

“LIBERATING THE CITY: BETWEEN NEW YORK AND NEW ORLEANS”—A RESPONSE

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Jamie Peck's interesting and ambitious paper on New York and New Orleans examines the links between the discursive elaborations of the new urban right and the diffusion of neoliberal policy in the two cities since the late 1970s. He argues that by employing a narrative of crisis, members of conservative think tanks such as the Heritage Foundation and the Manhattan Institute persuaded politicians of the necessity for a strong stance against welfarist tendencies and the simultaneous initiation and/or entrenchment of more neoliberal ones. He traces the geographical dissemination of this revanchist ideology primarily through the major journals and books of these think tanks and seeks to show crucial changes in the ideational climate of both cities. This shift in climate, he argues, guides a “neoliberal makeover” of both New York and New Orleans.

As with all Peck's work, the piece is thoughtful, nuanced, and well-researched. But it departs from much of his earlier work by virtue of its focus on ideas and personalities rather than structural forces *per se*. In this, it should be read as part of the broad corpus of scholarly work on the origins, extension, and entrenchment of neoliberalism worldwide. These began with broad analyses of capitalist restructuring and structural adjustment (mostly set in Latin America), but in recent years have become increasingly attuned to the particularities of place and the capacities of actors to produce different outcomes and trajectories.

Here, Peck investigates the political ideologies through which neoliberalism is produced as the rational way of understanding the economy and society. He unpacks the constituent parts of the neoliberal project to investigate the ways that this ideational shift is rendered material through the links between thought and policy. Rather than emphasizing a capitalist “logic” to the growth and extension of neoliberalism he seeks to show the multiple ways that it is constituted by individuals and institutions. This gives more weight to the productive capacity of discourse and to the agency of actors and successfully depicts neoliberalism as a complex project always in motion, never perfect, and never complete.

The paper is part of a pendulum shift away from economic interpretations of a capital “P” “Neoliberal Project” and helps to bring balance to a debate that had occasionally swayed to overly structuralist accounts of crisis and reorganization. In this sense, it is a new story. Yet in many other respects, and despite the attention paid to actors and agency, the story here also remains the same story; it is still an account of the “victory”

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of free-market ideology and the inexorable march forward of an ever-widening set of neoliberal policies. I am largely in agreement with the general outline of this narrative, but a number of contemporary critiques of this position are worth pursuing, to investigate its limits as well as those of its critics.

The first involves the constant re-centering of neoliberalism as process and idea. Contemporary feminist critiques warn of the dangers of reification when the very attention focused on neoliberalism as a hegemonic project can help to further its growth and expansion; when the assumption of centrality and the anticipation of neoliberal outcomes can make what is contingent and perhaps quite transient seem necessary and unstoppable. The second critique to examine involves the paper's analytical focus on neoliberalism as ideology and policy framework and asks what might be gained (or lost) with a more purposeful analytic of neoliberalism as governmentality. The third set of questions relates to the articulation of neoliberalism and neoconservatism in contemporary urban governance, particularly with respect to the issue of race. If an analytic of racial formation were to be more centrally positioned in this paper would the purported outcomes for the two cities look any different?

NEOLIBERAL HEGEMONY

The paper's focus is on ideological production—how the hearts and minds of a political elite can be won over through the arts of persistent persuasion. It is also about policy formation—how these ideas can be turned into action, in this case actions involving the regulation and organization of cities. In theory, these two processes are completely contingent on a particular constellation of people, forces, and events coming together in a given space at a given moment. For example, Peck argues that the "big ideas" of the Manhattan Institute essentially "set the terms and the tone for neoliberal urban policy-making in the ensuing period" (Peck, 2006, p. 686, this issue) in areas such as workfare, law and order policing, supply-side economics, etc. These big-theme interventions then "*incrementally* shaped the worldview of the new urban right, borrowing well-established conservative and free-market themes, but framing them into a practical governing philosophy in iteration with the ebb and flow of political opportunity" (Peck, 2006, p. 686, this issue). With the latter part of this sentence ("in iteration with the ebb and flow of political opportunity"), he is indicating a contingent relationship between ideological production and urban policy formation that is dependent on a given economic and political situation. This is highlighted in other areas by virtue of the strong empirical work in the paper as the author carefully tracks down the key books, articles, and speeches of the era and shows their dissemination and welcome reception among a conservative political clientele. In a number of instances, he even shows specific connections between the public output of think-tank organs such as the *City Journal* and particular politicians such as Rudy Giuliani (e.g., Peck, 2006, p. 690, this issue).

