

The Nation on No Map

“We must not remain trapped on this map; we must try to draw new lines to sketch out a life for ourselves that their borders, their states, and their map cannot hold.”

Foreword and Introduction:

What does Saidiya Hartman mean when she asks “what shape might the radical imagination assume when the state is no longer the horizon of possibility or the telos of struggle?” (xiv). What can we imagine beyond the state as either the terrain of struggle or the prize to be won?

What perceptions or connotations does anarchism have? What about Black anarchism? How have you heard these terms used before, if you have. Consider having your group produce a collective word cloud based on these terms at the beginning of your reading and again at the end.

Anderson writes that “many of the things I critique in this text are positions I held.” Take a moment to reflect on the beliefs you have held and what experiences, conversations, or texts made you reevaluate them.

- Consider returning at the end of your reading to this question: Who are some of the key thinkers or ideas this book introduced you to? How did their perspectives challenge your thinking?

Aimé Césaire advances that “the doctrine and the movement would be made to fit men, not men to fit the doctrine or the movement” (xxii). How do we ensure that our commitments are not to institutions or ideas, but to people? How do you see this problem Césaire poses showing up in our binary, electoral political system?

Chapter 1:

How does Anderson define or frame abolition and its scope? (3-4, 36-38).

What is Lucy Parson’s criticism of voting and electoral politics?

Anderson writes that “presenting the Black liberation struggle as a singular struggle with one line of thinking is a state project in and of itself” (14). How have other works you’ve read challenged that teleological idea of history? What sort of project is that narrative doing?

Anderson writes that “the state is not for us . . . use the conditions that the state has placed on us to inform our most radical incursions” (35). What are some examples of “making do and building from exactly where we are”? What does he mean by us[ing] the contradictions?

Chapter 2:

What does Anderson see as the problems of mythical origins of royalty and how does it relate to celebrity, capitalism, and the state? How do genetics and ancestry fit into this?

Anderson writes that “the entire notion of the necessity of ‘leadership’ in charismatic and messianic forms is absurd” (54-55). What are other forms of leadership have you encountered, either in your readings or your group, that disrupt this type of model?

What is Black capitalism and what do Anderson and others argue are its shortcomings?

What is the relationship between celebrity and nationalism that Anderson identifies (63-65)?

Chapter 3:

What is Black anarchism’s historic relationship to “the Left” according to Anderson? What have been the problems with the designation, “the Left”? From what questions and limitations did contemporary Black anarchism emerge? Whether you are familiar or unfamiliar with these terms or movements, what do you understand their limitations to be, based on Anderson’s critique?

“Many of us have more in common than we may want to admit, but one of the most important things we share is a threat,” he writes. “State violence is real and deadly” (93). What are some common threats that everyone in your group shares? How can you work together to highlight those commonalities and fight against them?

Chapter 4:

What are the alternative social, political, and economic systems that Black anarchisms have proposed?

How does Ashanti Alston describe Blackness and Black anarchism? (113). How does this differ from other ideas about race you may be familiar with?

Chapter 5:

“The state itself is white supremacist. . . This extremism exists in some form at every level of government” (122). What are some of the tangible examples of this extremism by state authorities or functionaries that you have experienced? Is this limited to “bad apples” or structural by design?

Chapter 6:

What is the distinction Anderson makes between the emancipation of 1865 and the abolitionism he is calling for today?

“We must not remain trapped on this map,” Anderson writes. “We must try to draw new lines to sketch out a life for ourselves that their borders, their states, and their map cannot hold” (184). What are some of these new lines outside the state that you and your group are already drawing?