

avoid overly technical language and strong presumptions regarding their readers' familiarity with the subject matter, and, therefore, it should be accessible to undergraduate students and beyond.

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Jamie Peck, *Constructions of Neoliberal Reason* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), pp. vi, 30, \$45. ISBN-13: 978-0199580576

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Neoliberalism as a form of governance has long been a subject of geographers who are interested in regional variants of capitalism, urban development, and state welfare reform. In recent years, however, there has been a concerted interdisciplinary effort to research the history of neoliberalism as a social movement, revealing multiple intellectual variants operating in loose concert across many decades and in many different countries. For example, a group of researchers brought together by Philip Mirowski, Robert van Horn, Dieter Plehwe, and Thomas Stapleford have explored the ways in which some of these neoliberals have moved together, both as a "thought collective" and as political actors, engaging in and/or inspiring policy advocacy and economic reform programs.¹

This historiographical turn is a point of departure for discussing *Constructions of Neoliberal Reason*, not only because geographer Jamie Peck authored one of the framing articles for *Building Chicago Economics*, but also because it provides some contextualization for *JHET* readers. Neoliberalism is largely an ascriptive term whose use in the social sciences has exploded in the last ten years. One of Peck's aims is to clarify the meaning of this term without being exceedingly reductive. For the purposes of this review, however, neoliberalism denotes a belief that markets are not self-organizing and that the proper role of the state is to shape, defend, and expand the scope of market activity. Further, these ascribed neoliberals tend to believe that their economics informs politics, but not the other way around. It may appear to some readers of such a history, therefore, that claims about the political motives of neoliberals are overstated, and that insufficient attention has been paid to intellectual diversity within the ascribed group, to their debates over technical questions of governance, and to their application of first principles to policy problems. By contrast, proponents of the new historiography, such as Peck, insist that this neoliberal economic knowledge is anything but value-neutral, and, as such, possesses a rich political history that needs to be told.

Peck is well aware of these historiographical skeletons, and eschews on the one hand the economic geographer's taxonomic approach to defining varieties of capitalism regionally, and equally rejects a history of a monolithic neoliberal order that operates globally under a single logic. As an economic geographer, Dr. Peck explores the relationship of knowledge production to space and place in the

¹Mirowski and Plehwe (2009). Mirowski, van Horn, and Stapleford (2011).

development of networks of neoliberal scholarship and policy advocacy. He is interested specifically in the relationship between this history of neoliberalism as a social network and the nature of specific variants of urban reform in the new millennium. His central argument is that neoliberalism is an adaptive political project. Initial efforts by neoliberals to “roll back” the state encounter obstacles and challenges that demand accommodation and reconfiguration. Libertarian strands of oppositional neoliberalism, therefore, end up in dialogue with more pragmatic discourses of market-conforming state governance. Neoliberal projects thus “roll out” unique institutional forms, speciating in every nation in which they are launched, shaped by each unique political ecology in which they develop. This is one reason why, Peck argues, neoliberalisms can thrive in a democratic United States or an authoritarian Chile.²

Peck argues this point with a number of case studies of variants of neoliberalism in the United States that are shaped by history and locality: neoliberal think-tanks and Hurricane Katrina, the roll-out of the “creative cities” urban-reform concept, and the policies and rhetoric of the Obama administration in its first year. He begins by offering a synthesis of the recent scholarship on the history of neoliberalism, focusing on the Mont-Pelerin Society and the “Chicago School” of intellectuals at the University of Chicago. Peck then traces the development of think-tanks, institutions that would subtly shape the economic zeitgeist over the course of decades by influencing the mid-level intellectuals of society: journalists, bureaucrats, and teachers, for example. Although this strategy was initially attributed to Friedrich Hayek, Peck names entrepreneur Antony Fisher as the prime architect of the proliferating neoliberal think-tanks in the 1970s and 1980s. Neither an economist nor a theorist, Fisher perfected new techniques in the marketing of political and economic ideas by seeding countries around the world with private foundations dedicated to the dissemination of market-oriented research and policy advocacy.

These think-tanks are the chief subjects in the case studies Peck explores. In each of these cases, however, variants of neoliberalism contend with one another, conforming to Peck’s “roll-back” vs. “roll-out” dialectic. In a chapter on the Manhattan Institute’s efforts to reframe the public conversation around the reconstruction of post-Katrina New Orleans, Peck argues that the think-tank provided conceptual resources to the fight against government spending in the wake of the disaster. While the institute’s scholars were prepared to release their customary barrage to “roll back” the state in this instance, they struggled to find a positive policy narrative to “roll out.” Ultimately, Peck argues, the institute returned to old exhortations of individual moral responsibility and the need to combat a criminal underclass in order to remake New Orleans in the image of an orderly society amenable to market activity.

Another chapter on urban reform reinforces Peck’s argument about “roll-back” vs. “roll-out” neoliberalism. Although the Manhattan Institute attacked the urban-renewal discourse developed by city planner Richard Florida, Peck stresses the degree to which

²This “roll-back” vs. “roll-out” neoliberalism was first developed by Peck and Adam Tickell to explain neoliberalism as a process of neoliberalization from the 1980s to the 1990s in the US and the UK. Peck now argues that this active engagement in repurposing the state forms part of a deliberate, long-term strategy. See Peck and Tickell (2002).

Florida's plans to attract the "creative class" to ailing American cities conformed to basic neoliberal tenets: a general aversion to government planning, regulation, and taxation; encouragement of competition among cities for scarce human capital; and the exaltation of individual high-technology entrepreneurship supported by a low-wage service sector.

Peck's social construction of neoliberal reason is more about the medium than the message, emphasizing techniques and processes of policy advocacy more than the rationales supporting a particular policy agenda. When Peck does discuss the content of policy advocacy, he finds rehearsed and dated prescriptions, as in the Manhattan Institute's deployment of Charles Murray's depictions of the dependent African-American family or James Q. Wilson's "broken-windows" hypothesis as wisdom for a post-Katrina New Orleans.

Peck asks how such neoliberal policies continue to be advocated if what is promised repeatedly fails to materialize. In the above case, however, the reader doesn't see evidence of clever neoliberal adaptation to the unique features of the New Orleans context, but rather the repetition of policy ideas that are perceived to have "succeeded," along with a host of other policies, in "reducing" (or transforming and shifting, depending on one's perspective) crime in New York City. His answer to this question of success in the face of failure is that neoliberalism, whatever its intellectual content, has become a language that not only takes the form of oppositional commentary through think-tanks and other media, but also appears to constitute the frames and bounds of US policy discourse itself. The successful policy "retailing" of the think-tanks reproduces a new version of the big-tent ecumene of early Cold War neoliberalism, except that the tent is now at the very center of the American political sphere.

It is a daunting task to write a history of neoliberalism that also illustrates the complexity and diversity of present-day neoliberal ideas and strategies in under 300 pages. Some historians of economics might wish to know more about the "wholesale" operations involving economic ideas. For example, Peck implies that neoliberals were opportunists who capitalized on the collapse of Keynesianism, avoiding the question of the explanatory power of their alternative economic frameworks. On the other hand, those historians who are interested in the social and historical context of economic knowledge will find a very good synthesis of a wide range of research that has been published in the last ten years, as well as thought-provoking conceptions of neoliberal governance in the present day.

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