

BOOK REVIEW

Black Lives and Spatial Matters: Policing Blackness and Practicing Freedom in Suburban St. Louis by Jodi Rios

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Rachael Baker, PhD

Urban Praxis Workshop, Detroit, Michigan, USA

The suburbs of St. Louis held the nation's attention in the summer of 2014 after police in Ferguson murdered eighteen-year-old Michael Brown, an unarmed teenager who was confronted by the police for "walking while Black." Jodi Rios's *Black Lives and Spatial Matters: Policing Blackness and Practicing Freedom in Suburban St. Louis* provides readers with a granular and historical perspective on the regional political economy and racist policing tactics employed in Northern St. Louis County suburbs where Blackness is calculated simultaneously as risk and resistance to predatory policing and enacts Black living as a method of freedom making. Rios's investigation spans postwar suburbanization, the role of school-district funding, and localized tax structures in solidifying racially fractured and desperately funded education districts that act as predeterminants for supposed criminality of Black youth and the neighborhoods where they reside.

"Blackness-as-risk" carries two meanings for Rios. First, Blackness is perceived by governing and carceral forces as a risk to law and order and alone is justification for citing and criminalizing the homes and social and reproductive practices of Black residents who are repeatedly subjected to interactions with police and law enforcement. Second is Rios's assessment that law enforcement's predatory tickets and fines (re)produce Black residents' fungibility by constructing a citation-to-jail pipeline while generating funding for policing budgets spanning unincorporated municipalities that "view poor Black residents as ATM machines" (p.1). Selected interviews featured in the text display governmental justification for predatory policing practices; as stated by an alderperson of Pagedale, fines and citations are "the teaching we have. . .to teach people how to live" (p. 135).

Rios examines how the region's small majority-Black municipalities, codified by suburban respectability, insert discourses of property rights, risk, and propriety borrowed from larger cities within local laws to extract revenue and discipline Black residents. The simultaneous reclassification

of suburban spaces into urban space through police violence is enforced through punishing residents for perceived violations of property-maintenance standards to "make up for economic losses resulting from the risk attached to their Blackness" (p. 143).

Rios grounds both risk and freedom through North County residents' ethnographic contributions. Interviewees discuss repeated engagement with varied policing forces within the politically fragmented metropolitan area of the North County: contributors to *Spatial Matters* share experiences that complicate commonly understood histories of capital flight in geographic regions of majority-Black populations. The predatory policing and bylaw enforcement weaponized against Black residents in North St. Louis County and their effect of criminalizing residents tells a story different from the common narrative of the absence of capital resulting from white flight. These ethnographic excerpts demonstrate how predatory policing and citation and bail fees for "existing while Black" are an economic consequence resulting from historical US capital relations that continue to calculate Blackness-as-risk.

The financial scaffolding of punishing analyzed throughout this text undergirds "geographies of unfreedom" that Rios urges readers to see as a site where the leadership of queer, trans, nonbinary, and Black women in the movement for Black lives is essential and transformational within the project for global emancipation from anti-Black racism. By confronting misogyny, transphobia, and homophobia within the movement locally, LGBTQTAI2 and Black women's dispatches from the movement in North County municipalities uphold Blackness as a catalyst for freedom and Black living as praxis toward peaceful enjoyment "in the face of death and unfreedom" (p. 166). Refusing nonbelonging and Blackness-as-risk, Rios's focus on the leadership of LGBTQTAI2 and Black women solidifies that the struggle against Black death in North County and hinges on the refusal of "respectability, conformity and assimilation" as viable modes of disentanglement from the anti-Black carceral state (p. 171). The critical lesson to draw from this portion of the text is that the global project of the emancipation of racism must center misogynoir, homo- and transphobia, and cis-sexism

in the struggle against white supremacy and its structural manifestations across systems of governance and finance, carcerality, property relations, social and romantic relations, and intersecting forms of oppression.

This text is well suited for introductory and graduate-level work in cultural and urban anthropology and would well serve scholars and thinkers with grounding in studies of

the carceral state, critical race studies, and human geography. Just as we've recently witnessed the movement for Black lives urgently marching and organizing across the United States, *Black Lives and Spatial Matters* suggests that we choose to analyze rather than ignore manifestations of racial capitalism, white supremacy, and the carceral state that lead to death and catalyze global freedom struggles.