



American Credo: The Place of Ideas in American Politics

Michael Foley

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American society may be hostile to the thought of ideologies, but it possesses a sophisticated but little understood ability to engage in deep conflicts over political ideas, while at the same time reducing adversarial positions to legitimate derivatives of American history and development. The study asks how this occurs; how the sources, traditions and usages of core ideas and their derivative compounds animate political discourse and structure the basis of political conflict; and how it is possible to sustain a high incidence of competitive value-laden argument and principled political conflict within a stable political order.

The fundamental aim of this study is to examine the traditions and usages of American political ideas within the arena of practical politics. By locating them in their respective contexts, it will be possible to assess both their changing meanings and their shifting relationships to one another.

In surveying America's core ideas both in isolation and in combination, the book facilitates an informed awareness of their political and cultural leverage as forms of persuasion and sources of legitimacy. American Credo roots the examination of American political ideas firmly in the milieu of social drives, political movements and contemporary issues within which the ideas themselves are embedded. This not only allows the study to investigate the interior properties and traditional priorities of America's key values but permits the theoretical implications and practical consequences of these ideas to be traced and evaluated. By marshalling a wide variety of evidence from different disciplines and perspectives, and by employing innovative principles of organisation, the study offers clarity and depth in support of an inventive explanatory scheme. It concludes with a review of the current and likely future challenges to the protocols and conventions surrounding the matrix of ideational coexistence.

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