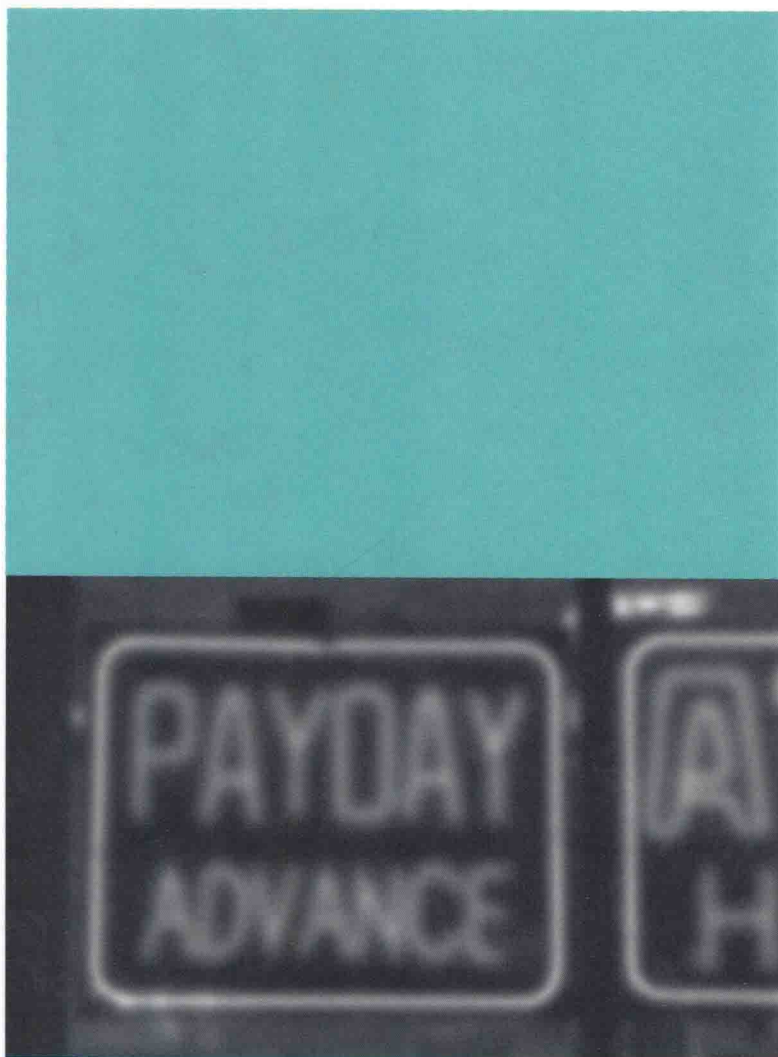


NEOLIBERAL CULTURE

LIVING WITH AMERICAN NEOLIBERALISM


ASHGATE



PATRICIA VENTURA

Neoliberal Culture

Living with American Neoliberalism

PATRICIA VENTURA
Spelman College, USA



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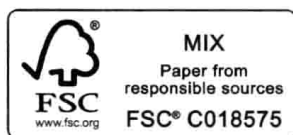
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Introduction:

American Neoliberal Culture

Here is what I set out to do in this book. I introduce the concept of neoliberal culture and offer a framework for scholarly analysis of it. Beyond this more general goal, I present my own analysis of neoliberal culture in the US by offering readings of particular artifacts that are essential to that culture's character. Thus, this book offers both a guide to neoliberal cultural studies and a discussion of how American neoliberal rationality ramifies from the economic realm to the cultural realm. In this effort I bring together approaches that are often seen as competing but that I think offer the possibility of capturing the fullness of American neoliberal culture.

Neoliberal Culture, itself an artifact of the times, enters the market when neoliberalism is a significant framework for analyses of the global economic financial crisis and the US's Great Recession that started in 2007, but in which neoliberalism as a cultural structure is a newer framework for analysis. It is a framework that deserves illumination in order to determine not only how to mobilize the approach for understanding everyday life but for explaining key structures shaping everyday life in the US. Remembering, that the "everyday" is a deeply complex and variable category, I borrow Lawrence Grossberg's definition of it as "uncataloged, habitual, often routinized nature of day-to-day living, what we don't think about while we are living it; it encompasses all the activities whose temporality goes unnoticed" (*Cultural* 278). *Neoliberal Culture* analyzes the massive infrastructure that creates the environment in which these quotidian routines and habits are lived out—that is, the structure of feeling that shapes everyday life.

