

Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-68127-8 - On Capitol Hill: The Struggle to Reform Congress and Its Consequences, 1948–2000

Julian E. Zelizer

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On Capitol Hill

The Struggle to Reform Congress and Its Consequences, 1948–2000

Thirty years after the “Watergate Babies” promised to end corruption in Washington, Julian Zelizer offers the first major history of the demise of the committee-era Congress and the rise of the contemporary legislative branch. Based on research in more than a hundred archival collections, this book tackles one of the most enduring political challenges in America: barring a wholesale revolution, how can we improve our representative democracy so as best to fulfill the promises of the Constitution? Whereas popular accounts suggest that major scandals or legislation can transform government institutions, Zelizer shows that reform is messy, slow, and involves many institutions coming together at the right time. The short period of reform in the 1970s – one that rivaled the Progressive Era – revolved around a coalition that had worked for decades, a slow reconfiguration of the relationship among political institutions, shifts in the national culture, and the ability of reformers to take advantage of scandals and elections. Zelizer presents a new look at the origins of the partisanship and scandal warfare that characterize today’s politics. The book also offers a warning to the next generation of reformers by showing how a new political environment can radically transform the political impact of government reforms, as occurred when the conservative movement – during its rise to power in recent decades – took advantage of reforms that had ended the committee era.

Julian Zelizer is Professor of History at Boston University. He is the author of *Taxing America: Wilbur D. Mills, Congress, and the State, 1945–1975* (1998), and *New Directions in Policy History* (2005). He is the editor of *The American Congress: The Building of Democracy* (2004) and co-editor of *The Democratic Experiment: New Directions in American Political History* (2003). Zelizer’s *Taxing America* was awarded the Organization of American History’s 2000 Ellis Hawley Prize and the Lyndon Baines Johnson Foundation’s 1998 D. B. Hardeman Prize. In addition to his scholarly articles and book chapters, Zelizer has appeared in the *New York Times*, the *Washington Post*, the *Boston Globe*, the *Sacramento Bee*, *Roll Call*, the *National Journal*, the *Los Angeles Times*, and *Slate*, and he has been a guest on Fox Television, National Public Radio, the History Channel, C-SPAN, and commercial radio stations around the country.

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Praise for *On Capitol Hill*

“When asked, ‘where can I find a good narrative history of the modern Congress?’ we now have an answer.”

– Ron Peters, *APSA Legislative Studies
Section Newsletter*

“Zelizer ... uses a rich historical record to explore the avenues and obstacles to congressional change in his *On Capitol Hill* ... Littered with scoundrels like Reps. Adam Clayton Powell and Wilbur Mills ... *On Capitol Hill* provides a lively portrait of the way that sometimes obscure procedural battles can empower different constituencies.”

– Juliet Eilperin, *The Washington Post*

“Zelizer’s study is best when it demonstrates how reforms were made possible by such developments as the Supreme Court’s reapportionment decisions of the 1960s and the Voting Rights Act of 1965.”

– David Lowe, *The Weekly Standard*

“Zelizer’s engrossing account of struggles over the filibuster in the 1950s and the fight to expand the House Rules Committee in 1961 nicely underscore the notion that institutional reform was an inextricable component of the great moral battles of the era.”

– Sam Rosenfeld, *The American Prospect*

“The volume should be required reading in graduate courses on Congress in political science; both its methodology and its substance are necessary for future congressional scholars. It easily could be used in undergraduate courses ... Finally, all serious scholars of Congress should have this book on their book shelves. It will quickly become the standard source for those seeking a history of the modern Congress.”

– Sean Kelly, *Perspectives on Politics*

“Zelizer persuasively depicts the problems of the era that inspired reform and the shortcomings of the system that reform produced. The process of change itself receives masterly treatment, both sensitive to the contributions to the process of individual political actors and perceptive about the larger institutional frameworks in which the process took place.”

– Robert Mason, *Reviews in American History*

“In his extensively researched, clearly written, and important work, Julian E. Zelizer presents a masterful study of the movement to reform Congress

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from 1948 to 2000 . . . Zelizer’s wide-ranging account of congressional reform in the context of external forces is a worthy successor to his prize-winning study *Taxing America* . . . These two books move Zelizer into the front ranks of scholars who specialize in political history, political culture, policy, and Congress.”
– Keith Olson, *Journal of Southern History*

“Zelizer’s work is a masterful account of Congressional history that is essential for those teaching contemporary American political history. It can offer many avenues for discussion in graduate or undergraduate seminars on the subjects of postwar liberalism and conservatism, on the nature of Congressional leadership . . . on the actions of interest groups and coalitions, on the relationship of the media and Congress, on institutional change, and on the overall struggle for power.”

