

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)

This conversation was occasioned by the posthumous publication of Clyde Woods' book, Development Drowned and Reborn: The Blues and Bourbon Restorations in Post-Katrina New Orleans, co-edited by Jordan T. Camp and Laura Pulido and published in 2017 by the University of Georgia Press. It took place as part of a session organized by Nik Heynen at the 2018 annual meeting of the American Association of Geographers in New Orleans, Louisiana, which featured commentaries from Anne Bond, Treva Ellison, and Willie Wright. Transcripts of the conversation have been edited and revised for publication.

Laura Pulido: I am so happy! This is very celebratory and it feels appropriate that we are here in a room full of people with great energy. One of the things that we decided to do was have a conversation between the two of us. We thought you all might be interested in hearing about our process of completing Clyde's book, but we also thought that for us as a team working on this, it would allow us to process our experience and get a bit of closure. I am very thankful to be here today.

Jordan T. Camp: Good afternoon. I am really excited. I want to thank Nik Heynen for organizing this session. He has been a champion for this book throughout, and helped us see it through. [Audience applause] I should also say it has been a joy to work with the University of Georgia Press and the "Geographies of Justice and Social Transformation" series. Thank you to

Treva, and Anne, and Willie for these amazing comments. I will be thinking about them for a long time.

It is especially great to be able to sit down with Laura to talk about this book. We worked on it together for about five years. In those five years I went between five universities. They would run me out of town at the end of the year, and I would have to go somewhere else. [Audience laughter] In that time I also got the opportunity to know Laura better. This is the first time that I have seen her since we finished the book. It is really powerful to sit down together.

We thought we might reflect on the process of producing a posthumous publication for Clyde, who was a mentor of mine, a dear friend of Laura's, and someone we both really loved. Let me begin with the first question: What did you think when Clyde asked you to finish the book? And why did you think it was important?

Pulido: Clyde first asked me to do it when he was in a hospital bed in Santa Barbara. It was a good day, he was talking. He was also in a state of denial. The way that he asked me was: "Okay, if anything ever happens to me, I want you to finish the New Orleans book. It's in a thumb drive in a drawer in my desk." What the hell is that? I mean, my friend is dying and so, I say "yes." Right? I say this for two reasons. First and foremost, because he was my friend, and he asked me to do this. And he may not have realized it, but I knew he was dying, and his days were very limited. But the second reason I agreed is because I knew he had been working on this for a very long time. I knew he was deeply committed to this project and that he had something very important to say.

I have to tell you, to be perfectly honest, I did not always believe Clyde's theories about how the world works. I did not always appreciate what he had to say about the state and how distinctive and important it was. We met on our first day of graduate school at UCLA and we were good friends the entire time. I heard endlessly from him about Mississippi and the South. Clyde gave me his perspective on the US racial state from the very first day I met him. When I actually read his dissertation, it was kind of like: "Well, I know this. I've been hearing it for the



last six or seven years.” But this also reflected the fact that I *didn't* understand. I had a very limited knowledge of southern history, slavery, political economy, the racial state and conspiracy theories (which Clyde was fond of). I did very different work in terms of environmental history. Our work intersected, certainly, in many ways. But I did not understand the larger literature(s) that he was engaging with and reacting to. I could not understand how it was a very unique project in that way. And so, it was actually partly through graduate school and through the first book that I got to understand him better as a scholar. I have come to respect him in a new way... it's not that I disrespected him, but I did not fully appreciate the depth and significance of what he was doing and its importance. I knew that there was something urgent in this book, even though I had not yet read it. So, that's why I knew it had to be completed.

What did you think when I first asked you to work with me on this?

Camp: I was really honored because you, Laura, are a tremendous scholar that I have been really influenced by. That was the first thing. Does everyone know she was selected to receive the 2018 Harold M. Rose Award for Anti-Racism Research and Practice from the AAG? [Audience applause] The second thing is I had worked with Clyde at the University of California, Santa Barbara, where I earned my Ph.D. He was a member of my dissertation committee, and we had worked on a number of collaborative projects about struggles in post-Katrina New Orleans, including a panel at the 2009 annual meeting of the American Studies Association (ASA) in Washington, D.C. with Shana Griffin, Brenda Marie Osbey, Sunni Patterson, and Kalamu ya Salaam. We thought it was important to try and intervene to show that, as Clyde argues so forcefully in the book, that Katrina was not a natural disaster. It was, as he put it, a *human-made* crisis.

