

***Black Geographies and the Politics of Place.*** Edited by Katherine McKittrick and Clyde Woods. Toronto: Between the Lines, 2007. 264 pp.

*Black Geographies*, edited by Katherine McKittrick and Clyde Woods, is an anthology of essays addressing the racialized production of space. These alternate spaces, the volume suggests, may be evident in physical, political, or imagined terms. The editors envision the text as a response to the normalized pathology of Black geographies defined by statistical data that do not account for socio-political and historical precedents that shaped those geographies. Therefore, one of the narrative threads connecting the twelve essays is the close examination of *how* Black geographies are formed. A second narrative thread involves the identification of alternative means of locating and imagining Black geographies. A bulk of the essays is situated in Canada but suggests diasporic connections throughout the Americas.

In the introduction, “No One Knows the Mysteries at the Bottom of the Ocean,” McKittrick and Woods address the events following Hurricane Katrina, arguing that the hurricane was not a spontaneous “natural disaster,” but rather the consequence of years of systemic neglect of Black spaces in New Orleans. The Atlantic Ocean became a metaphor for the unknown and the invisible histories and lived experiences of “the wretched of the earth...the homeless, the jobless, the incarcerated, [and] the invisible labourers” (2). Thus, the essays in *Black Geographies* also attempt to uncover the invisible perspectives of Black geographies in political contexts through interdisciplinary approaches. McKittrick and Woods assert that investigating Black geographies through interdisciplinary means avoids the trend of pathologizing Black geographies. They clearly aim to employ scholarship toward new visions of social justice.

In keeping with the idea that interdisciplinary approaches may provide new means of understanding Black geographies, this volume includes contributions from various fields. Essays present perspectives in the fields of cultural studies, gender studies, literature, architecture, and geography. Angel David Nieves’s architecture-based contribution, for example, applies a racial lens to the field of heritage preservation in order to question the systemic privileging of built structures in state historic societies. James Tyner’s essay investigates the relationship between geographic regions and radical politics during the Black Power movement. Both essays are demonstrative of groundbreaking scholarship that can result from envisioning Black geographies.

The Nieves’s essay, “Memories of Africville: Urban Renewal, Reparations, and the Africadian Diaspora,” uncovers the complex socio-political and historical tensions surrounding the valuation of Black spaces in national registries of historic places. Nieves argues that preservationists must “break free” from the heritage politics that value historic sites based on arbitrary, racially-hegemonic understandings of “significance.” In his view, preservation institutions exhibit two major prejudices in determining how to add new sites: they tend to reject historical narratives that are not celebratory, and they focus on the preservation of “structures” that have architectural significance. Nieves shows how the process of selecting preservation sites based on architecture excludes a Black geography such as Africville, Nova Scotia. His research reveals how the site, a Black community settled by former American slaves, was systematically imposed upon by Halifax’s city leaders as a dumping ground for unwanted municipal projects. Deemed an eyesore by Halifax city planners, Africville was eventually razed. A site such as Africville complicates an architecturally-based preservation prerogative because the city of Halifax erased material traces of Africville’s existence and, potentially, the

memory of the city's complicity in racist practices of urban renewal. Nieves notes how activists who were formally removed from Africville are currently seeking reparations against Halifax's city government for its role in the destruction of the community. This act of seeking reparations points to how differently imagined Black geographies can result in activism for social justice.

In a related essay on the politics of spaces titled "Urban Revolutions and the Spaces of Black Radicalism," James Tyner posits that during the Black Freedom movement, residents in Black urban geographies of the northern and western United States required a different kind of radicalism than their southern counterparts. By framing activism against the historical development of suburban neighborhoods, Tyner shows how practices such as zoning and limited public transportation created a type of legal segregation that also restricted the social and economic opportunities of poor Blacks. Accordingly, many Blacks in the North and West, having experienced firsthand an altered form of institutional racism, were not convinced of the aims of integrationism, which civil rights leaders advocated in the South. Activists from the North and West, Tyner argues, imagined a Black geography based on *communal separatism* because integration had been circumvented through legal means where they lived. In short, Tyner compellingly illustrates how geography informed radicalism and how racialized groups perceived themselves. Hence, Black Power activists derived different social and political goals than nonviolent resisters. Tyner is careful not to credit the production of Black geography alone as the sole influence on radicalism. Geography is one of many factors. His intervention is to frame the Black Power movement as a contested space and as a site for "producing a space for social justice" (230).

The essays in *Black Geographies* permit conceptualizations of this term that complicate material notions of bounded or physical territories. Although all the pieces in this collection focus on the African Diaspora, the volume has clear implications for the study of racialization and spacemaking in any context and through various media.

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