Neoliberal Culture as a Structure of Feeling

One of the ironies I discovered in writing this book is that while neoliberalism is thought of around the world as an American-led form of capitalist imperialism, in the US, neoliberalism is rarely part of the popular discourse outside of academic and progressive circles. Sometimes people assume that the term refers to the Democratic Party or to a permissive society or perhaps that it is the opposite of neoconservatism.¹

1 To clarify, neoconservatism adds Great Power politics and an embrace of unilateralism and colonialism to neoliberalism. So Bill Clinton's administration was neoliberal but mostly not neoconservative; George W. Bush's administration was thoroughly neoconservative meaning it embraced neoliberalism and unilateral conquest of sovereign nations. I should add that many use the term "neoconservative" to refer to the conservative movement of the Reagan

So what is neoliberalism? How do we experience something as abstract as neoliberalism?

Neoliberalism at one level is a set of economic and political policies and ideologies favoring corporatism, privatization of public enterprises, and the reduction of state power and intervention. But neoliberalism is also a governmentality—that is, the way subjects think about the collection of practices, techniques, and rationalities used to govern them and which they use to govern themselves. Neoliberal government represents the population's wellbeing as intimately tied to individuals' abilities to make market principles the guiding values of their lives, to see themselves as products to create, sell, and optimize.

As the title suggests, this book is about neoliberalism in the United States. It attempts to articulate what is novel about neoliberalism as a cultural logic, a term Fredric Jameson uses to describe the synchronizing of "new forms of practice and social and mental habits with the new forms of economic production" that acts as a kind of "force field in which very different kinds of cultural impulses ... must make their way" (*Postmodernism* xiv).

To obtain a clearer understanding of this cultural logic, I turn to Raymond Williams' term "structure of feeling," which he developed to describe "meanings and values as they are actively lived and felt." Seldom recognized as social or as forming part of a structure, Williams sees structures of feeling as "general change rather than a set of deliberate choices, yet choices can be deduced from [them], as well as effects" (131, 132). He maintains that we can see these kinds of changes in the everyday aspects of life such as the built environment, comportment, and dress. It is from this perspective that I establish my concept of neoliberal culture. Neoliberalism as a structure of feeling is not merely an ideology, not merely an economic perspective, not merely a rationality, but is the concatenation of them.

Neoliberal culture as a structure of feeling impels us to extend the market, its technologies, approaches and mindsets into all spheres of human life, to move the ideology of consumer choice to the center of individual existence, and to look to ourselves rather than larger social-welfare structures or society as the source of our success or the blame for our failure—indeed, to define "success" and "failure" in market terms. In short, to become entrepreneurs of ourselves as Foucault terms it.

The structure-of-feeling framework stresses that the sensibilities and unthought assumptions that suffuse daily life are, as Williams puts it, "from the beginning taken as *social* experience rather than as 'personal' experience or as the merely superficial or incidental 'small change' of society" (131)—social even as

years and beyond and thus apply it to the American Religious Right. That usage obscures the historical specificity of neoconservatism, which began among hawkish, weapons-obsessed, pro-Israel anti-communist policy wonks, most notably Irving Kristol and Norman Podhoretz and expanding to a second generation including William Kristol and Paul Wolfowitz. The introduction and the first chapter especially are meant to explain neoliberalism in a more general form but the last chapter brings in a more sustained discussion of the neoconservative brand of neoliberalism via the Iraq War.

neoliberal culture undermines the validity of thinking and working on the level of society, with “society” defined as “the sum of the bonds and relations between individuals and events ... within a more or less bounded territory” (Rose “Death of the Social?” 328).²

For Williams, this social experience forms a distinct generation or a period.³ I argue that neoliberal culture emerged from the end of the Cold War as a structure of feeling shaping Americans’ everyday lives. From that period it grew quickly into a cultural dominant, and while Williams uses the term structure of feeling to describe emergent formations, I use the term here because it continues to have resonance in the US context since this structure rests largely below the consciousness of most non-academics and non-progressive activists.

