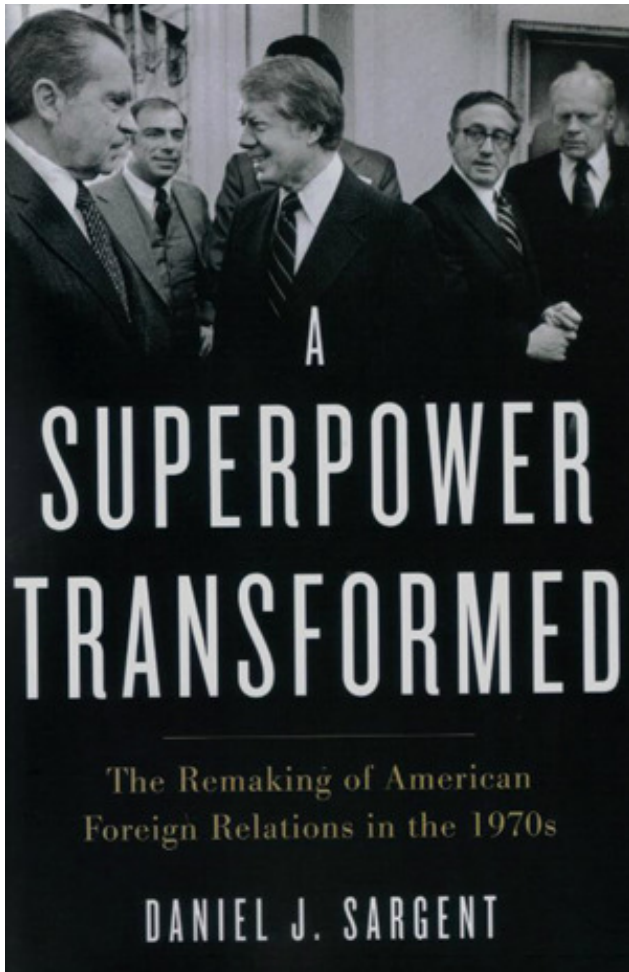


# 'SUPER' BOOK

## SARGENT PROVIDES AN INVALUABLE RESOURCE

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*"A Superpower Transformed: The Remaking of American Foreign Relations in the 1970s"* by Daniel J. Sargent. New York: Oxford University Press, 2015. 432 pages, \$34.95.



"Globalization was foremost among the forces that changed world politics in the 1970s," Daniel J. Sargent explains near the beginning of "A Superpower Transformed: The Remaking of American Foreign Relations in the 1970s," his new all-inclusive analysis of the decade that created much of the world we live in today. "Signifying the integration of markets in its narrowest definition and the expansion of social and economic forces to the planetary scale in its broadest sense, globalization stirred much debate."

"Within capitalist societies, globalization contributed to a transnational crisis of the public sector," Sargent continues. "What transpired among the industrialized countries in the 1970s, however, was not the remaking of international economic governance but its rollback, as integrated markets began to trump the managerial capacities of existing political authorities."

It has been said the significance of the past can only be fully appreciated in retrospect. This is certainly the case with the 1970s. At the time, those of us who lived through the enormous social, political and economic changes that took place during this turbulent decade were often

blissfully unaware of the powerful forces at work just below the cultural horizon. We had a collective sense the idealism of the 1960s was slowly giving way to the cynicism that always accompanies a deeper understanding of the way the world actually works, but we were nonetheless oblivious (for the most part) to the very real consequences soon to be manifest as a result of this tectonic shift in our shared values and priorities.

Not unlike many readers, the 1970s were my formative years. When the decade began, I was in the sixth grade; when it ended, I was in graduate school. As such, I had a front row seat to much of the transformation Sargent describes so eloquently. Having lived through many of the events that form the architecture for the author's narrative also gives me a fairly accurate perspective from which to judge the efficacy of his observations and conclusions.

One episode that continues to resonate with me is William Calley's trial for the My Lai Massacre, which began Nov. 17, 1970. Even though it has been 45 years since that dark moment in our

nation's past, the images from that horrific exhibition of Americans at their worst are still etched vividly in my memory.

"Many Americans objected to the prosecution, prompting numerous state governors to petition the White House on Calley's behalf," Sargent writes. President Richard "Nixon would, in time, issue him a tacit pardon. One lesson of the Calley trial was that the war's opponents did not comprise a clear majority. This point seemed to vindicate Nixon and (Secretary of State Henry) Kissinger's efforts to marginalize the war's critics through Vietnamization abroad and harassment at home, efforts predicated on a belief that a 'great, silent majority' of the American people supported the war."

As illustrated by the preceding excerpt from "In Pursuit of Primacy," the second chapter in the book, Sargent is at his best when separating fact from mythology. Even in 2015, many Americans wrongly assume the anti-war movement had almost universal support. This is due in part to the way protests were accentuated in the media, which frequently seemed to align itself philosophically and morally with those who had determined we could not win a conflict initiated on false pretenses and exacerbated by unrealistic estimates of our ability to overcome an enemy passionately determined to prevail. Sound familiar?

Sargent is an assistant professor of history at the University of California, Berkeley. All three of his degrees are in history; his B.A. is from Cambridge and his M.A. and Ph.D. are from Harvard. His previous publications include co-editing "The Shock of the Global: The 1970s in Perspective" as well as various journal articles and book chapters in a wide variety of scholarly publications.

"Superpower" is extensively researched, with 58 pages of source notes and 36 pages of references at the conclusion of nine chapters sandwiched between an introduction and conclusion. Conceptually, "Superpower" is arranged in two major sections: "Reaching Backward," which consists of chapters two through five, and "Stumbling Forward," which is made up of chapters six through nine.

The fifth chapter, "World Order Politics," was perhaps my favorite – for a variety of reasons, both academic and personal. Here, Sargent goes to some lengths to clarify the origins of the push toward globalization, a process that played out over the next few decades increasingly fueled by the unprecedented rise of advanced communications in general and the Internet in particular. Unquestionably, the Carter administration was instrumental in the genesis of the inevitable evolution we are still experiencing.

"Locating themselves in the cusp of change, Carter and his advisers presumed that the postwar era in international relations was ending," Sargent writes. "World order politics proceeded from the assumptions that technological modernization was contracting space and time; that transnational relations were rendering nation-states interdependent, if not obsolete; and that mass literacy and mass media were globalizing human aspirations, producing what (Zbigniew) Brzezinski called a 'global political awakening.' Carter sought to move U.S. foreign policy beyond the Cold War-centrism of recent decades, but Soviet-American relations could not be disregarded, especially since some of Carter's world order objectives involved the Soviet Union."

Any serious student of history would find "A Superpower Transformed" to be an invaluable resource, principally for Sargent's keen insights into a decade that set the stage for what has come to pass in the years leading up to our present state of affairs. The author makes a powerful and convincing case that the 1970s were more pivotal to the ongoing progression of our nation's global standing than is commonly acknowledged. I recommend it without reservation.

— *Reviewed by Aaron W. Hughey, Department of Counseling and Student Affairs, Western Kentucky University.*