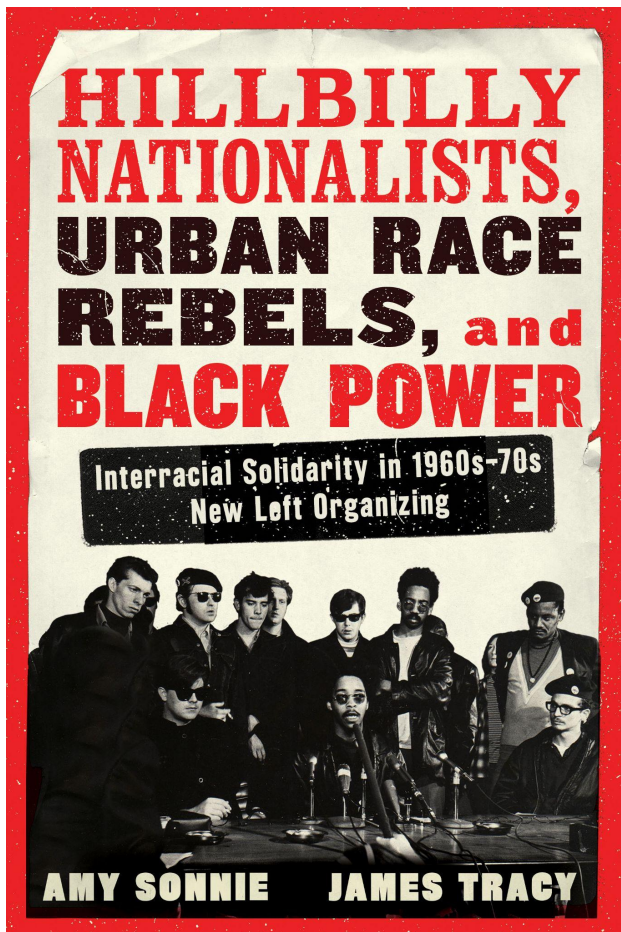


# Hillbilly Nationalists, Urban Race Rebels, and Black Power

BY AMY SONNIE AND JAMES TRACY

Book Discussion Guide for Expanded Edition



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## About this Guide

*"We say you don't fight racism with racism. We're gonna fight racism with solidarity."*  
— Chairman Fred Hampton, Chicago Black Panthers

This study guide for the updated and revised edition of *Hillbilly Nationalists, Urban Race Rebels, and Black Power: Interracial Solidarity in 1960s New Left Organizing* is intended for students, teachers, academic, activists, and general readers. Its purpose is to bring the questions and ideas inherent in the book to a more personal context and to serve as a guide for thinking about various forms of oppression in the United States—and specifically efforts to confront racism and classism, which led to significant interracial alliances. The guide also serves to highlight the broader context of the history discussed in the book and to spark discussion about the successes and failures of the New Left, how those successes and failures apply to our own contemporary political realities, and what lessons can be learned.

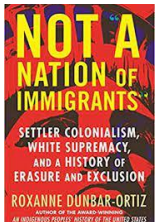
If you have questions or comments about this guide please contact Amelia Stymacks at [amelia@mhpbooks.com](mailto:amelia@mhpbooks.com).

# Discussion Questions by Theme

## Settler Colonialism and Racialized Capitalism

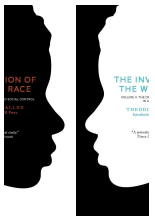
- What does the foreword by Dr. Roxanne Dunbar-Ortiz tell us about the role of race, class, and gender in the creation of the United States? Define settler colonialism and discuss how Native American, Black, poor white, Latinx, Asian, and other communities of color have been treated differently historically and today. *Refer to: Foreword*
- What is your family history? How did issues of race/ethnicity, class, gender/sexuality, citizenship, and geography shape your family's story and your opportunities? Create a timeline. Share at least two or three events that shaped your understanding of power, justice, opportunity, and belonging. Consider, as well, moments you acted in solidarity, or that changed you in some formative way. Explain why. *Refer to: Foreword, All Chapters*
- The Young Lords Organization asserted that international imperialism and colonialism were linked to domestic racism. Research the U.S. relationship to Puerto Rico. How did it inform the Young Lords' assessment? How do racism and imperialism intersect today? *Refer to: Chapter 2*