Clyde worked fiercely. It was one thing I admired so much about him. It was like he never stopped. He was always at it. He had penned a number of pieces in places like the *American Quarterly*, the flagship journal of the American Studies Association, to intervene in debates. He had been talking to me about this new manuscript. So, when Laura said, “Can you

work on it?,” besides swallowing really hard, and thinking, “How am I going do this? I don’t have my first book out. I’m a lecturer. I make \$1,300 a month. How are we going pull this off?” I just said, “yes.” [Audience applause]

Clyde had a really distinct voice and a kind of power. Everywhere he went he reminded people about the importance of the working class and the Blues epistemology. He told me once: “My thing is the Blues epistemology. What’s your thing?” [Audience laughter] We wanted to make sure that his distinctive voice was represented, particularly because he was kind of unrelenting.

One of the things that Clyde would do as a mentor is say things like: “You know, that was pretty good, but that won’t get you run out the room.” [Audience laughter] And he was serious about it. Some people do not want to hear things like we were still dealing with a plantation-style capitalism, that New Orleans was the “Wall Street of the Confederacy,” and that it was an epicenter of finance, shipping, and trade. That this was a place that had seen the overthrow of Reconstruction, and that this reaction gave rise to the nastiness that we see all around us today. That there is a Southern variant of fascism in this city that we need to understand the roots of. He would not have been surprised about Trump. I have more to say about that, but the point is that Clyde had a distinctive voice. He impacted a lot of us. We all looked up to him. I wanted to collaborate with Laura to make sure that his voice and his intervention got out in the world, and that the world was able to study it.

Pulido: Thank you.

Camp: What about some of the challenges? Can you reflect on that?

Pulido: This was really hard. There wasn’t anything really easy about it. From the very beginning, I could not find the manuscript. [Audience laughter] There wasn’t a thumb drive I could ever find. We found an old hard copy. [Audience grumble]

Yeah, it was really hard from the very beginning. And then, the book wasn't as complete as I thought it might be. So then I was like: "Well, what do I do with it now?" This might have been before I asked you to work with me on it...I don't recall. I had initially envisioned a different book. I thought: "Okay, I will write a different book." I had imagined something more like a morphing of me and Clyde. And then I remember talking to a colleague of mine (John Carlos Rowe), who had actually completed a couple of posthumous books. He said: "Oh no, no, no. My strategy has been to simply complete the book given what you have." He said: "Just let it speak for itself. It's their work. It's not your work." I mean, I even wanted to add all these photographs and maps. He said: "Don't do that." We did add some maps and I think that was the right thing to do, but John was right. It was really hard. I remember just spending months sitting with it and thinking: "What do I do? Where's Clyde's voice? Where's my voice?" And then, once I worked out a plan, I had to contend with endless other challenges – hiring people, completing the citations, etc.

Another really hard thing was that there were just these continual challenges. I just kept running out of steam too. I had kids. I had a job...I was looking for a new job. I had all this other stuff going on. And, you know, Jordan, one of the things, if you know anything about me, is – and most of you probably don't – is that I don't work a lot with other people for a whole variety of different reasons: I do not want to have to be subject to other people in terms of their schedules and their needs; I do not want to let them down and disappoint them; and it is stressful for me. So, I was really, really very careful about who I asked to work with me on this. [Laura laughs] I knew that Jordan had really, really high scholarly standards. I knew he got the job done. I knew he knew Clyde in a way I did not. And he knew what Clyde was thinking about in terms of the New Orleans project. I think it worked out. I am very, very blessed and inspired in my choice to ask Jordan to work with me because there were many times when I got tired. And, I was like: "No, I do not want to go find the permissions for 30 song lyrics!" And Jordan would say: "Well, this is what Clyde wanted. This is the book that Clyde would want to do." And he



just kept going like that – pushing us onward. He would pick me up when I could not keep going on. I'm very thankful for that. But that was hard. It was just such a big project.

