

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)

I would like to thank Clyde Adrian Woods for conducting the work that has brought us together today. Second, I would like to offer my gratitude to Laura Pulido and Jordan Camp for assuming the role of “midwives” of this book and for taking on the intellectual and emotional heft to bring it to fruition (Camp and Pulido 2017a: xvii). Third, I express my gratitude for the invitation to join in this conversation. My response to *Development Drowned and Reborn* will be personal, methodological, and political. In so doing, the threads I follow may meander, but hopefully in productive ways. My purpose is to show how tracking, to quote Laura and Jordan, “what Clyde was thinking and where he might have been going” (2017: xviii) helps me think and validates what I choose to think about.

As I read *Development Drowned and Reborn* I was struck by Clyde’s deep engagement with history and historical methods. Clyde unearths long histories of the exploitation of Black working-class and Indigenous communities, and the unique development traditions each formed throughout Louisiana. In form, Clyde’s work is a model for how to study and make use of multiple archives. The text is daring in the sense that geographers are often not trained or prepared – in the affective sense of anticipating the feel, the sound, and the look of an archive – to conduct such research. However, to engage in the rich regional geographies in which Clyde saw import, we must learn to approach these hallowed halls of partial knowledge. I say “partial” because Clyde also shows us that there are archives of knowledge absent from academic

institutions and finds purchase in non-traditional archival spaces and archivists. We see this as he refers to the embodied knowledges of the radical abolitionist Samba Bambara, the embattled jazz artist Buddy Bolden, the spirituals of Mahalia Jackson, and the pan-African ethic of the Universal Negro Improvement Association.

Clyde understood that “the archive” is constructed in relation to regimes of power that dictate what counts as knowledge and whose histories are worthy of posterity. He speaks to the limitations of disciplinary methods of disclosure in the article “Life After Death”: “Have we become academic coroners? Have the tools of theory, method, instruction, and social responsibility become so rusted that they can only be used for autopsies?” (Woods 2002: 63). Not only are the given tools of analysis are limited, says Clyde. So too are the ways in which we use them: “The same tools that symbolize hope in the hands of the surgeon symbolize necrophilia in the hands of the coroner” (ibid.). His ability to see – and optics are very important to his projects and the project of Black geographies – encouraged him to look at the archive awry and to look beyond the archive to find the multiple makings of what he saw as a global “Blues development agenda,” through which Black working-class and Indigenous communities, within various place and times, developed ideas for political, spatial, and human development antithetical to those of enslavers, politicians, and corporatists (p.2).

Clyde’s approach to archives and his analyses of what a Blues epistemology is, how it comes to be, and who informs its development, is informed by a fluid Black sense of place. Whereas *Development Arrested* suggests Delta Blues and a Blues epistemology was born of debt peonage in the Mississippi Delta, *Development Drowned and Reborn* illustrates that the Blues development tradition is not static and neither is a Blues epistemology. In the first chapter, which constructs a genealogy of the region by way of its early inhabitants, he shares: “The origins of this expansive geographical imagination were the product of the continental and global vision of

the First Nations and of the European and African settlers” (p.1). Katherine McKittrick (2011: 950) echoes his stance on the fluidity of a Black sense of place:

A black sense of place is not a steady, focused, and homogeneous way of seeing and being in place, but rather a set of changing and differential perspectives that are illustrative of, and therefore remark upon, legacies of normalized racial violence that calcify, but do not guarantee, the denigration of black geographies and their inhabitants.

Her words support Clyde’s argument that a Black sense of place is not only by and about Black people. The Blues is a place-based ethical position that develops in particular conditions of containment. Hence, says Woods, in New Orleans, there developed a conglomerate resistance tradition born of African, Afro-Caribbean, African American, and Indigenous influences, all while under “numerous colonial projects and national schisms” (p.2). In Wednesday’s panel on “Geographies of Land and Liberation”,¹ organized by Magie Ramirez, Michele Daigle, and myself, there was a missed opportunity to struggle with what Black and Indigenous groups’ claims to land and territory mean for each other, and with what tensions, challenges, and opportunities might emerge from such claims. In *Development Drowned and Reborn*, Clyde unveils that some development traditions resulted from intersections of Black and Indigenous identities, ontologies, and spatialities. Their heterogeneous production of unforeseen places and renewed livelihoods formed through fusions that required each to relinquish previous attachments to identity, place, and Indigeneity. Instead of simply practicing a “radical hospitality”, which Michele presented as a way for Indigenous groups in the present to encourage multilateral alliances, Clyde indicates that in Southern Louisiana, Indigenous and African people created a radical new house. With this in mind, and taking seriously Clyde’s

¹ Though he does not appear in this collection of reviews, Nik Heynen, Professor of Geography at the University of Georgia, organized the panel session at which each of these reviews were presented.

regional geographies and what they teach us about how Blues epistemologies develop, consider the following: What do the Blues look like in your place and time, or as the Zapatistas might say, your calendar and geography?

