



DIXIE BE DAMNED

*A Regional History of the
South East Through an
Insurrectional Anarchist Lens*



THE FINAL STRAW RADIO

JUNE 6, 2015



This week, we're excited to (re-)present a 2015 conversation with Saralee Stafford and Neal Shirley, editors and authors of their book out from AK Press entitled *Dixie Be Damned: 300 years of Insurrection in the American South*. The book is a study of Maroon, Indigenous, White, Black, worker, farmer, slave, indentured, women and men wrestling against institutions of power for autonomy and self-determination. All of this in a region stereotyped to be backwards, slow, lazy, victimized and brutal. The editors do a smash-bang job of re-framing narratives of revolt by drawing on complex and erased examples of cross-subjectivity struggles and what they can teach us today about current uprisings in which we participate.

Throughout the interview we explore some of the examples that became chapters in the book, critiques of narrative histories and academia and what new ways forward might be towards an anarchist historiography.

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TFSR: We're speaking to the editors of a new history book out from AK Press "*Dixie Be Damned: 300 Years of Insurrection in the American South*" - Saralee Stafford and Neal Shirley come on down. Thank you so much for your time.

Saralee: Thanks for having us.

Neal: No problem.

TFSR: So considering the relative popularity of regional histories and what this book is actually about, what brought you to write this book? And how does it diverge from what one might expect from a Southern history?

Neal: Yeah, there's a lot of regional histories out there, and Southern history is sort of its own genre that draws up, perhaps a niche, but highly, highly fanatical crowds. So, that is something we encountered when we first started talking about writing the book. You know, our take on it, first and foremost was that we've read a lot of those histories, but always found them really unsatisfactory in either even remotely dealing with these kinds of rebellious moments and social movements and whatnot that we deal with in our book. But when they do deal with them, there's these sort of very highly-scripted narratives, choreographed almost, if you will, that seek to explain the kinds of tension, social tension and social war that you see in the South. You know, just the short answer to your question, I think, is just that we found those explanations, highly unsatisfactory, in actually explaining, the roots of those tensions, and the kinds of conflict that happened in those rebellious moments and how those moments speak to today. Right? How they speak to the present. You know, we're anarchists, we sought to write a book about Southern conflict and social conflict and social war in the South that speaks to those politics, but also just that actually speaks to the present in general.

Saralee: And I think that while there is volumes and volumes of

regional history, specifically about the South written. There's not much to speak of regional history written by anarchists right now. And we hope that in doing this, also, it inspires others to kind of take on regions that they live in and look at inspiring histories of revolt from around different regions in the South, and not just the South, but the country. And I think, furthermore, this problem that we have a lot as anarchists, especially Southern anarchist, is that we are constantly looking at history that's in one sense, not our own, for inspiration. Whether it's to the big cities in the US or Europe. And I think for us, it was about trying to find things that resonated. Because in order to have the history be relevant in your present, it is important to know about what revolt has looked like in your own region.

TFSR: To be a little more direct, Neal, when you were talking about tensions that get danced around? Can you talk more explicitly about what kind of tensions you're talking about, in terms of histories written of the South?

Neal: Yeah, absolutely. It's something we deal head-on with in the book, and that have this hypothesis as we're doing the research and from our own politics and experiences. But that became more and more frustrating and explicit, as we learn more, and as we talked as collaborators and thought more was specifically like the way the progressive narrative has shaped the South. And I mean that in the broadest sense possible. I don't mean, like left Democrat. I mean any narrative that seeks a sort of progressive version of history. And so with that the specific examples like you're asking, could be the the way that people who do history with that narrative, gloss over social conflicts that are inconvenient to this idea that progress with a capital P is something that happens gradually over time and inevitably that it happens through modernity, industrialization, citizenship, the granting of rights from the State, etc.

There's these pockets of conflict that we probably disproportionately focus on in the book. For example, after the Civil War during Re-

construction, pockets of conflict during the Civil Rights Movement, that breakout of both rights and Black Power, organizing models, labor conflict that breaks out of the workplace, only model. So these are kinds of examples that we focus a lot on in the book. To give a very specific example for Reconstruction, a lot of the major social conflicts that emerged post-Civil War involve various populations of dispossessed either, you know, for example, all Black communities or former slaves or mixed race communities of Indians and former slaves and poor whites in other areas of the South, challenging not just the former Southern regime, the former Confederate regime, but also simultaneously challenging Northern models of redevelopment that bring in waged work that bring in contracted labor that bring in certain industry. And so they're fighting sort of a war on two fronts: one against this "capital S South" and one against "capital N North".