From the culturally dominant perspective in the US, the end of the Cold War marks the destruction of opposition to both Western capitalism and US dominance. The result was the self-proclaimed victory of the US, the West, and capitalism over communism and any other large force opposing capitalist expansion. This sense of victory emboldened the forces of neoliberalism not only to ramp up a radical agenda of privatization, corporatism, and deregulation that in the US context had been escalating notably since the days of Ronald Reagan (and before those years as well) but to promote change at the level of social experience, affect, meanings and values.

Chief among values prized by neoliberal culture stands freedom. Indeed, George W. Bush invoked freedom as part of his neoliberalized version of the old myth of American exceptionalism to explain the motivations of the attacks of September 11, 2001: “They hate us for our freedom!” This blaming/crediting of America’s freedom ties deeply with the free-market rationality that lies at the

2 I follow Tony Bennett in arguing for the need for both thinking at the level of culture, and in seeing culture not as an “amorphous domain” but as “consisting of a range of particular forms of expertise arising out of distinctive regimes of truth that assume a range of practical and technical forms through the variety of programs for regulating ‘the conduct of conduct’ that they are, or have been, attached to” (56). Bringing in this perspective means theorizing culture and governmentality together, a task that requires “attending to the way in which cultural techniques and technologies are expected to act on the social to bring about specific kinds of changes (or stabilities) in conduct where the social is interpreted as a specific constellation of problems—of attitude and behavior—arising out of distinctive strategies of rule” (58).

3 I use both “cultural logic” and “structure of feeling” to describe neoliberal culture because they both usefully express the coordination between economics, politics, and culture. I use “structure of feeling” to express the sense of neoliberalism emerging without our being aware of it in the formalized and conscious belief structures that in Terry Eagleton’s summation, “the dominant social order neglects, excludes, represses, or simply fails to recognize” (49). I use “cultural logic” to express the more general consideration of neoliberalism as a rationality. In both cases the terms are meant to highlight the unique relationship between various levels of social life—for instance, the political, juridical, cultural, ideological, and economic—without reducing them all to any one aspect or negating the structuring relationship between them.

core of neoliberalism. Freedom, from this perspective, is less a Constitutional right of citizens than a strategy for rule, a means of control (see Rose, *Powers of Freedom*). Considering “freedom” from this market perspective, the term refers to the sum of one’s consumer choices and the lifestyle purchased by acquiring the “right” accessories. Considered as a means of control, we see that people are governed through their freedom—encouraged, educated, and hounded into using their autonomy in ways that bind them to the market.

“Freedom” is not simply the ability to make choices or act without influence; it is influence being expressed through the self’s own choices, through the ways we conduct ourselves. After all, if we are held completely responsible for our own lives then we can be governed through the sense that we alone have made our own choices, and therefore we alone must be accountable for them. But to be governed here implies not merely the workings of a centralized power; following Foucault, it refers to the ways by which behavior is managed (the famous phrase describing this is the “conduct of conduct”). In neoliberal government, individuals feel solely responsible for their lives and come to believe that they are not entitled to assistance from the larger social structure.

Tellingly, what applies at the micro level in the American neoliberal culture regime seldom applies at the macro level. Thus, neoliberal rhetoric and policy hold individuals accountable for their own actions, but rarely do they hold systems or structures responsible. The major exception here applies to those structures such as welfare that neoliberals indict for creating and enabling dependency, especially among the poor. In that case, we are told, the system is to blame for developing inadequate individuals, although the poor still face condemnation despite the key role the welfare state ostensibly played in creating their plight. For neoliberal public policy is built upon centuries of association of economic wealth with hard work and great virtue and thus assumes the poor are lazy, given to criminality, and generally without morals—in short, that they deserve their misery even though the system is at least partly responsible for creating it.⁴

American Neoliberal Culture Emerges in the 1990s

This book analyzes neoliberal culture in the US, but events in the US cannot be understood apart from those outside the nation. Indeed, the neoliberal ascendancy has created vast new circuits that shape the very meanings of the local, national,