### Related Resources



**Not a Nation of Immigrants and An Indigenous Peoples' History of the United States** by Roxanne Dunbar-Ortiz

**Our History Is the Future: Standing Rock vs. the Dakota Access Pipeline, and the Long Tradition of Indigenous Resistance** by Nick Estes



**The Invention of the White Race** vol. I and II by Theodore W. Allen

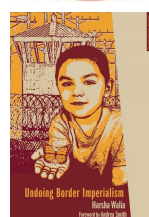
**Stamped from the Beginning: The Definitive History of Racist Ideas in America** by Ibram X. Kendi



**All My Relations** podcast with Matika Wilbur and Adrienne Keane

**Undoing Border Imperialism** by Harsha Walia

**Borderlands/La Frontera** by Gloria Anzaldúa



**War Against All Puerto Ricans** by Nelson Denis

**Harvest of Empire** by Juan Gonzalez

**A Different Mirror** by Ronald Takaki

## Rainbow Politics, Multiracial Solidarity & Common Cause

- What was the original Rainbow Coalition and what do the authors mean when they refer to the “longer legacy of rainbow politics in Chicago and beyond”? *Refer to: Introduction, all chapters, Epilogue*
- The groups profiled in this book built alliances based on common concerns—from poor housing conditions, to exploitative workplaces, to reproductive health and police brutality. How did these groups build solidarity with one another, even as they pursued the specific needs of their own communities? Name and discuss three issues today that can unite low-income communities in “common cause” without erasing differences.

- How did Black Panther leader Bobby Lee build trust and fellowship with poor white residents of Uptown? How did the Young Patriots build trust with the Black Panthers?
- What were the common interests of the Young Patriots, the Black Panthers, and the Young Lords? How did they deal with their differences? What lessons can you draw from the Rainbow Coalition, in particular the leadership of the Black Panthers, about the possibility of building multiracial coalitions today?
- What impact did Fred Hampton's assassination and government repression under COINTELPRO have on the Young Patriots, both in terms of influencing the organization's direction and leading to its dissolution? Why do you think an alliance like the Rainbow Coalition and Hampton's leadership was considered uniquely threatening by J. Edgar Hoover's FBI and the Chicago Red Squad?
- When Rising Up Angry held a rent strike, they targeted landlords who owned buildings in neighborhoods across segregated neighborhoods, and together demanded "good housing is a human right." A rent strike was a tactic within a broad social movement where poor people of all races stood together. Where do you see examples of similar tactics today?
- Why did White Lightning take a different stance on drug use than organizations with primarily middle-class members? How did Michael Tabor's ("Capitalism Plus Dope Equals Genocide") analysis impact White Lightning's understanding of addiction?
- What factors made it more difficult for White Lightning to organize white residents, compared to a group like the Young Patriots? Why did "cultural nationalism" and strict solidarity politics make less sense to them, compared to "internationalism"?
- The authors write (see Chapter 4 endnote): "Nelson Rockefeller didn't invent the War on Drugs—Richard Nixon did when he made the anti-drug agenda a central part of his presidency—but the Rockefeller Laws provided the blueprint for states to implement it." What were the consequences of these laws and how has the War on Drugs and "law and order" rhetoric more generally shaped the U.S. prison system over the last 40 years?
- How did groups like the Oregon Young Patriots bring "rainbow politics" into prison organizing? Research the U.S. prison system and examples of prison activism today.
- Many of the activists profiled in this book made sacrifices to join the movement. While white activists were sometimes punished less severely by vigilantes, law enforcement, and the FBI than Native American, Black, and Brown activists, there were still significant consequences for their activism, including murders. Choose one example from the book that shows how 1960s-70s activists grappled with these risks. Why did they choose to take the stand they did? What risks do social justice activists face today and who is most impacted?
- The authors write in the epilogue, "If it weren't for the millstone of government repression, the original Rainbow Coalition might have guided these organizations and the broader New Left through changing times." What lasting impact has the original Rainbow Coalition had, and what were its aims?

