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By Gary Gerstle

Princeton University Press, United States, 2017. Paperback. Condition: New. Revised edition. Language: English . Brand New Book. American governance is burdened by a paradox. On the one hand, Americans don't want big government meddling in their lives; on the other hand, they have repeatedly enlisted governmental help to impose their views regarding marriage, abortion, religion, and schooling on their neighbors. These contradictory stances on the role of public power have paralyzed policymaking and generated rancorous disputes about government's legitimate scope. How did we reach this political impasse? Historian Gary Gerstle, looking at two hundred years of U.S. history, argues that the roots of the current crisis lie in two contrasting theories of power that the Framers inscribed in the Constitution. One theory shaped the federal government, setting limits on its power in order to protect personal liberty. Another theory molded the states, authorizing them to go to extraordinary lengths, even to the point of violating individual rights, to advance the good and welfare of the commonwealth. The Framers believed these theories could coexist comfortably, but conflict between the two has largely defined American history. Gerstle shows how national political leaders improvised brilliantly to stretch the power of the...



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