

Book Review Symposium

Clyde Woods, *Development Drowned and Reborn: The Blues and Bourbon Restorations in Post-Katrina New Orleans* (eds J T Camp and L Pulido), Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2017. ISBN: 978-0-8203-5092-9 (paper); ISBN: 978-0-8203-5090-5 (ebook)

Development Drowned and Reborn, written by Clyde Woods and posthumously edited by Jordan T. Camp and Laura Pulido, contains the rich writing and stylistic tone, the vivid detail, and the remarkable analysis that Woods has gifted us with in all his work. It is perhaps unimaginative to begin by commenting on the beauty of Woods' writing, and yet I feel compelled to do so. This is both because I am so often struck by the power, clarity, and elegance of his phrasing and analysis, but more importantly because Woods' writing gives us new frameworks and vocabularies through which to make sense of the world.

Development Drowned and Reborn offers a uniquely comprehensive account of the historical development and racial geographies of New Orleans before and after Katrina: we come to understand New Orleans as an international port city and an epicenter of American slavery, as an imperial city central to projects of colonization, as the center of the Black freedom struggle and the birthplace of the Blues tradition. Woods disrupts narratives of history that obscure Black rebellion and the dialectic of struggle in shaping patterns of regional development and the racial and economic structure of the city. With rich, layered detail, Woods documents Black life, and the diverse and intersecting identities and religious and cultural traditions that came together in New Orleans to give rise to the Blues as a praxis, as a social justice effort underpinned by the notion of sustainable development, and as "a working class knowledge system" (p.35).

Beyond its significant theoretical implications, which I turn to momentarily, the book's far-reaching, deep history is one of its most striking qualities. Woods' examination spans over two centuries of social and political-economic development. He presents a thorough accounting of New Orleans' urban structure, mapping violent displacement, resettlement, and patterns of movement, flows of capital and shifting hierarchies of race and class, and regional and institutional power structures. His account is extremely attentive to social difference, illuminating the intersections of race, gender, and class, the centrality of gendered violence in racial capitalist projects, and the complexities – and absolute necessity – of multiracial, working-class solidarities.

In fact, the book demands a rethinking of the temporalities, geographies, and origins of some of the most pressing issues we face as a society, including the rise of the neoliberal carceral state and environmental disaster. His analysis reveals the significance of the region's power blocs and the role of plantation politics in influencing, even motivating, US and global neoliberalisms. Woods positions New Orleans not just as the center of the Blues movement and African American culture, but also as a driving force in US economic and political development. He demonstrates how “starve the beast” policies (p.262), or tax cuts designed to force sharp cuts in the public sector, created a state legacy of tax and fiscal institutions that blocked public expenditures, produced abandonment, and suppressed social movements. These policies, in turn, powerfully informed neoliberal strategies and policy development.

As Camp and Pulido note in their conclusion, Woods' analysis is astoundingly, almost eerily, prescient, offering remarkable insight into contemporary crises of racial capitalism and policing, the rise of Black Lives Matter movement, and teacher strikes over “starve the beast” policies that have gutted public education. He helps us to understand not just the historical, political, economic and racial contexts producing these crises but also the possibilities for socially just futures. For all that the book illuminates racial and state violence, Woods consistently – unswervingly – reminds us of the

dialectics of struggle defining capitalist development and the unfulfilled agenda for reconstruction. With the urgency of Woods' analysis in mind, I'd like to turn to some of the key theoretical insights that I draw from *Development Drowned and Reborn*, focusing especially on his interventions on segregation and abandonment, the carceral state, social scientific knowledge production about race and poverty, and the notion of disaster.

Segregation and Abandonment

Woods' examination of the Second Reconstruction spans three chapters (6, 7, and 8) and includes analysis of reconfigurations associated with urban renewal, the War on Poverty, and challenges to segregationist institutions from 1965 and 1977, the spatialized and racialized patterns of economic crisis and (dis)investment that concentrated poor communities of color in flood-prone areas between 1977 and 2005, and, what he terms, the New Urban Crisis from 2005 onward. This detailed inquiry provides a powerful framework through which to make sense of past urban freedom struggles and contemporary crises in policing and segregation across US cities. He illuminates how federal housing policy, as "a national project of racial ghettoization" (p.151), combined with urban renewal and suburbanization to "seal" low income Black communities in concrete (p.202). He underscores the significance of the built environment, produced through Bourbon-bloc techniques of urban planning and segregated industrial investment, in sustaining racial and class hierarchies and containing Blues mobilizations. Through these processes, "[w]hite-flight suburbs came to dominate regional politics, secured massive subsidies at all levels of government, and extracted massive subsidies from enclosed Black communities while simultaneously investing incomes earned in, and on, the city through the creation of new segregated spaces" (p.206). Later, he argues, impoverished Black neighborhoods were further marginalized through subsequent urban revitalization agendas, gentrification, and massive investments in infrastructural projects and sports and entertainment centers. Communities "sealed by concrete" received no such

investment and physical fortifications in the urban environment worked to limit the Blues Agenda¹. What I find so instructive here is Woods' insistence that we understand urban segregation not just in terms of the relational production of white wealth and propertied power and the impoverishment of working class communities, but also as a crucial means through which to fracture and delimit social movements and broader race-class solidarities.

