

Robin D. G. Kelley, *Freedom Dreams*. Boston: Beacon Press, 2002. 248 pages; ISBN: 0807009776 paperback; \$18.00.

Robin D. G. Kelley's *Freedom Dreams* outlines the contours of the twentieth-century black radical imagination, focusing on 'renegade' intellectuals and their "alternative visions and dreams" (ix). In the introductory notes, Kelley – known, among other things, as the author of *Race Rebels: Culture, Politics, and the Black Working Class* (1994) and *Yo' Mama's Disfunktional!: Fighting the Culture Wars in Urban America* (1997) – maps out his own intellectual and political journey from idealistic black nationalism through Marxism to surrealism. Notably, he does not primarily see surrealism as an artistic or aesthetic doctrine but as "an international revolutionary movement concerned with the emancipation of thought" (5). Kelley testifies that his mental odyssey has led him to appreciate visionary politics. "Call me utopian," he writes, "but I inherited my mother's belief that the map to a new world is in the imagination, in what we see in our third eyes rather than in the desolation that surrounds us" (2-3). Kelley links this spirit of "dreaming" with the legacy of the Great Dreamer Martin Luther King. This may not be the move one would expect from the author of a history of black political (mainly leftist) radicalisms, considering the ways in which demarcation lines among black intellectuals have been drawn in the past. In Kelley's words, however, his book was not written "for those traditional leftists who have traded in their dreams for orthodoxy and sectarianism" but for those who are still able to dream (7).

Chapter 1, "Dreams of the New Land," is a survey of back-to-Africa movements and other proposals for a black mass exodus from the United States to another "homeland." Kelley highlights the importance of the biblical Exodus story for these freedom dreams and presents a concise overview of their historical genealogies and outcomes. Chapter 2 looks at another variety of the African-American search for secular redemption and transformation, namely, black communism. Kelley does not focus on individuals whose communist affinities are well known to wide audiences, such as Richard Wright, but spends more time, for example, on Claude McKay's attendance at the Fourth Congress of the Third Communist International. Kelley's discussion of Paul Robeson's leftism is another valuable contribution, shedding light on an oft-forgotten aspect of the star's life: Robeson's Communist persuasion resulted in action by the House of Representatives' Special Committee on Un-American Activities (HUAC), and after his reputation had been tarnished and his career practically destroyed, he sank into a deep depression and finally suffered a nervous breakdown.

Chapter 3 examines the heyday of black nationalism in the mid- to the late 1960s from an atypical perspective: rather than re-telling the classic story of the Civil Rights and Black Power movements, Kelley brings into the spotlight "movements and activists that spoke of revolution, socialism, and self-determination, and looked to the Third World for models of black liberation in the United States" (62). Opting out of any critical paradigms of struggle that limit their visions to the U.S. context, Kelley

argues that such little-known groups as the Revolutionary Action Movement (RAM) supported, and were inspired by, anti-colonial movements and Third World solidarity. Chapter 4 explores “Dreams of Reparations,” providing vignettes of the immediate aftermath of the Civil War as well as of the current debate concerning the United States’ debt to the descendants of slaves. Kelley approaches the reparations campaign as a social movement that is not only, or even mainly, concerned with individual payments, but with social justice and the elimination of structural racism.

Chapter 5 sketches out the history of black feminist dreamers of freedom from Sojourner Truth and Anna Julia Cooper to such contemporary visionaries as bell hooks and Angela Davis. Avoiding a pitfall into which many historians of the movement have stumbled, Kelley consistently emphasizes that present-day African-American feminists are not only advocates of black women’s emancipation but also seek to be “theorists and proponents of a radical humanism committed to liberating humanity and reconstructing social relations across the board” (137). Kelley’s deliberate use of “we” in this context includes him in the group he discusses: “We are not talking about identity politics but a constantly developing, often contested, revolutionary conversation about how all of us might envision and remake the world” (137). Chapter 6 explores surrealism, arguing that many of its crucial sensibilities have always informed Afrodiasporic cultures. Calling attention to what Kelley sees as jazz’s impact on European and American surrealism, this chapter is particularly “inspired” (to use one of the critic Michael Awkward’s favorite terms) by the memory and music of the great pianist and composer Thelonius Monk – on whom, Kelley hints in the “Acknowledgments,” he will be writing next.