Camp: Some of the biggest challenges were, as Laura has already suggested, that we first began working with only a hard copy. We did not have a digital file! Right? How could you edit it? Our first task was to get it into some format that was editable. That was a process. The first half of the book was more complete, but the second half was still in process. Clyde had a really distinct methodology, argumentation, and engagement with a variety evidentiary sources. He had a unique way of understanding the world, and some of this could be seen in his notes to himself. We had to go through and we had to make some choices with the manuscript. That was really challenging.

The other thing is that we knew that readers would not be interested in this book because they want to read Laura and me. They could read our own books. They wanted to read Clyde Woods. So, the question was how do we stay faithful to his vision? Ultimately, we decided to go to some of those essays that he had been furiously writing. I mean, he was a really good essayist. He wrote for a moment. He was always trying to intervene. Clyde has these passages you remember so vividly. He would write, for example: “reports of the death of African American community life are truly premature” (Woods 2010a: 65), or “we see the old dry bones of both the Freedom Movement and the plantation oligarchy walking again” (Woods 2009a: 429). One could not possibly recreate his prose. It became a kind of surgical operation between those essays and what he had written in the manuscript. We tried to remain as faithful as possible to his distinct voice and intervention.

Then there were the permissions. Not only do you have to track down the range of permissions, but you have to figure out who owns the rights to “Memphis Minnie”? Well, it turns out a company does. How do you try to recreate the maps that Clyde was envisioning when he did not exactly say what they were? But he said he wanted a map. [Audience laughter] So, we had to find a map.



Pulido: That was my job!

Camp: Then, of course, when selecting maps in this period we had to consider and confront a whole imperial tradition of cartography. We had to make editorial decisions about those kinds of theoretical and political problems. There were a number of practical things to getting the book done, as well as honoring his voice, and honoring his argument.

I want to be really honest with you. One of my driving motives was that I had Clyde's voice in my head. Whether he said this to me or I just imagined it, I can not really tell you, but I would hear Clyde say to me, over and over again: "You've got to make me look good, man." [Audience laughter] Because, how many people knew Clyde? A few of you. He was always dressed to the nines. He had this distinctive sense of style. You know, he walked in a room like he owned it. And he wrote like that. He was trying to get run out of rooms. He was unrelenting in his critique of the plantocracy, of white supremacy, and in highlighting the unfinished business of freedom and labor struggles.

Clyde also wanted to take issue with Black elite and middle class leadership and highlight that there was an older labor-led tradition of freedom struggles. We both thought that the introduction needed to account for that and keep that in the forefront. But we tried to both stay faithful to the argument while also trying to make him look good, which meant ultimately that we made some kind of tough editorial choices about what to cut.

Laura and I were reluctant to add or cut much. At first, we had a foreword that was pretty short which explained some of our editorial decisions. But then we sent it out for review and, fortunately, we had really great reviewers, who had a big investment in the project. They said: "No. Actually, you're going have to situate this book, and the scholarship and explain some of the core concepts and categories. Define and describe them. Put them in dialogue with *Development Drowned and Reborn*. And then, you have to write a conclusion explaining its significance for labor and social movements in this current period, to bring it up to date."



It was at this point that we conceived and wrote the introduction and conclusion. That was challenging. It probably added another nine months to the project. But, ultimately, we thought it was important. We hope that it will make it a teachable text for people that might be coming to this work for the first time and might not have read his first book, *Development Arrested: The Blues and Plantation Power in the Mississippi Delta*, a new edition of which was recently republished by Verso with a foreword by Ruth Wilson Gilmore (see Woods 2017), or the volume he co-edited with Katherine McKittrick, *Black Geographies and the Politics of Place*, published by South End Press (McKittrick and Woods 2007), or the special issue, “In the Wake of Hurricane Katrina: New Paradigms and Social Visions,” of the *American Quarterly* (Woods 2009b) that he guest edited and was subsequently published by Johns Hopkins University Press (Woods 2010b). Those were challenges, because we were thinking, “This is the first thing a reader will see,” and we wanted to put forth his vision, the major intervention, and explain its significance for understanding New Orleans, Louisiana, the US, and global capitalism. That ultimately requires explaining some of these core concepts like “imperial Bourbonism.”

