



The Undercommons: Fugitive Planning & Black Study

Fred Moten , Stefano Harney , J. Jack Halberstam

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In this series of essays Fred Moten and Stefano Harney draw on the theory and practice of the black radical tradition as it supports, inspires, and extends contemporary social and political thought and aesthetic critique. Today the general wealth of social life finds itself confronted by mutations in the mechanisms of control, from the proliferation of capitalist logistics through governance by credit and management of pedagogy. Working from and within the social poesis of life in the undercommons Moten and Harney develop and expand an array of concepts: study, debt, surround, planning, and the shipped. On the fugitive path of an historical and global blackness, the essays in this volume unsettle and invite the reader to the self-organised ensembles of social life that are launched every day and every night amid the general antagonism of the undercommons.

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From Reader Review The Undercommons: Fugitive Planning & Black Study for online ebook

Jay Hanmer says

The second chapter raises excellent critiques of academia, but the language in later chapters becomes so vague as to be incomprehensible. Concision, lucidity and accessibility are lacking entirely.

Bookshark says

This is one of the most powerful books I've read in a long time. It spoke to me. I felt invited into their collaborative project; I felt as if I am already a part of something I did not know I was doing. Their call is towards something that is only faintly sketched, not quite visible yet, in fact precluded from clear visibility from the perspective of the state and capital. It isn't that their ideas are entirely new (though of course nothing is ever created ex nihilo, and in fact they're quite clear that they're working in collaboration and conversation with other) but that they say things in a new way. Their words run through the reader, shaking loose an avalanche of creativity, even if their meaning can't always be pinned down precisely. It's a book that compelled me to write. I'm eagerly anticipating what others will write in conversation with this book.

Some folks are complaining about the difficulty of the language, but I think the way this book is written is an integral part of what they're trying to accomplish. They explain the purpose of the language they're using - and why it's okay to use different language if their words don't do it for you - in the interview at the end. They use words experimentally, because they're trying to get to a particular place, and they call forth the words that seem like they might get us to that place. The words are thus provisional, open to interpretation and revision. The way they write melds high theory with poetry and vernacular, and I found it beautiful. They don't use jargon the way most people do, to distance themselves from the world. Rather, their words are opaque sometimes because they're trying to speak something that is currently submerged, unspeakable, ineffable. They're gesturing towards a future that is already seeping in through the cracks of the present. It's hard to put that into words, but it's impossible to put it into conventional syntax or to say it without the support of other thinkers who have already begun to verbalize that which we lack the language to describe. They actually seem to be making only minimal references; there are many more thinkers churning in the blank spaces behind the prose, haunting the text itself.

M.L. Rio says

This is an object lesson in everything that's wrong with theory. Harney and Moten's ideas might be great, but nobody will ever know because they're buried under a landslide of critical jargon and tautological bullshit. If I never have to read anything this willfully impenetrable ever again it will be too soon.

Ying says

"Instead our fantasies must come from what Moten and Harney citing Frank B. Wilderson III call 'the hold':

'And so it is we remain in the hold, in the break, as if entering again and again the broken world, to trace the visionary company and join it.' The hold here is the hold in the slave ship but it is also the hold that we have on reality and fantasy, the hold they have on us and the hold we decide to forego on the other, preferring instead to touch, to be with, to love. If there is no church in the wild, if there is study rather than knowledge production, if there is a way of being together in brokenness, if there is an undercommons, then we must all find our way to it. And it will not be there where the wild things are, it will be a place where refuge is not necessary and you will find that you were already in it all along.

Love,
J"

Carrie says

“There is this particular labor process model [in the university] that’s being exported, that’s being generalized in so-called creative industries and other places, and which is deployed expertly against study.”

I noticed this at SF State -- all the students doing projects -- and the kind of projects which are like fake "study" -- all they're really learning how to do is do projects in work/business model contexts. Gross. In my day, we studied alone in cubicles on the top floor of 6 floor libraries, that actually had real books (another critique of SF State). Hours and hours of reading alone and writing notes, and not talking to anybody.

