

Neoliberalism in the Neighborhood-Preparation

Introduction: Recall in Dan's lectures and in various readings how we have begun to define "neoliberalism". The U.S. economy has experienced a process of economic restructuring that is parallel to the economic restructuring that countries around the world have also experienced and that people around the world have challenged and seek to change. US restructuring was 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 restructuring for most of our society has not yet been as severe as in many nations in the Global South and some 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.

Keynesian economics: Prior to neoliberalism the dominant capitalist economic policy was Keynesianism, which is an economic theory and set of policies based on the thinking of economist John Maynard Keynes. Keynesianism was developed as a set of policy tools designed to help regulate some of the worst aspects of capitalism. Keynesian economics is procapitalist but distinct from "free trade," which seeks to remove governments from some parts of the economy. Keynesian economics emphasized the use of monetary and fiscal policy to overcome the debilitating downturns in business activity. Keynesianism emerged in large part as a response to The Great Depression. Keynesians advocated the use of controls such as interest rates (monetary policies) to control inflation and the use of government spending (fiscal policies) to stimulate growth. Keynesian theories and policies were questioned and opposed from the beginning by many corporate elites. But Keynesianism was the dominant economic model for over four decades. But beginning in the 70s neoliberalism emerged and became to take prominence.

Neoliberalism: The main points of neoliberalism include: 1) The Rule of the market. 2) Cutting public expenditure for social services like education and health care. Reducing the safety-net for the poor and even maintenance of roads, bridges, water supply. 3) Deregulation: Reduce government regulation of everything that could diminish profits, including protecting the environment and safety on the job. 4) Privatization: Sell state-owned enterprises, goods and services to private investors. This includes banks, key industries, railroads, toll highways, electricity, schools, hospitals and even fresh water. Although usually done in the name of greater efficiency, which is often needed, privatization has mainly had the effect of concentrating wealth even more in a few hands and making the public pay even more for its needs. 5) Eliminating the concept of the "the public good" or "community" and replacing it with "individual responsibility." (from "What is Neoliberalism? A Brief Definition for Activists" by Elizabeth Martinez and Arnaldo Garcia)

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 work shop will be to collectively get a glimpse of neoliberal restructuring from the ground up 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.

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 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 and region of the country. For example, right now I would say that my “neighborhood” is near 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.

But for this workshop, 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 30 years. So, I would identify my neighborhood as around Columbia Center in Hammond, as part of Northwest Indiana, (aka “The Region” by those from The Region including Hammond, Gary, Whiting, and East Chicago), Chicagoland which is in the “Rust Belt,” and which is part of the Midwest. But I would choose to work most at the level of The Region and the Rust Belt for this workshop.

Second

Take some time between now and the workshop 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 30 years, the racial and class demographics and changes in them over roughly the last 30 years, changes at your high school (or schools in the area) over the last 30 years. What are the major 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, the local newspaper, if possible talk with family members, friends, and former teachers. You might find current and older satellite and/or arial 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. What's being lost; what's being gained? 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 everything you can find about your neighborhood and the changes over the last three decades—the period we are calling neoliberalism—to the workshop on April 24th. 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 in the workshop will be the key components of your weekly report. The weekly report for this workshop will be due April 30th.

Neoliberalism in the Neighborhood – In class April 24

Workshop in small geographically-based groups

Introduce yourselves and Identify a time keeper and a facilitator

Take good notes—you will need them for the Weekly Report due on April 30th.

First. (10 minutes) Discuss and 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. Look especially at your notes from the lectures and at Teeple, Smith and Leite.

Next. (10 minutes) Once you have a common understanding of the various theories, policies and implications of neoliberalism, share with each other what neighborhood you will be talking about. Quickly go around the circle to identify where it is and summarize its key features. Where does your neighborhood and region fit into the global economy?

Third. (20 minutes) Share with each other what you found has changed in your neighborhood over the last 30 years and in what ways this has to do with the changing structure of the economy or not. Does your neighborhood fit differently into the global economy now than before?

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

Fifth (10 minutes) What are the differences AND similarities between the period in which Keynesianism was dominant and today in which neoliberalism has become dominant. Are there some consistencies?

Finally. (20 minutes) How are people resisting or seeking to overturn neoliberal policies in your neighborhood? What movements do you see taking shape in this neighborhood? What might your neighborhood look like under other models besides these two? What are the alternatives?

Break. (15 minutes)

Whole Program. (30 minutes) We'll put the pieces together with a full class discussion. Be ready to offer some of the things your group identified in the discussion.

Each individual. (15 minutes) You will have 15 minutes to begin piecing together your notes and your thoughts on the impacts of neoliberalism in your neighborhood.

Final Statements.