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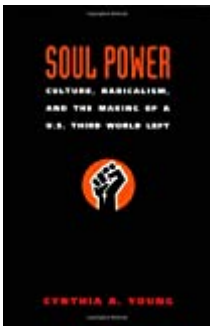

Cynthia Young. *Soul Power: Culture, Radicalism, and the Making of a U.S. Third World Left.* Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2006. 307 S. $79.95 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-8223-3679-2; $22.95 (paper), ISBN 978-0-8223-3691-4.

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Internal Colonies, Third World Revolution, and the Culture of the Left in the 1960s and 1970s

Cynthia A. Young's *Soul Power: Culture, Radicalism, and the Making of a U.S. Third World Left* uses six case studies of the cultural productions of radical social movements in the 1960s and 1970s to give rough periodization to what she calls the U.S. Third World Left. She defines this movement as a "distinct cultural and political formation ... [that] melded the civil rights movements focus on racial inequality, the Old Left's focus on class struggle and anti-colonialism, and the New Left's focus on grassroots, participatory democracy" (p. 4).

By describing it as a cultural formation of hybrid origins and multiple tendencies, Young's analysis of the U.S. Third World Left eschews a linear organizational or ideological genealogy, and de-centers (without explicitly mentioning) the central role in the Left that Max Elbaum gives to new communist organizations in his book, *Revolution in the Air: Sixties Radicals Turn to Lenin, Mao and Che* (2002). Instead, she finds the movement's distinctiveness and coherence in a common set of "discursive elements–including the depiction of urban communities as urban colonies, a belief in collective rather than vanguard leadership, and the powerful deconstruction of state violence" (p. 215). Its political-cultural project was to articulate and therefore facilitate the organization a unified "Third World" subject in a "First World" context. This work framed grassroots, working-class, anti-racist movements in the United States as not just being in solidarity with, but as fundamentally part of anti-capitalist, anti-imperialist Third World liberation movements around the world.

By emphasizing the inextricable connection between culture and politics in the making of the "U.S. Third World Left," Young has opened up a potentially rich field of inquiry similar to the way in which Michael Denning (who advised Young's work on this project when it was in its dissertation stage) used the study of culture to rethink the history and significance of the American Left in the 1930s and 1940s.[1] Denning's research treated the making and consumption of Popular Front art not as propaganda but as a key means of developing class consciousness, thereby expanding Old Left history beyond its focus on industrial unionism and Communist Party organizing. Young's comparatively less ambitious study does similar work to Denning's by taking the cultural productions

of anti-racist, anti-imperialist American activists of the 1960s and 1970s seriously. Her case studies trace a common structure of feeling during this era "just as the Port Huron Statement, the Freedom Summer, and the music of Bob Dylan helped craft what Raymond Williams has called a structure of feeling for the New Left" (pp. 3-4).

Soul Power's attempt to portray this "structure of feeling" as distinct from the other movements it grew out of faces a number of complicating factors. The U.S. Third World Left was, Young acknowledges, a "fragmentary, partial, and provisional" cultural formation (p. 10). "People whom I group under the rubric U.S. Third World Left hated each other or worked against one another â¦ [but] agreed about more than they disagreed" (pp. xi-xii). Despite the totalizing discourse of its often Marxist-Leninist or Maoist proponents, the U.S. Third World Left never produced "a unitary theory of hegemonic oppression" or cohered behind a single vanguard organization (arguably in part because the search for a single, authentic, revolutionary vehicle animated both their organizing and their infighting) (p. 11). The discursive claims and styles that made the Third World Left coherent were forms of social critique whose "impacts and uses" affirmed widely different, locally specific challenges to social inequality and state violence in the United States (p. 11).

Understanding these hybrid origins and varied applications of a radical, internationalist political culture, according to Young, "affords us an opportunity to think beyond the familiar binaries that structure most understandings of the sixties and seventies–cultural nationalism versus civil rights; race versus class; domestic versus international; political activism versus cultural experimentation" (p. 250). Young's attempt to "think beyond" these tropes is grounded in her six case studies, each with its own chapter.

