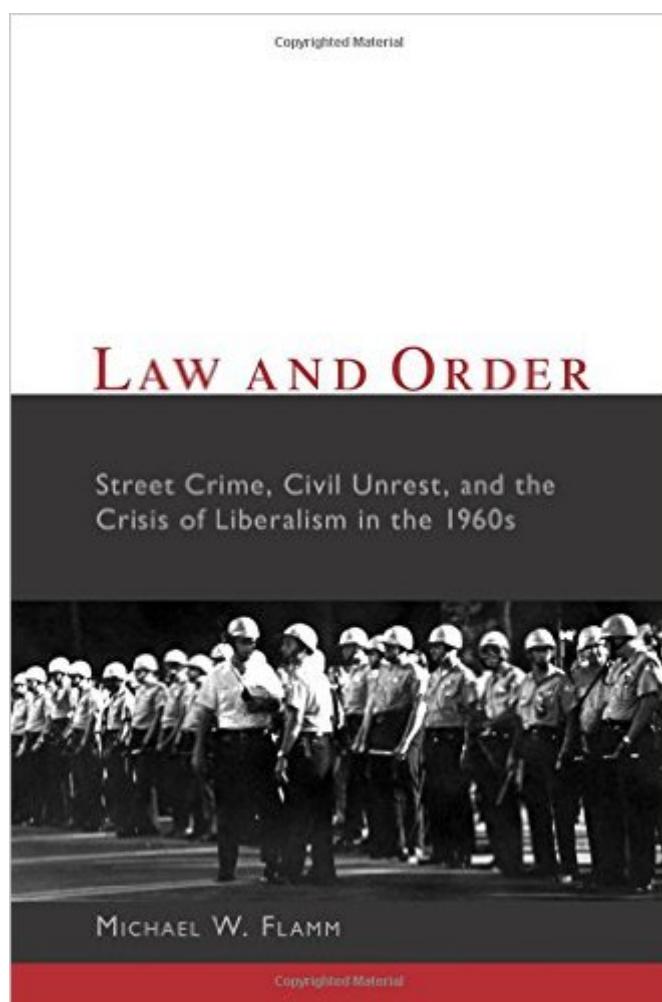


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Law And Order: Street Crime, Civil Unrest, And The Crisis Of Liberalism In The 1960s (Columbia Studies In Contemporary American History)



Synopsis

Law and Order offers a valuable new study of the political and social history of the 1960s. It presents a sophisticated account of how the issues of street crime and civil unrest enhanced the popularity of conservatives, eroded the credibility of liberals, and transformed the landscape of American politics. Ultimately, the legacy of law and order was a political world in which the grand ambitions of the Great Society gave way to grim expectations. In the mid-1960s, amid a pervasive sense that American society was coming apart at the seams, a new issue known as law and order emerged at the forefront of national politics. First introduced by Barry Goldwater in his ill-fated run for president in 1964, it eventually punished Lyndon Johnson and the Democrats and propelled Richard Nixon and the Republicans to the White House in 1968. In this thought-provoking study, Michael Flamm examines how conservatives successfully blamed liberals for the rapid rise in street crime and then skillfully used law and order to link the understandable fears of white voters to growing unease about changing moral values, the civil rights movement, urban disorder, and antiwar protests. Flamm documents how conservatives constructed a persuasive message that argued that the civil rights movement had contributed to racial unrest and the Great Society had rewarded rather than punished the perpetrators of violence. The president should, conservatives also contended, promote respect for law and order and contempt for those who violated it, regardless of cause. Liberals, Flamm argues, were by contrast unable to craft a compelling message for anxious voters. Instead, liberals either ignored the crime crisis, claimed that law and order was a racist ruse, or maintained that social programs would solve the "root causes" of civil disorder, which by 1968 seemed increasingly unlikely and contributed to a loss of faith in the ability of the government to do what it was above all sworn to do—protect personal security and private property.

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Customer Reviews

Despite some scholars' claims to the contrary, there has by now developed a growing literature on the origins and development of post-World War II American political conservatism. This includes Patrick Allitt's, Neil Jumonville's, George Nash's and Peter Steinfel's explorations of the intellectual origins of conservative thought as well as Michael Dallek's, Lisa McGirr's, William Berman's and Jonathan Schoenwald's studies of conservative political development. Michael Flamm's new book represents a newer strand of scholarship supplementing the others -- a study of a discrete area of public policy and conservative politics. As a result, Professor Flamm helps show that the 1960s was an incubator for ascendant conservative politics in the last 30-35 years of twentieth century America (and beyond, of course). At the most general level, Law and Order is about changing definitions of "security" and the effect of that transformation on American politics. Time was when economic security mattered, and the American mainstream voted the Democratic Donkey in the 1930s and 1940s. But starting in the 1950s, and accelerating in the 1960s, different notions of "security" took root; first came security from the Communist menace, then security from the perceived threat of urban disorder and cultural anarchy, which crested in the second half of the sixties. Though most so-called conservative voters would perhaps disagree, they began to vote for the Republican Elephant in the late 1960s because they wanted governmental security ... not economic, but cultural (and perhaps racial). This trend manifested itself firstly, and most starkly, in the area of crime control policy and/or "law and order" politics.

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