



BLACK WOMEN AGAINST THE LAND GRAB

The Fight for Racial Justice in Brazil KEISHA-KHAN Y. PERRY



A BOOK DISCUSSION GUIDE

for *Black Women against the Land Grab* by Keisha-Khan Y. Perry

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Keisha-Khan Y. Perry is associate professor of Africana studies at Brown University.

PRAISE FOR THE BOOK

“*Black Women against the Land Grab* makes a unique and overdue contribution to our understanding of social movements in Brazil. In a bold intervention from the tendency to ignore women’s participation in struggles for land rights and access to basic resources, Keisha-Khan Y. Perry paints women as the categorical leaders in resisting ‘development’ plans that amount to expelling poor, black communities from their historical homes. Her long-term involvement with the Gamboa de Baixo community in Salvador da Bahia, Brazil, and unabashed advocacy for their cause, results in an electrifying ethnography that showcases the wry humor and perceptive analyses of grassroots community activists.”

—SARAH HAUTZINGER, author of *Violence in the City of Women*

“*Black Women against the Land Grab* is an excellent treatment of the production of racialized space in Brazil. This book will be a useful contribution to future scholarship concerning anti-racist resistance and struggles for land and water across the black diaspora.”

—ANTHROPOLOGICAL QUARTERLY

“Obligatory reading for anybody interested in racism, grassroots politics, and the exclusionary effects of urban renewal.”

—ANTIPODE

“Essential.” —CHOICE

“Stimulating and well-researched.”

—JOURNAL OF LATIN AMERICAN AND CARIBBEAN ANTHROPOLOGY

“A real contribution to both social change and social justice research.”

—*CANADIAN JOURNAL OF LATIN AMERICAN AND CARIBBEAN STUDIES*

“This book is of central importance for those in the social sciences and humanities that are interested in the role of women in grassroots organizations.”

—*JOURNAL OF LATIN AMERICAN GEOGRAPHY*

“An invaluable contribution.” —*CULTURAL GEOGRAPHIES*

“A detailed and moving book.” —*ETHNIC AND RACIAL STUDIES*

“Keisha-Khan Perry’s brilliant ethnography reveals not only the complexity of Brazil’s young democracy but also the interconnections among conceptions of gender, race, community, and ‘development.’”

—*TRANSFORMING ANTHROPOLOGY*

“Black Women against the Land Grab contains an enjoyable ethnography, and will be useful to scholars interested in the intersections between race and gentrification in Latin America.”

—*LUSO-BRAZILIAN REVIEW*

“An example of an empirical investigation conducted by a committed activist, a feature that provides the book with intensity and engagement from the author.”

—*POLITICAL STUDIES REVIEW*

“Keisha-Khan Perry’s intimate look at the grassroots struggles of black women for urban land rights in Salvador, Bahia, is an important reminder of the need to examine the relationships between material need, personal identity, and political action.”

—*THE AMERICAS: A QUARTERLY REVIEW OF LATIN AMERICAN HISTORY*

“Suitable for students of gender politics, Africana and cultural studies, and readers interested in land rights and land distribution.”

—*BULLETIN OF LATIN AMERICAN RESEARCH*

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Perry discusses the spatial exclusion of black communities in Salvador da Bahia, Brazil, in the form of neighborhood segregation, forced displacement, and land appropriation by the Brazilian government. What do these processes—cloaked as “modern development” and “urban renewal” projects—aim to accomplish? How does the government work to confront critiques and grassroots protests as it forcibly removes black neighborhoods? What are the likely consequences if these political tactics continue to intensify?
2. Discuss ways in which the law is used against poor black communities in Bahia, encouraging land theft by Bahian elites rather than housing justice for the benefit of all. What does this say about the gendered, racialized state and whom it is working to serve?
3. How do the Brazilian media, government, and police forces work together to silence poor black communities? In what ways does the government utilize fear as a tactic to isolate these communities? What strategies have the communities used to push back against these tactics?
4. How do the black women activists organizing against land-theft policies in Salvador use their own identities—as poor black women, often domestic workers or fisherwomen—to better understand and combat the gendered, racialized, and class-based oppression they face?
5. How does Salvador’s Afro-Brazilian cultural and religious history affect activism in black communities like Gamboa de Baixo? How do black women in these communities find strength and encouragement in their ancestral culture to embolden their activism? What alternatives do African religious traditions provide that assist in fighting oppressive structures? How does the history of quilombos assist in this endeavor?
6. How does the tourist industry come into play in this new wave of spatial exclusion that has come to impact the Gamboa de Baixo community? Discuss the intensification of policing that has accompanied the tourism industry’s expansion.

7. Discuss the ways in which Gamboa de Baixo residents have, in recent years, begun to reproduce tendencies of white upper-class neighborhoods to exclude people based on racial and class markers. How have these changes come about and what purpose do they serve? What are the implications of this change in behavior for grassroots community building and activism?

8. Perry explains that mass displacement in the guise of urban development is a global problem. How have these trends affected your city or region, and how have they changed or intensified? How have these changes affected communities already marginalized due to their race or class? And what are community members doing to combat this? Research the segregation and racial/class exclusion in your city or region and find a community organization working to fight back against local injustices.

9. What are a few of the ways in which the women of Salvador practice solidarity with other marginalized peoples outside of their communities? Perry notes the connections that communities have made to struggles elsewhere, for example in the naming of the Palestina neighborhood and, in Gamboa de Baixo, the creation of a Council for Defense inspired by the Black Panther Party. Why is it important that communities make these connections and work to build off of and learn from struggles elsewhere? What possibilities might these efforts unleash?

10. Describe the media manipulations that work to shift attention away from the women's activism, portraying their organizing efforts as mere happenstance or focusing on the bravery of men instead, as in the case of Dona Telma and Senhor Amilton in Chapter 1. Why is it so important for the media to downplay women's organizing and leadership? What, in turn, do activist communities have to gain with their emphasis on women's central role as organizers and activists?

11. How are these efforts to shift attention away from the organizing of dedicated activists similar to media manipulations in Black Lives Matter coverage? Or, to what extent does this mirror media coverage of police brutality and subsequent community responses in cities near you?

12. Discuss Perry's positionality as ethnographer and activist. In what ways is her position surprising, or even contradictory, as she recounts her firsthand experiences of anti-black racism while working to document a movement outside her home country? How does her position differ from that of most anthropologists, and what does that add to her work?