Pulido: We had to define that! [Audience laughter]

Camp: Yes. You know? You don’t necessarily see this concept commonly circulating in the scholarship. [Audience laughter] In some ways it made the task of situating it in the literature easier. But you have to go back to other work and do some elaboration. For example, *Development Arrested* explained some of his debts in the development of the concept of “Blues epistemology” to Richard Wright in the 1930s. We had to ask ourselves, how do we offer context critical to understanding what this intervention meant in that historical moment? What was the political tradition that concept developed in? Or take the concept of “regional blocs.” In the first book Clyde is in dialogue with the work of Marxist theorist Antonio Gramsci (Woods 2017: 26). That approach to analyzing blocs was really important for understanding how the political and

economic relations between finance capitalists, bankers, Bourbons, and the plantocracy came to shape the city and region. These were relationships of power. This was one of the really important things that I get from his work. He was talking about a *longue durée*, and not offering some kind of ahistorical or trans-historical framework for understanding the historical geography of racism and capitalism in New Orleans.

As much as Clyde was talking about Bourbonism, he was also insistent about a distinct project he called “neo-Bourbonism.” He saw that such projects were prone to legitimacy crises since they were always subject to resistance. He observed how the Black working class has long organized in multiracial alliances with Indigenous, Latinx, Asian American, and white working class communities. In this way Clyde was asking us to think about – as Dr. Martin Luther King did 50 years ago before he was murdered in Memphis on April 4, 1968 – what it means to call for a *general strike* in the epicenter of the plantocracy. That is an important political challenge for us now.

Pulido: I want to talk about Clyde and space, particularly regions and territoriality. Clyde was always interested in regions. When I first met him, he said: “I’m interested in regions, regional development.” He studied with Ed Soja, which, of course, made perfect sense. He was Mr. Region. He offered Regional Doctrine I and Regional Doctrine II at UCLA Urban Planning. I was interested in regions too. I did not quite understand what a region was early on, but I was really interested in that. I’m a geographer for some of those very reasons.

At the time, there was nobody, of course, doing any work like Clyde. I just can’t explain to you all what it was like in the 1980s within the field of geography. There certainly were people doing work on Black geography. I do not want to pretend like there weren’t. But the scope of that work, in terms of the political possibilities and imagination, was very different. And for very good reasons. We’re really talking about the first generation of Black scholars in Geography who were working, very much, within more traditional methods and frameworks and looking at questions about residential segregation and things like this. There is Bobby Wilson.

Now I think he's a really, really important person for us to think about and to keep in conversation. Of course, Clyde and Bobby were friends. I read Bobby Wilson's work. I remember the first time I read Bobby Wilson's work, it was like: "Oh my god! Somebody's talking about this!" You know? I was just so excited. But Bobby and Clyde have different voices. They're different people.

The word to describe Clyde, like Jordan said, is "relentless." I used to call Clyde "my friend with all the conspiracy theories." They sounded far out to me at first, but many of them ended up being true...so they weren't conspiracies actually. [Audience laughter] He was right! You look at Bobby Wilson's work, it's not like that. My work is not like that. I think both me and Bobby Wilson do really good, solid, critical work around race and racial geographies. But Clyde was like on a totally different planet. He was asking: "How do I understand what a region is, how a region is constructed, and how do I understand territoriality by foregrounding white supremacy?" I don't think anybody had ever done that before. I think my inability to imagine such questions about the region when I was in graduate school made me assume: "I can't do that work, the region, that's white guys' work. That's Ed Soja." I like Ed. Ed was on my committee. I have lots of respect for Ed. But, you know, Ed was not about to foreground white supremacy. That wasn't going to happen!

I think about what Clyde has done, and he truly was creating an entirely new kind of framework. He used to talk about a new paradigm saying, "We need to create a new paradigm. You need to create a new paradigm." And I would say, "Clyde," with a note of impatience. And again, my own limitations could not allow me to see what he was saying for so many years until I engaged with this book in such an intimate way. And I say to myself: "Oh, I get it now, Clyde." Twenty years later I see what he was trying to do in terms of thinking about the region, the importance of the region. In a way, the region assembles our lives, it structures our lives in terms of how different forms of racism, political economy, racial capitalism, and gender relations are all formulated. He taught me about territoriality, which, again, is not something I had ever done, although it's something that was always interesting to me. As someone coming from Chicano

Studies early on, how could I not be interested in territorialization? It was not clear to me what kind of tools I would need and could imagine to talk about territoriality in a way that would be useful to me. Clyde has developed and given me those kinds of tools that are necessary to think about the creation of this place we call the United States. He was really, really, really remarkable in that way.

