The Right and Labor

The Long Exception

"The Long Exception" examines the period from Franklin Roosevelt to the end of the twentieth century and argues that the New Deal was more of an historical aberration--a byproduct of the massive crisis of the Great Depression--rather than the linear triumph of the welfare state. The depth of the Depression undoubtedly forced the realignment of American politics and class relations for decades, but, it is argued, there is more continuity in American politics between the periods before the New Deal order and those after its decline than there is between the postwar era and the rest of American history. Indeed, by the early seventies the arc of American history had fallen back upon itself. While liberals of the seventies and eighties waited for a return to what they regarded as the normality of the New Deal order, they were actually living in the final days of what Paul Krugman later called the “interregnum between Gilded Ages.” The article examines four central themes in building this argument: race, religion, class, and individualism.