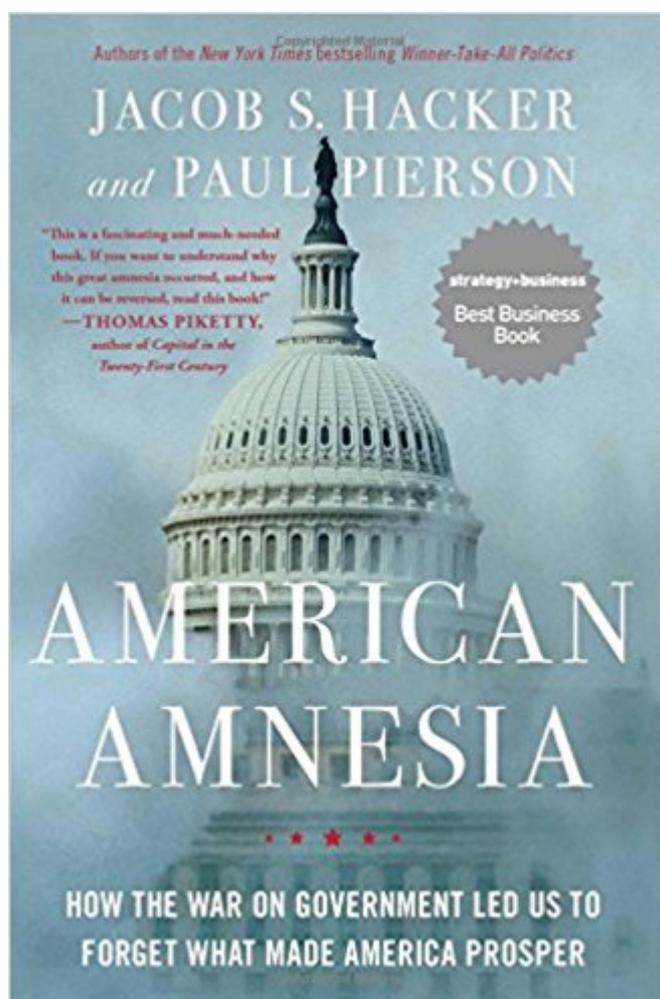


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# American Amnesia: How The War On Government Led Us To Forget What Made America Prosper



## Synopsis

A “provocative” (Kirkus Reviews), timely, and topical work that examines what’s good for American business and what’s good for Americans—and why those interests are misaligned. In *American Amnesia*, bestselling political scientists Jacob S. Hacker and Paul Pierson trace the economic and political history of the United States over the last century and show how a viable mixed economy has long been the dominant engine of America’s prosperity. We have largely forgotten this reliance, as many political circles and corporate actors have come to mistakenly see government as a hindrance rather than the propeller it once was. “American Amnesia” is more than a rhetorical phrase; elites have literally forgotten, or at least forgotten to talk about, the essential role of public authority in achieving big positive-sum bargains in advanced societies. The mixed economy was the most important social innovation of the twentieth century. It spread a previously unimaginable level of broad prosperity. It enabled steep increases in education, health, longevity, and economic security. And yet, extraordinarily, it is anathema to many current economic and political elites. Looking at this record of remarkable accomplishment, they recoil in horror. And as the advocates of anti-government free market fundamentalist have gained power, they are hell-bent on scrapping the instrument of nearly a century of unprecedented economic and social progress. In *American Amnesia*, Hacker and Pierson explain the full “story of how government helped make America great, how the enthusiasm for bashing government is behind its current malaise, and how a return to effective government is the answer the nation is looking for” (The New York Times).

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

In this lively, engaging, and persuasive book, Hacker and Pierson explain how much of our health and prosperity rests on what governments have done. American Amnesia will help slow the intellectual pendulum that is currently swinging towards an anarchic libertarianism that threatens more than a century of American progress.

• Angus Deaton, winner of the Nobel Memorial Prize for Economics in 2015  
“The best business book of the year on the economy.”

• Brad DeLong, strategy+business  
“This is a fascinating and much-needed book. America once invented universal public education and sharply progressive taxation of income and inherited wealth, and has shown to the world that strong government and efficient markets are complementary—not substitutes. But since 1980 a new wave of anti-government ideology has prospered, and is about to make America more unequal and plutocratic than Europe on the eve of World War I. If you want to understand why this great amnesia occurred, and how it can be reversed, read this book!”

• Thomas Piketty, author of *Capital in the Twenty-First Century*  
“American Amnesia provides chapter and verse on why the public has good reason to be angry...”

• The New York Times  
If you are curious about why our infrastructure, our roads and bridges and water systems, is falling apart then read American Amnesia. Curious about why the U.S. spends almost 18 percent of our GDP on medical care, but has health outcomes that are at levels of many developing countries then read American Amnesia.

• Inside Higher Ed  
Progress and prosperity in the United States, they demonstrate, have rested in no small measure on a constructive relationship between an effective public authority and dynamic private markets. We are now paying a terrible price for “forgetting this essential truth.”

