Since the Social Security Acts of 1935, the idea of a federal health insurance has haunted medical associations and so called ‘grass roots’ activists. Ever since, they have planned to banish this ghost from the machine of American Democracy. After President Lyndon B. Johnson’s renewal of health insurance for the elderly and the poor with both Medicare and Medicaid in 1965, no further reforms were enacted. When President Obama proposed the Affordable Care Act in 2010, conservatives shunned him as a socialist. In July 2012, the Supreme Court affirmed the constitutionality of the act. Nevertheless, it was during the election night of November 2012 that public debates still whistled the tune of “socialized medicine.”

In this lecture, Marcel Hartwig traces the stony path of American health care reform in three steps. Beginning with the first instances of regulated preventive medicine in the 17th and 18th centuries, his talk argues that the need for public health care grew due to the rationalization and professionalization of the medical class. The subsequent institutionalization of the clinic in the 19th century constituted a means both to politicize the effective administration of American citizens and to turn access to health care into a function of socioeconomic class. In this light, the current reformation of social security and federal health care appears as a final step to allow for a ‘controlled’ corporatization of the health care system – contrary to its highly popularized ‘socialist’ appeal.

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