

The Twilight of Equality?

Neoliberalism, Cultural Politics, and
the Attack on Democracy

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Introduction

What a long, strange trip it's been.

When I graduated from high school in 1972, the United States did not appear to be in good condition. Richard Nixon was president, the U.S. was embroiled in an unjust imperialist war in Vietnam, the limitations of 1960s civil rights legislation appeared in the form of persistent, entrenched racial inequality, the worlds of work and home were sharply segmented by gender hierarchies. But in 1972, I nonetheless had reason to be optimistic. Active and expanding social movements seemed capable of ameliorating conditions of injustice and inequality, poverty, war and imperialism. In fact, social movements were producing innovative critiques of a widening variety of constraints on human possibility—the women's liberation movement, gay liberation, lesbian feminism, black feminism, and other thriving or emerging formations joined radical labor activism, civil rights and black nationalist insurgencies, antiracist and anti-imperialist mobilizations. Despite all the internal tensions and conflicts, it also seemed possible that cross-fertilizations would incite exponential growth in the scope and impact of our shared or overlapping visions of social change. When I said I wanted to be a "revolutionary," this was not received as ludicrous or sectarian, but as a declaration of affinity with those whose overlapping aspirations for equality—social, political, economic, and cultural equality in a global context—seemed both thrilling and attainable.

I had no idea I was not perched at a great beginning, but rather at a denouement, as the possibilities for progressive social change encountered daunting historical setbacks beginning in 1972. From the perspective of more than three decades later, it is apparent that a great sea change begun in the early 1970s led us all in directions we simply could not have imagined then. From the early 1970s, global competition and

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falling profit rates stirred U.S. corporate interests to mount a counter-movement. This movement expanded in many directions from its base of pro-business activism, and it took many years to build; it has never been unified or stable. Yet, it has successfully opposed proliferating visions of an expansive, more equitable redistribution of the world's resources. Beginning with the election of Ronald Reagan to the presidency and throughout the 1980s, the overall direction of redistribution of many kinds of resources, in the U.S. and around the world, has been upward—toward greater concentration among fewer hands at the very top of an increasingly steep pyramid.

What happened? How did the forces of upward redistribution so forcefully trump the broad-based, expansive "revolution" toward downward redistributions that seemed so vital still in 1972? In the United States, the uneasy and uneven New Deal consensus among business, government, and big unions, built during the 1930s and more or less in place through the Great Society era of the 1960s, was dismantled. But this did not occur in order to remedy the undemocratic and antiegalitarian features of that consensus, or in order to generate greater democratic participation, material equality, cultural diversity, and good global citizenship, as many "revolutionaries" had hoped. Rather, the New Deal consensus was dismantled in the creation of a new vision of national and world order, a vision of competition, inequality, market "discipline," public austerity, and "law and order" known as *neoliberalism*.¹

Tracing their descent through capital "L" Liberalism, as developed in Anglo-Europe since the seventeenth century, the architects of contemporary neoliberalism drew upon classical liberalism's utopianism of benevolent "free" markets and minimal governments. These earlier ideas provided a set of rationales, moral justifications, and politically inflected descriptions of the institutions of developing capitalism. Such institutions, and their associated economic practices and social relations, changed over time and varied across space—capitalism has never been a single coherent "system." Liberalism has therefore morphed many times as well, and has contained proliferating contradictions in

indirect relationship to the historical contradictions of capitalism. In the United States during the twentieth century, the entire spectrum of mainstream electoral politics, from "conservatism" to domestic "liberalism," has varied largely within the parameters of Liberalism. Only the far right and the left have provided illiberal or antiliberal alternatives to the overwhelming dominance of differing and conflicting forms of Liberalism in U.S. politics.²

From the 1930s to the 1960s, a very limited form of welfare state liberalism, or social democracy, shaped the U.S. nation state and the political culture supporting it. The New Deal coalition defeated or marginalized antistatist conservatives (who were also Liberals in the classical sense), and absorbed or marginalized socialists and other progressive left critics of its limited version of equality within capitalism. During the 1950s and 1960s, criticism of the U.S. welfare state from both the right and the left intensified. Conservative antistatist attacks on New Deal social welfare programs mounted, as the new social movements pressed from the left for more equitable distribution of many kinds of resources. Then during the 1970s, the social movements encountered a new pro-business activism that ultimately seized the primary institutions of the state over the next two decades.

This pro-business activism, the foundation for late twentieth century neoliberalism, was built out of earlier "conservative" activism. Neoliberalism developed over many decades as a mode of polemic aimed at dismantling the limited U.S. welfare state, in order to enhance corporate profit rates. The raising of profit rates required that money be diverted from other social uses, thus increasing overall economic inequality. And such diversions required a supporting political culture, compliant constituencies, and amenable social relations. Thus, pro-business activism in the 1970s was built on, and further developed, a wide-ranging political and cultural project—the reconstruction of the everyday life of capitalism, in ways supportive of upward redistribution of a range of resources, and tolerant of widening inequalities of many kinds.³

Neoliberalism developed primarily in the U.S., and secondarily in

Europe, in response to global changes that challenged the dominance of Western institutions. Within the U.S. specifically, one might divide the construction of neoliberal hegemony up into five phases: (1) attacks on the New Deal coalition, on progressive unionism, and on popular front political culture and progressive redistributive internationalism during the 1950s and 1960s; (2) attacks on downwardly redistributive social movements, especially the Civil Rights and Black Power movements, but including feminism, lesbian and gay liberation, and countercultural mobilizations during the 1960s and 1970s; (3) pro-business activism during the 1970s, as U.S.-based corporations faced global competition and falling profit rates, previously conflicting big and small business interests increasingly converged, and business groups organized to redistribute resources *upward*; (4) domestically focused “culture wars” attacks on public institutions and spaces for democratic public life, in alliances with religious moralists and racial nationalists, during the 1980s and 1990s; and (5) emergent “multicultural,” neoliberal “equality” politics—a stripped-down, nonredistributive form of “equality” designed for global consumption during the twenty-first century, and compatible with continued upward redistribution of resources.

During every phase, the construction of neoliberal politics and policy in the U.S. has relied on identity and cultural politics. The politics of race, both overt and covert, have been particularly central to the entire project. But the politics of gender and sexuality have intersected with race and class politics at each stage as well.

Though built over several decades beginning in the 1940s and 1950s, neoliberalism *per se* is generally associated with the set of policy imperatives for international government and business operations called the “Washington Consensus” of the 1980s and 1990s. Generated by the International Monetary Fund, the World Bank and the U.S. Treasury, and also implemented through the World Trade Organization, neoliberal policies of fiscal austerity, privatization, market liberalization, and governmental stabilization are pro-corporate capitalist guarantors of private property relations. They were designed to recreate the globe in the interests of the unimpeded operation of capitalist “free” markets, and

to cut back public, noncommercial powers and resources that might impede or drain potential profit making. Nominally pro-democratic, the neoliberal financial institutions have operated autocratically themselves, primarily through financial coercion. They have also consistently supported autocratic governments and plutocratic elites around the world to promote one kind of stability—a stability designed to facilitate business investment. The effects of neoliberal policy implementation have consistently included many kinds of instability, however, including unrest associated with dramatically increasing inequality, and political fragility resulting from reduced sovereignty for national governments.

The Washington Consensus was a kind of backroom deal among the financial, business, and political elites based in the United States and Europe. Its policies reinvented practices of economic, political, and cultural imperialism for a supposedly postimperial world. Neoliberalism’s avatars have presented its doctrines as universally inevitable and its operations as ultimately beneficial in the long term—even for those who must suffer through poverty and chaos in the short term. In other words, neoliberalism is a kind of secular faith. Its priests were elected by no one, and are accountable only to the global elites whose interests are promoted by its policies.