– Donna Binkiewicz, *The History Teacher*

“*On Capitol Hill* asks a crucial question: Why does Congress appear less purposeful and effective than in the past? Julian Zelizer’s persuasive answer should engage – and trouble – everyone concerned with the future of American democracy. With its massive research base and its fair-minded, cogent analysis, this book will remain a landmark in the history of American government.”

– Michael B. Katz, Walter H. Annenberg Professor of History, University of Pennsylvania

“A truly magisterial work, *On Capitol Hill* situates pivotal shifts in congressional procedures within the panorama of twentieth-century U.S. history. Analysts of Congress learn how broader social movements and political reorganizations contributed to congressional reforms of the 1970s and pushed their consequences in unintended directions. Students of social movements learn why they cannot afford to ignore governing elites and institutional rules of the game. This book deserves a wide and enduring readership within and beyond academia. Bravo, Julian Zelizer, on a landmark achievement!”

– Theda Skocpol, Victor S. Thomas Professor of Government and Sociology and Director of the Center for American Political Studies, Harvard University

“Julian Zelizer’s remarkable book offers us nothing less than a hidden history of our times, a parallel universe that explains why Congress was able to enact some of the most significant legislation of the twentieth century and why other equally popular bills were consigned to the dustbin. Zelizer demonstrates that the impact of procedural reform in the Congress has had enormous consequences all across the land. This book is essential reading, not just for policy historians but for all those concerned with American labor, race, media, and political culture during the last half of the twentieth century.”

– Nelson Lichtenstein, Professor of History, University of California, Santa Barbara

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*The Struggle to Reform Congress
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JULIAN E. ZELIZER

Boston University



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For Nora:

From sitting across the table at Levering

to making our little darlings,

What a beautiful journey together,

I love you beyond words

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Acknowledgments

Writing this book has been a sheer delight. I am extremely grateful to the institutions that supported this research, including the Dirksen Congressional Center; Carl Albert Center; Gerald Ford Foundation; Gilder Lehrman Institute of American History; Hagley Museum and Library; Harvard University Shorenstein Center on the Press, Politics and Public Policy; National Endowment for the Humanities; and the State University of New York at Albany. Without their generous support, the research for this book would have been impossible to conduct. I likewise want to express my deep appreciation for the many archivists at the collections cited in this book. They helped me sort through the vast materials that were available and kindly tolerated my photocopying habits. Additionally, I would like to thank Walter Oleszek in the Congressional Research Service for sharing his personal collection on the Bolling Committee and Bill Cable for doing the same; Kristine Walseth of the House of Representatives for allowing me to see her Democratic Caucus hearing books; and Steven Frantzich for providing me the research materials he collected for his great work about C-SPAN. My thanks to Scott Alder, who put me in touch with Walseth and Oleszek and shared his oral history interviews. Nicole Mellow was very generous in helping me locate some archival data I was searching for. Ben Schwartz provided research assistance with some final improvements in the eleventh chapter of this book.

The Rockefeller College of Public Affairs and Policy at the State University of New York at Albany has offered me a wonderful intellectual home from which to complete this book. As the historian in a school of public policy and governance, I have benefitted from an exciting intellectual community and the warm reception from my colleagues. Working with sociologists, political scientists, economists, psychologists, and organizational analysts has pushed me to refine my arguments, strengthen my working assumptions, and clarify my analysis so that it could reach a broader audience. The Rockefeller College also provided me a special grant that helped obtain reproduction rights for some photographs in this book. A special thanks to Dean Frank Thompson, whose enthusiasm, optimism, and unwavering support have always made me feel welcome.

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Furthermore, I am deeply grateful to the numerous colleagues who took the time to carefully read earlier drafts of this manuscript and provide me with penetrating (and sometimes painful) evaluations of the work. They include Scott Adler, Lew Bateman, Edward Berkowitz, Sarah Binder, Lizabeth Cohen, Jacob Hacker, Michael Katz, Ira Katznelson, David Mayhew, Bruce Miroff, Nelson Lichtenstein, Nelson Polsby, Eric Schickler, Michael Schudson, Bruce Schulman, and Don Wolfensberger. Hopefully, they will agree that the current version is vastly improved from those earlier drafts. They should know that all were instrumental in this creative process. Each person offered me distinct suggestions for moving this project forward and bringing out important aspects of the narrative. Another group of colleagues were kind enough to provide me with constructive comments about articles, proposals, and conference papers that grew out of this work, including Brian Balogh, Alan Brinkley, Marc Carnes, Joseph Cooper, David Farber, Daniel Fox, Gary Gerstle, Lani Guinier, J. Morgan Kousser, Scot Powe, and Brigitta Van Rheinberg. As always, Eric Patashnik kept me laughing throughout this process, and our many conversations pushed me to thinking more broadly about the implications of my particular historical story. His comments on the manuscript were very helpful.