4 Consider former US House Speaker Newt Gingrich’s comments reported on 1 December 2011 while on the 2012 presidential campaign trail that “really poor children in really poor neighborhoods have no habits of working and have nobody around them who works so they literally have no habit of showing up on Monday and staying around all day. They have no habit of ‘I do this and you give me cash,’ unless it’s illegal.” See http://www.cbsnews.com/8301-503544_162-57335118-503544/newt-gingrich-poor-kids-dont-work-unless-its-illegal/.

and global. So if this volume uncovers cultural developments in the US it is with the express understanding that each of these developments connects deeply and intimately outside the nation. The following chapters trace the wirings and rewirings of globalized circuits within the US, a process that became faster and more extensive and expansive in the 1990s than it had in any time previous.

Now, this is not to say that life everywhere looked as it did in the US or that neoliberalism is particularly American. But there are particular qualities to American neoliberalism as well as general qualities that characterize neoliberalism in principle that were ubiquitously present in the US in the 1990s. By 2003 at the start of the Iraq War, American neoliberal culture had reached a kind of maturation point, and so that event takes up the last full body chapter of the book. By that point the key qualities characterizing the regime were in place and were culturally dominant. They include market rationality that leads to atomized existence and governance through freedom, and they affirm neoliberalism as a form of consciousness that shapes the processes of social reproduction and material production, labor and rest.

This book examines the effects neoliberalism and its conceptions of freedom and selfhood have had on the structures shaping everyday life and cultural representation in the US—the country ostensibly benefiting the most from neoliberalism, the country most closely associated with the destruction of the welfare state.

For example, I analyze Walmart (in which about one-third of the US population shops every week), Oprah Winfrey and Oprah's Book Club (as the personification of talk and television culture and one of the biggest forces in popular reading in the neoliberal cultural era), and Las Vegas (the American place represented commonly as the anti-everyday and has become the everyday fantasy of escape). And while these objects shape the fabric of everyday American life, they also operate massively on a global scale. Las Vegas houses many of the largest hotels in the world; Walmart is the world's largest retailer and private employer; Winfrey, a billionaire, sits comfortably among the 500 richest people in the world.

The processes of neoliberalization did not begin in the 1990s nor do they exist only in the US, of course, for certainly they could be traced to events and figures emerging well before then and from diverse places around the globe. David Harvey points to 1978-80 as years that will likely appear "revolutionary" to future historians of neoliberalism: the Chinese economy opened; union power suffered great collapses in Britain; and the US abandoned policies aiming toward maximally low unemployment in favor of monetarist strategies that prioritized the financial elite (1-2). From a very long view, we could trace with Michel Foucault the foundations upon which neoliberalism was built starting with ancient Greek practices of self-control and self-government, moving through liberal capitalist theories of Adam Smith, to the post-WWII free-market fundamentalism of the Chicago School as embodied in Milton Friedman, and finally to a proper neoliberalism as governmentality bringing market rationality into every sphere of life.

Judged from either historical perspective, the forces that brought neoliberalism to prominence had been amassing well before the 1990s. Much of the literature on postmodernism, commonly seen to have been the dominant cultural logic starting in the 1970s, traces out these developments: post-Fordist production, deep erosion of the Keynesian social-welfare state, technology advances that compress time and space.⁵ But it was the end of the Cold War that opened up the world to neoliberal capitalists' variously multinational, transnational, and post-national strategies of accumulation. And particularly important for our purposes, the end of the Cold War saw neoliberalism crystallize as a structure of feeling.

In the 1990s in the US, neoliberalism developed under several names: the "New World Order," especially in relation to the US's military-political position among other nations; the "Washington Consensus," especially in relation to the US's financial interaction with other nations via the World Bank/International Monetary Fund; and "globalization," especially when a catch-all term was needed to discuss the erosion of borders in most areas of human interaction. Usually seen as revolving around Washington, New York, and Hollywood, the brand of American-style neoliberalism arising in the 1990s represented a new era in the US's international relations while it marked a change in the conduct of the state domestically.