But how did pro-business activists manage to deploy the levers of government at the seat of postimperial power, in Washington, D.C.? How have global politics proceeded, out of range of democratic accountability in the United States as well as in the rest of the world? This has occurred through (A) the presentation of neoliberal policies as neutral, managerial precepts for good government and efficient business operations, with the underlying capitalist power politics and cultural values obscured; (B) the opposition between U.S. domestic *conservative* versus *liberal* politics, or Republican versus Democratic policies, with the overarching salience of global neoliberalism across this entire spectrum effectively ignored; (C) the shape-shifting array of alliances and issues through which a neoliberal policy agenda has been promoted in the United States and abroad.

to change things that remake world to this view.

(A) The most successful ruse of neoliberal dominance in both global and domestic affairs is the definition of economic policy as primarily a matter of neutral, technical expertise. This expertise is then presented as separate from politics and culture, and not properly subject to specifically political accountability or cultural critique. Opposition to material inequality is maligned as "class warfare," while race, gender or sexual inequalities are dismissed as merely cultural, private, or trivial. This rhetorical separation of the economic from the political and cultural arenas disguises the upwardly redistributing goals of neoliberalism—its concerted efforts to concentrate power and resources in the hands of tiny elites. Once *economics* is understood as primarily a technical realm, the trickle-upward effects of neoliberal policies can be framed as due to performance rather than design, reflecting the greater merit of those reaping larger rewards.

But, despite their overt rhetoric of separation between economic policy on the one hand, and political and cultural life on the other, neoliberal politicians and policymakers have never actually separated these domains in practice. In the real world, class and racial hierarchies, gender and sexual institutions, religious and ethnic boundaries are the channels through which money, political power, cultural resources, and social organization flow. The *economy* cannot be transparently abstracted from the *state* or the *family*, from practices of racial apartheid, gender segmentation, or sexual regulation. The illusion that such categories of social life can be practically as well as analytically abstracted one from another descends from the conceptual universe of Anglo-European Liberalism, altered and adapted to the U.S. context during the early nineteenth century (see chapter 1). While reasserting this ideology of discrete spheres of social life, in practice contemporary neoliberal policies have been implemented in and through culture and politics, reinforcing or contesting relations of class, race, gender, sexuality, ethnicity, religion, or nationality. The specific issues, alliances and policies have shifted over time and across differing locales, but their overall impact has been the upward redistribution of resources and the reproduction of stark patterns of social inequality.

(B) In the United States, specifically, the neoliberal agenda of shrinking public institutions, expanding private profit-making prerogatives, and undercutting democratic practices and noncommercial cultures has changed hands from Republicans in the 1970s and 1980s, to New Democrats in the 1990s, and back to Compassionate Conservative Republicans in the new millennium. The domestic political language of two party electoral politics, a language that labels figures and initiatives as *conservative*, *moderate*, or *liberal*, has effectively obscured the stakes in policy disputes. If Ronald Reagan was a *conservative* president, with substantial support from the religious *right*, and Bill Clinton was a *liberal* president excoriated by *conservatives* and the *right*, then why do their policy initiatives look so much alike? It was Bill Clinton who pushed the North American Free Trade Agreement through against organized labor's opposition, and who presided over "the end of welfare, as we know it." The continuities from Reagan through Bush I, Clinton to Bush II—the continuities of neoliberal policy promotion—are rendered relatively invisible by the dominant political system and language. Global neoliberalism, based in but not reducible to U.S. corporate dominance, embraces a broad spectrum of U.S. domestic politics. Conflicts between conservative Republicans and liberal Democrats have been shaped largely within the terms of neoliberalism, even as nonliberal and even antiliberal forces (from the proto-fascist nationalism of Pat Buchanan to the socialist radicalism of Cornell West) have been engaged or appropriated through alliance politics as well.

But then are there no important differences between Reagan and Clinton? Was there really no basis upon which to prefer the election of Gore over Bush II? This was the claim of Ralph Nader's presidential campaign during the 2000 election, a claim that many progressives rallied around, and others found incredible. What about the Supreme Court and the fate of *Roe v. Wade*? What about civil rights, affirmative action, gay visibility? It is at this point of confusion and dispute that the progressive left in the United States finds itself stymied. The split between those who emphasize economics, wealth distribution, corporate dominance, and the sale of political office (such as the Nader campaign)

and those who emphasize political and cultural equality and access (and who were frightened by both Bush and Nader's relative indifference to issues of gender, race, and sexuality during the 2000 election) has effectively undermined progressive-left activism in the United States since 1980.

(C) If neoliberalism has been the continuing foundation for pro-business activism in the U.S. since the 1970s, that activism has also engaged a shifting array of political/cultural issues and constituencies in order to gain power and legitimacy. Because (as I have argued) the economy and the interests of business can not really be abstracted from race and gender relations, from sexuality or other cleavages in the body politic, neoliberalism has assembled its projects and interests from the field of issues saturated with race, with gender, with sex, with religion, with ethnicity, and nationality. The alliances and issues have changed over time and have differed from place to place—within the U.S. and abroad (see chapters 1–3). In order to facilitate the flow of money up the economic hierarchy, neoliberal politicians have constructed complex and shifting alliances, issue by issue and location by location—always in contexts shaped by the meanings and effects of race, gender, sexuality, and other markers of difference. These alliances are not simply opportunistic, and the issues not merely epiphenomenal or secondary to the underlying reality of the more solid and real economic goals, but rather, the economic goals have been (must be) formulated in terms of the range of political and cultural meanings that shape the social body in a particular time and place.

The Achilles' heel in progressive-left politics since the 1980s, especially, has been a general blindness to the connections and interrelations of the economic, political, and cultural, and a failure to grasp the shifting dimensions of the alliance politics underlying neoliberal success. As neoliberals have formed and reformed their constituencies, and produced issues and languages that connect their economic goals with politics and culture in politically effective ways, progressives and leftists

have tended more and more to fall into opposing camps that caricature each other while failing to clearly perceive the chameleon that eludes them.

During the 1960s and 1970s, the proliferation and expansion of progressive-left critiques and social movements constituted a fertile ground for connections—as well as for conflict and confusion. Identifying the most significant sites of inequality and injustice, and discovering the best means for attacking them, was always a contentious project. But the range of social movements—antiracist and anti-imperialist, feminist, lesbian and gay, radical labor, and environmentalist—did not generally or easily fall into camps with economics emphasized on one side, and culture on the other. Gay liberation newspapers included anti-imperialist manifestoes and analyses of the racist legal and prison system. Black feminists set out to track the interrelations of capitalism, patriarchy, and racism. There were bitter fights among contingents of activists who prioritized one or another “vector of oppression” and dismissed others—but the economics/culture split did not appear as a major and sustained divide in U.S. progressive-left politics until the 1980s.

The progressive-left social movements of the 1960s and 1970s might be conceptualized as overlapping, interrelated (if conflicted) *cultures of downward redistribution*. The differing sectors were joined by languages and concepts, practices and policies, as well as by movement institutions that combined cultural and material resources. Such cultures were mixed, neither pure nor consistently critical of all forms of inequality and injustice or unfreedom. But in their hybrid, mongrel mixtures the overall emphasis that connected the progressive-left social movements was the pressure to level hierarchies and redistribute *down*—redistribute money, political power, cultural capital, pleasure, and freedom. They were met, from the early 1970s forward, with a pro-business counter movement intent on building a *culture of upward (re)distribution*. Business and financial interests were no more unified or consistent than the social movements, but their activities forged languages and concepts, practices and policies, and founded new institu-

tions to promote mechanisms that either shored up or established inequalities of power, rank, wealth, or cultural status.

During the 1980s, as standards of living dropped in the United States and global inequalities expanded, social movements responded to multiple constraints and pressures in part by fragmenting, in part by accommodating to the narrowing horizons of fundraising imperatives, legal constraints, and the vice grip of electoral politics. *Identity politics*, in the contemporary sense of the rights-claiming focus of balkanized groups organized to pressure the legal and electoral systems for inclusion and redress, appeared out of the field of disintegrating social movements.⁴ Single-group or single-issue organizations dedicated to lobbying, litigation, legislation, or public and media education had existed earlier *as only one part* of larger, shaping social movements. As the practical wings of broad-based mobilizations, ranging from reformist to radical on a motley collection of connected issues, such organizations usually remained intimately connected to movement cultures. But during the 1980s, such organizations—known collectively as the “civil rights lobby”—began to appear as the parts that replaced the wholes. The reproductive freedom movement receded, but the National Abortion Rights Action League remained; the Civil Rights and Black Power movements disintegrated, but the NAACP persisted. Focused narrowly on U.S. domestic politics, and even more narrowly on courtroom litigation, legislative battles or electoral campaigns, large portions of the organized efforts of social movements succumbed to liberalism’s paltry promise—engage the language and institutional games of established liberal contests and achieve equality.

