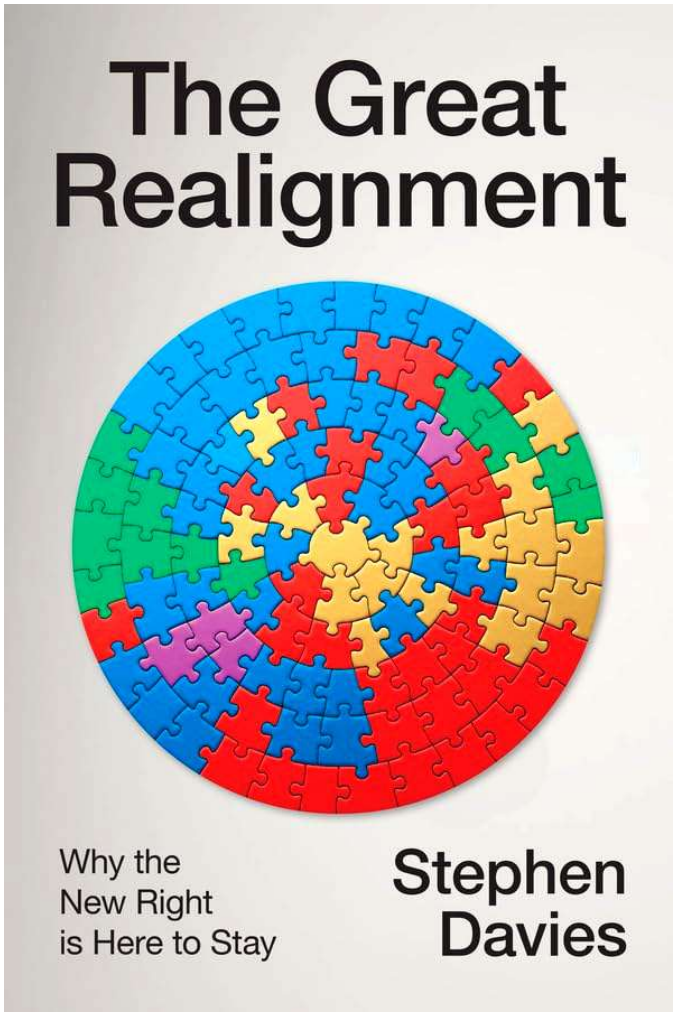
BOWLING GREEN DAILY NEWS

‘The Great Realignment’ offers framework for understanding current chaos

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“The Great Realignment: Why the New Right is Here to Stay” by Stephen Davies. Hoboken, NJ: Polity Press, 2026, 224 pages, $29.95 (hardcover).



“We are seeing a break from the immediate past and something new is emerging,” Stephen Davies asserts at the beginning of “The Great Realignment: Why the New Right is Here to Stay,” one of the latest entries in the ongoing barrage of attempts to explain the still-evolving political landscape in the United States and elsewhere across the globe. “We find ourselves increasingly in a new political era, where the term ‘right’ is taking on a new meaning to the one it had before. In reaction, something will also happen to the meaning of ‘left.’ How to explain this?”

“There are many accounts of what is happening and what its causes are,” the author continues. “All of these, however, are lacking in important ways. The explanation and account offered in this book is this. What we are seeing is a political realignment. As used in this book, the term realignment refers to a kind of sea-change or shift in the nature of political debate and divisions. Realignments of this kind happen at regular intervals – roughly very forty years or so – in stable political communities. Politics is always ultimately binary, with two sides or camps, which we call left and right. Every so often the issue that divides one side from the other and structures politics, changes. The issue that politics used to center around fades away or becomes less important and a new one appears. This is a realignment.”