The emphasis on the contingency of the ideology-policy articulation is important because of the many examples throughout history where it can be shown that the ideas put forth by conservative think tanks *have not* had much influence in affecting urban change. For example, former mayors Ed Koch and David Dinkins presided over what many consider the worst moments of New York's malaise, from 1978 to 1993, yet did not seem unduly influenced by the fledgling Manhattan Institute's dire prophecies of gloom. Nor

were their policy prescriptions followed. And current Mayor Bloomberg has effectively dismantled many of the “law and order,” anti-homeless, and other revanchist policies initiated under Giuliani, despite the Manhattan Institute’s ebullient cries of victory with respect to “broken windows”-style policing and the shrill warnings of doom if there were to be a return to the bad old days of chaos and overspending. Thus, in terms of the actually identifiable links between pronouncements of the new urban right and urban policy in New York, one could argue that they have been relatively minor and relatively transient, occurring by chance and political circumstance, and lasting less than a decade.

But, despite the clear contingency of the think-tank-urban policy connection in New York, the overriding tone of the paper is still one of long-lasting, deep-seated change, a *zeitgeist*-level shift, a trajectory of damage and dismay that the New Orleans case continues to highlight. Although the Katrina disaster is barely a year behind us and a new urban right policy for the city in preliminary stages, New Orleans is already projected to “stand as concrete testimony to the reach and potency of neoliberal urban-policy conventions” (Peck, 2006, p. 684, this issue). This pronouncement tends to fudge what actually happened in New York, for although many free-market and anti-welfarist policies clearly remain, particularly in the areas of housing and education and often stemming from *federal* mandates, the specific constellation of conservative ideas, institutions, policies, and personalities that enabled Giuliani’s sharp-edged neoliberal moment in the sun is on the wane.

The contingent and contestable New York thus morphs smoothly into the concretized condition of 21st century New Orleans and, in a sense, Peck has cleverly managed to have his cake and eat it too. The paper faithfully unpacks a small “p” neoliberal project, interrogates particular, highly contingent practices and events, investigates individual biographies and institutions, emphasizes the productive nature of discourse, and underlines the historical and geographical specificity of two urban sites, all the while maintaining the impression of a powerful capital “T” “Neoliberal Trajectory.”

So, is there such a trajectory? I would argue that this scholarship *in combination with* the work of other urban research could substantiate the broad tenor of this assertion. And one of the limitations of the critique I have just made is that it identifies theoretical overreach based on individual work rather than on a broad corpus of scholarship. While pointing to the lacunae of specific pieces is important, it can be disingenuous to suggest that broad tendencies and trajectories should not be identified because each case is always contingent and could (and sometimes does) produce alternative outcomes. Most conclusions such as Peck makes here draw on a now massive scholarly output on neoliberalism, and rely on the collaborative nature of academic research and thinking.

But does the existence of a scholarly community drawing and elaborating on each other’s work help to reify the subject of its study? And does this preclude alternative visions and outcomes? These are important theoretical questions that in a sense can only be answered *through the discursive construction of other trajectories*, other ways of seeing and being, other city futures. If neoliberalism is being produced, in part, through paradigmatic ways of thinking and speaking then the response should not be simply to critique existing scholarship on neoliberalism but rather to imagine and research alternative forms of socioeconomic governance. We need a kind of radical supplementarity of the project using feminist and post-structuralist insights yet maintaining our collaborative

knowledge base and our concern with violence and dominance (Butler, 2004; Sparke, 2006).

NEOLIBERAL GOVERNMENTALITY

The second critique I want to explore involves the question of neoliberalism as governmentality. The paper takes as its analytical focus neoliberal ideology and neoliberal policy formation and traces the specific links between them in two cities. Although a claim is made that the new urban vision of the think tanks "both express *and put to work* an increasingly pervasive governmental rationality" (Peck, 2006, p. 683, this issue), the paper only investigates this in the strictest sense vis-à-vis a way of thinking about the practices of government. It does not investigate a broader understanding of governmental rationality as governmentality, that is, in terms of the *mentalities* of governing—the ways that all people, including the governed, think about governance and their own relationship to rule. How might the paper look different if this *had* formed a central framing device?