What is important to understand is that neoliberalism crosses party lines as easily as it crosses national borders, and in doing so it takes on different forms. In much of Asia it has received a measured and mixed response since it has a deeply mixed record. Certainly, the neoliberal model led Thailand and Indonesia to economic collapse starting in 1997, but the result was quite different in China, which, not coincidentally, embraced only select parts of the model while rejecting key aspects such as unrestrained currency speculation and mass privatization of infrastructure. In Latin America, the neoliberal model was adapted with particular ferocity resulting in financial collapses in countries such as Argentina, Brazil, and Mexico and a deepening of the deadly poverty already plaguing the continent. (Perhaps the earliest display of this ferocity was in Chile in the 1970s where Milton Friedman's "Chicago Boys" teamed up with the CIA to install the military junta of Augusto Pinochet; the result was the privatization of much of the nation's resources to the benefit of key

5 Neoliberalism rises up to replace postmodernism as the cultural dominant in the post-Cold War years. We should note, postmodernism is a product of the same energies that produced neoliberalism—namely, the economic crises of the 1970s and the after-effects of the 1960s' revolts against imperialism as well as race, gender, and sexual oppression. But I would argue that the two rationalities diverge importantly on the issue of grand narratives. Postmodernism, as articulated by Jean-Francois Lyotard, assumes the end of metanarratives, while the concept of neoliberalism implies that capitalism has emerged in the post-Cold War era as precisely the kind of totalizing narrative that postmodernism writes off. If some key theorists of postmodernism never accepted the end of totalizing narratives—Fredric Jameson being central here—it is still the case that postmodernism is often understood in precisely those Lyotardian terms.

foreign corporations and the nation's wealthy class, whose position Pinochet had solidified with mass imprisonment, torture, and murder.)

In the US, where neoliberal policies have caused significant economic and social upheaval, resistance to it is not really prominent. This lack of resistance is shocking when we consider that in the 1990s, the first decade of the neoliberal culture era, wealth accumulated upward to the very rich to an extent not seen since the years leading up to the Great Depression. According to the Economic Policy Institute, the 90/50 gap, the ratio between wages of those at the top 90 percent of earners and those in the middle 50 percent, grew in the 1990s.

So too, outsourcing—and anxiety over the prospect of outsourcing—resulted in job insecurity, depressed wages, the growth of poverty, a widening income gap between the middle class and wealthy, and longer working hours for everyone from college grads to high-school drop-outs.⁶ College-educated, white-collar, blue-collar, knowledge workers—almost all workers faced stagnant or diminished earnings at the same time as the share in total *national* income of the top 0.1 percent doubled (see Harvey chapter 1).⁷ As the gap between the rich and everyone else continued to grow to levels unseen since before the Great Depression, the dominant national economic narrative centered not on these growing inequalities or the levels of debt that consumers assumed in order stay afloat but on the decade's global economic expansion. It is thus no surprise that despite the harsh economic realities, there was no sustained and widespread opposition to neoliberalism in the US. There were a few moments of opposition, most notably the WTO protests in Seattle in 1999, but mostly we are left with the strange situation in which much of the world actually sees the US as a neoliberal imperial power, while many Americans operating outside academic and progressive circles remain unaware of what neoliberalism even is.

This book addresses the question of how Americans can remain so unaware by examining neoliberalism as a structure of feeling as opposed to, say, simply a set of economic priorities or policies. I argue that in the US, this structure of feeling is shaped by several rationalities and apparatuses governed by conscious goals. Because they work together to make up a structure, I will call them *components*. These components frame our being in everyday life with the larger structure of feeling such that existence tends to be addressed in particular ways.

6 The Economic Policy Institute has extensive data on the subject. For one example, see its issue guide to outsourcing at <http://www.epi.org/content.cfm/issueguide_offshoring_faq>; then follow the many links to other pages for statistics and analysis of issues surrounding off-shoring, Walmart, globalization, NAFTA, CAFTA, and many other neoliberalism-related topics.

7 Emerging from these numbers were a few standouts who came to embody the super-wealthy of the neoliberal era including Walmart founder Sam Walton, who would have become the world's richest individual had he not died and split his exceptional wealth among his wife and four children, who he left individually to stand among those at the top of the list of the world's richest individuals.

