

Drawing New Maps to the Future

Parallels exist between the movement of bodies globally in the search for freedom and belonging, and the migratory nature of Black life within the borders of the U.S.

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a review of

The Nation on No Map: Black Anarchism and Abolition by William C. Anderson, Saidiya Hartman (Foreword), Lorenzo Kom'boa Ervin (Afterword). AK Press 2021

As a Black diasporic female academic and activist, it isn't so easy to encounter the intersectionality of the struggles I encounter reflected in many academic or anarchist discussions.

Often, writings by both Black and white authors jump straight into a collaborative vision of the future without some attendance to the challenges of such transitions that remain rooted in the divisions around color, gender, class, and state-based identity that are upheld by a casual and omnipresent neo-liberal ideology.

There is also a tendency to mythologize a straight line from the oppression faced by Black people across the globe, to an automatic refusal on behalf of Black people that there is any benefit or boon to revanchist capitalism or reformist politics.

However, just as with any group, Blackness is not monolithic, and the power of white supremacist and colonized ideology to infect even those who consider themselves most radical is an ever-present and well documented reality. It is not an understanding that is often spoken of in public, but it is one which may be whispered in hushed tones in movement spaces, and that accompanies fears about "dividing Black people" if mentioned too loudly.

But it is an understanding that we must begin to confront if any of us truly hope for a future that doesn't fold back in upon its treacherous past. Truly then, any serious examination of a practical anarchism that doesn't romanticize history or the present must include some treatment of how it is that all groups, even Black groups, organize both through and past the violent essentialism of racialized, misogynistic, and anti-immigrant narratives and practices which have produced the economic, social, and societal outcomes which continue to harm and terrorize Black people, women, and those labeled foreigners.

Anderson's book foregrounds this perspective as foundational to liberatory work, and it's long overdue.

Serving almost as an update to Frantz Fanon's *The Wretched of the Earth*, a writing which itself remains relevant today as the term Decolonization enters buzzword status, *The Nation on No Map* functions much like a primer for Black anarchism.

Anderson does an excellent job of centering the need for historical truth-telling as a way to expose oft-ignored fallacies within Black organizing, bridge connections between historical Black activism and the frequently unnamed presence of anarchist ideology in Black movement spaces, and highlight the need to refresh the goals of Black coalition building between diasporic groups and across anarchist spaces.

One of Anderson's most compelling arguments as he advocates for an active and inclusive Black anarchist tradition is his definition of Black existence as being inherently anti-State given that it is designed to be an instrument of their subjugation. Anderson provides a critical outline for the ways in which notions of citizenship, who belongs

within and outside of Western borders, and who deserves to have a seat at the decision-making table are inherently linked to the enduring traumas of Black and Brown rejection, disunity, displacement, and danger.

He notes, “To be a citizen has meant to be white and like whiteness, citizenship itself is an invention that is of no use to us here. It has done much more harm than good. Anything that affords some people more rights than others based on borders, race, or class should be abolished. It has no redeeming quality for Black people and fighting to be recognized by or within it means seeking to be embraced by something that has our rejection, if not extermination, built into its very definition.”

In this way, by linking the experiences of those who are minoritized, marginalized, and commodified through State sanctioned dogma, Anderson is able to highlight the parallels that exist between the movement of bodies globally in the search for freedom and belonging, and the migratory nature of Black life within the borders of the U.S. as whole communities of people are time and again pushed out or rendered invisible through gentrification, incarceration, and violent forced assimilation.

In addition to this important work of decentering nationality as the prime source for liberation, Anderson’s work also provides an intentionally inclusive review of Black and Brown authors who have for years thought deeply about liberatory practices like those espoused in anarchism, or what Anderson at times deems, intercommunalism.

These author/activists help him paint a picture which firmly centers Black activism within the sphere of anarchism while underscoring the very issues which necessitate a Black anarchist space that must reside outside of, even if alongside, traditionally white led anarchist milieus.

Furthermore, for anyone attempting to understand how State based co-optation of movements for change leads to the manipulation, absorption, and/or dilution of real and potential threats to its existence, Anderson’s book is a must-read.

With frightening numbers of Black people dying due to Covid-19 (among other viruses that have long held reigns of terror over Black lives), the ever-increasing absurdity of the wealth chasms between those doing the work and those manipulating the workers, global climate disasters on the rise, trade wars and military wars constantly threatening our safety, and the ever expanding non-profit industrial complex, the time is ripe for unabashed and unafraid examination of our commonly held yet not so popularly challenged beliefs.

There is a real need for serious and transparent scholarship about the kinds of ideologies, revisionist histories, and bloated narratives that are holding us back and those that advance true interconnectedness as we attempt to survive and so do with everyone’s humanity in mind. Anderson’s book does just this, without pretension, without mincing words, and without apology.

Megan Douglass is the Digital Director at For Our Future MI, the Managing Editor of the Detroit-based social justice magazine *River-wise*, an applied anthropologist pursuing her Ph.D. at Wayne State University with a focus on decolonized methodologies and sustainable movement building, a mother, and a lifelong advocate for the human rights of all minoritized peoples. Her favorite sayings are “if you aren’t angry, you aren’t paying attention,” and “another future isn’t just possible, it’s already happening.”

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