• The Philadelphia Inquirer

Jacob S. Hacker is the Stanley B. Resor Professor of Political Science at Yale University. A Fellow at the New America Foundation in Washington, DC, he is the author of *The Great Risk Shift: The New Economic Insecurity and the Decline of the American Dream*, *The Divided Welfare State*, and, with Paul Pierson, of *American Amnesia: The Forgotten Roots of Our Prosperity*; *Winner-Take-All Politics: How Washington Made the Rich Richer—and Turned Its Back on the Middle Class*; *Off Center: The Republican Revolution and the Erosion of American Democracy*. He has appeared recently on *The NewsHour*, *MSNBC*, *All Things Considered*, and *Marketplace*. He lives in New Haven, Connecticut. Paul Pierson is the John Gross Professor of Political Science at the University

of California at Berkeley. He is the author of *Politics in Time, Dismantling the Welfare State?*, and (with Jacob S. Hacker), *American Amnesia: The Forgotten Roots of Our Prosperity; Winner-Take-All Politics: How Washington Made the Rich Richer and Turned Its Back on the Middle Class; Off Center: The Republican Revolution and the Erosion of American Democracy*. His commentary has appeared in *The New York Times Magazine*, *The Washington Post*, and *The New York Review of Books*. He lives in Berkeley, California.

America's "mixed economy," in which the private sector and the government each do what they do well has been the key to the most successful economy in history. The nation pulled together in the second world war and that was followed by a few decades of phenomenal growth in the private sector and an expansion of public programs that were beneficially complementary to the private sector. The private sector performs better when the government is functioning well. In recent decades the balance of the mixed economy has tipped, largely due to the infusion of antigovernment ideology into our politics. Instead of cooperating in perpetuating what has worked well, we have become highly polarized with control being assumed by the plutocracy whose primary tool has become government obstructionism. By suppressing the government role in public programs and regulation we are seeing a deterioration in incomes, retirement plans, health care affordability, infrastructure maintenance, and a failure to improve our education systems, just to mention a few. A well balanced mixed economy works for everyone - individuals and families, and businesses. It even works well for the plutocracy, although it would slow, though not eliminate, the transfer of wealth from hard working American families to the billionaires at the top. Libertarians who live in the Ayn Rand fantasy world (Hard Randians) would continue to complain, never quite understanding the important complementary role that government does play in making this a better society for all of us. On reading *American Amnesia* you will understand why we have to abandon the politics of polarization and join together in supporting the appropriate roles of markets and our government in incentivizing a properly balanced mixed economy that in the past had served us so well. It can do so again.

An interesting look at some economic pictures past and present. Especially if we are interested in making America great again. To pursue such a quest we need to determine when we considered our nation to be at its greatest and then look at data that generated that feeling and compare it to current data. Only then can we compare what we are doing now to recapture that greatness. The authors talk much about America mixed economy through much of the 20th century and how that

economy has been supplanted in the 21st century. A good book for those really interested in the economics of America's past greatness and how our country's attitudes toward taxation and government involvement in the economy have changed.

I loved this book! The authors provide the history of how the involvement of government in society has brought about economic and social success as compared to other rich nations. What really made us great!! It exposes how politicians and rich business people have been blaming government for economic woes. Blaming government has become very popular, so politicians along with rich business are using this to further their very narrow agendas. I am not giving justice to the book, but just think about the following things that were brought about by government interference: Clean water, sewer systems, disease control, clean air, the internet and many other technology advancements. You've got to read this book to understand why Trump won and why there are so many wackos in office trying to advance their agendas instead going back to the "fixed economy".

The popular diatribe against Government has disturbed me for some time. The Right has foolishly tried to make all government "bad". Yet, at every turn of every day I am truly benefited by our government's effectiveness in bringing us roads, bridges, water, security, protection, airport security, safe fuel, safe food, safer healthcare, clean air, education, and the list goes on and on. I urge everyone to read this non-partisan, ideology-free study of the reality of government in our time. It is time to bring some sense and truth to the discussion. Author Jacob Hacker hit it on the head!

This is both depressing and surprisingly (or somewhat) upbeat. I listened to it first on audio and I have now purchased a paper copy. I am one who strongly believes that we should not forget to water our roots - regularly. This book shows most clearly why it is important to remember our past.

Hacker and Pierson have done us all a great favor in writing this book. It follows how the GOP and allied political forces have systematically shredded the connection between unions, government and business that have characterized our greatest periods of economic growth. It shows how the trend among media and political commentators for political balance has unfairly tarnished liberal policies and furthered the aims of a small group of powerful conservatives. In short, the very idea that government can have a positive role has been trashed over the past three or four decades. Required reading for those who want a deeper understanding of how the political climate that helped elect Trump was created...

More Americans need to become informed, involved citizen activists. Unfortunately, it now requires two or more full-time incomes to support a modest lifestyle that includes a roof over one's head and food on the table. Who has time to become either informed or involved in politics? Hence the biggest mouth, the loudest, most annoying and usually least competent lout in the room (or on the political stage) wins. Need proof? President Trump. Not even Barnum and Bailey could withstand that level of competition!

Excellent informative upsetting, provocative read. I'm not sure I buy his somewhat forced optimism. It is quite repetitive after first 5 or 6 chapters, hence the 4 stars

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