

Book Reviews

***Knocking The Hustle: Against the Neoliberal Turn in Black Politics.* By Lester K. Spence. Brooklyn, New York: Punctum Books. pp. 190. \$19.00 (paper).**

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Neither I nor anyone else should be writing a review of *Knocking the Hustle: Against the Neoliberal Turn in Black Politics*. It is potentially too important to be satisfied with its current form. It is a draft, but it should not be a final draft.

The work's greatest strengths are that it identifies, explains, and illustrates a number of key concepts that enable one to grapple with contemporary Black politics in the United States. Its greatest weakness is its exposition.

The narrative opens with a brilliant introduction which the author calls a Foreword. Dr. Spence describes an episode in his own life and compares it with that of a hypothetical Black man of different educational, income, family, and networking backgrounds. The rest of the book explains and illustrates the circumstances which have rendered the two scenarios commonplace within the contemporary United States, points out the extraordinary depth and breadth of oppressive conditions, and argues for political strategies which can overcome them. Except for the Foreword, the most powerful part of the book is the last chapter, outlining strategies which might effectively counter the liberal turn.

The question of central importance to Dr. Spence is the kind of society and governance that Black people in the United States, and the United States as a whole, want. To answer it he postulates a number of critical elements for investigation. The principal one is the neoliberal turn. By the neoliberal turn he means the belief that society works best when it works according to the principles of the market. Other elements

include: the significance of good/bad jobs, the hustle as a way of life, how racial politics enabled the U.S. population to support the turn to neoliberalism in such large numbers, the fact that there is more inequality within the Black population than there is within the white population, the significance of human capital in neoliberalism, the resources needed to build and maintain families, the importance of anti-respectability in the politics of the Black Lives Matter movement, *seizing* power as preferable to *speaking truth* to power as a political strategy, and the greater importance of political organizing over mobilizing in the long term.

All of these considerations are explored in the text, but they have to be dragged, kicking, and screaming, out of the morass in which they are enmeshed.

There are a number of factors which contribute to the difficulty of wrestling the author's key observations out of the text. One is that the target audience for the discussion is not clear. As a result, the narrative can have different effects for different sets of readers. For example, information about peonage, details about the New Deal and the great depression out of which it arose, the significance of organized labor, the complexity of the Civil Rights Movement, private financial backing for charter schools, and the devastating impact of neoliberalism on populations throughout Africa, Asia, Latin America, and the Carribean, will be familiar to many academics and activists. On the other hand, detailed information about such subjects is imperative for others to follow Spencer's thinking—even though it is impossible for him to supply *enough* such information within a book of this length.

A related problem is redundancy. It is important to reinforce a subject for people who are unfamiliar with it. For others the same practice results in tedium. In short, how Dr. Spence identifies his reading audience is important. It is not clear that he has done that.

Some simple fixes could be applied for the sake of clarity. The author's exegesis is both wide-ranging and intricate. A few guide posts would help the reader remain oriented. The chapters are numbered, but except for the final chapter—Solutions—they are not named. Providing titles would help readers stay focused. The Foreword might more rightly be labeled Introduction. The other chapters, even though all of them are eclectic, each have prominent themes, consecutively: The Hustle, Cities, The Black Megachurch, Education, and What Won't Work.

Editing is key to all that. Spence is animated by tidbits which support and sometimes give presence to parts of his discussion: how Motown organized its labor, and where it got its name; how often Ace-Hood's composition is reflected in varied settings; Times Square's movement from a center of pornography to a center of neon billboards. Often such reflections counter the force of the narrative. The reader has to re-boot. Where exactly are we? Additionally, there are all too many common composition errors. There are not more typos than normal, but there are more errors in grammar, punctuation, phrasing, and incomplete sentences. The volume is too long to be an article and too short to be a book that adequately addresses its central themes. It needs more background on the Black church, a deeper consideration of leaving prophets and public intellectuals behind, a fuller examination of the whole range of contradictions in the Black population. This work represents, perhaps, some of the key challenges of transforming an article into a book (In the Foreword, Spence says it came out of a *SOULS* article).

Professor Spence saves the best of the book for last. His discussions of the Baltimore Algebra Project and the Leaders of a Beautiful Struggle in Baltimore; The Malcolm X Grass Roots Movement in Jackson, Mississippi; and the Chicago Teachers Union are instructive and enlightening. Each is worthy of another chapter.

As this book now stands, it is for those who are ready to dig, who do not mind having their important assumptions challenged, and who dare to envision, as Professor Spence puts it, another way of life.

***Race and the Origins of American Neoliberalism.* By Randolph Hohle. Routledge Research in Race and Ethnicity. New York and London: Routledge, 2015. 256 pp., \$145.00 Cloth**

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In recent years there has been a growing interest in the relationship between race and the neoliberal policies ushered into existence by the