Governmentality in this wider sense follows the work of Dean (1999) and others who are interested in the connections between technologies of rule and mentalities of rule. How do people come to understand, accept, and enact their lives in a manner that allows and facilitates certain methods of being governed? How is the exercise of power created and received as rational, just, and true?

With this broader formulation, a whole new set of actors and practices that are invisible in Peck's account become increasingly important to analyze. A city that seemed, in the paper, to consist primarily of Manhattan Institute employees plus Rudy Giuliani suddenly becomes a teeming, densely populated, highly complex site of individuals and groups with conflicting desires and needs. What is the relationship of these people, "the governed," to the ideological pronouncements and policy formation of "the governors"? Have the "permanent persuaders" succeeded in persuading these people to enact their lives in ways amenable to neoliberal philosophies of governance? Have they tapped into a larger *zeitgeist* shift with respect to the mentalities of rule? If so, how?

In order for any ruling regime to operate effectively over time, it must do more than win the hearts and minds of those who are ruled. It must also structure the arena of social action in which people understand and govern themselves. In other words, it must not just persuade effectively with respect to a particular project or set of policies; it must also inculcate a particular way of being in the world and a mentality that understands that particularity as universal—as the true and correct way. According to scholars such as Rose (1999), individuals in modern liberal democracies are now governed through the mentality of freedom. They are obliged to be free, and they are encouraged to always "understand and enact their lives in terms of choice" (Rose, 1999, p. 87).

Contemporary technologies of rule will thus work most effectively if they are articulated with this mentality—of every individual's freedom to shape his life in order to realize his full potential; of every individual's right to maximize her own human capital at all times and in all places. How does this sense of individual freedom and choice, of rational calculation and maximization in the populations of New York and New Orleans interconnect and influence think-tank ideology and political policy in a mutually constitutive manner?

Using an analytic of governmentality in the paper would have encouraged Peck to examine more closely the articulation between the technologies of rule that he investigates and the mentalities of rule that underpin them. It would have forced an engagement with subjectivity formation and with a form of discursive production that does not necessarily emanate from “the top,” but rather operates through the types of ubiquitous capillary passages in society enumerated by Foucault. Using a governmentality perspective to critique the paper’s focus on elite technologies of rule is therefore useful. But what are the limitations of this critique?

One of the problems associated with the governmentality literature is the ways that the approach often abstracts from particular “subjected” realities (see, e.g., O’Malley et al., 1997). Despite the professed desire to understand in detail the mechanisms of governance in society from multiple sites and practices, the actual empirical research in this vein is relatively thin. Contemporary calls to theorize neoliberalism as governmentality or globalization as governmentality (e.g., Larner and Walters, 2004) perpetuate this trend by celebrating “superficiality” and undermining the validity and usefulness of decades of already-completed empirical work, which reportedly tried to go too deep and explain too much.

If Peck *had* included the mentalities of rule, the shifts in consciousness, values, and beliefs of the people of New York in the 1970s and New Orleans in the 2000s, would he have been able to stake any claims at all, or even to gesture toward a Neoliberal Trajectory? Or would the project have become an empiricist study of “surfaces, practices, and routines” (Larner and Walters, 2004, p. 495) that lead everywhere and hence nowhere? Is that the point? Furthermore, would a comparative empirical study of this type (necessarily ethnographic and in two different time periods) even be possible in a journal-length article? While the governmentality framework is clearly useful, especially in underlining the lacunae in certain kinds of research, it is also beset with its own limitations, which must be interrogated as well.

NEOLIBERALISM AND NEOCONSERVATISM

In both New York and New Orleans, one of the most striking features brought out in Peck’s research is the manner in which neoconservative tropes are called into the service of neoliberal agendas. The most egregious of these are the stereotypes associated with racialized populations: corruption, chaos, decay, laziness, greed, and many others. In both cities, but especially in New Orleans, these tropes are used to establish the impossibility of continuing (corrupt) business as usual and the imperative to clear everything (Black) away and start afresh. It is at this point that the neoliberal vision makes a strong alliance with these neoconservative desires, for it is the market that is called forth as the instrument of these changes. The free market, conceptualized as an efficient and value-free force, will sweep out greed, chaos, and corruption, but without the taint of racism or inhumanity. As a neutral process, free-market capitalism can thus be positioned as both economic savior and social engineer, but without anyone having to say so, at least explicitly.