That war, the fact that dispossessed people would actually burn down plantation property in rejection of the idea of labor contracts. And the rejection of paid labor doesn't match with the traditional historical notion that slaves were trying to transition from slave labor to wage labor. So that breaks with both the traditional kind of lefty progressive vision, also the Marxist vision that people like W.E.B. Du Bois would espouse.

Saralee: Also, in a lot of these registries, even Leftist academic ones, you have the problem that was that Reconstruction failed, right? That it was the Southern backwardsness, and there was this failure to instill this Northern project. So what we're looking at is not that it was a failure, but that it was also rejected, actively rejected from the beginning.

Neal: That's maybe a more specific example of what we're trying to dig into real deep and get at this idea that the alternative to the traditional notions of like the conservative South that's posed by most folks as like rights, citizenship, democracy... it's not a real alternative in that actually those things existed and came about as

ways to contain social conflict. And that's a larger truth that's sort of taken for granted and anarchist discourse, but we wanted to dig really deep into Southern history and figure out how that's played out here. And we wrote this book for an audience at large, not just for Southerners. Because a lot of the major conflicts in the United States that have determined where political economy has gone, where social movements have gone, have all honed in on the South. So the major wars fought on this country's soil: Revolutionary War, the Civil War, really primarily deal with the question of what to do with labor and political economy in the South, what to do with potentially rebellious people in the South, specifically what to do with people of color, specifically, African folks. And so this history becomes meant to anyone interested in questions of social movements or recuperation, or how social conflict is happening today.

TFSR: When y'all talk about the American South, what are you pointing to? What does that signify geographically, historically, and culturally?

Saralee: Yeah, this is a... this is one that we wrestled with a lot at the start of the of this project, one, because, of course, we wanted to include so much, you know, we wanted to think as broadly as we could about the South and include as much interesting conflict as possible. But obviously, that wasn't... it's not possible. And we are already kind of recovering in working with a lot in the 200 some pages that exist now. But I think one of the ways is to look at where, in kind of a pre-Civil War idea and definition of the South in terms of how specifically slavery played out in the Southeast, was an important marker.

What were the slave states? What were the states that did withdraw from the Union and engage that conflict. Because we knew we were going to be dealing with a lot of Civil War and post-Civil War land struggle. And so that was really relevant. I think, also, a lot of it had to do with what we found and what we had access to, and narratives that kind of found us in the process of writing the book. Neal and I

have spent most of our lives in North Carolina. I spent a lot of my life in Georgia. You see a lot of Appalachian struggle show up because those are histories that are really palpable when you're trying to look at these things like autonomy and less politically motivated struggle. Appalachia always comes up. So, I don't know... How else would you characterize?

TFSR: First off, what do you mean by less politically motivated forms of struggle?

Saralee: Well, what I mean by that is in the way that people defined how they were in conflict and what they were rebelling against and what they were working towards. And so we definitely were trying to find periods, you know, in areas of rebellion that were not kind of self organized as Marxist as socialists, even as anarchists, but were more organized through kinship, through through ideas in connection to land, through ideas and connection to various forms of dispossession. Does that make sense? Rather than for a specific Political agenda, party, organization, platform.

Neal: Yeah. So, I think that sort of anti-political bent, if you will, and I realized that's not a conventional use of the word. But I think Saralee summed it up pretty well. But that anti-political bent becomes important for two reasons. One, is that it speaks to our current political moment in the 21st century, where, you know, increasingly, you're seeing riots erupt all over the country all over the world that don't betray in immediate politicality in the sense that you can't point to it and label it very easily. You can't identify clear demands, clear representatives, clear negotiators, until those people try and emerge from outside kind of like the the ambulance chasers of whatever riot you're talking about. And so, because so much defines our current political moment and the moment that anarchists seek to intervene in and engage in, that makes the history in which social struggles will also look like that back in the day, really important because it speaks to the present.

The other reason I think that anti-political bent is very important is because without it, you can't actually digest social conflict in the South, because the South hasn't had a lot of the same degree of politicization of social movements that have happened in the northeast, for example, or the Midwest areas like Chicago or the west coast, where you have, for example, large immigrant communities bringing very established philosophical 'isms' like anarchism, socialism, communism into social movements, and really giving a very clear political trajectory to those movements. That happened a lot less in the South for a huge array of reasons. And that's not to say, when we say that a social struggle isn't political, we're not saying that it doesn't involve visions of new ways of living, new forms of life, that it doesn't involve questions of decision making, or egalitarianism, or questions of power dynamics, or ethics of care, strategy. What we're saying is that it doesn't involve an institutionalization of narrative of structure, if that makes sense. And I realized that's a little vague, but I think that becomes particularly important in the South because of how the South developed differently.