Although *Freedom Dreams* introduces a pantheon of individual figures, it is, above all, a book about black movements. In Kelley’s genealogical model, movements shape individual intellectuals’ thought and inspire the questions they ask. Kelley, moreover, situates individual black thinkers within the wider interracial movements; he looks, for example, at prominent black American communists as part of American communism writ large. In so doing, he stresses that black intellectuals, when articulating sensibilities dominant in their communities, “produced brilliant theoretical insights that might have pushed these movements in new directions,” had they not been held at bay for racist reasons (6).

Kelley’s reader-friendly overview is an intellectual project that is overtly political but not programmatic. Kelley’s avowed and unabashed utopianism at some level resonates with Paul Gilroy’s articulations of his objectives and visions in *Between Camps* (2000; also known as *Against Race*), although the respective guidelines of the historian and anthropologist Kelley and the sociologist and cultural critic Gilroy for choosing and organizing material are rather different. Kelley’s tapping into King’s vision and the consequently heavy emphasis on “the strength to love,” moreover, brings to mind bell hooks’s recent work. The common denominator between Kelley and Gilroy, at least – and Kelley would also include bell hooks in this group (see p.

137) – is a search for a new humanism, which highlights transnationality, transraciality, and cosmopolitanism, as well as embracing inclusive gender politics.

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Paul Lauter, *From Walden Pond to Jurassic Park: Activism, Culture & American Studies*. Durham: Duke University Press: 2001 (*New Americanists Series*, ed. Donald E Pease). 288 pages; ISBN 0-8223-2671-X; \$18.95 pbk.

Paul Lauter, Professor of Literature at Trinity College in Hartford, Connecticut, is one of the grand old “young” men of American Studies. For over 40 years he has been tilting at the windmills of established academic opinion, theory and methodology – and not without effect, as this wide-ranging collection of his essays makes clear. His chosen vehicle has been the field of American Studies, which he has been instrumental in developing and defining. As practicing teacher, theorist and former President of the American Studies Association (1992), he has expanded both the scope and the depth of the field, helping to define it as separate discipline from its early mentors, American literature and history. Further, as a self-proclaimed political activist and cultural radical with an agenda, Paul Lauter provides a refreshing change from the popular political neutrality of modernist and post-modernist perspectives. As a historian, I was particularly pleased with the way he has carefully placed his subjects and his own analysis of them into an historical context, following his adopted injunction to “Always historicize” (22).

That being said, it is difficult to find any center or specific aim to this compilation. Rather, it seems more like a set of essays in search of a mission. This is reflected in the structure of the book which is divided into three general categories; Part One, *Practicing American Studies* (five essays); Part Two, *American Studies in a Racialized World* (three essays) and; Part Three, *Revisiting the Canon: The Question of Modernism* (four essays). While all can be connected to American Studies – or at least American Studies as practiced by Lauter – there is no intrinsic connection either between the three parts or among the essays each contain, though Lauter spins a loose thematic thread around them in a series of introductions. Rather, they constitute snapshots of various aspects of American Studies as perceived by Lauter during the 1990s – though their subject matter ranges across the centuries.

The merit of the work lies in the individual essays (referred to as chapters) and the weight and insight that Lauter brings to their various topics. This is not inconsiderable, given his erudition. They can, however, be somewhat daunting. Reading them is to receive a flash course in the developments in the study of American literature and American Studies over the past fifty years, both explicitly in their stated content and implicitly in the manner Lauter refers them to us. Regarding style, Professor Lauter is a very well read gentleman, with a quick wit and an easy way with words. One gets the distinct impression of a virtuoso lecturer and instructor from his deft manner of