*Refer to:*  
Introduction,  
Chapter 2, and  
interview with Hy  
Thurman

*Refer to:*  
Chapter 3

*Refer to:*  
Chapters 2 and 4

*Refer to:*  
All chapters,  
Epilogue

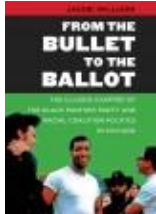
## Related Resources



**First Rainbow Coalition** film dir. by Ray Santisteban (2019)

**Black Power** by Jeffrey Ogbar

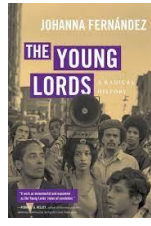
**Liberation, Imagination and the Black Panther Party** ed. Kathleen Cleaver, George Katsiaficas



**From the Bullet to the Ballot** by Jakobi Williams

**Legacy to Liberation** by Fred Ho

**Global Imagination of 1968** ed. Katsiaficas, Cleaver, et al.



**The Young Lords: A Radical History** by Johanna Fernández

**The Struggle Within: Prisons, Political Prisoners, and Mass Movements in the United States** by Dan Berger



**COINTELPRO 101** film - Freedom Archives

**American Revolution II** film

**The People's Detox** film by Jenna Bliss

**Judas and the Black Messiah** film by Shaka King (2020)

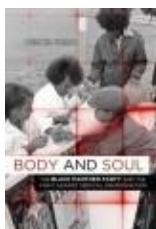
See also: Young Patriots [website](#), and National Young Lords [website](#) / [archive](#).

## Serve the People

- Why did the Black Panthers start “Serve the People” programs and what are some examples of the services they provided? What did the Black Panthers mean when they used the phrase “Survival Pending Revolution”?
- What “serve the people” programs did the groups profiled in *Hillbilly Nationalists* run in white and multiracial communities? How did the groups leverage their community programs to engage residents and build multiracial solidarity for fair housing, healthcare, and other human rights?
- Research examples of serve-the-people style programs today. What values do today's mutual aid programs uphold? How are they similar or different from the programs of the Black Panther Party?

Refer to:  
Chapters  
2, 3 and 4

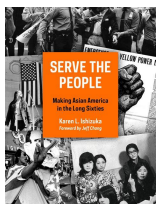
## Related Resources



**Body and Soul: the Black Panther Party & the fight against medical discrimination** by Alondra Nelson

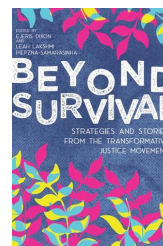
**Serve the People** by Karen Ishizuka

**The Black Panthers: Vanguard of the Revolution** film by Stanley Nelson



**Want to Start a Revolution?** ed. by Gore, Theoharis & Woodard. See chapter on Oakland Community School

**Survival Pending Revolution** by Paul Alkebulan; and **The Black Panther Party: Service to the People Programs** by David Hilliard



**Beyond Survival** ed. by Piepzna-Samarasinha & Dixon

**Survival and Resistance: Mutual Aid in Disastrous Times** webinar with Klee Benally, adrienne maree brown, Naomi Klein, Dean Spade and Chandan Reddy via Red May 2021



