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**The Sun Never Set Upon The Blues: Reading and Honouring Clyde Woods, November
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In Memory of Clyde Woods: Racing Neoliberalism and its Long Durée

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Clyde and I were doctoral students at the Graduate School of Architecture and Urban planning at UCLA through the 1980s and we shared the same doctoral advisor, Ed Soja. But in the typical, often solitary nature of the work our paths didn't cross much during our years in the program, although we graduated the same year, and shared the podium in 1992 at Spring Convocation. It was really after I read *Development Arrested* (Woods 1998; 2007) that we connected. The book prompted me to propose a joint panel on 'Racing Neoliberalism' for the AAG conference of 2007 with the idea of opening a conversation between those in geography engaged in critical race theory and those who were otherwise critical but silent on issues of race (I saw myself largely in the latter category - reading Clyde's book I felt I clearly had something to learn). In historical geographies of the United States, this silence often takes the form of a sin of omission, one which (by implication) relegates the southern United States to the backward, the residual, the reactive. It begins with the casting of slavery as a pre-modern holdover rather than a constitutive dimension of modernity; the false positioning of southern blacks as passive victims of their fate, rather than active political citizens whose tactics and strategies we might learn from, a position

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which only compounds the inability of the so called 'progressive north' (the northern United States here) to forge sustained and meaningful political alliances.

The book was for me, something of a revelation, in which Clyde accomplished several tasks simultaneously. He recuperated knowledges that have been ignored or simply forgotten in critical geography around the constitutive dimensions of racial terror under capitalism, reaching back to slavery but repeated at different critical junctures in the history of the United States. In doing so, the work suggested - by demonstration - that to perpetuate this omission constitutes a “rupture of cultural memory” (Broeck 2003: 37) a crucial silence in the Althusserian sense of a symptomatic silence.

And Clyde’s work acted and continues to act as an invitation to further conversation - for reasons that speak at once to questions of conceptual development and theory building but that are also crucial more broadly to political practice. It is this invitation to further conversation, along with his insights, that Clyde leaves us in his legacy, a conversation that has been sadly cut short but one I think we must continue, for the good reasons elaborated in *Development Arrested* and in his subsequent work on post-Katrina New Orleans. *Development Arrested* is first of all a detailed historical geography of the two centuries of active and predatory underdevelopment of the Mississippi Delta by the planter’s bloc, which Clyde sets out in 12 separate stages. It is a complex work - it deserves reading, and rereading. This is a work you need to sit with to appreciate its several offerings - I will touch on only three here.

In his first line of argument Clyde invites us, as he put it so eloquently, to “revise labor history so that enslaved African Americans assume their rightful place as one of the world’s first working classes, and one of its most important”. And the book provides ample evidence that we must

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rethink the history of American slavery, not as a “feudal or semi-feudal throwback incompatible with capitalism” but rather to “re-conceptualize the history of the plantation south as a birthplace of American industrial capitalism” (see Woods 1999: 7, 6). Beginning with Marx’s observations that cotton production on slave plantations was absolutely necessary to the rise of industrial capitalism in England, Clyde invites us to reconsider the view that slavery on American soil was an anachronistic hold over from feudalism, and along with it the implied teleology of development of modes of production. He argues: “enslaved Africans had been [already once] ‘freed’ or alienated from their lands, tools, communal rights, hereditary privileges, and subsidies of nature. They were subsistence wage earners and the largest section of the working class... [C]apitalism in every period including the present can exist and thrive based on slavery and other forms of unfree labor” (1998: 46). Clyde thus invites those of us not fully engaged in critical race theory to trace the generative capacities of racism in capitalism back into its very core (rather than treating racism as one of many oppressions that one ‘needs’ to acknowledge simply out of a strategic mindfulness to build an inclusive politics).