Many if not most of those engaged within the civil rights lobbies, or the protest and pressure politics aimed at the media and marketplace, understood the limits and false promises of the “equality” on offer through liberal reform—equality disarticulated from material life and class politics, to be won by definable “minority” groups, one at a time. They engaged a politics of the possible, often with the hope of using liberalism’s own languages and rules to force change beyond the boundaries of liberal equality. Like the motley, radical union movements of

earlier decades, that collapsed largely into the coopting embrace of New Deal corporatism in the post–World War II era, the social movements disintegrated, leaving their liberal reformist wings as their most visible traces. Meanwhile, the more radical and transformative segments of social movements nonetheless survived, in a range of new as well as continuing organizations and campaigns and in a growing library of progressive-left intellectual and scholarly projects and publications. Occasionally, it all came together as it had in earlier times—the movement born to fight AIDS and HIV infection linked identity and civil rights politics with an encompassing vision of material and cultural equality, and drew upon the resources of activists, theorists, artists, and scientists to construct an imaginative range of political interventions during the 1980s.⁵ Overall, the remnants of the 1960s and 1970s social movements, together with the identity-based organizations and civil rights establishment of the 1980s, remained cultures of downward distribution—even if in a less generally radical sense during the 1980s.

But during the 1990s, something new happened. Neoliberals in the ranks of U.S. conservative party politics began to slowly and unevenly shed the “culture wars” alliances with religious moralists, white supremacists, ultra nationalists, and other antiliberal forces that had helped guarantee their political successes during the 1980s (phase 4, above). Neoliberal New Democrats, led by Bill Clinton, included civil rights/equality politics within a framework that minimized any downwardly redistributing impulses and effects (phase 5). And some organizations within the “civil rights lobby” narrowed their focus and moved dramatically to the right, accommodating rather than opposing the global inequalities generated by neoliberalism.

Meanwhile, activists and intellectuals on the progressive-left, operating outside the terms of two party neoliberalism, fell more deeply into unproductive battles over economic versus cultural politics, identity-based vs. left universalist rhetoric, theoretical critiques vs. practical organizing campaigns (see chapter 4). Most recently, a newly insurgent antiglobalization movement, emerging into active visibility and effectiveness at the beginning of the twenty-first century, offers a space

where such divisions might be remade into productive connections—though this remains a possibility, and not an achievement. In general, too few on the left have noticed that as neoliberal policies continued to shrink the spaces for public life, democratic debate, and cultural expression during the 1990s, they were doing this *through* their own versions of identity politics and cultural policies, inextricably connected to economic goals for upward redistribution of resources.

The Twilight of Equality? is written as an analysis of the politics of the 1990s, and as a polemic for the twenty-first century, to argue that as long as the progressive-left represents and reproduces itself as divided into economic vs. cultural, universal vs. identity-based, distribution vs. recognition-oriented, local or national vs. global branches, it will defeat itself. On one side, the identity politics camps are increasingly divorced from any critique of global capitalism. Some organizations and groups creep into the neoliberal fold, shedding downwardly redistributing goals for a stripped-down equality, paradoxically imagined as compatible with persistent overall inequality. They thus sacrifice the broad goals that might connect a new social movement strong and ambitious enough to take on inequalities that single-issue politics only ever ameliorate, but never reverse. On the other side, critiques of global capitalism and neoliberalism, and left populist or universalist politics within the U.S., attack and dismiss cultural and identity politics at their peril. Such attacks strip them of prime sources of political creativity and new analyses, and leave them uncomprehending before the cultural and identity politics of the opposition. In addition, they drive constituencies seeking equality away, toward the false promises of superficial neoliberal "multiculturalism." In other words, they help to create what they fearfully or critically imagine.

Chapter 1 of *The Twilight of Equality?* places contemporary neoliberalism within the context of the development of Liberalism in the United States from the early nineteenth century. This chapter outlines how the

categories of Liberalism produce false rhetorical separations between economic, political, social, cultural, and personal life that continue to resonate in contemporary politics. The chapter then examines the politics of welfare "reform" and prison expansion in order to illuminate the concrete interconnections among the economic, political, and cultural projects of neoliberalism. Chapter 2 offers a case study of the operations of neoliberalism in phase 4 of its construction in the U.S.—the now residual phase of "culture wars" alliances. This chapter traces a sex panic that began over a women's studies conference at SUNY/New Paltz in 1997 and connects the "moral" discourse there to the tax-cutting agenda of New York state corporations. This strategy of attack on public institutions is then traced to the tax revolt begun in California, organized around Proposition 13 in the early 1970s. Chapter 3 moves to another case study focused on phase 5—the emergent "multicultural" phase of neoliberal policy promotion inaugurated in the 1990s. This chapter unravels the core arguments of a group of gay writers organized through the Independent Gay Forum, focusing especially on the writing of Andrew Sullivan. The narrow and deceptive "equality" rhetoric these writers deploy in fact generates support for neoliberal politics and global inequality. Finally, Chapter 4 argues that the split between economic justice campaigns and antiglobalization politics on one side, and identity or cultural politics on the other, is a misguided and disabling disconnection for the entire progressive-left.

Overall, *The Twilight of Equality?* argues that neoliberalism has a shifting cultural politics that the progressive-left must understand in order to constitute an effective opposition. But rather than focus on neoliberalism's cultural project, sectors of the progressive-left reproduce, within their own debates, Liberalism's rhetorical separation of economic/class politics from identity/cultural politics. This separation seriously disables political analysis and activism.

If the triumph of neoliberalism brings us into the twilight of equality, this is not an irreversible fate. This new world order was invented during the 1970s and 1980s, and dominated the 1990s, but it may now

be unraveling—if we are prepared to seize the moment of its faltering, to promote and ensure its downfall. Only an interconnected, analytically diverse, cross-fertilizing and expansive left can seize this moment to lead us elsewhere, to newly imagined possibilities for equality in the twenty-first century.

1

Downsizing Democracy

That corporations have taken the spotlight as latter-day English-speaking conquistadors—Magellans of technology, Cortéses of consumer goods, and Pizarros of entertainment—reflected the cosmopolitanizing of their profits, a cousinship to earlier Dutch and then British cosmopolitanizing of investment. . . .

The last two decades of the twentieth century . . . echoed the zeniths of corruption and excess—the Gilded Age and the 1920s—when the rich in the United States slipped their usual political constraints, and this trend continued into the new century. By the 1990s data showed the United States replacing Europe at the pinnacle of Western privilege and inequality. This, of course, is part of what made the United States the prime target of terrorism in much the same way as the Europe of czars, kings, and grand dukes was during the period of 1880–1920.¹

We are living in a dangerous and uncertain time. A breakdown in multilateral cooperation in global politics, accompanying the revival of an overtly violent assertion of U.S. imperial power in the Middle East, puts the fate of millions in the hands of a few. At the same time, inequality among nations and within the U.S. continues to grow at a dizzying pace. And in response to the continuing economic downturn inaugurated when the dot.com bubble burst in the late 1990s, the executive branch of government in the U.S. advocates cuts in the budget for social services and public welfare, yet proposes more increases in military and security spending. The twenty-first century is off to a frightening start.

And yet, this dangerous and tragic start also presents opportunities for a renewed politics of equality and democracy within the U.S. and around the world. Neoliberal dominance, seemingly invincible from the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989 through the 1990s, is under attack as never before. Economic and financial crises—in Mexico in 1994, in Asia in 1997—ignited long-simmering conflicts between wealthy Western creditor nations and the debtor nations of the poorer, developing world. The staggering crash of technology/dot.com stocks listed on the U.S. Nasdaq index punctured the confidence of investors, and gutted the bank accounts of a significant proportion of the American middle class. Resulting public fury helped propel the exposure of corrupt financial practices and widespread corporate greed. And the use of military force in the Middle East exposed the coercive underbelly of purportedly benign U.S. foreign relations and trade policies.