**Mutual Aid: Building Solidarity During This Crisis (and the Next)** by Dean Spade (with [study guide](#))

## Poor Whites and the White Arc of the Rainbow

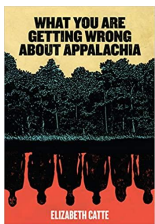
- The five groups profiled in this book mobilized poor white communities with deliberate attention to address racism alongside economic concerns. Why was this so important and how did it lay the groundwork for poor whites' participation in the Rainbow Coalition and similar multiracial alliances? What did these groups do to address racism in white communities?  
*Refer to:*  
Foreword, Introduction, All Chapters
- Dr. Dunbar-Ortiz asserts, "the truth is that the Movement was, and still is, mired in class hatred." Peggy Terry, Hy Thurman, and other members of JOIN and the Young Patriots came to the same conclusion. After reading this book, do you agree or disagree? What might the community activists profiled in this book have done to build more trust across class divides?  
*Refer to:*  
Foreword, Chapter 1, Interview with Hy Thurman
- In the introduction, the authors explore media images of poor whites. Why do you think white southerners, "rednecks," and hillbillies are the subject of jokes and negative media attention? After reading this book, how has your understanding of poor whites, in particular poor white southerners, changed? Does this change your understanding of racism and ways to end it?  
*Refer to:*  
Introduction, Chapters 1 and 2
- What do you think the authors meant, in the introduction, when they asserted that many poor whites profiled in this book came to see that "ending racism was not a threat or an act of charity, but a part of gaining their own freedom"? Do you agree?  
*Refer to:*  
Introduction, all Chapters
- What were the steps in Peggy Terry's antiracist development, from daughter of a Klan sympathizer to neighborhood organizer with JOIN Community Union? What might these steps reveal about white antiracist growth in general?
  - Black leader Monroe Sharp (Congress of Racial Equality) told Peggy Terry, "You have to really know who you are before you ever know who we are." Was his advice intended to reinforce segregation or transform it? Why was Peggy hesitant and what did she learn? How does knowing "who you are" help you think about your own social justice activism today?
  - Peggy Terry's vice-presidential run was strategic: she knew she wasn't going to win. What was she hoping to achieve? What was her message to white voters and what was her opponent's message? If Peggy Terry ran today, what might she say and where might she go? Write a sample speech.
- In Chapter 1 we meet student activist Jean Tepperman, who recalls a decisive moment at the 1963 March on Washington when she was asked to join thousands of others to "take a collective step forward if they would commit their lives to the struggle." Thinking about your own values, activism, or path, what moments can you recall when you needed to make a deliberate commitment to take a stand, make a change, or commit to a cause? What made this choice easy or difficult?  
*Refer to:*  
Chapter 1
- While members of JOIN and the Young Patriots migrated from the South or came from college campuses, members of October 4th Organization and White Lightning grew up in urban working-class neighborhoods. How did this distinction shape the work they did?  
*Refer to:*  
Chapter 4

- Philadelphia's October 4th Organization worked in both workplaces and communities. Do you think that one is more productive than the other as a site for working-class organizing today?
- What are some of the ways that the October 4th Organization created spaces for public protest? How did they then use those spaces to identify and organize neighbors sympathetic to their cause?
- How did class factor into the Vietnam War and anti-Vietnam War organizing? How did Rising Up Angry become a more welcoming home for Vietnam War vets and draftees than other Left organizations?
- In 1968, Rising Up Angry's Mike James challenged serious organizers to "get off the Interstate" and connect to the progressive potential of the heartland. Many of the New Left activists interviewed for this book believe the white Left's failure to mobilize even greater masses of poor white Americans was a "fatal flaw." Does this same advice apply today? How would you define the "heartland" and what would it mean for progressive organizing today?
- Today we are seeing an increase in white supremacist, homophobic and transphobic, and anti-feminist campaigns that are radicalizing people to the "right." What can people who believe in justice, dignity, and collective liberation do to counteract this and appeal to working-class and poor white people?

*Refer to:*  
Chapter 3

*Refer to:*  
Epilogue,  
All chapters

## Related Resources

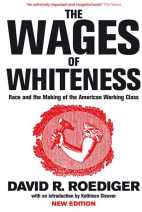


**What You Are Getting Wrong About Appalachia** by Elizabeth Catte

**The Wages of Whiteness: Race and the Making of the American Working Class** by David Roediger

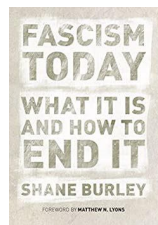
**Not Quite White: White Trash and the Boundaries of Whiteness** by M. Wray

