

## **The New Deal and the Great Society**

We are going to think about the future of the American welfare state by examining its twentieth-century origins: The New Deal (FDR), the Fair Deal (Truman) and the Great Society (LBJ). The larger question is whether these efforts to create a modern welfare state in the United States were the beginning of a long historical process which has been rudely interrupted by the Reagan "Revolution", Democratic conservatism (Clinton and Obama) and the presidency of Donald Trump? Or whether these efforts to create a welfare state were the "great exception", as one historian has argued. On this interpretation, the great tradition of a weak state and individual self-reliance was interrupted by neo-socialist innovation, which resonates poorly in the basically conservative and individualistic American tradition. These are obviously two very different takes on American history, and we should think of them as rebuttable propositions, subject to the test of rigorous historical analysis. So we will start with analysis of the origins and nature of the reform efforts from 1932 until 1968, and then examine where welfare policy has gone since the election of Richard M. Nixon. From this point of view, Donald Trump may not be (entirely) an aberration, but rather a continuation of the return to "normality" under Ronald Reagan.

There is obviously a great deal of historical literature that bears on this question, and I will distribute short lists of books and articles that some of you may want to consult. I will, as usual, show quite a few videos concerning the events and institutions in question, and each class will include opportunity for group discussion. These are matters on which we all have opinions. I will do my best to get you to provide historical arguments for your positions.

We will particularly look at some of the major social innovations of the New Deal and Great Society: Social Security, Medicare, federal programs to support employment and respond to various types of social trauma. The larger question we will address is: what is the role of the state, if any, in protecting individuals and families from the threatened loss of health, home and work? I think there will be plenty to talk about!

**LEADER:** Stanley Katz retired from a career as a professor in the Woodrow Wilson School of Princeton University.

**FRIDAYS:** 9:30 a.m. to noon, 6 weeks: February 28 through April 3

**LOCATION:** The Presbyterian Church of Lawrenceville, Maximum 45 seats