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The Long Crisis: New York City and the Path to Neoliberalism
by Benjamin Holtzman (review)

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nations' decision to raise their oil prices by 70 percent and the subsequent oil embargo against the United States intended to undermine its support for Israel in the Arab-Israeli conflict. Wight's petrodollar analysis gets going in the third chapter on US government efforts to, in the words of Henry Kissinger, "soak up [Saudi] dough" by pursuing "petrodollar interdependence" (84) between the two nations. Subsequent chapters cover the role of petrodollars in US relations with the MENA, including Egypt, the Iranian Revolution and its aftermath, the advent of the Carter Doctrine, and efforts by various MENA nations to either resist or integrate themselves into the US-led petrodollar order, all with varying degrees of success.

Oil Money is a well-researched study that contributes significantly to our understanding of the role that the financial dynamics of oil played in shaping the projection of US power abroad. The economic structures and incentives of petrodollars informed and shifted how the United States and MENA nations related to each other. But, as the use of arms sales agreements to absorb petrodollars demonstrates, those new relations also intensified regional violence, inequality, and unaccountable state power. Although Wight admirably attempts to integrate "cultural narratives" (7) into his account, particularly from Arab and Iranian sources, the book's analyses of popular films and other sources do not always add significantly to its larger argument. Nevertheless, Wight ultimately succeeds in demonstrating the important role that the energy crisis and subsequent petrodollar flows played in remaking the international order. He shows how the United States emerged a winner—with new allies, lower oil prices, and the further expansion of capitalism—but at the cost of new enemies and conflicts that continue to shape the world today.

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By the mid-1960s, New York City was no longer a pleasant place to live. Gritty, grimy, often dangerous—the features that made the city a theater of dreams for young bohemians made it a nightmare for everyone else. Decaying infrastructure, abandoned and burned-out buildings, refuse-strewn parks, street crime, rats; at nearly every turn, the city government seemed incapable of meeting the long crisis. New Yorkers, though, proved resilient. They organized. They took action. They experimented, doing for themselves what government could not. They transformed their neighborhoods and their city—and through this, they reconstructed both expectations of urban governance and the mechanisms through which it was achieved. New Yorkers turned, as so many did during the 1970s, to the private sector and to the market. As Benjamin Holtzman writes in *The Long Crisis*, "collectively, these experiments facilitated a process of marketization—a term that refers to the city's greater reliance on the private sector and market rather than on traditional mid-century institutions of urban liberal governance" (3). New York City, a leading bastion of midcentury liberalism, became the vanguard for neoliberalism. Mayor Rudy Giuliani sat on Robert Wagner's throne.

Scholars interested in the neoliberal turn have long looked to New York City. Its fiscal crisis in the early 1970s punctuated the breakdown of postwar liberalism's limitless ambitions. The city's rebirth as the global command center of relentless finance and flexible accumulation set the pace for the next era.

In *The Long Crisis*, Holtzman reframes this story by emphasizing that neoliberalism developed not only as a top-down project imposed by elites but also as the unintended consequence of grassroots mobilization to improve city life. Two sets of actors stand out. First, city-dwellers organized to meet urban challenges around housing and public space, often adopting entrepreneurial, quasi-public structures to achieve their goals. Second, New York City's liberal mayors, beginning with John Lindsay (1966–1973) and continuing to Abraham Beame (1974–1977), promoted nongovernmental solutions as the city struggled through economic decline, diminished federal support, and enduring racial tensions. A third group sat offstage: economic elites and promarket reformers. They waited to capitalize on the urban crisis. By the late 1970s, civic experiments in nongovernmental governance opened the door to more aggressive privatization and affluent development, championed by Ed Koch (1978–1989). Ultimately, Holtzman concludes, "though the residents behind" New York City's civic experiments "were not usually driven by ideological adherence to free-market principles, their actions initiated and expanded the role of private actors and the private sector in addressing concerns that had typically been served by government" (236).

