

***Constructions of Neoliberal Reason* by Jamie Peck.  
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**Reviewer:** Dave McAllister<sup>1</sup>

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I have always held an ambivalence about the neoliberal message, I must admit, and not because of its conservative project or fastidious belief in market-as-solution to every problem. Rather, my ambivalence is toward the calls to decrease and, indeed, decapitate government. Neoliberals provide a modern-day incarnation of Thoreau's motto, "that government is best which governs not at all." Thoreau envisioned an anarchic society governed by moral responsibility and called for individuals to organically disavow and disassociate from the power structure that was engaged in an imperialistic war in Mexico and that upheld the institution of slavery. The key for Thoreau was not the message but the individual's action; Thoreau's advocacy was not about imposing his concept of morality on the country, or his desire to change government to his own image. Rather, he wished "to refuse allegiance to the State, to withdraw and stand aloof from it effectually."<sup>2</sup>

As Jamie Peck demonstrates in *Constructions of Neoliberal Reason*, despite the rhetoric, the neoliberal project has in contrast always been about gaining power to remake the State rather than destroy it. This is the central paradox of neoliberalism: "the *unattainability* of its fundamental goal – frictionless [stateless] market rule" (16). At the same time as the

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<sup>1</sup> **Dave McAllister** is an instructor in the History Department at Ursinus College. He is also an adjunct in the Departments of History and African-American Studies at the College of New Jersey. In his spare time, he teaches the topic of social justice to his four boys.

<sup>2</sup> Joseph Wood Krutch (ed.), *Walden and Other Writings by Henry David Thoreau* (New York: Bantam Books), 100.