The book's various chapters focus on American neoliberal culture's key components in order to understand how this structure was embodied and internalized, represented in popular culture and architecture, and enacted in law and consumption practices. To understand these we need to understand why American neoliberal culture developed: it emerged as a prominent aspect in the wider global neoliberal agenda to restore class privilege to the very wealthy, class privilege that had been reduced by regulation, taxation, and the creation of public enterprises such as water, electric, pensions, healthcare, and education.

Note, in the Cold War period, such modern welfare-state services had been a key part of a strategy for educating subjects on the benefits of capitalism. And many individuals did benefit from the Keynesian US welfare state. But capital benefited even more from the economic redistributions of big government: indirectly in the form of loyalty to the state and rejection of forces opposing capitalism (such as communism), and directly through infrastructure development and coverage of many of the costs of social reproduction, which in turn enabled the purchasing power and workforce training of a large middle class. Neoliberalism challenges that formula through precipitous reductions in wages, job security, welfare benefits, and organized labor protection in the name of market freedom.

To understand the havoc such free-market developments bring, we need only consider the case of Russia in the 1990s. In those early post-Cold War years, neoliberal economists, following the lead of American wunderkind Jeffrey Sachs, directly and indirectly served the interests of a powerful cadre looking to exploit Russia's resource potential by helping implement what they called "shock therapy"—a program to bring the country into the capitalist fold by quickly lifting price controls and subsidies, selling off and thus privatizing hundreds of thousands of state-owned companies, and implementing broad free-trade policies. The decade was a time of massive turmoil as the nation moved from the Soviet economic system to capitalist economic restructuring to popular protest occasioned by the economic and social turmoil brought on by shock therapy to the squelching of much of Russia's nascent democracy.

For the average Russian, the 1990s was a turbulent time marked by the growth of both organized crime and run-of-the-mill criminality in the face of swollen poverty rates—trends that have yet to show significant signs of improvement. Just as troubling, mortality rates in Russia became (and remain) among the highest in the world; the average life expectancy of a Russian man is 59 years, and the birth rate has not only dropped precipitously but 70 percent of infants experience complications at birth (Feshbach). Less than ten years after the Soviet Union dissolved, Vladimir Putin, a former KGB operative, had solidified the power of the ruling elite. Those who protested the erosion of democracy and the privatization of Russia's vast resources too loudly were silenced, shut down, or killed.

Not as quickly (or "therapeutically"), the US also underwent a program of neoliberal "reform." Some of these changes began in the 1970s, but the end of the Cold War and the implosion of an actually existing socialist alternative to US-led capitalism launched what we can properly call the neoliberal era in the US. The

institution of the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) in 1994 was a metonym for the US's larger deindustrialization in the wake of globalization. Certainly, manufacturing job losses, which number in the millions, can be blamed in part to increases in automation and productivity, but the effect of NAFTA cannot be overlooked. Indeed, the Economic Policy Institute found that in the mere eight years from 1994 to 2002 the US trade deficit with Mexico grew from \$1.4 billion to \$37.1 billion.

The signing of NAFTA was fairly coincident with recognition of the US economy's steady shift from manufacturing to financialization where profitability was (and remains) based decreasingly on production and increasingly on financial enterprises such as credit, insurance, and free-wheeling speculation in exotic financial instruments. Even older firms associated with the factory-production model of accumulation, such as car companies, opened up finance units that brought in an increasingly larger share of the corporations' total profits as traditional production segments declined.