But such disillusionments and exposures will produce opportunities for progressive-left politics only if we are prepared to seize them. This moment of violent rupture in the smooth operations of neoliberal policies might be repaired through the construction of a reformed neoliberal hegemony, rebuilt through brutality and poised to extract yet more of the earth's surplus for the benefit of the wealthiest one percent of the world's population. Or, opposition and resistance to violence and inequality around the world might coalesce into a new social movement strong enough to change our historical course.

There is much encouragement for the hopeful. Highly visible demonstrations against neoliberal globalization beginning in the late 1990s, followed by the rapid assembly of a global peace movement in the early twenty-first century show that visions of a more peaceful, equitable, and democratic world are widely shared. Even some neoliberal "insiders" have begun to see the danger that, to quote the *New York Times*, "capitalists could actually bring down capitalism." Joseph Stiglitz, former chief economist of the World Bank, recently excoriated the "Washington Consensus" for undemocratically and sometimes disastrously imposing "global governance without global government"

during the 1980s and 1990s. Republican populist Kevin Phillips listed the costs of the neoliberal "reigning theology" of "free" domestic and global markets to ordinary Americans: reduced income and stagnant wages, long work hours, diminished community and commonweal, fewer private and government services, poor physical and mental health care, competitive consumption, and the spread of money culture values. He also penned the diagnosis of U.S. imperialism as a cause for terrorism that begins this chapter.²

Neoliberal insiders wish to save neoliberalism by reforming it, but their alarmist jeremiads provide ample reason for replacing, rather than merely reforming, the institutions and policies that have created the conditions they describe. And so the opportunities for proposing alternate visions, for organizing, and for building something different open up before the progressive-left. But it will not be possible to seize these opportunities without a broad understanding of the neoliberal project—and this understanding will be blocked as long as leftists and campaigners for economic justice dismiss cultural and identity politics as marginal, trivial, or divisive. *Neoliberalism was constructed in and through cultural and identity politics and cannot be undone by a movement without constituencies and analyses that respond directly to that fact. Nor will it be possible to build a new social movement that might be strong, creative, and diverse enough to engage the work of reinventing global politics for the new millennium as long as cultural and identity issues are separated, analytically and organizationally, from the political economy in which they are embedded.*

What the progressive-left must understand is this: Neoliberalism, a late twentieth-century incarnation of Liberalism, organizes material and political life *in terms of* race, gender, and sexuality as well as economic class and nationality, or ethnicity and religion. But the categories through which Liberalism (and thus also neoliberalism) classifies human activity and relationships *actively obscure* the connections among these organizing terms. This abstract claim requires some explanation and illustration and an historical detour. So, in order to pinpoint the

specificity of post-1970s neoliberalism, we will first briefly trace the history of Liberalism, then look more closely at the period during which the key terms and categories of Liberalism in the United States were established—the early nineteenth century.

The practices and institutions of exchange known collectively as *capitalism* emerged slowly and unevenly in Anglo-Europe over several centuries as feudal institutions disintegrated. Evolving institutions of production and exchange organized scattered and improvised practices, as centers of innovation shifted across the landscapes of emerging nation-states. The process of change was often dislocating and sometimes violent, and the benefits and costs of the new modes of production and exchange were unequally distributed. By the seventeenth century, the ideas, values, and categories known as *Liberalism* began to cohere into a political theory for capitalist economies administered through nation-states.

Liberal theorists, such as John Locke and Adam Smith, provided a set of metaphors, an organizing narrative, and a moral apologia for capitalism. They also provided a cartography of the “proper” regulation of the relations among the state, the economy, and the population. Liberal theorists disagreed with each other, and their ideas changed over time in relation to changing forms of capitalism and evolving nation-states.

But the master terms of Liberalism—public vs. private—have remained relatively consistent, as have the master categories—the state, the economy, civil society, and the family. Different forms of Liberalism define the categories somewhat differently and assign publicness and private-ness to them in varying ways. But the most public site of collective life under Liberalism is always the state, the “proper” location of publicness, while the most private site is the family. The economy and civil society appear as mixed sites of voluntary, cooperative rational action (as opposed to the coerciveness of the state, and the passion and authority relations of the family), with both public and private functions—though both sites are generally regarded as more private than public.

Much of the analytical force of Liberalism then is especially directed toward distinguishing the state from the economy and outlining the proper limits to the state's power to regulate economic, civic, and family life.

The master terms and categories of Liberalism are rhetorical; they do not simply *describe* the “real” world, but rather provide only one way of understanding and organizing collective life. On the one hand, they obscure and mystify many aspects of life under capitalism—hiding stark inequalities of wealth and power and of class, race, gender, and sexuality across nation-states as well as within them. Inequalities are routinely assigned to “private” life, understood as “natural,” and bracketed away from consideration in the “public” life of the state. On the other hand, as the ideas of Liberalism become common sense, they also work to create or remake institutions and practices according to their precepts.³

During the early nineteenth century in the United States, Anglo-European Liberalism was adapted to the conditions of the new nation-state. Among the central innovations were the explicit accommodation of the institution of racial slavery and the accompanying assertion of the formal political equality of white men. These innovations proceeded slowly; they were secured in part by *universal white male suffrage*. During the first decades of the nineteenth century, as property qualifications for voting were eliminated in state after state in the U.S., requirements for full citizenship shifted from a complex array of economic, racial, gender, religious, or genealogical characteristics to the simpler identity markers: *whiteness* and *maleness*. This change is often interpreted as an expansion of democracy, because many propertyless white men were newly enfranchised. But the enactment of white male suffrage also constricted democracy. Some propertied women and free black people were newly *disenfranchised* by the new legislation, but much more significantly, the removal of property considerations from voting requirements allowed for a more complete (rhetorical) separation of the economy, understood as primarily private, from the public, democratically accountable (to white men, in theory) state.⁴

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With universal white male suffrage, the formal equality of state participation could more easily be defined as distinct from the "natural," "private" inequalities of developing industrial capitalism in the United States. The identity marker *white* also neatly cordoned off indigenous populations and non-Anglo-European immigrants from citizenship, while also working to define the entire institution of racial slavery as part of the private economy, with slaves counted as property rather than participants in public life. The identity marker *male* implicitly cordoned off the family as a private sphere for women and children under the authority of a white male head of household. Thus enslaved black people, white women, and their children were defined as belonging (in different ways—slaves as property, white women and children as subordinates and dependents) to the private worlds governed by individual white men, while indigenous people, nonwhite immigrants, and free black people occupied ambiguous statuses outside of formal citizenship.

This particular instantiation of Liberalism in the United States was never fixed or stable. Its terms and categories never did wholly reflect or control reality. Liberalism's rhetorical separations of state from economy, civil society, and the family never did describe the real, complex interrelations of forms of collective life. The workings of the economy depended on the state for support and regulation; civil society was stratified by economic and political inequalities; the family was founded on the state-defined and regulated institution of marriage; the economy provided the material base for state institutions and family life.⁵

From the early nineteenth century on, the terms "liberal" and "conservative" outlined constantly shifting positions within the overall umbrella of Liberal capitalism in the United States. As slavery gave way to new forms of racial apartheid and economic inequality, and as the laws of marriage and the organization of political and economic rights according to gender were challenged and shifted during the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries, notions of the "proper" relations of the

domains of liberalism were debated. "Liberal" and "conservative" positions along the political and cultural spectrums denoted particular, historically specific arguments about those proper relations. For instance, during the Progressive era of the early twentieth century, "liberal" progressives argued to expand the power of the state to regulate economic relations considered at least partly "public," such as the hours and conditions of labor, while "conservatives" considered such regulation an improper interference into "private" property and contract rights.