Holtzman develops this story of transformation over six chapters, which examine different crises in the city's lived environment and the nongovernment solutions city residents developed. The first two chapters center on housing, looking first at urban homesteading as a solution to disinvestment and building abandonment and then at the conflict between rent stabilization and co-op conversion. The next two chapters turn to public space, focusing first on grassroots efforts to revitalize the city's parks and then on community and business efforts to stop crime through citizen patrols and private security officers. In the final two chapters, the book considers the postfiscal-crisis city, first by showing the ways that mayors used tax incentives to lure affluent real estate development and then by examining the epidemic of homelessness that simultaneously resulted from and seemed to threaten soaring property values.

In many of these chapters, Holtzman traces a similar pattern. Confronting a problem city officials could not or would not solve, New Yorkers organized and pursued experimental solutions. In doing so, the nongovernmental organizations they formed took on governance functions. City leaders, in turn, embraced these activities, seeking to achieve public goals with minimal public investment. For example, in Chapter 1, tenants of owner-abandoned buildings formed associations, such as the Renegades and the Urban Homesteading Assistance Board, to take over, renovate, and redevelop these properties. Over time, urban homesteading institutions became extensive landlords, and city government encouraged them to provide housing management, training, and rehabilitation services in exchange for grant funding. Likewise, in Chapter 3, neighborhood groups initially formed to care for littered and deteriorating parks. The city embraced public participation, tying city park funding to local civic engagement.

Eventually, in New York City's most prominent parks—Central, Bryant, and Madison Square—the city ceded management authority to nongovernmental initiatives, like the Bryant Park Restoration Corporation, funded by businesses and private donations. What once was public now was private, managed not for general well-being but for the specific interests of the rich and powerful.

The Long Crisis is well researched and clearly written. In his acknowledgments, Holtzman thanks the "organizations that welcomed me into their workspaces to rummage through their file cabinets, storage units, and basements" (x). This rummaging rewards readers with a rich tapestry of institutions and grassroots activists. In this sense, the book succeeds in its effort to move between different sections and socio-economic strata within the city, documenting large-scale change through dense, local experience. Holtzman is also careful to draw connections between New York City and other U.S. cities, suggesting that the transformations he documents were common among once-liberal metropolises.

Still, for all this, the historiographic stakes of the book remain ambiguous. In its framing, *The Long Crisis* is tragic. It documents the lamentable decline of "traditional mid-century institutions of urban liberal governance" and their replacement by "the private sector and market" (3). The concluding chapter on homelessness drives the point home. Yet, a different reading might reveal continuity rather than transformation (and declension). Liberal governance, even at its most state-centric and ambitious, was always a public-private, associational project. Liberals fostered markets. They relied on private institutions, like labor unions, to promote social well-being. The ambiguity may lie in language. Holtzman faithfully couples the "private sector and market" (3). But many of the book's "private sector" institutions might be better classed as "civil society" or—as in the United Kingdom—"third sector." Many are forms of small-*g* government. In this light, *The Long Crisis* might reveal the resilience of "the associational state" across the rise and fall of the New Deal Order in both its civic spiritedness and its Faustian bargain with social inequality.

Or, for readers who are committed to a New Deal Order framework of active and robust government, we need to know why the city could not address the chronic problems Holtzman documents. Why were the "traditional mid-century institutions of urban liberal governance" (3) so weak? The problem seems to have been money, or the lack of it. The city's declining tax base was part of this equation; its inability—as evident in the fiscal crisis—to raise limitless money in bond markets was another part. In this sense, the power of so-called traditional midcentury institutions was already constrained by the private sector (investors) and the (bond) market—at least after 1954, when the city returned to the market after selling bonds exclusively to city pension funds since 1945. Private financiers held a fiscal veto—that they only exercised it in the 1970s and remade the city in its wake should not obscure their enduring authority. *The Long Crisis*, in name and framing, perhaps emphasizes how brief the liberal exception was, if it was exceptional at all.

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