It’s hard not to feel that Davies is on to something spectacularly relevant with this manuscript. Regardless of where you fall on the political spectrum, only the most disconnected would not be able to sense the potential seismic shift we seem to be in the midst of at the moment. At the core of his thesis is the overarching suggestion that we are moving away from political divisions based primarily on economic priorities and policies and toward an unchartered polarity based more on national identities and cultural characteristics. He forcefully maintains the instability most of us feel is a completely logical extension of a steadily progressing assault on how we define who we are and the anxiety that arises when that identify seems to be slipping away. When fundamental assumptions no longer seem to apply, a time of uncertainty and chaos inevitably surfaces.

Structurally, the book consists of an introduction followed by seven relatively comprehensive chapters and a conclusion; the key claims in the treatise are supported by 11 pages of source notes. The literary style is crisp and conversational, and while the intended audience is clearly general readers who have an innate interest in the subject matter, academics will also find this one provocative and thought-provoking. Certainly, I found myself debating several passages out loud as I made my way through this sociopolitical discourse with an undeniable linkage to most of our collective experience these days.

Davies does an exceptional job of expounding on the historical context which gave rise to his purported realignment. He is meticulous and detailed as he constructs a completely rational case for what he sees happening not just in the United States and the U.K., but in virtually every other democratically based country. Reflect on this excerpt from "The Roots of Resistance," the third chapter:

"The content of the politics that dominated the 1990s and 2000s was novel in many ways, and was a departure from the forms of ideological politics of the previous century. A better label for it than neoliberal is 'radical middle' or 'technocratic managerialism.' It is a kind of politics that focuses on processes or rules. The goal is to maximize two things: human material well-being, and personal choice and agency. The key was thought to be economic growth and innovation, both of which increased human capacity and made material constraints less binding."

"The challenge for the policy process was to find ways of achieving this and to ensure that the benefits were widely distributed. The distribution question is why arguments about the nature and degree of redistribution via government action were the remaining major source of disagreement. This approach to politics is at odds with not only socialism but also traditional conservativism and some kinds of liberalism. It is essentially the politics of the managerial and expert class, and of the graduate seminar. A central role is given to expertise, to the role of a class of highly educated and trained people who have a detailed knowledge and theoretical understanding not accessible to the general population."

See the problem for many starting to emerge?

A Senior Academic Fellow at the John Locke Institute, Davies was a Senior Lecturer in the Department of History and Economic History at Manchester Metropolitan University as well as Head of Education at the Institute of Economic Affairs from 1979 through 2009. Previously he was program officer at the Institute for Humane Studies (IHS) at George Mason University in Virginia as well as a Visiting Scholar at the Social Philosophy and Policy Center at Bowling Green State University in Ohio. A historian, he graduated from St Andrews University in Scotland in 1976 and gained his PhD from the same institution in 1984. His previous books include "Empiricism and History" (2003) and "The Dictionary of Conservative and Libertarian Thought" (1991), which he co-edited with Nigel Ashford. He is also a regular contributor to The Daily Telegraph.

In the final analysis, Davies does not come across as overly optimistic that we will be able to navigate the turbulent waters that lie ahead without enduring significantly more pain – economic and otherwise – than has been thrust upon us to date. Witness this from the Conclusion:

"The number of 'losers' in the system is steadily increasing as it breaks down and also as it becomes increasingly a zero-sum process. In particular, much of the former beneficiary class, the PMC (professional managerial class), is no longer on the winning side. This will become more marked as AI destroys many of their jobs (much more so than manual ones). This may benefit the new right but it could also lead to an increase in support for a radical left interlocutor, as the threatened members of the PMC cling ever more tightly to their cultural status and the associated set of values. All of this is uncertain, and will take varying forms in different countries."

Perhaps Steve Baker, former Conservative Member of Parliament, sums it up best: "'The Great Realignment' explains the persistence and power of the new right not as a passing protest, but as a

structural and enduring transformation — one rooted in large-scale social, economic, and cultural changes that have created an entirely new political map. This book is an essential read for everyone who does not want to be surprised constantly by the development of politics in the West. It is indispensable."

If you are interested in how we got here, and more importantly, where we may be headed, you should probably add this one to your list of required reading. Highly recommended.

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