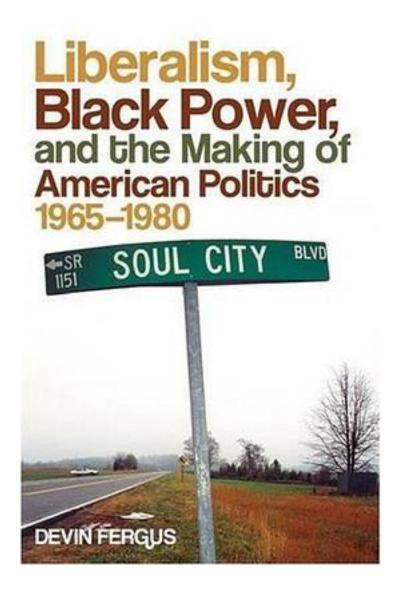
Liberalism, Black Power, and the Making of American Politics, 1965-1980



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In this pioneering exploration of the interplay between liberalism and black nationalism, Devin Fergus returns to the tumultuous era of Johnson, Nixon, Carter, and Helms and challenges us to see familiar political developments through a new lens. What if the liberal coalition, instead of being torn apart by the demands of Black Power, actually engaged in a productive relationship with radical upstarts, absorbing black separatists into the political mainstream and keeping them from a more violent path? What if the New Right arose not only in response to Great Society Democrats but, as significantly, in reaction to Republican moderates who sought compromise with black nationalists through conduits like the Blacks for Nixon movement? Focusing especially on North Carolina, a progressive southern state and a national center of Black Power activism, Fergus reveals how liberal engagement helped to bring a radical civic ideology back from the brink of political violence and social nihilism. He covers Malcolm X Liberation University and Soul City, two largely forgotten, federally funded black nationalist experiments; the political scene in Winston-Salem, where Black Panthers were elected to office in surprising numbers; and the liberal-nationalist coalition that formed in 1974 to defend Joan Little, a black prisoner who killed a guard she accused of raping her. Throughout, Fergus charts new territory in the study of America's recent past, taking up largely unexplored topics such as the expanding political role of institutions like the ACLU and the Ford Foundation and the emergence of sexual violence as a political issue. He also urges American historians to think globally by drawing comparisons between black nationalism in the United States and other separatist movements around the world. By 1980, Fergus writes, black radicals and their offspring were "more likely to petition Congress than blow it up." That liberals engaged black radicalism at all, however, was enough for New Right insurgents to paint liberalism as an effete, anti-American ideology--a sentiment that has had lasting appeal to significant numbers of voters.

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目录:

Liberalism, Black Power, and the Making of American Politics, 1965-1980_下载链接1_

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