

Hugh Davis Graham, *The Civil Rights Era: Origins and Development of National Policy*. N.Y.: Oxford UP, 1990. 578 pages, hardcover, \$ 29.95

Hugh Davis Graham's new book, *The Civil Rights Era*, is a massive treatise on a brief, but complex and decisive epoch in American history, the years 1960-1972. Based on thorough research in the Kennedy, Johnson, and Nixon presidential archives, the National Archives, and special collections of the Library of Congress, this comprehensive study of the Second Reconstruction not only scrutinizes presidential policies but also delves into the congressional struggles around the passage of seminal civil rights legislation in the mid-sixties and penetrates into the confounding world of federal committees, agencies, and commissions. The book includes a section of a hundred pages of meticulous notes, introduced by an informative essay on the source material, which makes it a particularly useful source book for scholars working on the subject.

The overarching theme of the richly woven texture of the book is the change from "nondiscriminatory justice" to "compensatory justice" in the interpretation of civil rights legislation. The author patiently traces the development of the concept of "affirmative action" from its modest beginnings in Executive Order 10925 issued by the Kennedy Administration on March 6, 1961, to implement equal opportunity provisions, aiming mainly at employer compliance. Graham depicts the expansion of the concept of "affirmative action" from its limited reach as an instrument implicit in the Civil Rights Act of 1964 (strictly defined by the firm assurances of Hubert H. Humphrey in his efforts to allay the fears of its opponents) through its progressive "redefinition" over the next eight years when it was most surprisingly strengthened by the Nixon Administration, particularly by the efforts of Secretary of Labor George P. Shultz. The book builds a solid foundation for understanding the extension of "compensatory justice" to other minority groups, including women—which reached its legislative culmination point with the passage of The Equal Employment Opportunity Act of 1972—and the court battles over "affirmative action" in the late 1970s and throughout the 1980s. Perhaps the most valuable part of the book is the section on the Nixon years. Here the author is able to unravel several of the puzzling paradoxes which characterized the civil rights policies of the Nixon Administration.

To students who do not have a firm grasp of the history of the legal and legislative drive of the era the book may represent an overpowering wealth of detail. This is not a suitable textbook for those who want an overview of the era in terms of political history. It is too specialized and too "skewed" to serve that purpose. Its main emphasis is definitely on the Executive branch, although it deals primarily with the legislative aspects of the work carried out here; hence it also includes a great deal of congressional politicking. The chief objective of the author seems to be to unmask the real nature of many of the

popular concepts that were generated during those years, and the book will also serve well as a comprehensive repository of information on the deeper reaches of the federal structure.

Although this book is largely a study of bureaucratic politics, its narrative is to a great extent person-based, drawing on an abundance of insight. What might have been a drab account of federal red tape institutions has become an intriguing tale of the corridors of power. I have no hesitation in declaring it one of the major authoritative sources for the study of the Civil Rights Years.

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