TFSR: What stories do you focus on in your seven chapters? Why did you choose those? And what are you hoping that the reader will derive from them?

Saralee: I guess, just to give an overview... the book starts in early 1700s, and runs along the colonial territories of Virginia, North Carolina, and the Great Dismal Swamp. Looking at a kind of evolution from the Indian Wars against colonial settlements into maroonage as a form of both escape from plantations and slavery into a form of attack. So the Great Dismal Swamp was an area that was deeply feared and hated by colonial Europeans. They didn't understand that kind of geography, they didn't like the animals in it, and then quickly became associated with territories that were controlled by escaped slaves. And so that area is... it's important. Not only because of how long of a period of revolt that went for well into the 1800s. But also, just from the beginning of the book, setting up the importance of the figure of the maroon, and the social position of

the maroon as not something that was just an identity formed out of escape or running away from these systems, but directly engaged in attacking and trying to end slavery.

So I think that creates like a strong basis for some of the kind of subjects that we look at throughout the rest of the book. And then we move on into the Civil War period, specifically in the Ogeechee area between the Ogeechee rivers and Coastal Georgia. Where we are looking at the kind of struggle for land and autonomy and for life without labor contracts that Ogeechee people were engaged in, in that area. So from like, 1868, to 1869, but definitely starting from the onset of the Civil War to well into like the early 1900s. Along all those tracts of land that Sherman initially had kind of gifted back over to former slaves, and then that was immediately rescinded by Johnson.

So looking at that, and then into another period of really interesting Reconstruction Era revolt called the Lowry Wars. Which was in coastal, eastern North Carolina. It's an interesting juxtaposition to the Ogeechee struggle because while the Ogeechee insurrection was pretty much entirely Black former rice workers, were rice slaves, the Lowry Wars focuses on a multiracial banditry of Lumbee Indians, poor Scots-Irish whites, who had kind of integrated into the Lumbee ethnic and cultural world, and also former slaves who had escaped and joined the Lumbee tribe. And their attacks on Reconstruction plantation society similar to Ogeechee in that planters were returning to lands trying to trying to kind of reassert their power that well at the same time Northern labor institutions like the Freedmen's Bureau were trying to get people to go back to work through introducing of the wage contract to the labor contract. And so we see a lot of different forms of resistance in the Lowry's there. And then there's a little bit of a leap into the coalfields and Tennessee and I'll let Neal talk about a couple of chapters there.

Neal: Yeah, so from there the book sort of takes a bent towards focusing on what at first glance might be a more sort of traditional

radical or lefty history in the sense of focusing on labor and labor battles. But the labor battles we choose to focus on are pretty specifically chosen to highlight a struggle that challenges that model. So, the next chapter that comes to pass is called the Stockade Wars, which refers to a heightened period of conflict in the early 90s in eastern and central Tennessee, between Black and white free coal miners, as well as almost entirely Black prisoners in conflict with various mostly Northern owned coal companies and railroad companies as well as the actual state of Tennessee and the National Guard. And they're they're basically fighting against the convict lease, which is what a lot of listeners will be pretty familiar with, probably, but was a system of re-enslavement by which almost entirely poor Black folks were imprisoned for small offenses, and then they're physically leased out to private companies to do their labor, especially in mining and in railroad, also often timber as well in the deep South.

They're fighting that system, which was a way to undermine the power of waged workers as well as exploit the dispossessed generally. So that resulted in a pretty unusual alliance of people fighting out of their own interests and social networks against those companies in the state of Tennessee. You know, what comes to pass is that laborers and prisoners end up burning down company property, looting company property, and then setting prisoners free, giving them clothes and food and helping them get out of the State. So you have a situation where Southern white folks are actually freeing Black prisoners and helping them get out of the state. And so some pretty unusual alliances develop in that context that we don't often read about or think about. It's not a typical workplace struggle, if you will.

And then, with some interludes, we skip on to a Wildcat struggle led by women also in eastern Tennessee, in the mills, in 1929 in Elizabethton, Tennessee. It's a bit of a leap, but it involves similar issues that are at the fore. But we focus also to a large degree on some of the gendered constructs that break down in the heat of a wildcat

struggle at primarily to mills and Elizabethton, Tennessee in 1929. And the dynamics of conflict internal to that movement. The ways that the union sort of helicopters in at the last moment to try and sort of negotiate the struggle and how that dynamic plays out and how that prophecies what's going to happen in central North Carolina with the much larger mill strike activity starting in 1930.

