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Cedric Johnson, *After Black Lives Matter: Policing and Anti-Capitalist Struggle*. Verso, 2023, 416 pages. ISBN 9781804291672.

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Cedric Johnson's *After Black Lives Matter* documents a crucial moment in U.S. history, beginning with the Black Lives Matter (BLM) movement. Johnson highlights a time of vulnerability during President Trump's administration, when many experienced a collective "feeling of blackness" and came to the painful realization that their collective lives didn't matter in a society rooted in systemic racism and capitalist exploitation. This period reached a peak with the gruesome murder of George Floyd by the Minneapolis police and the COVID-19 pandemic. Global uncertainty and anxiety were amplified by police brutality and a government that appeared to exhibit fascist tendencies. The BLM movement provided a space for mourning, memorialization, and a sense of normalcy in a world that had been shut down and was just beginning to reopen. Johnson also emphasizes how the internet and social media brought police brutality into the public view, allowing northerners to witness firsthand the injustices faced by Black communities in the South.

One of the key arguments in this book is that the election of Barack Obama did not bridge the racial divide in the U.S., as many had hoped. Johnson critiques the simplistic view that the racial issues within policing can be attributed solely to race, emphasizing the need for accountability within the broader capitalist framework. Johnson asserts that the modern incarceration system is driven by the need for a capital and class struggle, a system that has roots in urbanization following World War II and is now deeply intertwined with wealth accumulation and property protection. Johnson defines the problem of modern policing as one where police departments are saddled with the task of managing a "surplus population" (21). In this book, capitalism and class struggles lie at the helm of the modern-day incarceration system. Therefore, movements or slogans like "The New Jim Crow" and "Black Lives Matter," which view the incarceration system as a way to "control Black bodies," appeal to liberal commonsense understandings of American inequality (21). Johnson does not center race as the primary problem of American policing; rather, he views police officers as tools used by capitalists to secure property. He demonstrates that only when we understand the incarceration and

policing issues through this lens can we broaden the discussion and work toward meaningful progress, where the problem of modern policing is not confined to race alone. Instead, such discussions should focus on broader social and human concerns. The book argues that only when the capitalist logic that modern policing serves is abolished can we effectively address the carceral system.

The book is divided into six chapters and uses methods like historical analysis and interpretation, political and cultural criticism, and speculative theory. The first chapter traces the history of carceral origins by exploring how race and class are tied together. In this chapter, Johnson conducts a historical analysis of the origins of the new incarceration systems, arguing that they arose as a means of maintaining wealth accumulation within the capitalist system. He notes that the methods of maintaining capital through policing have evolved over the years. The chapter critiques works like C. Vann Woodward's and Michelle Alexander's *The New Jim Crow*, which center race as the primary focus of their investigation of policing problems. However, Johnson also praises these works for their ability to recognize certain issues. For instance, the chapter acknowledges Alexander's documentation of second-class citizenship and "felon disenfranchisement" as conditions created by mass incarceration but disagrees with Alexander's assertion that "Black people feel policing and incarceration worse than any other group" (42).

Johnson focuses on class rather than caste, as Alexander does, rejecting idealist notions that race or caste alone provides sufficient explanations for policing injustices (44). The chapter acknowledges that discrimination exists in jobs and public spaces such as clubs. However, it still maintains that policing evolves with class struggle, as labor is "regulated for the benefit of class interest" (59). The chapter further explores how modern-day policing does not allow for the redemption of the incarcerated but works to keep them perpetually disadvantaged. Johnson argues that modern policing evolved to protect capitalist interests and maintain class hierarchies. Documentaries like *Up the Ridge* and *13th* support his argument that the prison system operates primarily as a profit-making institution rather than a place of redemption or rehabilitation.

As the book progresses, Johnson highlights the mid-twentieth century as the rise of a consumer-driven nation that deepened issues of policing and mass incarceration. Class became tied to consumption, leading to increased policing to sustain this system. The Cold War and postwar capitalism created a middle-class consumer society and a growing population of unemployed people. Johnson critiques race-focused explanations for these issues, arguing that without addressing the role of capitalism and class dynamics, we cannot fully understand the expansion of policing and prisons.

The book argues that poverty, particularly Black urban poverty, is not a temporary or incidental issue but a necessary condition for the survival of capitalism,

which relies on low wages and a competitive labor market. In later chapters, Johnson critiques identity politics within the Black Lives Matter (BLM) movement, noting that while Black identity politics has played a role in raising awareness about systemic injustice, it may not offer lasting solutions to police violence. He suggests that activists must broaden their focus beyond the police as mere oppressors and instead view them as workers who are shaped by and complicit in the same capitalist system they enforce.

The book concludes by examining the January 6, 2021, insurrection at the White House, revealing not only the fragility of American democracy but also the limits of abolitionist ideas, especially those from the radical left of the BLM movement. The insurrection showed a stark contrast between how the police were deployed during BLM protests, with heavy force used against peaceful protesters, and the relatively lenient treatment of Trump supporters storming the Capitol. Many observers saw this disparity as an example of "white privilege," while further critiquing the irony that, while BLM protests advocated for dismantling police forces, the insurrection reminded many Americans of the necessity for police to maintain order. Johnson believes that this contradiction reveals the challenges BLM faces in its mission to reform or abolish policing.

While Johnson offers a powerful critique of the relationship between capitalism, policing, and class, his downplaying of race's role in shaping the carceral system may risk oversimplifying the lived realities of Black communities. Race and class dynamics are not mutually exclusive; they often intersect to influence both public perceptions of law enforcement and the lived experiences of those affected by the system. The book could also have probed deeper into the internal contradictions within abolitionist thought, exploring how movements aiming to dismantle the carceral state can navigate the ongoing realities of racial violence and systemic injustice.

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