

The False Promise of Big Government: How Washington Helps the Rich and Hurts the Poor

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I. Introduction

This lecture is not about making government “small,” or about depicting it as “bad.” The lecture is about the automatic assumption that bigger government is a necessary aid to the average person.

II. The Myth that bigger government is needed by the poor and average person to counteract the injustices of the private sector

- A. New Deal roots of the myth
- B. The historical staying power of the myth – e.g. Great Society, 2008 recession

III. Addressing the Myth

- A. Contradictory facts, admissions
- B. Big government responds to big power – e.g., relationship to big business
- C. Big government becomes end in itself
 - 1. Size of government is proxy for social remedies – e.g., education, poverty
 - 2. How big government can betray the poor
 - 3. How big government can backfire on stated intentions
- D. Big government crowds out social institutions vital to poor and average person
 - 1. The benefits conferred by the mediating institutions of civil society
 - 2. How government can undercut those institutions
 - 3. How social erosion hurts the poor