From there, the book goes on to focus on a period of Civil Rights as well as Black Power and urban riots that happens in the late 60s, sort of dealing with like, digesting how the New Deal and how other government programs managed to kind of subsume and contain that period of radical labor conflict. And so what you see decades later is a lot of really heightened social conflict that deals directly with the identities around which some of those new deal concessions, avoid or sell out, right? So Black folks, women, queer folks, things like that, movements like that.

And so we deal next with urban riots that erupt beyond the boundaries of both Civil Rights and Black Power as narratives. And we try and deal with some of the urban riots that are have often been ignored in the South as emblematic of a kind of social struggle that can't be contained by the Political narrative with a capital P. It exposes some of the limitations of Black Power and identity, as well as the rights framework that the Civil Rights movement is basing itself around.

And then to sort of close out the book. The last chapter deals with a large women's prison rebellion in 1975, in Raleigh, North Carolina. We chose that because we wanted to focus on a prison struggle that hadn't been talked about much we also chose it because we wanted to focus on something dealing with prisons, just because of how that's emblematic of where political economy and institutions of control and exploitation are headed. But in that time period in the early and mid-70's, it prophecizes against sort of the world we live in today. And so we focus on a five day uprising at a women's prison in Raleigh, North Carolina, and sort of internal dynamics of

that revolt and how activists sort of negotiated for it and within it, how the administration's dealt with containing it, etc, etc. And then we close out the book with a concluding sort of a more meta chapter that basically is our own notes for historiography that might break beyond some of these leftist narratives of Southern history that we've been attempting to challenge throughout the book as a whole.

TFSR: So the 40th anniversary of that struggle in the Raleigh women's prison is coming up in June. Is there anything going on? Do you know?

Neal: There should be! It would be a great June 11 thing for people who celebrate June 11. I guess, for listeners who don't know that is, but it's the remembering and celebrating long term anarchist and eco prisoners struggles. But yeah, no, I mean, there absolutely should be.

Saralee: Every Mother's Day there's a big demo, which was just last Sunday, at the... what's kind of closest to what was the North Carolina Correctional Center for Women. So it's basically the same facility in the same neighborhood. And I think maybe because of that, it's hard to turn around and do a June event, but there definitely should be.

TFSR: I'm not trying to interrupt the flow of questions. But since you're gonna be doing a book opening right around that time... the event will be spoken about in a public setting again, which is pretty damn cool.

Saralee: Definitely. That's a really good point. We should we should bring that up.

Neal: You should just show up. And, you know, yeah, go ham with that.

TFSR: Throw bananas from the crowd.

Neal: Why aren't we doing anything for the 40th anniversary? But I don't know sir!. Who's that crazy man with a banana?!

TFSR: **And I warned you!!! Can you talk a little bit about the process of collaborating and writing this book, like do the chapters come out in each of your voices? Or do you find a different, not third position, but like fourth or fifth?**

Saralee: Whoah, that's deep.

Collaborating has been for both of us one of the most frustrating and surprising and just kind of alchemical experiences of the last few years of my life, I think. Neal and I came into this project with a lot of affinity and I think a lot of seeing a lot of each other in each other. That makes sense? And being like, "Oh, we can work together!" And then, you know, obviously, through any kind of deep collaborating like writing a book together, I think we just were able to strike this balance where my writing background is deeply abstract and theoretical, and I had never written anything this kind of concrete and material before. And I think it was really helpful to have Neal's writing background which is really different than mine. To be able to force deadlines, and also to just kind of know. He's had five more years on me of writing. So I think we kind of ended up playing this dance between deadlines and having to just like force stuff out and just get it done. And then also, having a really good editing process between the two of us. We both catch different things and see different things. I don't know, it's been really interesting.

Neal: Yeah, I feel like if two or three years ago, somebody's been like "you're gonna collaborate with one person on a writing project for two and a half years." Or two years, or however long it's been? Maybe three at this point? I would call them crazy, and never want to do that. But I think, because it emerged gradually, we learned how to do it sort of over time in a way that was... you know, it wasn't like we were writing for a university that gave us a deadline. This is our own project that we're passionate about. And that we have written in...

basically in the cracks of the things we actually do with our lives, which are a lot of wage work, and then a lot of actual political activity in the streets and projects that are our primary priority, I think.