Radicals of many stripes occasionally attacked the categories themselves, but these challenges were successfully marginalized at each critical phase of the history of American Liberal capitalism. The overarching Liberal distinction between the economy, the state, civil society, and the family consistently shaped, and ultimately disabled progressive-left politics by separating *class politics*—the critique of economic inequality—from *identity politics*—protest against exclusions from national citizenship or civic participation, and against the hierarchies of family life. Though this split is often assigned to post-1968 developments in radical/progressive/left politics, it actually inheres in the categories of Liberalism, in their U.S. version particularly, and has limited the scope of radical politics since the early nineteenth century. Abolitionism and the women's suffrage movement, for instance, only partially overlapped with agrarian radicalism, worker militancy, socialism, or anarchism in the United States.⁶

Competing notions and evaluations of "public" and "private" institutions and "values" organized the political positions we think of as "liberal" and "conservative" as positions *within* Liberalism throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. During the post-World War II period, the contemporary versions of these positions emerged from the battles over the contours of the New Deal and the liberal welfare state and from the Civil Rights movement's challenge to American apartheid.

During the 1950s and 1960s, self-described "conservatives" labeled the New Deal's earlier expansions of public/state action into previously

“private” bastions of economic power and civil society or culture as “liberal.” The Civil Rights movement’s struggle to extend formal public racial equality from the state to “private” employment practices, civil institutions, and public accommodations—for instance, the demand to integrate the customer base as well as employment practices of restaurants, hotels, trains, and buses—was described by opponents as “radical” or “liberal.” Though both the New Deal era welfare state and the Civil Rights movement were heterogeneous, with many beliefs and factions contending for effective action, these were commonly lumped together and fiercely attacked by “conservatives” as efforts to expand the state and reduce the freedoms and prerogatives of “private” economic, associational, and family life.

During the 1950s and 1960s, such “conservatives” argued for reprivatizing as much of the common life of the nation as possible. *Except*, in a characteristic contradictory move, conservatives also worked to deny the protections of privacy against state interference in domestic and sexual life to all but the procreative, intraracially married. So, they advocated *more privacy* in the economy and civil society, over and against the interference of the state, but they turned around and advocated *less privacy* in the family and in intimate and sexual life—areas where they supported state interference in the form of laws forbidding or criminalizing miscegenation, abortion and birth control, sodomy, or sexually themed cultural expressions, for instance. Here they were countered by “liberal” efforts to eliminate such laws. Thus, in the arena of economic and collective activities, conservatives represented the state as a bad, coercive, intrusive force against freedom, while New Deal and Keynesian liberals and many leftists invoked a democratically accountable “public” state interest in guaranteeing equality of access, if not always of distribution of material and cultural resources (here liberals and leftists often parted company). In the arena of personal, sexual, and domestic life, conservatives accorded “privacy” only to the favored form of family life and supported state regulation of intimate relations in the name of social order for all others. Liberals ambiv-

alently and unevenly, but increasingly, defended a right to sexual and domestic privacy for all, defined as autonomy or liberty from state interference.

In a larger political, historical, and philosophical frame, the “liberalisms” and “conservatisms” of the 1950s and 1960s were variants of Liberalism—of the kind that has defined the American political project since its inception. But during the 1970s and 1980s, the “liberalism” of the 1950s and 1960s became “old liberalism,” “tax and spend liberalism,” “welfare state liberalism” or “civil rights and entitlements liberalism.” From the dominant political form described by Arthur Schlesinger as “the vital center” in 1949, this liberalism shifted to a left of center position as the new “neoconservatives,” former self-identified liberals and leftists themselves, attacked the Civil Rights movement, black radicalism, the growth of the welfare state, the countercultures of the 1960s, the post-1968 new feminism and gay liberation, the New Left, and the Democratic Party, from which many had bolted by 1980. Traditional conservatives, self-identified as such during the 1940s and 1950s, did not easily accept the neocons, who had too recently been tarnished with liberal leanings. But the merging of the neocons into the conservative political and intellectual movement in the United States during the 1980s, along with the election of Ronald Reagan to the presidency, helped to push the perceived “center” in American politics rightward.

During the 1990s a new liberalism appeared, defined against the “old” liberalism, heralded by the New Democrats of the Democratic Leadership Council and led by Bill Clinton. This new liberalism was not a parochial U.S. political formation, but echoed the appearance of “third way” politics in many Western nations—a politics defining itself as somewhere between the “old” liberalism and conservative political parties and policies. Various “third way” parties and leaders labored to combine pro-market, pro-business, “free trade” national and global policies with shrunken remnants of the social democratic and social

3rd way ✓

justice programs of Western welfare states. Third way proponents argued for smaller, more efficient governments operating on business management principles, and appealed to "civil society" (or "the voluntary sector") and "the family" to take up significant roles in the provision of social safety nets.

The new liberal centrism of the 1990s converged with 1980s conservatism in advocating a leaner, meaner government (fewer social services, more "law and order"), a state-supported but "privatized" economy, an invigorated and socially responsible civil society, and a moralized family with gendered marriage at its center. This convergence defined the location "neoliberal"—an expansive center that might include 1990s left/center New Democrats as well as George W. Bush's "compassionate conservatives." Leftists, "old liberals," multiculturalist "special interest" groups, and a right wing composed of religious moralists and overtly racist nationalists (referred to in some quarters as "paleoconservatives") were increasingly marginalized and excluded from political power and mainstream visibility.

Neoliberalism, a political label retrospectively applied to the "conservative" policies of the Reagan and Thatcher regimes in the U.S. and Great Britain, rocketed to prominence as the brand name for the form of pro-corporate, "free market," anti-"big government" rhetoric shaping Western national policy and dominating international financial institutions since the early 1980s. This "neo"liberalism is usually presented not as a particular set of interests and political interventions, but as a kind of nonpolitics—a way of being reasonable, and of promoting universally desirable forms of economic expansion and democratic government around the globe. Who could be against greater wealth and more democracy? Especially since the fall of the Soviet empire by the end of the 1980s, neoliberals have argued that all alternatives to the U.S. model have failed—fascism, communism, socialism, and even the relatively mild forms of the welfare state advocated by social democrats, labor movements, and Keynesians. Not trumpeted are the sharply declining participation rates in the Western "democracies," and the

rapidly expanding, vast economic inequalities that neoliberal policies have generated in the U.S., in Great Britain, and globally.

In world politics, Western political leaders and economic elites have supported neoliberal policies as the apogee of private freedoms and maximum wealth expansion within a neutral regulatory framework. But in practice, the institutions promulgating neoliberal solutions to global problems have advanced the specific interests of Western financial, commercial, and trade centers with coercive tools—especially through offering conditioned loans to needy nations, and by negotiating and imposing biased trade agreements. The practices of the International Monetary Fund, the World Bank, and the World Trade Organization have resulted not in a "neutral" global framework for economic and cultural flows, as the term "globalization" implies, but rather in the transfer of wealth and power from poor parts of the world to the West, especially to the United States during the 1990s. As even neoliberal "insider" critics have pointed out, global financial institutions have acted primarily in the direct interests of Western creditors and corporations, transferring wealth from the globe's poorest to its richest locations. These practices constitute a reinvention of Western imperialism, not the worldwide democratization and broad-based enrichment promised by neoliberal globalization's promoters.⁷

This neoliberalism is generally associated with economic and trade policy; the cultural politics of neoliberalism are considered and debated relatively rarely, primarily in discussions of the economic and political mechanisms of U.S. and Western cultural imperialism. In the domestic arena, the "culture wars" of the past twenty years have been conducted separately from questions of monetary and fiscal policy, trade negotiations and economic indicators—the recognized realm of neoliberal policy. But in a wide range of cultural policy territories—from public spending for culture and education, to the "moral" foundations for welfare reform, from affirmative action to marriage and domestic part-

nership debates—neoliberalism's profoundly antidemocratic and anti-egalitarian agenda has shaped public discussion. Neoliberalism in fact has a cultural politics—a contradictory and contested cultural politics, not unlike the equally contradictory and internally contested economic and trade politics that have defined the location "neoliberal" since the Reagan/Thatcher 1980s.⁸

The broadest cultural project of neoliberalism—the transforming of global cultures into "market cultures"—has a mixed track record. Both in the U.S. and worldwide, neoliberal efforts to establish or remake the relations among the core domains of Western liberalism—the state, the economy, the family and civil society—rarely succeed in a straightforward way. While posing as the harbingers of peace and prosperity for the global masses, neoliberal policymakers in fact create peace in some places and war in others, prosperity for some and ecological destruction and poverty for many more. Target populations and institutions do not cooperate; people welcome, adapt to, or resist the impositions of neoliberal change in unpredictable ways. But overall, efforts to create a world safe for neoliberalism have been most successful where the domains of Western liberalism have been successfully imposed or redescribed through neoliberalism's key terms: privatization and personal responsibility. These terms define the central intersections between the *culture* of neoliberalism and its economic vision, in the U.S. and abroad (see the case studies in chapters 2 and 3).