Peck’s research reveals these important articulations—of neoconservatism and neoliberalism, of racism and capitalism—but does not make it a central concern of the paper. Yet one might argue that this unholy alliance, existing at many different scales of

governance, represents the most important political happening of the last three decades. The ways that these particular ideologies come together to form a hegemonic bloc are crucial to interrogate in depth—not only because we need to know how they are made, but also through that knowledge how they can be unmade.

Peck invokes the work of Gramsci in the beginning of the paper vis-à-vis the critical role of the “empowered class of ‘permanent persuaders’” (Peck, 2006, p. 683, this issue). But Gramsci’s work on hegemonic formation (and Stuart Hall’s following him) is arguably even more pertinent. Hall’s (1988) research on the rise of Thatcherism, for example, explored in depth the ways in which particular kinds of narratives were conjoined with others to produce a new regime of truth. He examined the re-positioning of adult perceptions and dispositions through ideological forms of persuasion, but then made the important leap of analyzing the ways that these ideologies were sutured together through particular kinds of practices. As in the two cases outlined by Peck, racial fear and antagonism featured prominently and was yoked to both nation and capital in (at that time) new ways. Interrogating the specific nature of these forms of articulation, these suturings, helped him to understand the rise of Thatcherism as a hegemonic moment. These kinds of interrogations can also help us to understand Thatcherism’s fall, as well as the rise of third-way neoliberalism that followed it.

In the prognostications of conservative U.S. think tanks, race and the market are also yoked together, but the forms of this interconnection look different. How are they different? How are neoconservative narratives both useful and disruptive to neoliberal goals in New York in the 1970s and New Orleans in the present? Peck shows the ways that racial tropes related to welfarism, waste, violence, lawlessness, and corruption were effectively employed by the think tanks to argue for the pure, cleansing, efficient, neutral, orderly forces of free-market capitalism. But what was the exact historical and geographical context for this happy marriage of convenience? What are the associated practices of this discursive articulation? What was the scale employed by the authors of these tracts? We need to know these locations in order to ferret out the dis-locations, the unworkable scales, the fracturing points where the neoliberal and neoconservative center cannot hold, or cannot hold for very long.

Numerous pundits and scholars believe that one of the factors leading to Thatcher’s downfall had to do with her reliance on neoconservative narratives of nationalism and the necessity to defend England’s territorial borders and extra-territorial remnants of empire. In the context of the increasingly internationalist orientation of England’s business and financial community this territorial imperative began to crumble—coming to a head finally at the EU treaty negotiations in Maastricht in 1992. The problems associated with different scales of truth—the mentalities of rightness and rationality associated with the nation versus Europe—took Thatcher down. What about New York and New Orleans? What advantages and problems may be associated with the formation of hegemonic blocs at the urban scale?

In the quotations and references provided throughout the paper, the urban-centric flavor of the Manhattan Institute and the nationalist flavor of the Cato Institute and the Heritage Foundation is striking. With respect to the formation of lasting hegemonic blocs, could this be a problem, as it was for Thatcher? At what point does an urbanist or nationalist flavoring undermine a global free-market project? At what scales and in what

contexts can a neoliberal–neoconservative relationship hold together and when and how will it fall apart?

Racial narratives and tropes are frequently employed in the service of capitalism. But they can be fracturing points as well. In the early stages of the Katrina debacle, the usual stories of Black laziness, greed, and mismanagement were so profoundly at odds with empirical reality, with what people were seeing on their television sets, that this narrative actually backfired. There existed a moment of dislocation when the curtains parted and the little man operating the wizard's sound and lighting effects was there for all to see. Yes, the new urban right quickly pulled the curtains shut, but these moments of disjuncture are cumulative and can be important.

What is the role of race as glue and as fracturing point in the intellectual project of the new urban right? How does racial formation work at the urban scale versus the national scale versus the international scale? What are the suturing points and the breaking points in hegemonic blocs that rely on disparate ideologies of race, nation, and free-market capitalism? These are a few questions that could be posed in this paper—hopefully leading to new research in the collaborative project of scholarship.

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