And so, you know, and all the friendships and ethics of care that have to come along with those things. Those always take priority. And so this is a project that emerged in the cracks of those, and I feel like at least for me, I got a lot better at collaborating without an appropriate amount of space for it to take up and ways to communicate about it. But it's an intense thing. I think for anybody who's listening... everybody knows if you ever tried to just write text for a flyer with another person, it can be really hard. You know, you can kind of be like two bulls with horns slamming into each other about it. But try doing that for three years! You know?

It's been a joy. I've actually really enjoyed it. I've become a much better writer and a better thinker, and I think a better person through it. Hopefully a better communicator too. In terms of your question of voice. I think that's up to the readers to tell us what they think, that we did a good job with the voice. But I think at least what we were going for was the same voice in all of the chapters. Our vision for the project at the beginning was not to have the book be read and experienced like an anthology by different authors but by one voice and one political vision and set of ideas and interpretations. Which is not to say me and Saralee probably agree in terms of interpretation about everything, but for the most part the book is a singular shared set of narratives around what we're researching. And I think we did a pretty good job with it. I feel pretty good about it, having read it more times than I care to ever again, through the editing process.

TFSR: So would you say it's the kind of book that someone could just pick up and delve in anywhere? Or does it serve the reader more to start from, you know, introduction and go through the whole thing?

Saralee: Well, I think if you start from the introduction you get more of a... I mean, definitely, we wrote in the introduction to be read, not as some kind of like aside. We spent a lot of time collaborating on the introduction and conclusion and was most fun, I think, for both of us to write those. But no, the thing I love about this book is that you can just pick it up, start in a section that you already have interest in, or maybe something's inspiring you to read that. And then if you like it you can read the rest. So I do think that's helpful. Especially in dealing with such a big book. I don't want the size and like the scope of the narratives to be intimidating, or to feel like, "Ugh, I have to read all of this?!" So yeah, people should read it however they want, really.

Neal: I'm gonna add one thing on there. I do think, you could pick it up. You could be in a bathroom and pick up one chapter and just read the chapter by itself and get something out of it. But the chapters are inter-referential both directly in the sense that you'll see a sentence that's like "just like in Ogeechee blah, blah, blah, blah, blah." That's the next chapter, whatever. But they're also inter-referential in terms of the ideas. Just to give an example, the kinds of interpretation we have over conflicts around citizenship and assimilation that occurred during Reconstruction period speak directly and immediately to the kinds of internal conflict and recuperation and containment strategies that the state uses during the Civil Rights period.

Specifically those two moments Reconstruction and Civil Rights 60's / 70's era. They speak to each other in history, so they speak to each other in the book. You're going to get a lot more out of reading about those urban riots in the way that the state contains them if you read about the way the State sought to contain conflicts post-Civil War. Because the strategies are very much related and the way they manipulate and exploit and contain Black rage, specifically Black rage are highly connected. And so actually, the book is very much a unified whole, in that sense. And I do hope that people read all of it.

TFSR: Through a few sections of the book you talk about the creation of whiteness, can you talk about race and how y'all tried to handle it in this book?

Saralee: I think that any book or text that is grappling with the history of the American South, but also the history of this continent has to directly deal with the forced enslavement of millions of Africans, of the genocide of the people that were here before colonizers showed up. And also, through that the creation of whiteness as something separate in a privileged kind of non identity, then the marked identities of people of color that were created through these violent colonial regimes. So it's not a separate topic, you know what I mean? It's just how we have to look at this history. Otherwise, it's irrelevant, right?

So I guess, I don't want to treat race as like a separate topic. It's part of the narrative and kind of spirit of every single chapter throughout. In terms of specifically the creation of whiteness, one of the reasons that the Great Dismal Swamp was really important for us, just looking at the struggle on the dividing line of North Carolina & Virginia, is that some of those very first distinctions between the indentured Anglo servant and the enslaved African happened in these territories and in these struggles. So what happened when an indentured white and an enslaved Black... Well, those terms weren't even used yet but an indentured Anglo and enslaved African ran away together. What happens when they're both caught, right? And so, the history of how those two subjects are created differently is the creation of Whiteness in that early period. And then you see it evolve throughout the book. You want to talk about the evolution of it?

Neal: Yeah. I mean, so I really like what Saralee said. We are not interested in talking about race as like this separate thing, or even as a separate product of identity. But part of this larger whole of development and resistance that are always happening, you know, in tandem with each other and against each other. We talk a lot especially

in the earlier chapters about primitive accumulation as this sort of.. it's a classically Marxian concept but we take a pretty different take on it. And we've been influenced by people's like Sylvia Federici's understanding of that, whereby primitive accumulation is not a one time event, but something that continues to happen over and over and over again. It's sort of capitalism, or what the State or various structures sort of constantly weeding the field, if you will, to renew their own projects.

