

CRISIS, CONFLICT, AND CONSUMPTION: CASE STUDIES OF THE POLITICS
AND CULTURE OF NEOLIBERALIZATION IN URBAN RESPONSES TO GLOBAL
ECONOMIC TRANSFORMATIONS

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ABSTRACT

Urbanization in the United States since the 1980s has proceeded in an environment dominated by neoliberal policy. With provisions including federal devolution that places the burden of service provision at the local level, privatization, labor discipline, and selective laissez-faire governance, neoliberalization has accelerated the transformation of the U.S. economy through deindustrialization and the growth in cities of constituent industries of spatial commodification like real-estate and tourism. But neoliberalization has been unevenly implemented in cities with variation constituted largely by local culture. In three distinct articles I analyze the links between global, national, and local processes of neoliberalization and examine how these are shaped by local culture, which among other factors may constitute varying levels of acceptance of or resistance to neoliberalism. The first article uses these analytic constructs to explain variation in urban concentrations of foreclosures during the U.S. housing market collapse beginning in 2007. I demonstrate that the crisis has been most severe and sustained in cities which most closely adhere to neoliberal principles and less so in cities where resistance to neoliberalization has been relatively greater. The second article is a case study which relies on these constructs to explain the nature of urban contestation over place-branding and development projects in Branson, a small tourist city in Southwest Missouri. Finally, the third article reveals contradictions in and examines how brand messaging and the built-environment in Branson are constructed by political elites to stimulate consumption and enhance profit.