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Thomas Borstelmann. *The 1970s: A New Global History from Civil Rights to Economic Inequality*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2011. 401pp.

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During the course of the 1970s Americans became both more equal and less equal. More equal as individual legal rights were attained and yet less equal as economic inequality developed. This is the paradox with which Thomas Borstelmann grapples in *The 1970s: A New Global History from Civil Rights to Economic Inequality*.

How did this happen? *The 1970s* demonstrates that trust in the public sphere - of government and its programs - was replaced by faith in the private sector. A perception of government mismanagement and incompetence followed the Vietnam War, the Watergate scandal, and continuing economic crisis. The Rights Revolution empowered the individual and created the cultural space for faith in unregulated individual participation in the market. Borstelmann argues that as rights were legislated, supposedly ending discrimination, a widespread belief that hardship was an individual's own fault emerged. "The green of currency was the only color that mattered", he explains of this new attitude, "remaining inequalities were natural and reasonable" (313).

This shift from the public to private sphere in politics and economics was reversed in popular culture. The legislation of rights was coupled with a variety of cultural influences and facilitated greater freedom of expression. Movies, television,

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music, and books became more violent and more sexual, thrusting what was once strictly private into the public arena. For example, the 1970s was the decade that pornography went mainstream, reflective of "a growing inclination to let individuals do what they wanted to do and buy what they wanted to buy, as long as it did not obviously hurt other people" (168). Borstelmann shows how the development of this "inclination", alongside the legislative narrative of rights, must be incorporated into our understanding of the legacies of the decade.

The 1970s packs a lot of history into its 401 pages. Its strength lies in its strong central thesis and the incorporation of much of the recent scholarship of 1970s history. Over half the book is devoted to understanding the multiple crises of the 1970s, the rights revolution, and emergence of market values, successfully convincing the reader of the centrality of these issues to the decade. The book's second half places these topics into a global context, and then examines subsequent resistance to "hyper-individualism". A final chapter argues that many of the western world's problems in the early twenty-first century are rooted in the 1970s.

Other studies have provided a more detailed analysis of specific 1970s topics such as conservatism, religion, and economic histories (including financial and environmental), but *The 1970s* incorporates much of this varied scholarship into its analysis of the decade. Borstelmann places these themes in context and effectively makes his argument that more social equality went side-by-side with increasing economic inequity. They cannot be understood separately. In making this claim the book does not rely on new archival material, but instead weaves existing studies into an overarching synopsis of the 1970s in the U.S.

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The price of this refreshingly wide scope, however, is detail. The central "more equal, less equal" thesis sometimes oversimplifies. For example, I am not convinced that the rise of conservatism can be neatly attributed to the popularity of market-based solutions and reaction against unrestrained expression. Faith in the market system resulted from a number of developments touched upon, but not always discussed in depth. Campaign finance reform, the demise of the Bretton Woods system, and the rise of global consumption and indebtedness, for me, need further development and a more central role in understanding the structural changes of U.S. society and economy in the 1970s.

It should be noted that *The 1970s* is not a comprehensive global history, as its title suggests, but instead "an interpretation of the American past in its global context" (xiv). Borstelmann notes a global trajectory similar to that of the U.S. but does not claim to write a comprehensive global account.

Used as a text to enter the field of 1970s U.S. history the book excels and should receive wide readership. The study is accessible, very well written and incorporates much recent 1970s literature. This book demonstrates that – thankfully - historians have definitively moved on from the description of the 1970s as a time to forget, sandwiched between the "revolutionary Sixties" and "conservative Eighties". Borstelmann successfully establishes that "the decade turns out to be a crucial period of change and adjustment" (3). *The 1970s* is an important addition to the growing body of literature focused on the decade.