In much the way that Sylvia Federici highlights a focus on the witch hunts and women's reproductive power and women's bodies in Europe as an often overlooked aspect of primitive accumulation for capital in Europe, the creation of Whiteness as a concept as something which previously sort of disparate groups could gather around. And likewise, the creation of different ethnic groups and identities and Blackness becomes a part of that process, it's part of primitive accumulation in the United States. It's something that hasn't been talked about, perhaps as much as it should be as a way that Capital made its own development possible on this continent. It couldn't have happened without it.

On the one hand that's where you find the origins of Whiteness. It's also where you find the origins of Black identity, not just as a victim of these forces, like democracy or divisions of labor, but also in the process of resisting those forces. So, Blackness emerges in places like the Great Dismal Swamp where people, on the one hand, are victimized by Capital and plantation life and the State, but they're also coming together and forming a sort of pan-African identity vis-à-vis their resistance, so they have direct agency.

That's also something the Marxian narrative of primitive accumulation never takes into account is the actual agency of the dispossessed. They tend to view them as sort of passive pawns. And we see this process of primitive accumulation also as one in which resistance takes place. And that's the source of a lot of these identities. And so when we talk about race, we're trying to take that larger

picture into account and you know, whether or not we succeed in that is up to the reader, but that's what we're going for.

TFSR: And I like the way that you see on page 268, where you address this. Like where you suggested, for example, that race and its inherent violence could be re-framed from question of identity and belonging to a method of government. And where you go on from there, I thought was also another interesting way of posing it, not only in direct relation to that ongoing process of primitive accumulation.

So you get a bit heady and introspective with your views on history, historiography and storytelling. So, what were some of the things you were wrestling with in writing and editing this book concerning... I guess, in particular, what I was getting at with that question is...

Saralee: Well, I think an interesting thing that happened in writing this book is that... There's a theorist, Walter Benjamin. He was an antifascist, and I don't want to call him a communist because he would have hated that. But he lived in in the early 20th century in Europe, and he killed himself at the at the border between France and Spain when he thought he wasn't able to escape the Nazis. He wrote these really beautiful, right before he died, these really beautiful theses on the philosophy of history. It's a text that I discovered when I was really young and probably really misunderstood it. It didn't really actually come to make any sense until I was engaged in this writing project. And Neal had also been reading Benjamin and been playing with that as well. And, honestly, I think to give a shout out to the work done by folks in the West Coast who wrote that and I think they they brought Benjamin into the anarchist context in a really fierce and relevant and beautiful way that made me realize it was okay to read non-anarchist theorists and use them when trying to write a book like this.

But yeah, I think basically, the work by Benjamin by Federici by

The Final Straw Radio / Dixe Be Damned: A Regional History...

Foucault, you know, all those kind of European all-stars. We don't use them to try to sound important or to try to like obscure our own ideas, but I think we tried to pull out threads of their concepts of history that just felt really relevant in our context and more specifically for Benjamin. So, our goal in working with such a large amount of material and definitely having to... we had to order the book in somewhat progressive fashion just in the sense of dates. But we wanted the actual work to speak beyond that. And so, for us getting away from the linear progressive narrative that Neal was talking about earlier is looking towards a version of writing and doing history where capitalist time, colonial time, all these different structures of time, that are that linear progressive narrative break down in these in these moments of rebellion.

That's the word rupture that we use a lot, right? Is to kind of mark where the time of work, or the time of imprisonment, or the time of enslavement is destroyed, even if just momentarily by those actors, by those subjects. The difference between something like a rupture, or what we would say, and what we're referencing a lot in the insurrectionary time and historical materialism an introduction, And then something like a progressive version of revolt is that at the end of a progressive revolt, the idea is that the subjects are reinstated and are just in a better position than they were before. Right? Those are things like rights and things like getting your demands met, right? And then what we're looking at that breaks with that concept of time, is the time of the rupture, where you don't return to the same subject position afterwards with just better conditions, right? Life kind of halts for a while, and new life forms and new forms of activity are created. And obviously, we know these are temporal. These are temporal junctures, they don't last. But they're important for us to to seize on and to hold up. And it's those memories that get washed under, and get erased, and get ignored in progressive histories. Is that helpful?

TFSR: Yeah, definitely. It seems like, and I hope I'm not just reiterating, but in those moments, if you ever experience those mo-

ments of rupture, when the world stops, it's like you can see the potential for a line of flight out of it at that point. It's like you can see that utopia or not...you know, whatever, whatever Uopia. You know?