MEMOIRS:  
**Revolutionary Hillbilly** by Hy Thurman  
**Odyssey of a Mother Country**  
**Radical** by Chuck Armsbury  
**A Blanquito in El Barrio** by Gil Fagiani



**Solidarity Is This: The Role of White People** podcast episode 16 by Deepa Iyer with Heather Cronk & Olivia Lowery (see [syllabus](#))

**A Promise and a Way of Life** by Becky Thompson



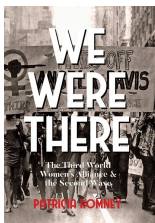
**White Rage: The Unspoken Truth of Our Racial Divide** by C. Anderson

**Fascism Today: What It Is and How to End It** by Shane Burley  
See also: [Suggested readings](#) from Conspire for Change

## Gender and Feminism

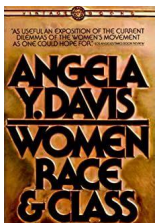
- In 1969, the Third World Women's Alliance started a newspaper called *Triple Jeopardy*. What did the term "triple jeopardy" refer to? Research this alliance, the Combahee River Collective, and the origins of the term "intersectionality." How did the leadership and scholarship of Black women and women of color influence the organizing work of the groups profiled in this book?  
*Refer to:* Chapter 4, as well as 3
- At a time when many second wave feminists were taking a separatist path, the women of Rising up Angry and October 4th Organization remained committed to staying in the community, working with men, addressing domestic violence, and advocating for reproductive rights. What were the class dynamics involved in that decision?  
*Refer to:* Chapters 3 and 4
- Members of JOIN formed Welfare Recipients Demand Action and participated in the formation of the National Welfare Rights Union. What shared experiences brought white women and women of color together at a time when other organizations focused on either race, class/labor, or gender, but rarely all three? What did they hope to achieve?  
*Refer to:* Chapter 1
- During their time in JOIN several leaders helped found the Chicago Women's Liberation Union, one of the oldest feminist organizations in the country. How did the women's liberation movement shape JOIN and Rising Up Angry? What tensions existed in the 1960s women's movement, and how did groups in this book counter those tensions?  
*Refer to:* Chapters 1 and 3
- How did Rising Up Angry evolve from being an organization primarily focused on organizing young men into a thriving space for working-class female leadership? What contributed to this evolution and why was it important?
- What do you think people mean when they use "identity politics" as an insult? What is the origin of this term? What do the groups in this book teach us about race, class, and gender "identity" within coalitions that recognize differences as well as similarities?  
*Refer to:* Epilogue, and All chapters

## Related Resources



**The Activist Roots of Black Feminist Theory** by Linda Burnham  
(with [video](#) discussion March 2021)

**We Were There: The Third World Women's Alliance and the Second Wave** by Patricia Romney



**Until Black Women Are Free, None of Us Will Be Free** by Keeanga-Yamahtta Taylor

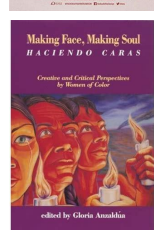
**Women, Race & Class** by Angela Y. Davis