Chapter 1 documents how, for Harold Cruse, Robert F. Williams, and Leroi Jones, visits to Cuba and exchanges with Cuban artists "fueled their search for a black national culture and belief in cultural revolution as the key to political liberation" in a way that prefigured the creation of a U.S. Third World Left (p. 19). The chapter is partly synthetic, and weaves together Van Gosse's research on Cuba's significance to the New Left, Komozi Woodard's study of Leroi Jones/Amiri Baraka, and Tim Tyson's biography of Robert F. Williams.[2]

Chapter 2 frames New York's Hospital Workers Union Local 1199–with its Old Left leaders, its domestic and international anti-racist movement solidarities, and robust movement culture–as an "exceptional" blend of working-class civil rights organization and anti-racist, anti-sexist labor movement organizing whose history does not fit neatly in standard civil rights, black power, or 1960s narratives (p. 55). The chapter combines a reading of Local 1199's newsletter with Leon Fink and Brian Greenberg's history of Local 1199, *Upheaval in a Quiet Zone: A History of Hospital Workers Union, Local 1199* (1989), to describe the movement significance of films, newsletter, art gallery, and social events. These, Young concludes, helped produce an unusual fusion between identity politics and organized labor that makes it seem in retrospect like a "road not taken" for 1960s social movement culture (p. 57).

Chapters 3, 4, and 6, about the history of the U.S. Third World Left in film, seem like the heart of *Soul Power*, and make up a book within a book. Moving between analysis of individual films and the histories of the activist collectives that produced them, *Soul Power*'s chapters on film ground its otherwise fairly broad claims. Taken together, the chapters provide a thoughtful overview and coherent periodization for the U.S. Third World Lefts origins, development, transformation, and lingering legacies as a cultural formation.

Chapter 3 describes the adaptation of Cuban Third Cinema styles to U.S. culture by New York City-based Newsreel. Newsreel, an activist filmmaker collective founded in the wake of the 1967 anti-Vietnam War protest, fused art and politics by both documenting and furthering antiwar and civil rights movement protest movements. Young's study of Newsreel partly relies on the scholarship of Bill Nichols and Michael Renov.[3] However, she uses her own oral histories and close readings of Newsreel films to "rethink the filmmaking arm of the New Left" and to show how some of its films in 1969 and 1970, particularly those on the Young Lords, "presaged a U.S. Third World Left" by situating anti-racist campaigns in the U.S. in an anti-colonial, international context (pp. 105-106).

Chapter 4 examines how styles explored by Newsreel were more fully developed by its successor organization, Third World Newsreel, whose documentary filmmaking framed poor, non-white urban neighborhoods as internal colonies produced through the same structural forces that organized U.S. imperialism abroad. This codification of the internal colony thesis was a product of upheaval within Newsreel, when debates over New Left racism and sexism, and Newsreel's complicity in those forms of oppression, resulted in almost all of Newsreel's white filmmakers leaving the organization. The remaining mem-

bers, who rebuilt the organization by recruiting members of color and renaming it Third World Newsreel, "forged a new institutional practice, one that sought to concretely connect local struggles in urban communities of color to larger Third World dynamics" (p. 145). Young documents the aesthetics of this practice through a close reading of "the groups visual manifesto," *Teach our Children* (1972), which connects the Attica uprising to urban rebellions and "construct[s] and visualize[s] a radical Third World public" emerging in response to neo-colonial state violence (pp. 156, 146).

Chapter 5 provides a break between film chapters to describe Angela Davis as a "unique U.S. Third World Leftist" (p. 185). Noting the "critical silence" with which scholars have received Davis's writing, and the awkward way in which historians of the 1960s have sought to situate her activism in relation to Black Power politics, Young argues that Davis's "revolutionary internationalism" has largely been misrepresented as a black nationalism (pp. 185-186). With a "radically deconstructive project–unraveling U.S. imperialism at its point of origin," Davis's writings on political prisoners and the politics of prisons delegitimized American state violence in part by critiquing nationalism. They did so in a way that took anti-racist and anti-sexist politics seriously enough that she did not, like many Third World Leftists, call forth a singular and unified Third World subject of resistance (p. 186).

