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Attention Shoppers: American Retail Capitalism and the Rise of the Amazon Economy

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Kathleen Thelen is Ford Professor of Political Science at MIT. Her work focuses on the origins and evolution of political-economic institutions in the rich democracies. She is the author, among others, of *Varieties of Liberalization and the New Politics of Social Solidarity* (2014) and *How Institutions Evolve* (2004), and co-editor of *The American Political Economy: Politics, Markets, and Power* (with Jacob Hacker, Alexander Hertel-Fernandez, and Paul Pierson, 2022). Thelen has served as President of the American Political Science Association (APSA), Chair of the Council for European Studies, and as President of the Society for the Advancement of Socio-Economics. Thelen is General Editor of the Cambridge University Press Series in Comparative Politics, and a permanent external member of the Max Planck Institut für Gesellschaftsforschung in Cologne, Germany.

American Retail Capitalism traces the origins of the Amazon economy to the late 19C as large-scale retailers capitalized on the uniquely permissive regulatory landscape of the American political economy to outgrow the capacity of the government to regulate them. Thelen's explanation focuses on features of the legal context, in particular a uniquely congenial competition regime, and on the impact of a fragmented regulatory landscape that invited regulatory arbitrage and outright rule-breaking. As they grew, America's large retailers were able to assemble an ever-growing political support coalition that could be weaponized to head off the regulatory efforts they faced.