The primary strategy of turn-of-the-millennium neoliberalism is *privatization*, the term that describes the transfer of wealth and decision-making from public, more-or-less accountable decision-making bodies to individual or corporate, unaccountable hands. Neoliberals advocate privatization of economic enterprises, which they consider fundamentally "private" and inappropriately placed in any "public" arena. They go further than this, though, in advocating that many ostensibly public services and functions also be placed in private profit-making hands—education, garbage collection, prison building and operation, and cultural production. All this privacy is rendered desirable by the recycling and updating of nineteenth-century liberalism's

equation of economic activity with voluntary, uncoerced, private freedom, and with productivity, efficiency, and wealth expansion.

This private world appears as an imaginary construction, not a historical reality. Inefficient, unprofitable "private" industries routinely request and receive government support, even direct subsidies. And the greater "productivity" of some privatized services depends on the substitution of lower-paid workers and lower-quality materials rather than on any managerial acumen. Thus the allegedly free and efficient private-enterprise system operates, not as an empirical reality, but rather as a phantom ideal that is then contrasted with coercive, plodding, incompetent, intrusive post-World War II governments—from fallen totalitarian regimes to stagnant or bankrupt welfare states.

Of course, this rhetorical universe in no way matches the "really existing" policies of neoliberal politicians, who often advocate government support for "private" industries, regulated economic competition to soften the effects of "free" market discipline, and a range of welfare state programs (especially those that benefit more affluent, voting populations). In actual policy debates, the project of applying the operative rhetorics of public and private can thus become quite complex. When the state acts to support "private" business interests—providing subsidies and bailouts for instance—that can be good. But when the state acts in the "public" interest—providing housing for the poor or protection for the environment—that can be intrusive, coercive, and bad. The proper range for debate over government action is understood as relatively narrow, covering monetary, fiscal and trade policies, infrastructure maintenance, and "night watchman" property protection, law and order measures. Thus, in comparison with the mid-twentieth century Western welfare states, that expanded state action to provide a "social safety net" and new support for public institutions, neoliberalism shrinks the scope of equality and democratic public life dramatically, in all areas of material production and distribution.

In the policy arenas of cultural and personal life, neoliberalism is currently more pointedly conflicted. Ranging from New Democrats to "compassionate conservatives," neoliberal politicians and organiza-

① have these domains been transformed?

② are there aspects that operate independently of identities?

privatization
&
personal
responsibility

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tions debate the relative merits of a more-or-less liberal, libertarian, or socially conservative agenda. Most flexibly combine apparently contradictory positions, in a kind of productive incoherence designed to appeal and appease: President Bill Clinton, for example, supported affirmative action and the death penalty, abortion rights, and the Defense of Marriage Act. But the debate and continuing flexibility in these arenas, particularly in the U.S., is working toward a “third way” rhetoric positioned between the moral conservatism of the religious and nationalist right, and the perceived “multiculturalism” and “civil rights agenda” of the progressive-left. This rhetoric promotes the *privatization* of the costs of social reproduction, along with the care of human dependency needs, through *personal responsibility* exercised in the family and in civil society—thus shifting costs from state agencies to individuals and households. This process accompanies the call for tax cuts that deplete public coffers, but leave more money in the “private” hands of the wealthy.

The valorized concepts of *privatization* and *personal responsibility* travel widely across the rhetorics of contemporary policy debates, joining economic goals with cultural values while obscuring the identity politics and upwardly redistributive impetus of neoliberalism. Two general policy arenas have proved especially productive for these concepts and help to illustrate the relationship between the economic policies and the cultural projects of neoliberalism—welfare “reform” and “law and order” initiatives. In both arenas, neoliberals have promoted “private” *competition*, *self-esteem*, and *independence* as the roots of *personal responsibility*, and excoriated “public” *entitlement*, *dependency*, and *irresponsibility* as the sources of social ills. And in both arenas, state policies reflect and enact identity and cultural politics invested in hierarchies of race, gender, and sexuality as well as class and nationality.

Welfare reform and the law and order politics of the past two decades clearly illustrate the dense interrelations among neoliberalism’s economic vision and its cultural projects. *The goal of raising corporate profits has never been pursued separately from the rearticulation of hierarchies of race, gender, and sexuality in the United States and around the*

globe. Neoliberals, unlike many leftists and progressives, simply don’t assume that there is any important difference between material goals and identity politics. They make use of identity politics to obscure redistributive aims, and they use “neutral” economic policy terms to hide their investments in identity-based hierarchies, but they don’t make the mistake of fundamentally accepting the ruse of liberalism—the assertion of a clear boundary between the politics of identity and class.⁹

During the 1990s, welfare “reform” made it onto the legislative agenda as the long-term culmination of one of many efforts to cut social costs, in the form of state-funded entitlements, and cut labor costs—thereby boosting the corporate profits that had begun sliding in the 1960s and 1970s, slowly rose again in the 1980s, then skyrocketed in the 1990s. Few put this underlying agenda of the “workfare” component of welfare “reform” as bluntly as political science professor Lawrence Meade when he wrote,

Low-wage work apparently must be mandated, just as a draft has sometimes been necessary to staff the military. Authority achieves compliance more efficiently than benefits, at least from society’s viewpoint. Government need not make the desired behavior worthwhile to people.¹⁰

Part of a broader cultural project of legitimating the redistribution of resources upward, welfare “reform” has also depended, for its cultural effectiveness, on coded hierarchies of race, gender, and sexuality—especially as they affect women and children.

The overall impetus of welfare “reform,” or the elimination of the so-called welfare “entitlement,” was to transfer the function of providing a social safety net from public agencies to private households maintained through low-wage employment. The gap between the needs of workers and their dependents, and the inadequate pay and benefits provided by their insecure, often no-benefits jobs, is left to be filled by overstretched families and overburdened volunteer charities. Thus social service functions are privatized through personal responsibility as the

proper functions of the state are narrowed, tax and wage costs in the economy are cut, and more social costs are absorbed by civil society and the family. In addition, this redistribution of costs and benefits has been starkly differentiated by hierarchies of race, gender, and sexuality.

In some respects neoliberal welfare reform, crystallized in the 1996 Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act (PRWORA), was nothing new. From early-twentieth-century widows' pensions to the 1935 Social Security Act and Aid to Dependent Children (ADC), which morphed into Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC), welfare policy in the United States has always been shaped to reflect racial exclusions and racist assumptions, to police the "morality" of poor women, and to regulate and contain the low-wage labor market. The 1996 revamping of AFDC into Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF), one of the centerpiece achievements of the New Democrats under President Bill Clinton, did not break this pattern. The Democratic effort to "end welfare as we know it" *did* mask the race- and gender-specific operations of the policy change with neutral goals like promoting "self-esteem" and "empowerment" through work "opportunity." But as political analyst Anna Marie Smith has clearly demonstrated, the actual policies of the legislation (including "family caps" to limit support for newborns, mandatory child support cooperation even in cases of domestic violence, family planning and adoption relinquishment incentives, and sexual abstinence education) expose its underlying assumption: The sexual practices and household structures of poor women, especially black women, are the central causes of poverty and of associated social disorder and criminality.¹¹

These legislative features emerged from decades of efforts to erode New Deal welfare state programs, especially AFDC, through the deployment of images of sexually promiscuous, lazy welfare queens breeding for the profit of an ever-enlarging welfare check. The specific neoliberal spin on this cultural project was the removal of explicitly racist, misogynist language and images, and the substitution of the language and values of *privatization* and *personal responsibility*. From the Clinton administration into the Bush II regime, welfare reform has

been presented as a boon to recipients lifted out of welfare *dependency* and into the low-wage labor market. The new policies have also been touted as helping to promote marriage and reduce youthful "out of wedlock" pregnancy.