Neal: Yeah, I think for us, that's where for, well I should say for me, but I think for us? Where, for example, a lot of these writers, these theorists, but especially Benjamin, becomes really exciting because he had a lot of courage to basically break with the Marxism of his day which was saying that communism is a product of these inevitable but gradual historical forces. And, you know what that does is it takes agency away from us as actual people acting on the world. And it also means that to a large extent it's this inevitable, despairing version of history. There's not really... for example, I remember Marxists, orthodox Marxists responding to the Zapatista rebellion when that broke out and was big in the late 90's. They would be like, "well, it's really inspiring, but doesn't really matter because they haven't become proletarians yet, so they can actually progress"

Saralee: Or Du Bois says says the same thing about the Maroons In the South.

Neal: Right, Du Bois sort of writes off the Maroon rebellions as this thing where like, well, they haven't become wage workers yet. So it's like, they wouldn't know how to make communism yet. It's kind of arrogant. And it's also just writing off this period of really important history. And so in our historiography, and you in the conclusion we sort of.. it is a bit heady, I suppose. But also we try and get into a lot of concrete examples as to how that progressive version of history causes historians to ignore really important stuff. Because they don't find it interesting, because it doesn't present any possibility to them of the gradualism they're looking for.

And to your point, the important things in those insurrectionary moments... One thing that's important is that sometimes a riot leads to an insurrection, which leads to a social revolution. So, it's not just

a visionary, imaginary exercise, they do actually lead to real ruptures that can be permanent. Right? But also, even when they don't do that, like what you just said, Bursts, that I really like is that they are these lines of flight. You're in this moment, behind a barricade and you suddenly realize life doesn't have to go back to normal. The line of flight can go towards any of these things that we have words for like the commune or anarchy or the wild or whatever.

Doing history differently allows us to see, I think with more clarity hopefully, those moments that provide a line of flight. Whereas, for example, doing history of vis-à-vis, the traditional labor history model, just to give an example tends to not give you a line of flight so much as a way to see how to press for individual workplace demands. And that doesn't actually provide you with the same kind of line of flight, as might a Wildcat strike in eastern Tennessee whereby they burned down all the city infrastructure and steal from the rich. It's not just a matter of they're more militant, it actually is that the content and substance is different.

Saralee: And how people are transformed in those moments are different.

Neal: Yeah, that is another aspect of this messianic quality that Benjamin talks about is that it changes the actors themselves. And that becomes really important when you talk about all the ways that race and Capital and gender and the State have made us who we are. We need those moments of transformation. We need Fanon's psychoeffective violence to change ourselves. We have to go through that violent process or otherwise we can't change ourselves either. So, there's an individualist component just as much as a collective one. Yeah.

Saralee: Yeah, like that.

TFSR: Yeah.

Saralee: Yeeeeeah. Psychoeffective Violence.

Neal: That's, by the way, my DJ name.

TFSR: I was about to say that! I was about to say that needs to get looped, and just like... a good beat underneath it. Anyway, this brings me to the question about what is an anarchist historiography? And are you attempting to frame one out at the end of the book in the conclusion? Or is it more of a challenge and a call?

Saralee: I think we attempt to frame it out, but it's definitely through the context of the narratives in our book. And so, we don't kind of transpose an idea of our historiography onto just a blanket future concept, if that makes sense. I think it is a call for sure. For me, this whole book is a call. I want to see more anarchist in this work and doing history. And I hope that it's a provocative call in the sense of it creates dialogue and creates more discourse around what an anarchist historiography could be, because I think we're definitely also looking for that in comrades and looking to push these ideas and make them better, make them more present to our times constantly as well. But what would you say Neal?

Neal: Um, yeah, I mean, in its best moments I think it could be interpreted as a call to new kinds of historiography. Speaking personally, I mean, I am an anarchist. But I'm not really highly invested in that word as an identity. And I'm not particularly interested in things like historiographies, or critiques or things like that being connected to that word. I question how useful it is. I think, for me, I want historiographies that are negative and critical of the things that exists now. I'm sort of less interested in them affirming a singular narrative and then calling that anarchist. I think it would be a step backwards. Anything that presents itself as singular or universal. I mean, I don't think we could substitute an anarchist narrative for a progressive one, or for a Leftist one. I think that would be futile and bad. You know, a step backwards.