In addition to reading this book, my close friend Meg Jacobs has constantly supported me and kept my spirits high. Meg is a wonderful friend. I have thoroughly enjoyed our time together at conferences. We have experienced the thrills of parenthood together while working through the challenges that face young historians. She also gave me terrific comments on this book, which made it a better product. Meg makes my world much brighter.

Pennsylvania State University Press gave me permission to reprint some material that appeared in an extended and different version of the story in Chapter 7, which appeared as “Seeds of Cynicism: The Struggle over Campaign Finance, 1956–1974” in the *Journal of Policy History*, vol. 14, no. 1 (Winter 2002), pp. 73–111. Duke University Press granted permission to reprint material that appeared previously as “Bridging State and Society: The Origins of 1970s Congressional Reform” in *Social Science History*, vol. 24, no. 2 (Summer 2000), pp. 379–93.

The people at Cambridge University Press have treated this manuscript with efficiency and class. Frank Smith has been excited about this project from the first time I mentioned it to him. Starting with our great lunch in St. Louis and continuing throughout the publication process, he has made sure that the completion of this book was an enjoyable process. Frank read each chapter with great care. I hope that he is pleased with the final product. Matt Darnell did a wonderful job of copyediting.

Most important, there is my family. My parents, Gerald and Viviana Zelizer, have remained big fans (as they say) of their son and have always pushed me to pursue my interests. Without a doubt, the best things ever to happen in my life occurred over the past few years: the birth of our delightful daughter Sophia Miriam and our adorable son Nathan Solomon. Sophia is an absolute joy and already a great person. She fills the room with her smiles and spirit. Every time

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that I hold her in my arms, she warms her daddy's heart. Pardon the cliché, but she will always be daddy's girl. Nathan arrived as this book went to press. I can already tell that he is wonderful and I can't wait to get to know him.

Finally, there is the person to whom this book is dedicated, the other love of my life, my beautiful wife Nora. I have always believed that the biggest challenge in human existence is to not be lonely. Once you have overcome that obstacle the rest is relatively smooth. Ever since our first date in 1991, when Nora and I sat together on the corner stools of Baltimore's Cat's Eye Pub and listened to a rocking version of "Me and Bobby McGee," I just knew that my own challenge was over. Nora is the most incredible person I have ever met. Brilliant, kind, fun, sexy, and loving, Nora is – to borrow a phrase from my favorite band – my Sunshine Daydream. Every moment we have shared has filled my heart with love. From taking the tape-recorded tours of the Louvre to tromping down Key West's Duval Street in the wee hours of the night, Nora always makes every experience festive beyond words. She has taught me to take a moment wherever we are to appreciate what is around us. Of course, on June 1, 2002, Nora offered me the greatest gift a person can give, our daughter Sophia, and for that I will always be indebted to her. And on December 26, 2003, she gave me that gift again with Nathan. As I said in my first book, Nora and I have many adventures left together and I hope this book is a small testament to my love for her. If this paragraph makes it sound as if I am ridiculously over the top about this woman, well, that's because I am. Thank you, my love.

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Gerald Ford Presidential Papers	(GFP)
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Kenneth Lazarus Files	(KLF)
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Hagley Archives, Wilmington, Delaware

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Harry Truman Oral History Collection	(HTOHC)

House of Representatives, Washington, D.C.

House Rules Committee Hearings	(HRC)
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Howard Baker Papers, Knoxville, Tennessee

Howard Baker Senate Papers	(SHBSP)
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John F. Kennedy Library, Boston, Massachusetts

John Kennedy Presidential Papers	(JKP)
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Democratic Study Group Papers	(DSG)
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Lyndon Johnson Collection	(LJOH)
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Lyndon Johnson Presidential Records	(LJP)

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Frank Thompson Papers	(FTP)
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Justice Marshall Harlan Papers	(JMHP)

Senate Historical Office, Washington, D.C.

Senate Oral History Project	(SOHP)
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State University of New York at Albany, Albany, New York

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Walter Oleszek Papers (Legislative Research Service) (WOP)

William Cable Papers (House Parliamentarian Office) (WCP)

Vanderbilt University, Nashville, Tennessee

Television News Archives (TNA)

Washington State University, Pullman, Washington

Tom Foley Papers (TFP)

Wisconsin State Historical Society, Madison, Wisconsin

Americans for Constitutional Action Papers (ACA)

Americans for Democratic Action Papers (ADA)

Congress of Racial Equality Papers (CORE)

Leadership Conference on Civil Rights (LCCR)

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Oral History Interviews

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