The Carceral State

In tracing the unfinished project of radical reconstruction, Woods examines how policing and the militarization of racial relations infused planning approaches. With the decline of *de jure* practices of segregation, shifts in the regional economy and neoplantation planning and policies further concentrated wealth and poverty and reinforced *de facto* segregation. Police violence supplanted mob violence as a means to harden boundaries of racialized and classed segregation and to contain the Blues agenda. He provides a piercing illustration of the role of state violence and police brutality in projects of racial management, demonstrating not their uniqueness or exceptionality, but rather their fundamental, everyday role in a system of racial capitalism. Woods offers an important corrective to analyses of policing as newly militarized to instead illustrate the long history of police brutality and the ongoing surveillance of poor Black and Brown communities to sustain racialized urban enclosures.

Social Scientific Knowledge Production

Development Drowned and Reborn offers a penetrating critique of social science scholarship on race and poverty that is as crucial and pressing today as ever. Racial enclosures and the rise of the carceral state in Louisiana and beyond, Woods contends,

¹ The Blues Agenda, grounded in Black, working-class ways of knowing and Black artistic and political expression, refers to Black and working class movements against racism, capitalism, and imperialism (see Camp and Pulido's [2017] introduction to *Development Drowned and Reborn*, "The Dialectics of Bourbonism and the Blues", for a more detailed discussion).

were made possible not just by neoplantation polices and efforts to securitize spatial divisions, but also through planning approaches and social science analyses of poverty and race that obscure the interconnections between race and class and pathologize abandoned and impoverished communities of color. He documents discursive shifts in scholarly vocabularies of racism, from a language of explicit racial inferiority to one emphasizing crime, poverty, deviance, and uncaring Black families. Documenting the rise of colorblind racism, he emphasizes that Bourbons² and their allies “understood perfectly that the new institution of American social science, with its theories of poverty, crime, and disease, was a glove that fit perfectly the racist theories of the post-Nazi, anticolonial, and Cold War global intellectual environment of the 1950s” (p.166). Woods condemns planners’ failure to account for race and planned abandonment. Rather, these factors have been “surgically excised from the discourses surrounding new planning movements” such as new urbanism, smart growth, and mixed-use developments (p.268), while planners, city leaders, and developers continue to focus on moral failings of the Black community. With this critique, we might also challenge the uncritical deployment of notions of public safety within recent planning movements, which have overwhelmingly focused on crime reduction and policing – and the expansion of the carceral state –rather than on environmental and public health crises (such as lead-poisoned water), housing conditions and access, or other “unsafe” structural dynamics that create significant harm in low-income communities.

Disaster

Woods invites us to unsettle our conceptualizations of disaster. For example, he refers to poverty as a “human made disaster” (p.242), urging us to understand it as actively produced. He insists on using the word “impoverishment” throughout the book to call

² Woods’ uses the terms Bourbons to refer to regional blocs or growth coalitions working to consolidate wealth and power and to suppress redistributive agendas (again see Camp and Pulido’s [2017] introduction to *Development Drowned and Reborn* for a fuller discussion).

attention the ways poverty is dynamically constructed and remade, and to “encourage examination of the disastrous choices that were made to create community, racial, class, and gender destitution” (p.242). Moreover, Woods rejects considerations of Katrina that emphasize the event as singular and sudden. His analysis further complicates examinations of “disaster capitalism” that focus primarily on a calamitous event and subsequent neoliberal rebuilding. Instead, his framework requires that we view Katrina through histories and layers of devastation wrought by racial capitalist crisis and reconfiguration.

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Development Drowned and Reborn is an extraordinary book and, to my mind, Clyde Woods’ work represents the finest example of the kind of scholarship we can aspire to produce as geographers in its synthesis of the dialectics of struggle and the striated disasters of racial capitalism and environmental crisis. With great respect and humble admiration, I want to thank Jordan and Laura for being the necessary “midwives”, as they call themselves, to bring this book into the world. We are grateful.

Reference

Camp J T and Pulido L (2017) Introduction: The dialectics of Bourbonism and the Blues. In C Woods *Development Drowned and Reborn: The Blues and Bourbon Restorations in Post-Katrina New Orleans* (eds J T Camp and L Pulido) (ppxxi-xxix). Athens: University of Georgia Press

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