Signal developments such as the signing of NAFTA were not the American equivalent of widespread changes brought on by global trends or by economic exigencies but were products of a very particular domestic economic-political-social agenda tied to the global and overlapping priorities of powerful financial institutions, multinational corporations, governmental and nongovernmental organizations, and an elite class of global capitalists and their cronies—all of whom were able to speed up the on-going processes of such changes in part because the end of the Cold War signaled the end of a worldwide American competition with Soviet-style socialism for the hearts and minds of the world's people. Indeed, the promise to "bolster America's economic prosperity" was actually listed as one of the top-three objectives in the Clinton administration's National Security Strategy. Obviously, the US government served business interests throughout the twentieth century, a trend that was obvious from the CIA's first coup—the overthrow of Iran's democratically elected Mohammed Mossadeq in 1953—conducted in large part to protect Western corporate access to cheap oil against Mossadeq's plan to nationalize his nation's reserves. But it was also true, as one State Department official put it, "We focused heavily on the political and ideological competition with the former Soviet Union, often to the detriment of American business. With the end of the cold war, however, there has been a dramatic shift in the department's emphasis to business" (quoted in Snow 47).

The kind of widespread turmoil cause by the downward salary and job-security pressure that NAFTA and other free-trade agreements create by making US workers compete with underpaid, unprotected foreign workers produces a widespread sense of vulnerability lurking just beneath the rhetorical surface of economic opportunity. This vulnerability is only heightened by the pressures of financialization that both encourage and require individuals to acquire debt. These developments are born out of the key neoliberal premise—that the market itself instructs us on how we should conduct our lives. And here is the essence of neoliberalism's appeal. It offers a vision of freedom as originating in the market

and thus based on the sense that we are all fundamentally consumers and thus all equal in principle, if not in fiscal fact. That is to say, from the perspective of neoliberalism's market orientation there is nothing inherently keeping us all from achieving our desires because supposedly we all have a chance to acquire the resources to fulfill those desires and wants. Of course, we are told we have to *choose* to be "successful," choose to work hard to acquire what we want, but that too is represented as part of the promise of neoliberalism: if we work hard, we *will* get what we want; if we don't get what we want, we haven't worked hard enough. Buried deep within this promise is the fact of structural inequality, but that too often is ignored or represented as a benefit because it is governed by bedrock principles which, we are repeatedly assured, are elemental to the system and keep it fair: rule of law, privatization and emphasis on property rights, the privileging of the individual over the collective, and most fundamentally, limits on state and sovereign power.

Liberalism and Neoliberalism

Few statements capture neoliberal rationality better than Ronald Reagan's famous one-liner, "The nine most terrifying words in the English language are, 'I'm from the government and I'm here to help.'" Implying not only that the state is ill-suited to help individuals but that individuals ought not look to the state for assistance, Reagan's quip reflects a characteristic anti-statism lying at the heart of all liberalisms—whether of the classical or neo variety. This mistrust of the state is, as Norberto Bobbio describes, "the original kernel" of liberalism, which is "a theory of the limits of state power, premised upon the individual as possessor, prior to the emergence of political power, of certain interests and rights, including the right to private property" (82). Such rights-based states are intended to defend the individual from government: "they are, in other words, guarantees of liberty ... in the sense of what is known as negative liberty" (15).

Bobbio's description summarizes the foundation of liberalism, built on two premises: first, a notion of individualism rooted in the idea that each individual has inherent rights—the most treasured in the classical liberal tradition being the right to private property—and second, a negative perspective of liberty that sees freedom as liberation *from* the state, rather than the freedom *to be* autonomous or unrestrained. In the American tradition, individualism and negative liberty were the dominant ideologies concerning the state until the twentieth century. In the wake of that century's tremendous upheavals, especially the Great Depression of the 1930s, the classical liberal vision was largely seen as unfeasible. Lack of state regulation, especially of economic interests, showed freedom from the state to be a hollow liberty for the majority of the population who were now suffering the effects of systemic unemployment and poverty that would only be alleviated by federal government intervention. Thus, the twentieth century saw the tremendous growth of the American social welfare state, also known as the Keynesian service

state, meant to level out capitalism's never-ending cycle of boom and bust and to mitigate inequality through intervention in and regulation of market forces. The American service state, though fundamentally liberal in its orientation, did exert pressure on economic and market forces especially through regulation, greater taxation, and protection of unionism. But the receding of the service state in the neoliberal era correlates with an expanding power of market forces. In the US, the aggressive reassertion of liberalism's negative liberty and individualist orientation emerged as part of an expansion of the economic sphere into areas that previously were considered unsuited for market logics or at least worthy of funding from non-market forces as well. Think here of everything from the privatization of prisons to the eroded public subsidy for art.