Chapter 6, applies themes from the study of Davis to a study of "L.A. Rebellion" filmmakers from the University of California Los Angeles (UCLA)'s Ethnocommunications Program during the mid-1970s. The group's signature films, particularly *Bush Mama* (1976) and *Killer of Sheep* (1977), fused fiction and documentary through a focus on characters trying to survive in post-riot Watts. While adopting Third World Left elements that "critique[d] U.S. practices of state violence," these films also "portray[ed] the devastated communities and resistant or numbed black subjects left in their wake" (p. 233). The internal colony described by these films was not just material, but also psychological. This made their characters' everyday acts of survival heroic when put in relation to the overwhelming power of state-managed social forces aligned against them. The L.A. Rebellion's response to the growing conservative movement and economic crisis in the United States in the 1970s therefore offered a "more nuanced, even pessimistic view of the possibility for inner-city revolt" (p. 214).

By treating the L.A. Rebellion films as a full engagement with the reality of its subjects lived experiences, even to the point of employing Watts residents as actors and film crews, Young charts the declining appeal of revolutionary ideology in the mid-1970s without portraying this shift in declensionist terms. Her sympathetic portrait of the films accompanies a very thoughtful critique of the Manichean aspects of U.S. Third World Left thought, with particular attention to Franz Fanon's influence on the movement.

The L.A. Rebellion films "crack[ed] the shell of U.S. civil society, exposing its innards–the schools, welfare offices, churches, hospitals and courts–as a manifestation of brute force" (p. 227). But the question U.S. Third World Leftists never answered, according to Young, was "what sets the decolonization in motion?" If "the colonized must disidentify with the colonizer â¦ how precisely does that process of disidentification begin? A focus on the leap from passivity to action ignores the transitional stage" (p. 228). If the Third World Left was accurate in its critique of state violence, it wildly overstated the imminence of revolution. The grouping together of multiple, national liberation movements into a monolithic, voiceless "Third World" struggle to be invoked by "First World" activists covered over this contradiction between analysis and praxis, between solidarity and unity. Young therefore describes L.A. Rebellion films as having provided an unsentimental "eulogy for the era," a reflection on faded dreams for radical change in the face of the intractable nature of the urban crisis and the rise of the New Right, a stripping away of illusions of deliverance through new forms of engagement (p. 7).

This is a moving conclusion to a book that Young admits is suggestive rather than definitive. *Soul Power* synthesizes previous literatures but also leaves out many of the diverse organizations that made up the U.S. Third World Left. And it for the most part privileges histories of black radicalism in a way that seems surprising since the very term "Third World" was used in part to refigure the black freedom movement into something much broader. This lack of broad survey makes the film chapters all the more important for providing focus and coherence to Young's attempts to redefine a 1960s historiography that has been dominated by SDS/ Weathermen and Civil Rights/ Black Power dichotomies. Their contributions especially make *Soul Power* a valuable new work for its suggestive arguments that define the U.S. Third World Left as cultural and not just sociopolitical formation.

Notes

[1]. Michael Denning, *The Cultural Front: The Laboring of American Culture in the Twentieth-Century* (New York: Verso, 1996).

[2]. Van Gosse. *Where the Boys Are: Cuba, Cold War America and the Making of a New Left* (New York: Verso, 1993); Komozi Woodard, *A Nation within a Nation: Amiri Baraka (LeRoi Jones) and Black Power Politics* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1999); Tim Tyson, *Radio Free Dixie: Robert F. Williams and the Roots of Black Power* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1999).

[3]. Bill Nichols, *Newsreel: Documentary Filmmaking on the American Left (1971-1975)* (New York: Arno Press, 1980); William J. Nichols, "Newsreel: Film and Revolution," (M.A. thesis, University of California, 1972); Michael Renov, "Early Newsreel: The Construction of a Political Imaginary for the New Left." *Afterimage* 14, no. 7 (1987): 12-15; Michael Renov, "Newsreel: Old and New–Towards an Historical Profile," *Film Quarterly* 41, no. 1 (1987): 20-33.

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