**She's Beautiful When She's Angry** film  
dir. by Mary Dore

**Rising Up Angry** archives

**Chicago Women's Liberation Union Herstory Project** website



**The Trouble Between Us** by Wini Breines

**Making Face, Making Soul: Creative and Critical Perspectives by Feminists of Color** ed. Gloria Anzaldúa



## Music, Media & Culture Wars

- We are seeing an increase in disinformation campaigns designed to confuse, discredit, and attack racial justice and social justice, including the teaching of historical facts about racism (see attacks on “critical race theory,” the 1619 Project, and ethnic studies). What did you learn from this book that can help you demonstrate the value of honest conversation about racism (historically and today)?
  - Research and discuss examples of disinformation used against the civil rights, Black Power, and New Left movements? What similarities and differences exist today?
  - Research and define disinformation. Identify three examples of disinformation today and discuss what is at stake for everyday people (from education to elections). What can people who believe in justice, dignity, and liberation do to counteract disinformation campaigns?
- Nearly every New Left organization engaged in publishing and cultural work. According to historian John McMillian, independent media “helped to socialize people into the Movement, foster a spirit of mutuality among them, and raise their democratic expectations.” Locate three primary sources representative of New Left media—from newspapers to comics, art, poetry, symbols, and music. What do you notice about the topics, concerns, and design? What similarities and differences can you observe with the way social movements use media, the Internet, and cultural symbols today?
- Why did the Young Patriots originally embrace the Confederate flag? How did their coalition partners react to this decision? What led them to eventually disavow the flag? Thinking about today, what distinguishes symbols that groups reclaim from symbols that remain oppressive?
- What are some examples of how JOIN Community Union, the Young Patriots, and Rising Up Angry celebrated local culture? How did this emphasis lead to organizing successes on the one hand, and tensions with some student activists (from Students for a Democratic Society) on the other? Was it right for student organizers to adopt and participate in local culture when they were living in the community?
- Rising Up Angry sought to expand on the work of JOIN Community Union, partly by organizing disenfranchised white youth throughout Chicago. What are some examples of Angry’s cultural work, and how did they utilize culture-building activities to bring white youth into antiracist organizing?

Refer to:  
All chapters,  
Epilogue,  
Interview with  
Hy Thurman

Refer to:  
All chapters

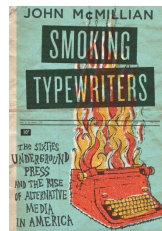
Refer to:  
Chapter 2, and  
Interview with  
Hy Thurman

Refer to:  
Chapters 1, 2, 3

### Related Resources



**Party Music: The Inside Story of the Black Panthers' Band and How Black Power Transformed Soul Music** by Rickey Vincent  
**Framing the Black Panthers** by Jane Rhodes



**Smoking Typewriters: The Sixties Underground Press** by John McMillian  
Freedom Archives [White Lighting](#) newspaper collection  
[Disinfo Defense Toolkit](#) from ReFrame (2020)

## From Theory to Practice: Lessons for Today

- Ask each member of the group to collect family stories (oral, written, or photographed) on family history during the 1950s to 1970s. Did any members of your family participate in New Left organizing (examples: Civil Rights, Black Power and Third World Liberation, women's movement, student movement, Yippies, anti-war demonstrations, gay liberation)? Why or why not?
- What key political and economic philosophies comprised the analytical base of the groups discussed in the book? What about these philosophies makes these organizations representative of the Left? What can we learn from New Left groups that could benefit movements today?
- What do these groups teach us about the difference between being an "ally" and being in active "solidarity?" Define each term and share a time in your life when you stood up in support of an issue, cause, or person. Which kind of action were you taking?
- In the book *Trans Liberation* Leslie Feinberg traces the birth of the trans/queer liberation movement to the 1960s Black feminist and Third World Liberation movements. Yet poor, trans sex workers were written out of the story of Stonewall/Gay Liberation until recently and these same participants remained (mostly) closeted within the groups profiled in Sonnie and Tracy's book. Research the origins of Trans/Queer Liberation. What are three ways you can be in solidarity with working-class trans, nonbinary, LGBTQ+ people today?
- While de facto segregation still exists today, many rural, suburban, and urban communities are home to racially mixed populations of working-class people, including refugees and immigrants. What does the "common cause of freedom" mean in these regions? What tensions exist?
- How does climate change impact low-income communities, rural communities, and communities of color? Identify one region impacted by climate change (from extreme weather to wildfires, flooding, drought, and impact on local fishing, farming, or food supply, etc). Who lives in this community? What alliances could be built with others facing the impacts of climate change?
- List the key community organizing strategies these groups used to bring people together, address racism and sexism, and forge alliances. What stands out as similar to or different from today's social justice movements?

Refer to:  
Full book  
including  
Interview with  
Hy Thurman

Discussion guide created by Amy Sonnie and James Tracy, with input and contributions by Lynn Lewis, Malkia Cyril, and Jen Soriano.



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