“Balogh’s splendid synthesis convincingly describes how the federal government unobtrusively shaped the growth of the nation. Along the way, he also reveals the vital relationship between high political theory and policy implementation in the making of the American state.”

– Richard Bensel, Cornell University

“In this pathbreaking book, Brian Balogh brings into sight the hidden wellsprings of national political authority in America’s supposedly stateless nineteenth century. Combining revealing new historical research with a deft grasp of both historical and political science scholarship, Balogh not only untangles the mystery of how a national government so putatively weak could govern so powerfully in advance of modern bureaucracy; he also offers an extraordinary historical vista on the governing challenges of our own era.”

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– Edward L. Ayers, University of Richmond

“Returning political history to a pride of place and combining rich assessments of federalism, political thought, territorial expansion, political economy, and judicial decision making, this synoptic inquiry convincingly solves a great mystery. By explaining why the vigorous activities of American federal governance were elusive and hard to credit despite the wide arc of public authority, this powerfully argued and deeply researched book puts to rest the myth of a weak nineteenth-century state.”

– Ira Katznelson, Columbia University
Although it is obvious that America’s state and local governments were consistently active during the nineteenth century, a period dominated by *laissez-faire*, political historians of twentieth-century America have assumed that the national government did very little during this period. *A Government Out of Sight* challenges this premise, chronicling the ways in which the national government intervened powerfully in the lives of nineteenth-century Americans through the law, subsidies, and the use of third parties (including state and local governments), while avoiding bureaucracy. Americans have always turned to the national government – especially for economic development and expansion – and in the nineteenth century even those who argued for a small, non-intrusive central government demanded that the national government expand its authority to meet the nation's challenges. In revising our understanding of the ways in which Americans turned to the national government throughout this period, this study fundamentally alters our perspective on American political development in the twentieth century, shedding light on contemporary debates between progressives and conservatives about the proper size of government and government programs and subsidies that even today remain “out of sight.”

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A Government Out of Sight

The Mystery of National Authority in Nineteenth-Century America

BRIAN BALOGH

University of Virginia and the Miller Center of Public Affairs
For CMB, JEB, DAB, and KC
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