Jacob Wren says

A few lines from *The Undercommons*:

Critique lets us know that politics is radioactive, but politics is the radiation of critique.

We run looking for a weapon and keep running looking to drop it.

What are the politics of being ready to die and what have they to do with the scandal of enjoyment?

Can't you hear them whisper one another's touch.

Form is not the eradication of the informal. Form is what emerges from the informal.

I think you can make a good case that human being in the world is, and should be, sheer criminality. Which also, first and foremost, implies that making laws is a criminal activity.

Charlie Kruse says

Incredible... opaque.... this book opens the door to reassessment of the our world in every sense, the social with the material, the performative and the authoritative, the non individualised... I feel so strongly for this book I cannot express myself. To read again and again

Misty says

This was an incredibly quick and easy read, but it was packed with multiple great thoughts, and it is something I definitely see myself coming back to.

ralowe says

i feel like i had placed my self under advisement to read this book right away for about a year before i actually did. maybe it was two years. i should be ashamed of myself. i had the digital download but this is the kind of book you have to feel in the world with the paper and i lucked upon a copy that allows that. this book is rather audacious in its insistence that blackness should be a resource to any political action in our global present (code for a very gentle read on the occupy paroxysm and other associated social events within and without trickle-down academia). that examining the predicament of black people provides necessary insight into the empire you're fighting. this came off as poetically stretched in a way that teased contrivance and will merit and obtain later re-reading, re-absorption. of course i keep being like "who's this stefano guy?" and it should be little doubt that i was there for fred mostly. the first thing that pops up for the other guy is a page placing him in singapore. i've been told he's really out of the uk. so i have this disjunctive image of a containerized hold heading for singapore probably from london piloted by captain phillips. so this guy is naturally on my reading list, i mean if fred likes him, heck! it's something to tide you over till moten's follow-up to in the break, but not quite as expansive as that longed-for fantasized book would have to be.

Muthee BM says

Brilliant book, it was a second read and I will come back to this book over time. I especially liked Debt and Study

Erica says

DNF. Unfortunately, this is probably one of the most painful and frustrating readings I've ever come across in academia. Paragraphs upon paragraphs of impenetrable, vague, and (IMHO) unnecessary additions that completely obfuscate the actual points being made. The authors are frustratingly fond of using mile-long sentences and confusing descriptions that contribute very little to whatever ideas they put forth:

Never having to confront the foundation, never having to confront antifoundation out of faith in the unfrontable foundation, critical intellectuals can float in the middle range.

HUH??? Was all this really necessary?? Clearly, there are people who found value trudging through this literary quagmire, but I am personally so tired of having to read every sentence four or five times before understanding its meaning -- and then finding out it contributes absolutely nothing to the main point of the section. The lack of clarity and concision within the writing makes reading this book extremely tedious. I'm sure there are valuable ideas buried in here, but medieval texts are easier to parse than this.

Andrew Bertaina says

It's a difficult text. In part, it's difficult because of the theoretical and philosophical language that sometimes goes undefined. That said, it's also difficult because it proposes new ways at looking at our relationship to the university, capitalism, and planning vs. policy.

Razi Shaikh says

'Never being on the right side of the Atlantic is an unsettled feeling, the feeling of a thing that unsettles with others. It's a feeling, if you ride with it, that produces a certain distance from the settled, from those who determine themselves in space and time, who locate themselves in a determined history. To have been shipped is to have been moved by others, with others. It is to feel at home with the homeless, at ease with the fugitive, at peace with the pursued, at rest with the ones who consent not to be one. Outlawed, interdicted, intimate things of the hold, containerized contagion, logistics externalises logic itself to reach you, but this is not enough to get at the social logics, the social poesis, running through logisticality.'

A book that's both bewildering and dense, but also informative and poetic. Requires a more than little grasp of postcolonial theory and postmodern jargon, with a generous spread of time and efforts. If that's all in place, the book can be very fruitful to read.

Nathaniel says

tbh though parts of it are borderline unreadable

jess says

wanna think abt how moten's call to disorder suggests a more radical project/relation to each other than what scot nakagawa uses harmony to describe here <https://www.racefiles.com/2015/08/21/...>
