Trusting Kids & Rewilding Humanity

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a review of

Trust Kids! Stories on Youth Autonomy and Confronting Adult Supremacy, Carla Bergman, Editor. AK Press, 2022

When youth liberation comes to mind, typically one's first reaction involves hierarchical catastrophizing—*if not for the school system, who would prepare youth for the workplace? If not for nuclear families, who would prepare youth to be law-abiding citizens?* And, if one is an anarchist, it may instead involve a few near-universal yet vague points of reference. In social movements, many of us have heard of homeschooling or unschooling, read the occasional thinkpiece on family abolition, shouted "protect trans kids" in sync with a large group of cis adults at a protest.

Youth liberation is far-off, blurry, defined by ideals that work well After The Revolution without material guidance on how to implement them. However, in this recent anthology, youth liberation (and its intersection with queer liberation) is framed with a startling immediacy. In *Trust Kids!* Carla Joy Bergman posits that, rather than a slew of policy-based afterthoughts, youth liberation comes down to the basic principle of autonomous trust.

Trust Kids! is a collaboration between caregivers, educators, youth, and community organizers, bringing together essays, interviews, and poetry on the practice of youth liberation. Bergman describes the central themes as "conversations about the ways that children can be included, loved, and cared for in more generative and just ways," underscoring the book's viewpoint that youth liberation is a collective project.

Rather than blaming youth for ageism or denying everyone's need for care, *Trust Kids!* is fundamentally a project about what it means to build better mutual aid networks. The contributing authors in this anthology not only advocate against ageism, but also dream of communities that can provide educational resources and support youth without any sense of hierarchical coercion.

After its beautifully written introduction by Matt Hern, the text begins with a radically hopeful poem: "When the hem is ripped out we'll see the borders were never real / We're childing the world from the power that adults wield."

This frames reality as if youth liberation is already happening, an active and inclusive process—and shortly afterwards, an interview with a trans young adult takes center stage. Author Enfys Craft suggests that trans autonomy looks like "getting to do what we want with our bodies, how we want to do it," thus carrying on the idea of childing the world-creating spaces in which individuals have power over themselves without a need to engage with hierarchy. Following that, Ulliam Joy Bergman's essay contains one of the most memorable quotes in the text: from their nine-year-old self, a declaration that "I don't need to be empowered by adults; I need them to stop having power over me."

This statement—as well as the following essays on unschooling and alternative schools, the inequity inherent in high school, and the importance of culture in youth liberation, encapsulates the book's cen-

tral thesis that, rather than adult posturing and virtue signaling, youth liberation is most effective as a fundamental disruption to the societal structure of age-based power.

Even the format of the book, not a collection of platitudes by teachers and parents, but an active conversation with youth, drives home this point. Where the #OwnVoices movement championed authentic and accurate representation in the realm of fiction, *Trust Kids!* does the same in the conversation about youth liberation, inspiring and challenging readers to listen directly to the needs and experiences of youth.

Initially the title of the book, "Solidarity Begins At Home" remains the title of a pivotal essay, with Bergman reminding readers that "the relationships we are in must be deeply respectful and mutually beneficial to all involved," including caregiving relationships between adults and youth. Making age gloriously irrelevant, this sentiment captures the core of the anarchist project and youth liberation.

The collection goes on to advocate the ethic of "childing the world," making every space accessible for youth with the knowledge that, in the spirit of universal design, this makes the world a more liberatory place for everyone of every age. Overall, this project not only explains and justifies youth liberation in the ways that some adults need, but universalizes it, making it less about identity and more about the ethic of care, autonomy, and accessibility that must underscore all dynamics, both under anarchy and in the intergenerational, trusting spaces that prefigure it.

Not just for kids, teens, and those in community with them, but for everyone who longs for a more caring, anarchic society, *Trust Kids!* is a beautiful and inspiring read.

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