Welfare reform advocates do not trumpet the transfer of costs for care of children (and for the ill and the elderly, who are also often cared for by unpaid or low-paid women at home) from the public purse to the lowest paid women workers as the goal of new legislation. "Compassionate conservatives" do not connect the goal of tax cutting for businesses and the estates of the wealthiest Americans to such cost reductions. And though the value of sexual abstinence followed by marriage is accepted across the entire expanse of the neoliberal political spectrum, from traditional moralists to earnest communitarian progressives, the cornerstone role of marriage as a coercive tool of the privatization of social costs is not exactly clearly outlined.

In neoliberal discourse, married women are assumed to be responsible for children and dependent on wage-earning husbands, and are often advised to stay at home during their children's early years to build self-esteem and independence in the young. They are also encouraged to volunteer, as the bulwarks of civil society and "faith-based" social service provisions, with their unpaid labor underpinning the *privatized* social safety net. Single, divorced, and widowed women may "choose" to work in a gender and race-segmented labor market without affordable childcare or public assistance in order to build *their* self-esteem and independence—or, some welfare reformers suggest, they may "choose" to put their children up for adoption by married couples, or house them in orphanages. Lesbian and gay, bisexual or transgendered parents may choose only to take their chances amid the patchwork legal minefield of inadequate to hostile partnership provisions, custody rulings, adoptions laws, social services, employment and health insurance practices, and educational (in)visibility.

For men, neoliberal policy wonks and politicians have advocated "law and order" programs, including the "war on crime" and the "war on drugs," "zero tolerance" policing, "quality of life" crackdowns on

crimes against public order, and the mass incarceration of young poor men, especially black men.

As Christian Parenti, Angela Davis, and other critics of the U.S. "prison industrial complex" have pointed out, the rise in mass imprisonment in the U.S., leading to the highest incarceration rates in the world, proceeded in two waves: The first, under President Richard Nixon, began as a response to widespread political rebellion and the perceived precariousness of social, racial, and economic order; the second, under President Ronald Reagan, was designed as a response to the poverty and dislocation created through neoliberal economic restructuring. Setting aside the use of social democratic government programs as a primary mode of incorporating and defusing the anger and alienation of poor populations, neoliberal policymakers turned instead to policing and imprisonment as central regulatory and disciplinary institutions. Social democracy's social safety net, negotiated through protracted struggles among social classes and racial groups from the 1930s to the 1960s, had redistributed a proportion of accumulating wealth and power down and outward. Once corporate profits began to slip during the 1960s, political rhetoric and favored modes of social control got harder and meaner.¹²

Law and order policies have been promoted with race and gender "neutral" rhetoric emphasizing the threat of crime to "average" citizens, even as actual crime rates have declined. But the impact of such policies has been far from neutral, as a close look at the coded language of politics clearly reveals. As H. R. Haldeman once commented,

[President Nixon] emphasized that you have to face the fact that the whole problem is really the blacks. The key is to devise a system that recognizes this while not appearing to.¹³

By the year 2000, fully half of U.S. prisoners were black (while African-Americans constituted 13 percent of the U.S. population), and nearly one-quarter of young black men were incarcerated or subject to the criminal justice system through parole and probation. Those con-

victed of felonies were permanently barred from voting in twelve states. Immigrant populations, or citizens perceived as immigrant or "foreign," were subjected to increased surveillance and harassment by the Immigration and Naturalization Service, as well as by border patrols and federal, state, and local law enforcement agencies, following the anti-immigrant sentiment codified in the passage of Proposition 187 in California. This harassment then escalated after September 11, 2001. The vast majority of those affected by such aggressive policing and incarceration practices have been men of color—perceived as less docile because less encumbered by responsibility for children, more violent, and therefore less productive for the "private" low-wage workforce than women.

The current crisis of neoliberalism in the United States, marked by spreading corruption scandals, slipping corporate profits and declining foreign direct investment, is throwing the conflicts among mainstream economic and political elites into sharp relief. On one side are the "free market" true believers, the descendants of F. A. Hayek and Milton Friedman who once formed a small unpopular minority, but grew into a kind of secular priesthood by the 1990s. This variety of utopianism is represented in its purist form by the Cato Institute's vision of a libertarian market society, in which the state, the family, and civil society are best shaped by market values. By the mid-1990s, both rationalistic New Democratic policy wonks and demagogic Republicans lying deep in the swamp of hysterical populist moralism seemed drawn toward the light of such market utopianism. Just following the Newt Gingrich-led Republican sweep of the House of Representatives in 1994, noted swamp monster and new majority leader in the House, Representative Dick Armey, spoke at the dedication of the new Hayek auditorium at the CATO Institute, saying,

Fifty years after *The Road to Serfdom*, the closing thought of F. A. Hayek's great treatise (as expressed in the highly influential *Reader's*

Digest condensation) still rings true: "The guiding principle of any attempt to create a world of free men is this: A policy of freedom for the individual is the only truly progressive policy. . . ."

I mean, who would have imagined, a year ago, that the leaders of Congress would be looking to those crazy libertarians over at Cato for advice? Who could have imagined we would be discussing abolishing whole programs, turning others back to the states, repealing ill-conceived laws, and dismantling cabinet agencies, just as you've always recommended?¹⁴

Who indeed would have thought that Hayek and the *Reader's Digest* would have been brought into communion? Or that a moral regulator of Armev's ferocity would be so well received among libertarian opponents of U.S. drug laws? Or that "ending welfare as we know it" would soon become the signal achievement of a "progressive" Democratic administration? Such were the strange convergences of the 1990s.

But the current crisis of neoliberalism is now bringing other conflicts, buried under market frenzy during the 1990s, into the political light. Hard-line Republican neoliberals in the U.S. government have begun to advocate violence and war abroad, as well as increasing disciplinary surveillance at home, as modes of ensuring the stability of Western corporate and political hegemony. On the other side, softer neoliberals have come out swinging in the name of "democracy" and global cooperative multilateralism. Neo-Keynesians, progressives, populists, and social democrats support reformed international institutions and diplomacy in U.S. foreign and trade relations. They also support renewed forms of welfare state power to rein in market abuses and the sometimes violent as well as unjust anarchy that insufficiently regulated markets spawn. Even neoliberal true believers, from the editors of *The Economist* to Wall Street denizens, have shifted gears to support more state action to rescue capitalism from a feared global free fall. The political question within the neoliberal fold is: Will state action take the form of global warfare, corporate welfare, or a renewed, limited social democracy?¹⁵

The newly more visible conflict among elites is accompanied by an overlapping conflict over cultural politics. On one side is the residual strategy of cultural traditionalism deployed during the late twentieth century "culture wars"—energetic attacks against "multiculturalism" and "permissiveness" intended to shrink the funding bases as well as popular support for sites of nonmarket politics—the arts, education, and social services. On the other side is a newly emergent "equality" politics that supports "diversity" and "tolerance," but defines these in the narrowest terms, and entirely within the framework of globalist neoliberalism.

wars. These mobilizations might become sites for factional struggles over the disciplining of the troops, in the name of unity at a time of crisis and necessity. But such efforts will fail; the troops will not be disciplined, and the disciplinarians will be left to their bitterness. Or, we might find ways of thinking, speaking, writing, and acting that are engaged and curious about “other people’s” struggles for social justice, that are respectfully affiliative and dialogic rather than pedagogical, that look for the hopeful spots to expand upon, and that revel in the pleasure of political life. For it is pleasure *and* collective caretaking, love *and* the egalitarian circulation of money—allied to clear and hard-headed political analysis offered generously—that will create the space for a progressive politics that might both imagine and create . . . something worth living for.