Camp: Clyde's book forces a reckoning with the long history of the plantocracy, and encourages readers to remember the relationship between the rise of capitalism and slavery. It is also an intervention about the pervasive persistence of colonialism and imperial Bourbonism. He suggested that these are unfinished projects. I will just say three things about this.

The first is that Clyde sought to intervene in debates about the roots of neoliberalism and the history of resistance. He thought that New Orleans had been overlooked in scholarship about global and nationalism neoliberalism. He wanted to think about a dialectic between its roots in the political practices of the plantation bloc with its extreme opposition to taxation, social wage programs, and labor and social movements. He showed how the Bourbon development agenda had been exported to the Caribbean, South America, Africa and beyond. Clyde was suggesting that there were, to use his words, some "big dogs" in Louisiana who have been influential politically since at least the 1830s, if not before. In this way, we might put this Blues geography of imperial Bourbonism in dialogue with the new history of capitalism. Walter Johnson has written an important book in the field (Johnson 2013). There are a number of other new works of scholarship that are suggestive. In this regard I think the kind of socio-spatial dialectic that informs Clyde's analysis gives him a unique methodological vantage point for understanding the dialectics of race and space underpinning capitalist development in the city, the region, the US, and the world. That is very significant.

Second, Clyde passed away a few years before new cycles of rebellion rocked Baltimore, Ferguson, and Standing Rock. He was from Baltimore, as some of you probably know. He saw his city burned to the ground after uprisings following the murder of Dr. King in 1968, a year to



the day after he had given his speech breaking the Cold War consensus, opposing the anti-communist US war in Vietnam. And he saw all that. He saw what Ruth Wilson Gilmore and David Harvey describe as kind of “organized abandonment” that occurred in Baltimore with the destruction of public housing, the eradication of the social budget, and the expansion of a prison industrial complex (Gilmore 2008; Harvey 2018).

Lastly, Clyde would not have been surprised at all by the emergence of new alliances in resisting racism, capitalism, and US imperialism, which he saw as linked to a long struggle against the dominance of the Bourbon ruling class and its imperialist project. Yet he also showed how freedom and labor struggles in New Orleans in the wake of Katrina could become a cornerstone of a “Third Reconstruction.” I think that is very important politically, especially when we see the revival of the Poor People’s Campaign, co-chaired by Rev. Dr. William J. Barber and Rev. Dr. Liz Theoharis. It is being organized by poor and working people across the country. Dr. King’s efforts in 1968 have been taken up by this dynamic movement. They were forestalled. Clyde’s book can inform these efforts to resist authoritarian politics, austerity economics, and white supremacy in the present moment. It has been a delight to work with Laura in getting this urgent book out in the world.

Pulido: Thank you. Likewise. [Audience applause]

References

- Gilmore R W (2008) Forgotten places and the seeds of grassroots planning. In C R Hale (ed) *Engaging Contradictions: Theory, Politics, and Methods of Activist Scholarship* (pp31-61). Berkeley: University of California Press
- Harvey D (2018 [1982]) *The Limits to Capital* (new edn). New York: Verso
- Johnson W (2013) *River of Dark Dreams: Slavery and Empire in the Cotton Kingdom*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.

- McKittrick K and Woods C (eds) (2007) *Black Geographies and the Politics of Place*. Boston: South End Press
- Woods C (2009a) Katrina's world: Blues, Bourbon, and the return to the source. *American Quarterly* 61(3):427-453
- Woods C (ed) (2009b) In the wake of Hurricane Katrina: New paradigms and social visions. *American Quarterly* 61(3):427-830
- Woods C (2010a) Life after death. *The Professional Geographer* 54(1):62-66
- Woods C (ed) (2010b) *In the Wake of Hurricane Katrina: New Paradigms and Social Visions*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press
- Woods C (2017 [1998]) *Development Arrested: The Blues and Plantation Power in the Mississippi Delta* (new edn). New York: Verso

Jordan T. Camp
Program in American Studies
Barnard College
jcamp@barnard.edu

Laura Pulido
Departments of Ethnic Studies & Geography
University of Oregon
lpulido@uoregon.edu