So I'm interested in people writing history and interpreting and taking on that task, seriously, as it informs the conflicts we're living in now. Because it does. And I'm interested in people doing so in ways that are just as critical and combative as like all the sort of fiery polemical communicate type things that we read now on the internet in utter abundance. You know, I think people should fight over and delve into these ideas that are historical with that same degree of passion. I guess I would be interested in seeing that. I would never expect a singular anarchist historiography to emerge from that. I would expect a diverse and contradictory array of historiographies to emerge that have certain sort of principles in common, like a rejection of Leftism, like a rejection of the progressive narratives that we were confronted with now.

And also a rejection of the way that the Academy owns history. That's something we don't have in the interview, but it's something we've talked about in public discussions and talks that we're hosting with this book. Pretty much I think anytime when we go and talk at university, we're probably going to be basically presenting front and center a critique of how the academy owns this material. Because we've had to confront that in our own research as non-academics doing a somewhat academic kind of project in all the degrees of the real things like money and time and professionalism and salary and tenure that invoke privilege around who gets to own and do history are something that anarchist should also deal head on with. Anarchists already have been dealing head on with as well as a lot of non-anarchists. But in terms of the historiography, I'm probably a little skeptical. I am less interested in it being anarchist, but I'm definitely interested in more critical historiography is emerging. And, and having a deeply sort of negative and critical take on how things have developed with history. Is that vague? I don't know.

TFSR: No.

Neal: Okay, good.

TFSR: Where can people expect to run into y'all on this series of speaking engagements? Do you have a schedule slated?

Saralee: Yeah, we have the beginnings of a schedule. We're having an actual release party like a bacchanal celebration, no formal speaking, you have to dress up.

TFSR: Like what? Like Bacchus.

Saralee: Yeah

TFSR: Toga party.

Saralee: We're hoping that people actually bring their formal attire. We don't get to see each other in formal attire enough because we're poor. But I think that's May 31, in Durham at the Pinhook. So that's kicking off a couple of weeks of local events. So then we'll be Greensboro, June 1 at Scuppernong Books. We will be in Durham, June 3 at the Regulator. We will be at the International, which is an anarchist run space in Carrboro, on June 8. June 14th will be in Atlanta at the Hammonds Museum with some people who have been involved in struggles in Atlanta that were actually written about in the book and mentioned in the book. So it'll be really exciting. June 14. That's a daytime event. And then June 20, in Raleigh, at So and So Books. We're hoping to be in Asheville in July whenever Firestorm opens and invites us. And then in the fall, we'll be doing some stuff on the west coast. And then we'll also be doing a big Southeast Midwest tour. Then eventually in the Fall also in Northeast tour.

Neal: We took joy in making the Northeast have to be last. Sorry!

Saralee: Yeah, if you want to see us soon, you've got to come to us in North Carolina or Georgia, but we'll come to you at later.

Neal: Yeah, and you can get the book off of probably AK Press's

The Final Straw Radio / Dixie Be Damned: A Regional History...

website. You can also get it from us. I hope you can get their website. You can get it from us as well if you come to our events. I want to, if it's okay to do a totally disgusting plug, we also have a poster series that we've put together that deals with like four or five of the themes of different chapters. And they're really big, beautiful, like three foot tall, full color original watercolor art themed around like protagonists in different chapters with text that was written by us and Phil. And they're really big and beautiful and wonderful. And they're going to be sold with the book at different events and stuff pretty cheap. So thanks to P&L Printing for helping us with those because it gave us a really, really good deal.

TFSR: Thank you, Denver.

Saralee: Yeah, what's up?

TFSR: Oh, cool. Thanks so much for chatting. And is there any other disgusting plugs you want to make before we stop recording?

Neal: Yeah, go crazy on June 11th. Get real. Get hard. Go hard.

TFSR: Stay hard.

Neal: I want to send some shout outs anybody listening to this who helped us with this project. Or was a patient ear or who gave critique, because there's a lot of those people out there and we owe so much of this work to them. So, thank you to all those people.

Saralee: Thank you to all the rebels in the last two years that have given us inspiration as well.

TFSR: Yeah. And go hard, stay hard.

Neal: Yeah, that's good. Why don't you make that a T shirt.

TFSR: Hey, I'd actually be stealing it from Ida.

Saralee: And Atlanta...

TFSR: Yeah, they won't mind. We've been speaking with Neal Shirley and Saralee Stafford about their new book "*Dixie Be Damned. 300 years of Insurrection in the American South*" published by AK Press. More about the book can be found at AK-Press.org



The Final Straw is a weekly anarchist and anti-authoritarian radio show bringing you voices and ideas from struggle around the world. Since 2010, we've been broadcasting from occupied Tsalagi land in Southern Appalachia (Asheville, NC).

We also frequently feature commentary (serious and humorous) by anarchist prisoner, Sean Swain.

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