Notes

Introduction

1. For an illuminating account of the limited “social warrant” of the 1930s, based on higher wages for white male workers and on an expanded “warfare” as well as welfare state, see George Lipsitz, *American Studies in a Moment of Danger* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2001). In chapter 4, Lipsitz outlines the attacks on both the Age of the CIO (1930s) and the Age of the Civil Rights movement (1960s) during the 1970s and 1980s—attacks fomented by a powerful coalition of multinational corporations, small property holders, independent entrepreneurs, and religious fundamentalists.
2. My discussion of the history of Liberalism, here and in chapter 1, is necessarily highly truncated. The literature on this topic is vast. For good introductions, see Karl Polanyi, *The Great Transformation* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1944) and Wendy Brown, “Liberalism’s Family Values” in her *States of Injury* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1995), pp. 135–165.
3. For varying but nonetheless overlapping outlines of the features and agenda of neoliberalism, see Jean and John L. Comaroff, editors, “Millennial Capitalism and the Culture of Neoliberalism,” a special issue of *Public Culture*, 12, no. 2 (Spring 2000); Noam Chomsky, *Profit Over People: Neoliberalism and Global Order* (New York: Seven Stories Press, 1999); and David Boaz, editor, *Toward Liberty: The Idea That Is Changing the World* (Washington, D.C.: The Cato Institute, 2002).
4. As I will argue more extensively in chapter 1, *identity politics* in the broadest sense arises from the exclusions of the U.S. nation-state beginning in the early nineteenth century. But *identity politics* in the narrowest sense defined here first appeared in the 1980s.
5. See any of a long list of publications by Cindy Patton, including *Inventing AIDS* (New York: Routledge, 1990), *Last Served? Gendering the HIV Pandemic* (New York: Taylor and Francis, 1994), and *Globalizing AIDS* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2002).

Chapter 1, Downsizing Democracy

1. Kevin Phillips, *Wealth and Democracy: A Political History of the American Rich* (New York: Broadway Books, 2002), pp. xii, 412.
2. *New York Times*, “The Week in Review,” 30 June 2002, p. 1; Joseph E. Stiglitz, *Globalization and Its Discontents* (New York and London: W. W. Norton, 2002); and Phillips, *Wealth and Democracy*.

3. The literature on the history of capitalism and Liberalism is vast. For good introductions see Karl Polanyi, *The Great Transformation* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1944) and Wendy Brown, "Liberalism's Family Values" in *States of Injury* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1995), pp. 135-165.
4. For an interesting account of this process, see Kathleen McHugh, *American Domesticity* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999).
5. See Timothy Mitchell, "Society, Economy, and the State Effect," in George Steinmetz, editor, *State/Culture: State-Formation after the Cultural Turn* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1999), pp. 76-97; David Lloyd and Paul Thomas, *Culture and the State* (New York and London: Routledge, 1998); Michael A. Peters, *Poststructuralism, Marxism and Neoliberalism: Between Theory and Politics* (New York and Oxford: Rowman, Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 2001).
6. There were some occasions of connection and overlap in organizations such as the Knights of Labor, for instance, or through the work of activists such as Emma Goldman.
7. For an analysis of neoliberalism's history and impact, see the special issue of *Public Culture*, "Millennial Capitalism and the Culture of Neoliberalism," 12, no. 2 (spring 2000), especially the introductory essay by the volume editors, Jean Comaroff and John L. Comaroff, "Millennial Capitalism: First Thoughts on a Second Coming," pp. 291-343. See also George F. DeMartino, *Global Economy, Global Justice: Theoretical Objections and Policy Alternatives to Neoliberalism* (New York and London: Routledge, 2000); Noam Chomsky, *Profit Over People: Neoliberalism and Global Order* (New York: Seven Stories Press, 1999); Andriana Vlachou, editor, *Contemporary Economic Theory: Radical Critiques of Neoliberalism* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1999).
8. For especially nuanced accounts of the cultural politics of neoliberalism in the Latin American context, see the introduction and essays in Jacquelyn Chase, *The Spaces of Neoliberalism: Land, Place and Family in Latin America* (Bloomfield, Conn.: Kriemarian Press, 2002).
9. See Judith Goode and Jeff Maskovsky, editors, *The New Poverty Studies: The Ethnography of Power, Politics, and Impoverished People in the United States* (New York: New York University Press, 2001). The introduction and essays collected in this volume trace the broad effects of neoliberal policies on poverty rates and the experience of impoverishment in the U.S., including examination of welfare and criminal justice and incarceration policies.
10. Lawrence Meade, *Beyond Entitlement: The Social Obligations of Citizenship* (New York: Free Press, 1986), pp. 84-85, quoted in Christian Parenti, *Lockdown America: Police and Prisons in the Age of Crisis* (New York and London: Verso, 1999), p. 168.
11. Anna Marie Smith, "The Sexual Regulation Dimension of Contemporary Welfare Law: A Fifty State Overview," *Michigan Journal of Gender and Law* 8, no. 2 (2002), pp. 121-218. Smith provides both an analysis of the 1996 reform and a brief summary of the history of welfare legislation in the United States, as well as an extensive list of citations for historical and legal studies of the welfare state.

12. Angela Davis, *The Prison Industrial Complex* (San Francisco: AK Press Audio Recording, 1997); Parenti, pp. 3-66. See also Sasha Abramsky, *Hard Time Blues: How Politics Built a Prison Nation* (New York: Thomas Dunne Books/St. Martin's Press, 2002).
13. Quoted in Parenti, p. 3.
14. Dick Arney, "Creating a World of Free Men," in David Boaz, editor, *Toward Liberty: The Idea That Is Changing the World* (Washington, D.C.: The Cato Institute, 2002), p. 428.
15. See for instance Stiglitz, Phillips, and "The Wickedness of Wall Street," *The Economist*, 8 June 2002, pp. 11-12.

Chapter 2, The Incredible Shrinking Public

1. See Carole Vance, editor, *Pleasure and Danger: Exploring Female Sexuality* (Boston: Routledge, 1984). This volume includes papers presented at the 1982 conference.
2. For a chronology and description of the sex wars debates, see Lisa Duggan and Nan Hunter, *Sex Wars: Sexual Dissent and Political Culture* (New York: Routledge, 1995).
3. See Cathy Cohen, *The Boundaries of Blackness: AIDS and the Breakdown of Black Politics* (Chicago, Ill.: University of Chicago Press, 1999) and Richard Meyer, *Outlaw Representation: Censorship and Homosexuality in Twentieth-Century American Art* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), for accounts of aspects of the AIDS and arts censorship debates.
4. The CBS *60 Minutes* segment aired on March 22, 1998.
5. Truth in Politics identified no other members in addition to Shipley. TIP had complained frequently in previous years about women's studies events, to little avail, though Shipley did join in the successful opposition to Rosemary Curb, a former nun, a lesbian, and a 1997 finalist for a deanship at SUNY New Paltz. In addition to the activity of TIP, some local observers noted that many figures involved in the attack on the "Revoluting Behavior" conference had ties to the secretive, conservative Catholic organization, Opus Dei.
6. The friendly gay paper, the *New York Blade News*, 14 November 1997, pp. 1, 8, described the School of Fine and Performing Arts conference as including an art exhibit with enlarged photographs of vaginas and enlarged illustrations of female genitalia from *Gray's Anatomy*, a play about AIDS, and a seminar on the sexual content of Andy Warhol films.
7. The conference budget of \$5,566 included \$400 each from the Office of the President and the Office of the Dean of Arts & Sciences. The rest of the funds were from private sources and registration fees.
8. Bradford P. Wilson, "Politicizing Academic Freedom, Vulgarizing Scholarly Discourse," *Chronicle of Higher Education*, 19 December 1997.
9. "Panel Backs SUNY Campus on Sex Conference," *New York Times*, 23 December 1997, B5.

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