Development Drowned and Reborn anticipates a growing intellectual and political concern for the transnational ties between plantation and power blocs, as well as the people subjected to their authorities, not to mention their austerity. *Development Drowned* and its contemporaries – I am thinking, in the main, of Peter James Hudson’s *Bankers and Empire* (2017) and Lisa Lowe’s *The Intimacies of Four Continents* (2015) – illustrate what Laura and Jordan state in the introduction to *Development Drowned and Reborn* as “the dialectical relationship between the regional, national, and global political economies” (2017: xxii). These transnational tethers exist along a spectrum of subjection and struggle, exposing commonalities between corporatists and politicians across the Western Hemisphere as well as working-class people fighting more equitable lives.

Clyde goes to painstaking lengths to articulate the formation and connection of local, national, and imperial expressions of Bourbonism (state and corporate control of society)² as early examples of what, today, we commonly call neoliberalism (Ruddick 2012). An intellectual vein I am beginning to mine is the study of how forms of austerity in America are rooted in the economic asphyxiation of Black communities in the US North and South. I want wrestle with how amorphous anti-Black austerity initiatives in the United States – which facilitate and require uneven development – are necessary for the methods of redevelopment we are seeing in the form of urban renewal, gentrification, and the closing and repurposing of public schools.

There are important connections between Clyde’s discussion of the role of uneven development in the expansion of ghettoization in New Orleans and Daniel Sayers’s (2015) archaeological work on maroon communities, connections I believe may influence our

² See Laura Pulido and Jordan Camp’s (2017b) introduction to *Development Drowned and Reborn*, “The Dialectics of Bourbonism and the Blues”, for a definition of Bourbonism as it was articulated by Clyde Woods as an unjust political and corporate consortium in New Orleans.

knowledge of how and where we create people's movements. In an easily overlooked statement Clyde says: "Large-scale ghettoization proceeded in New Orleans only after new technologies emerged that opened swampland for residential development" (p.151). Not only does Clyde – à la Bobby Wilson – dislodge studies of Black urban underdevelopment from a predominately Northern exposure, he suggests – hearkening Neil Smith and David Harvey – that the development schemes which facilitate and necessitate racialized uneven development are dependent upon technological advancements. Sayers states as such in his monograph on marronage in the Great Dismal Swamp. Once seen as a "desolate place for a defiant people", it was not until advancements in engineering did the "Adventurers to Drain the Great Dismal Swamp", an investment group that included the likes of George Washington, drain the swamp and expose its timber and maroon geographies to exploitation and assault.

Sayers, like Clyde, shows that within unevenly developed racialized spaces of unvalue³ (i.e. any entity that stymies the flow of capital), people produce alternative lifeways, an example of which being the maroon community's creation of what Sayers calls a "praxis mode of production" (2015:8). Collectively, these authors indicate that within – to quote Sayers once more – capitalism's "blind spots" we may find political and spatial alternatives to those created by plantation and power blocs. This is what Clyde referred to in a panel dedicated to Neil Smith's *Uneven Development* at the 2009 AAG conference in Las Vegas, Nevada. He stated that commons are a product of capitalism and that "particularly for racialized communities, there's this constant search for a new commons" (Woods 2009). By "product", Clyde suggests that the ceaseless expansion of capital through space(s) at the expense of communities, encourages quests for ways to live in excess of capital and its accumulation of space, time, labor, etc. To conclude, Clyde's work on New Orleans presents a problem for thought and a political

³ My understanding of unvalue is drawn from David Harvey's (2018) conception of the term as a signifier for challenges to the circulation of capital, and thus the production of value under capitalism.

passageway that foresees the ceaseless production of place not just through the recognition of a multiplicity of actors, but through intersections thereof.

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