



# **History and Health Policy in the United States: Putting the Past Back In (Critical Issues in Health and Medicine)**

*Rosemary A. Stevens*

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In our rapidly advancing scientific and technological world, many take great pride and comfort in believing that we are on the threshold of new ways of thinking, living, and understanding ourselves. But despite dramatic discoveries that appear in every way to herald the future, legacies still carry great weight. Even in swiftly developing fields such as health and medicine, most systems and policies embody a sequence of earlier ideas and preexisting patterns.

In *History and Health Policy in the United States*, seventeen leading scholars of history, the history of medicine, bioethics, law, health policy, sociology, and organizational theory make the case for the usefulness of history in evaluating and formulating health policy today. In looking at issues as varied as the consumer economy, risk, and the plight of the uninsured, the contributors uncover the often unstated assumptions that shape the way we think about technology, the role of government, and contemporary medicine. They show how historical perspectives can help policymakers avoid the pitfalls of partisan, outdated, or merely fashionable approaches, as well as how knowledge of previous systems can offer alternatives when policy directions seem unclear.

Together, the essays argue that it is only by knowing where we have been that we can begin to understand health services today or speculate on policies for tomorrow.

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