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Holcombe's "Liberty in peril: Democracy and power in American history" (book review)

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Book Reviews



Holcombe, R. (2019). *Liberty in peril: Democracy and power in American history*. Oakland, CA: Independent Institute. 225 pp. \$24.95. ISBN 9781598133325

Author Randy Holcombe's *Liberty in Peril* challenges readers to critically examine the premise for a substantial erosion of personal freedoms. This loss of protection in freedoms follows a series of progressive changes in federal governance away from its foundations in liberty (the protection of individual rights above all else) to that of a democracy (the rule by the majority at the expense of the minority). Readers are taken on a historic journey through the breadth and scope of the emerging political, economic and social transformations since the founding of our nation. Holcombe begins this journey with a meticulous scrutiny of the ideology of democracy as we see it today and prepares the groundwork for consideration of our founding roots in the American ideology of liberty. As readers weave through the narrative weighing out consensus and democracy, Holcombe skillfully applies strong historical context, poignant excerpts from key political figures and objective interpretation of social whims and private interests which seek an ever-increasing voice in the operation of government. Discussions center upon and survey the historical, political interests and social motivations through the Revolutionary, Civil and World Wars, from economic fluctuations to judicial reviews and the modern expansion of centralized government

Readers of *Liberty in Peril* will find themselves both enriched and engaged from chapter to chapter as they easily digest in-depth, synoptic reviews from past to present. This book strikes a keen balance between the interplay of engaging historical narrative and a depth of academic analysis of the governing principles of liberty. Holcombe further secures his readers interest within the text by rounding each chapter with summative conclusions and concepts on which to self-reflect. A final chapter, *The Dangers of Democracy*, provides readers with a broad, but fair account of political and economic dysfunction amidst the intertwined fate and inherent danger of the two issues under direction of popular opinion apart from formative consensus.

This book is ideal for academic libraries whose institutions have courses in American history, policy and socio-economic discourse as well as a great addition to any public library seeking to refresh their catalog in history and politics. Readers

akin to historical accounts of evolving federal governance and liberty as Robert Higgs' *Crisis and Leviathan* and Eric Metaxas' *If You Can Keep It* will find like treatise and interest in this text. Overall, Holcombe has provided a balanced, engaging and detailed account of historical transformations in civil liberties and the democratic processes influencing personal freedoms found in the United States.

Reviewer

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