Beyond the Neoliberal Order:
Reimagining the Recent History of the US

Call for Papers

Deadline: February 22, 2027

It is commonplace to think of the history of the United States over the last five decades as an era of "neoliberalism": a potent, tentacular ideology that transformed not only the U.S.'s economy, but its civic institutions, both major political parties, and even the souls of American citizens. According to the account popularized by historian Gary Gerstle, the "New Deal order" structured the political economy, public policy, and social contract of the U.S. between 1933 and 1980, before it gave way to a "neoliberal order" – amidst the decline of which we currently live.

The conventional wisdom in both political discourse and the academy holds that America's mid-century liberal state retreated before the advance of the market and its advocates from the mid-1970s onwards. Rooted in the fast-growing Sunbelt, the conservative political movement took over the Republican Party and defined itself in intellectual terms through a "free-market" economic ideology, hostility to "big government," and support for "traditional" social and cultural values. These features constituted neoliberalism's public philosophy. Fiscal crises and energy shocks that battered the U.S. economy in the 1970s furnished the conservative movement with preconditions necessary for extending its power from the GOP to the American political system writ large. Ronald Reagan's election to the presidency in 1980 marked the conservative movement's, and its neoliberal public philosophy's, rise to power.

This conventional wisdom further suggests that President Reagan's neoliberal departures in public policy, governance, and public philosophy were fully consolidated into an "order" only in the 1990s. With the Cold War over, Soviet Communism was spent as a countervailing ideological force. The 1990s then unleashed the animal spirits of the neoliberal order: globalization, financialization, the concentration of mass employment in lower-paid service sectors, and the increasing redistribution of wealth into the hands of elites. Most gallingly for many interpreters of this new order, the consolidation was accomplished from the center-left. Sunbelt moderates Bill Clinton and Al Gore folded neoliberal precepts into their own policies and rhetoric, most (in)famously in the form of the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) and 1996 welfare reform. Shaping all of these political, economic, and social developments were powerful currents of technological innovation.

Perhaps the neoliberal order is very real and still with us. But in recent years, U.S. historians have started to complicate this potent narrative, reimagining recent political history in the context of new threats to the order: the parallel populisms of the MAGA New Right and democratic socialist Left. Complex new interpretations are emerging that map the outer bounds of American politics during the supposed ascent of the neoliberal order between the 1970s and 1990s, probe the weaknesses and

contradictions of that era's apparent free-market consensus, and locate origins of the 21st-century populist counterrevolution in the fabled "end of history" decades earlier.

Beyond the Neoliberal Order: Reimagining the Recent History of the United States will convene scholars of both conservatism and liberalism who are at work crafting these new narratives. Cosponsored by the **Kinder Institute on Constitutional Democracy** (University of Missouri) and the **Ronald Reagan Presidential Foundation and Institute**, our conference seeks participants who study conservatism and liberalism broadly construed. We are interested in the development of political philosophies and ideas, party politics and movements outside of the formal political system, public policy and governance, and the economy. Participants will be researching the history of the U.S. since 1968, and we welcome scholars who engage with present-day politics, whether in academic or public-facing work.

The priority of *Beyond the Neoliberal Order* is to reimagine the narrative of free-market consensus and bring it into touch with present trends and realities. What alternatives were offered or practiced in response to the rise of the neoliberal order? What are some of the conventional interpretation's blind spots and gaps? Before the mid-2010s, why did scholars of the neoliberal order fail to foresee the rise of today's parallel populisms? The MAGA New Right at least benefitted from Tea Party voices crying in the pre-2016 wilderness; in contrast, the Left's resurgence caught both politicians and scholars of U.S. politics by surprise. Are there alternative narratives and models that better account for these developments?

Some recent scholarship even calls the *historical* hegemony of the neoliberal order into question, pointing out, for example, tensions within President Reagan's GOP coalition or liberal-left interest in international "varieties of capitalism" during the 1980s. Perhaps there was no real order after all: How does growing polarization in the 1990s relate to the purported bipartisan neoliberal policy consensus? Topics like court politics, news media, and the institutional rewiring of both major parties seem to provide data points for a grand narrative stressing polarization rather than a cross-partisan neoliberal order. And yet, should scholars of polarization *also* reexamine this competing narrative in view of commonalities, both affective and substantive, between our era's parallel populisms?

Beyond the Neoliberal Order looks to open out the field of recent political history topically and regionally as well as interpretively. How did politics and policymaking at regional, state, and local levels vary or diverge from national developments? Scholars of "neoliberalism" have most neatly fit this framework over regulatory, criminal justice, trade, and welfare policies. What does new scholarship have to say about arenas such as foreign policy, religion, technology, and public administration?

This conference will provide scholars of late 20th- and 21st -century politics with a forum to share, discuss, and refine new work. We invite participants from disciplines such as political science, economics, and sociology, as well as history. The conference aims to generate wide-ranging, publicly engaged discussion that represents a diversity of intellectual perspectives.

Beyond the Neoliberal Order will convene at the University of Missouri's Kinder Institute on Constitutional Democracy in Columbia, MO, on **October 15-16, 2027**. We invite submissions that either focus on liberalism and the Democratic Party or analyze the Left and Right in comparative perspective. Members of the Reagan Institute's History of Conservatism Working Group will act as discussants. Attendees at the Kinder Institute's conference are also invited to the Reagan Institute's biennial Age of Reagan Conference, for which attendees' costs will be covered. The Age of Reagan

Conference will take place at the Ronald Reagan Presidential Library in Simi Valley, CA, on **August 3-5, 2027**. There, the History of Conservatism Working Group will present its work reassessing and reimagining the legacy of Reagan-era conservatism.

Please submit one-page abstracts, along with an academic CV, to the conference convener, Henry M. J. Tonks, Postdoctoral Fellow at the Reagan Institute at htonks@reaganfoundation.org, no later than **February 22, 2027**. For further information, please contact Henry Tonks; Jeffrey L. Pasley, Kinder Institute Chair in Early American History at the University of Missouri (pasleyj@missouri.edu); or Geoffrey M. Kabaservice, Vice President of Political Studies at the Niskanen Center (gkabaservice@niskanencenter.org).