Historically, the American service state never enjoyed universal acceptance; Barry Goldwater's failed 1964 presidential campaign, for instance, was backed by those very forces that resented Keynesianism. But it took the stagflation of the early 1970s to crack the Keynesian foundation of the US economy.⁸ The Reagan years then pushed the process along. But it was the end of the Cold War that finally emboldened the service state's opponents to eliminate many of the gains that had been made in the wake of the Great Depression when socialist government was an actually existing threat to US capital. With that threat greatly reduced, the Keynesian state diminished and a new liberal state emerged.

This book argues that a new culture rose to dominance after the Cold War ended as part of the expansion of liberal ideals—particularly the aggressive reassertion of liberalism's negative liberty and individualist orientation. But they assumed new forms because they were shaped by the equally aggressive movement of market rationality into all spheres. As Wendy Brown argues, neoliberalism's unique achievement is to make even the state “construct and construe itself in market terms as well as develop policies and promulgate a political culture that figures citizens as exhaustively as rational economic actors in every sphere of life” (694).

It is the omnipresence of a market rationality that makes the ideology of consumer choice appear to be the essence of freedom and encourages us to see ourselves as atomized individuals who alone are the source of our successes or the blame for our failures—indeed, to define “success” and “failure” in market terms. Liberalism's negative liberty manifests in the development of government through freedom in which people are motivated to action not through force but because they choose to do what is desired of them. And an individualist orientation reemerges in the compulsion toward self-entrepreneurialism in which people feel obligated to see themselves as marketable “products” that must be made commercially viable. These new forms create the context for the development of neoliberal culture. And though neoliberalism is built on a fundamental mistrust of the state, we should not assume that means the state has receded as a repressive force in the neoliberal era. The nearly 2.5 million Americans in jail or prison remind us that even if the preferred form of neoliberal government is to rule *through* individuals rather than

8 See Harvey's *A Brief History of Neoliberalism* for a definitive account of this process.

over them, powerful structures are in place to rule over as well. Thus we see that neoliberal rationality and policy has a deeply ambiguous relationship with the state. For at a very fundamental level, the massive inequality that neoliberalism generates requires a strong state to protect the property and promote the interests of those who have succeeded in market terms. As Barry Hindess puts it, “Liberty and domination are joined in liberal thought like two sides of a single coin: the value of one may appear on the face, but the figure of the other is firmly stamped on the reverse” (“The Liberal Government of Unfreedom”).

In capitalist history, we can understand the connection between liberty and domination by studying the process of primitive accumulation; that is, the process describing the formation and perpetuation of capitalism. What is important to realize about primitive accumulation is that people’s *freedom* to work for wages was deeply attached to the *requirement* that they work for wages with misery, imprisonment, or torture awaiting many of those who committed the crime of not finding employment (Perelman, Chapter 1).⁹

In a system in which economic decisions are un-democratic, inequality is an inevitable result, but neoliberal culture provides compensations in an attempt to mitigate the appearance of suffering. A key compensation, in fact, lies in the very denial of the structural nature of neoliberalism’s horrors. That denial enables neoliberal subjects to avoid operating in an antagonistic relation to any other ideologies or to formal structures of power, and allows those individuals and groups who have assumed a friendly relationship with the powers-that-be to blame victims of social, economic, and political ills for their own problems—as when the supposed laziness of the poor is said to be the cause of poverty. As a result everyday life is depoliticized.

The Neoliberal Family

Another way of expressing this depoliticization is to say that neoliberal governmentality holds all individuals responsible only for themselves and their families. A deeply lonely and disempowering position, it discourages the kind of collective action and coalition building that is essential to political movement. But from another perspective it is also deeply liberating. After all, if we have no responsibility for anyone else, then we are free to worry about no one besides ourselves and our families. And this brings us to neoliberal culture’s arguably most significant compensation and one that we will return to repeatedly in this book: the *family*.

9 Those few people who gained control of the means of production were able to subject the rest to the demands of the economic system they created; the history of the alliance between these forces, their apologists, and the law has largely been skipped over by liberal apologists for capital, represented most notably Adam Smith.