His second line of argument is a recuperation of acts of resistance and critique by an oppressed black community, which Clyde carefully documents in excavating the political narratives in what he conceptualizes as a ‘blues epistemology’ - the primary vehicle of song which was left to a people who were denied access to decent, if any, education, for whom at some points in their history the very act of reading or writing could be cause for reprisal. Here Clyde challenges us to think beyond the conventional boundaries of who does theory and who simply follows a vanguard of thought and practice - raising questions about where we should look for (and what we should count as) critique, or analysis. To ignore this form of organic intellectual is to play into the myth that black communities were passive in the face of repeated repression. Clyde continued this line of argumentation in the investigation of rap songs that young black singers

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created in the wake of Katrina that documented the removal, repression and exploitations of the black community in New Orleans following that man-made disaster - an argument elaborated more fully in a series of articles by Woods (2009a; 2009b), Kish (2009), Camp (2009) and others in a special issue of *American Quarterly*.

And finally Clyde documents a history of two centuries of economic underdevelopment, punctuated by of repressive interventions by the plantation bloc to destroy any alternative infrastructures or organizational supports developed by the black community. Contemporary practices indentified with neoliberalism, such as creative destruction or privatization, were already long present in the rural south. This included willful destruction of cooperatives and collectives, and of community ventures of support, the razing of villages, the underfunding or complete lack of access to health care and education, and the placing of strict limits on subsistence farming (which forced families to resort to overpriced purchases from company stores). All of these practices resonate with the neoliberal trajectories and tendencies that are the subject of an ever-expanding literature in contemporary critical geography, and they took place long before the introduction of neoliberal practices on a national scale through the 1970s and 1980s. Clyde's book appeared before the critique of neoliberalism was fully developed in geographic scholarship but we would do well to revisit that literature and its claims in light of his work. The rise of neoliberalism is often told as a *national* story of a series of shocks to the welfare state, subsequently projected on a world stage that characterize the transition from a welfare to a workfare state. Some works have focused on the broad crisis in capitalist strategies of accumulation that found purchase in the philosophies of Friedman, Hayek and others, who espouse the freedom of individuals and markets even as the practices of neoliberals involve brutal dismantling of Keynesian infrastructures and repression of those very freedoms (see Harvey 2005). Others have focused on the regional specificities of roll back and roll out

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neoliberalism and its complex historical geographies - Jamie Peck's (2001) *Workfare States* and Neil Brenner and Nik Theodore's (2002) work on the geographies of 'actually existing neoliberalism' come to mind. What has been missing from this literature and what Clyde's work brings to light, although he did not engage the terminology of neoliberalism specifically: an older genealogy of the project and its complicity with racial terror. Although the dominant narrative around neoliberalism in the United States emphasizes that attacks have been mounted against a largely white unionized working class, a dismantling of the golden age of Fordism and along with it the Keynesian welfare state, many of the technologies of neoliberalism were honed and refined in the rural south long before this. This includes the development of 'role model theory', which attributed poverty in black communities in the rural south to moral deficiency, and the claims that the antidote was an intensification of capitalist development. What Clyde later termed as asset-stripping - in his analysis of post-Katrina New Orleans - is evident in two centuries of active underdevelopment of the Mississippi Delta. This invites us at the very least to consider the links between these earlier technologies we now associate with neoliberal practices and their contemporary form. The contours of workfare (and its racialized dimensions) emerged in chiaroscuro in the rural south in moments such as the 1930s when WPA allotments and welfare relief were cut severely if African Americans refused to work in the fields.

This is not to suggest that these practices in the southern United States were somehow simply a precursor to the development of a fully articulated neoliberal agenda in the north. Clyde's work invites us to look at a different genealogy of neoliberal practices, a neoliberalism of a long durée. More than that he documents several crucial moments when the north - both northern unions and politicians (among them presumed progressives) - was complicit in these processes, or at the very least, attempted to dilute demands, refocusing movement energies away from more contentious issues like land reform and towards voter registration. This disconnect between north

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and south, between African American workers in the plantation economy (whether as slaves, gang laborers, or sharecroppers) begs the question about the alternative histories that might have emerged had a different and deeper alliance been struck. Similarly, were the critical left in geography to treat racialization as an organizing principle rather than effect of modernity, of capitalism, Clyde's work invites us to consider what kinds of alliances, what kinds of analyses, practices and conversations might emerge. It is this conversation, sadly cut short with Clyde, that we must continue with the rich and thought-provoking legacy he has left us.

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