

A Call to Action

Book Review by LARRY P. ARNN and THOMAS TACOMA

REDISCOVERING AMERICANISM AND THE TYRANNY OF PROGRESSIVISM

By Mark Levin

New York: Threshold Editions, 2017. 259 pages.

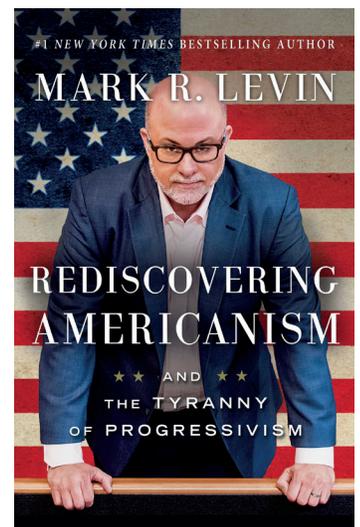
Mark Levin's newest book, *Rediscovering Americanism*, takes the reader on a dynamic ride through the history of American political thought to explain the crisis of our time. Levin explores the principles of the American Founding, the Progressive counter-revolution, and the philosophers who inspired them both. He argues that the Founders understood something fundamentally true about human nature and human society, and he contends that their principles remain perennially applicable to government. A tragedy of American history is the success of the Progressive movement in rejecting the Founding. Progressives have sought to replace that foundation with their own utopian vision of history and government. Levin gives a sobering account of the Progressive philosophy and its success over time. But there is reason to hope. His book is more than an intellectual history—it is a call to action.

Levin begins with a commentary on the Declaration of Independence. He says that its natural law claim “is the foundational principle at the core of American society,” and he cites numerous authorities from the Founders and the political thinkers who inspired them. Cicero, John Locke, and Algernon Sidney set in place the vital groundwork. And coupled with the legal thinking from statesmen such as William Blackstone and Edmund Burke, the Founders—brilliant in their own right—created American government based on the eternal principles of natural law.

But a nation established on sound principles is not immune to attack, even from its own citizens. Levin tracks the thought of key Progressive leaders and how they transformed American government. Herbert Croly, Theodore Roosevelt, Woodrow Wilson, and others worked to alter and, in many ways, abandon

the Founding in favor of “an ideological agenda broadly characterized as ‘historical progress.’” Levin also illustrates how the writings of four influential philosophers prepared the way for the Progressive rejection of the Founders’ principles. Jean-Jacques Rousseau, Georg Hegel, Karl Marx, and Auguste Comte were all hostile to fundamental republican ideas, including the separation of powers and federalism. In their writings, particularly Comte’s advocacy of legal positivism, one discovers “an ideological brew of tyranny.”

Levin stands on the shoulders of giants when he critiques the philosophies that informed Progressive thought, and he exposes the injustices and failures of Progressive government. The work of Karl Popper reveals just how dangerous Hegel’s teachings were. Popper argued that Hegel’s nineteenth century historicism was the root of twentieth century totalitarianism. In addition, Levin draws heavily on the work of Isaiah Berlin, Friedrich Hayek, and Milton Friedman to critique the flawed premises and negative consequences of Progressivism in the twentieth century. For example, incessant government regulation has undermined individual liberty and placed financial burdens on all Americans. These bureaucratic intrusions contrast starkly with the principles of the American Founding,



eloquently stated in the Declaration and protected by the Constitution.

Levin reminds us of the danger facing our nation by pointing out how deeply rooted Progressivism is in our society and how it stands in opposition to the Founding. Consequently, Levin points the way forward, which is a path of restoration:

America's founding principles are eternal principles . . . born of intuition, faith, experience, and right reason. They are the foundation on which the civil society is built and the individual is cherished; they are the basis of freedom, moral order, happiness, and prosperity.

Levin has taken the time to learn from the great thinkers of the past and is thus able to see more clearly the

challenge of our time. This book is his opportunity to share and reflect on the lessons he has learned from his studies. He has read Montesquieu and Tocqueville; he knows Hayek and Friedman; he respects Locke, Bastiat, and the other great political philosophers of the past. But he loves the American Founders, and he understands their ideas and their defense of American government. Likewise, he is able to fathom the mindset of contemporary Progressives because he has learned their political theory. Levin sees their goals and strategies at work. He is therefore able to warn his readers of what is ultimately at stake. Levin fears that America has been wholly set adrift by Progressivism. To correct course, he calls us back to "the doctrines and principles of the American founding."

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