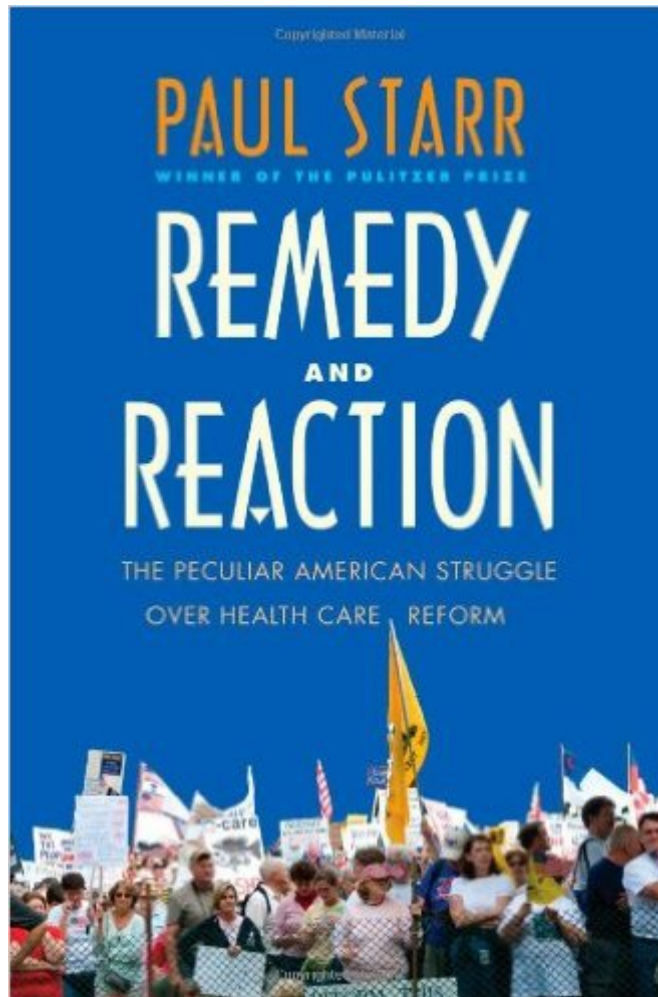


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Remedy And Reaction: The Peculiar American Struggle Over Health Care Reform



Synopsis

In no other country has health care served as such a volatile flashpoint of ideological conflict. America has endured a century of rancorous debate on health insurance, and despite the passage of legislation in 2010, the battle is not yet over. This book is a history of how and why the United States became so stubbornly different in health care, presented by an expert with unsurpassed knowledge of the issues. Tracing health-care reform from its beginnings to its current uncertain prospects, Paul Starr argues that the United States ensnared itself in a trap through policies that satisfied enough of the public and so enriched the health-care industry as to make the system difficult to change. He reveals the inside story of the rise and fall of the Clinton health plan in the early 1990s and of the Gingrich counterrevolution that followed. And he explains the curious tale of how Mitt Romney's reforms in Massachusetts became a model for Democrats and then follows both the passage of those reforms under Obama and the explosive reaction they elicited from conservatives. Writing concisely and with an even hand, the author offers exactly what is needed as the debate continues—a penetrating account of how health care became such treacherous terrain in American politics.

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Customer Reviews

The U.S. spends far more on health care than others - 17.6% of GDP, compared to an average of about 9% in other economically advanced nations. Meanwhile, as of 2010, about 50 million Americans are without health insurance at any time, our outcomes are, at best, only comparable,

and variation in disease rates do not explain the cost differences either. Higher prices, however, do. Paul Starr's 'Remedy and Reaction' provides excellent insight into how this has occurred. Briefly, during the first half of the 20th century the U.S. diverged from the more common path taken by western democracies and failed to establish a general system to finance health care. Instead, it ensnared itself in what Starr calls 'a policy trap,' devising an increasingly costly and complicated system that satisfied enough of the public (veterans - a separate system established after WWI; employer provided - encouraged by tax benefits and its offering a way around WWII wage/price controls; Medicare - 1965; Medicaid - 1965) and so enriched the industry as to make change very difficult now that it consumes nearly one-fifth the American economy. When the major European countries created their national insurance systems between the 1880s and early 1900s, health care was a small proportion of their economies, about 3%, and thus much more easily maneuvered. Now, not only are providers and insurers likely to provide strong resistance to change, the public is as well. Some because they view their existing coverage as 'earned' and resent others receiving similar status, others see their freedom of choice being limited, while fear of benefit reductions and/or growth in government spending motivate still others.

An excellent and very informative history of government efforts to reform health care in the U.S., leading up to a brilliant analysis of the politics that shaped and (just barely) achieved the passage of the Affordable Care Act (aka Obamacare) in 2010. The second half of the book is fascinating, a political thriller that (like Spielberg's "Lincoln") lays bare the grubby political maneuvering that allowed the achievement of a morally desirable end. As a progressive Democrat, I had thought that Obamacare did too little, and gave away too much to health-care interests. This book made it clear to me that, in 2010, the sort of health care reform that progressives wanted was not politically possible. It also made it clear to me that Obamacare was a major achievement that will have increasingly positive effects over time -- an achievement that now seems likely to remain in place. Given the enormous amount that has been written on current U.S. health policy, it is hard to know where to turn for analysis. Paul Starr's resume suggests that this book is a good place to start. He is an eminent expert in the field of public policy. He is a professor of sociology and public affairs at the Woodrow Wilson School at Princeton, co-founded the liberal magazine "The American Prospect", and has written many books on public policy, including the Pulitzer winning "The Social Transformation of American Medicine". Despite his academic background, however, he writes in a real world political framework, and has the experience to back it up -- he was a senior advisor to President Clinton during the 1993 attempt to reform healthcare. Clearly, he has a liberal back-

ground, but his analysis focuses on facts. The first half of the book surveys efforts to reform U.S.

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