

POLITICAL ECONOMY & SOCIAL MOVEMENTS

...the point however is to change it.
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Winter 2007

Neoliberalism in the Neighborhood – Prior to Jan. 26

This workshop will require some preparation. Outside of Class:

First

Email Tony at zaragozt@evergreen.edu letting me know what you will be considering your neighborhood for this workshop. This might be where you grew up--what you consider your hometown. Or it might be where you call home now. Either way, it should not just be your temporary home, but be a place you know something about, a place you have a relationship to over some years, and a place you want to get to know better. I would like this info in advance so that I can begin to form groups prior to the workshop and so that I can do a little background reading myself.

By “neighborhood” I mean the community you grew up or live in, in the context of the area where it is located. Think about the place at different scales: first the specific area in the immediate vicinity of your home, then the neighborhood, the part of the town, the entire town and county, and the region of the state. For example, right now I would say that my “neighborhood” is right by Garfield School, on the West Side, in Olympia, Thurston County, the South Sound, Western Washington and the Pacific Northwest. Give yourself a range to work with, but focus somewhere in the middle scale of this range—the area of your daily life where you find home, school and work, family and friends.

For example, I would probably choose to work with where I grew up because I have a better handle on the changes that have occurred there over the last 35 years. So, I would identify my neighborhood in Hammond, as part of Northwest Indiana, (otherwise known as “The Region” as those from The Region say including Hammond, Gary, Whiting, and East Chicago), Chicagoland, the “Rust Belt,” and the Midwest. But I would choose to work most at the level of The Region and Chicagoland for this workshop.

Second

Take some time this week to do some research on this neighborhood. To the best of your ability, check out the general history, the local economy, companies, and industries and changes in them over the last 35 years, the racial and class demographics and changes in them over roughly the last 35 years, changes at your high school (or schools in the area) over the last 35 years. What are the big changes you can identify?

You might have a good understanding of this from your own experiences and knowledge base, but it would be good to do a little digging too. You might check out the internet, your local newspaper, if possible talk with family members, friends, and former teachers. You might find current and older satellite and/or aerial photos? Or photos of places from over the years that you may know. You might check out census data for your state, county and city. You might think of other ways to see changes in your neighborhood. Some ideas you might explore: sprawl, decay, gentrification, old and new industries, old and new construction, size of businesses, transportation methods, shopping patterns, employment, homelessness, shifting racial/ethnic demographics, immigration, environmental problems, safety and women's space, crime, mechanisms and architecture of social control, organizations that are forming and alternatives people are building, etc. Be able to describe the changes as if you were giving a tour of your neighborhood/town/county to a visitor from outside your region.

Finally

Bring whatever you can find out to the workshop on Friday. The more you do to prepare for the workshop, the better it will be for all of us. The preparation you do along with our conversations on Friday will be the key component of the Economics Field work question on the Second Economics Problem Set.

Neoliberalism in the Neighborhood – In class Jan. 26

Introduction

Recall in last Friday's workshop we talked in groups and as a class about a Structural Adjustment Program in SAPlandia. Consider that the US is also a variation of SAPlandia. The US economy has also experienced a process of restructuring. Though our conditionalities were not imposed by the IMF, but by our own elected officials who have been following the line of similar financial institutions such as Federal Reserve, U.S. Treasury, and Wall Street. Granted our structural adjustment for most of our society has not been as severe as in many nations in the Global South and many in this country are still among the world's wealthy (due to the history of conquest and slavery and the ongoing processes of imperialism). But there are ways in which this is changing.

David Harvey, in his book *A Brief History of Neoliberalism*, riffs on Richard Nixon's famous idea that "we're all Keynesians now," by saying "we're all neoliberals now." The last 35 years since Nixon's declaration have been about the transition from us all being Keynesians to all being neoliberals. It's not that we all believe deeply in neoliberalism on a conscious and active level. But the very structure of our economy, politics, society, culture and relationships are in the process of being thoroughly re-woven as neoliberal.

As the pieces in *Real World Macro* point out, these new policies, culture, and society took time to emerge and they didn't emerge together. Ellen Frank notes that Reagan and Bush I shifted policy and changed our conception of what government can and should do, but it took years of Clinton and Gingrich to really see the change all the way through—Welfare Reform, NAFTA, Operation Gate Keeper, the Telecom Act, etc. This process of change found an even more aggressive pace under Bush II. These changes are noticeable in the way the structure of things around us has changed and is changing. Our collective goal in this workshop is to put together the signs, clues and traces of these changes. Some of the changes might be the people who live there—who's moving in and who is moving out, others might be changes in policy, laws or policing, others might be architecture and landscape, and still others might be forms of recreation. Finally, consider how people are resisting or trying to overturn the major changes in the place.

The goal in this workshop is to collectively get a glimpse of neoliberal restructuring and to recognize the signs of economic change that are taking place before our very eyes and to discuss what this means for our lives, for social movements, and—not to be dramatic—perhaps even for the future of humanity.

Workshop in small groups (Take good notes—you will need them for the Econ Problem Set #2)

First. (15 minutes) Discuss review what neoliberalism is. Please use the whole time to be sure you all have a good shared understanding of various aspects of neoliberalism as our many texts have outlined.

Next. (10 minutes) Once you have a common understanding of the various theories, policies and implications of neoliberalism, share with each other what your neighborhood is. Identify where it is you will be talking about.

Third. (30 minutes) Share with each other what you found has changed in your neighborhood over the last 35 years and in what ways this has to do with the changing structure of the economy or not.

Four. (10 minutes) In what ways have the lives of different women changed over this period? The lives of different men?

Finally. (10 minutes) What are the differences AND similarities between the period in which Keynesianism was dominant and today in which neoliberalism has become dominant. What might your neighborhood look like under other models besides these two.

Whole Program. (30 minutes) We'll end with a full class discussion to put the pieces together.