

The Review of Politics 86 (2024), 236–237.

© The Author(s), 2024. Published by Cambridge University Press on behalf of University of Notre Dame. This is an Open Access article, distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution licence (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>), which permits unrestricted re-use, distribution and reproduction, provided the original article is properly cited.

A Symposium on Deva Woody's *Reckoning: Black Lives Matter and the Democratic Necessity of Social Movements*

*Erica Chenoweth, Juliet Hooker, Erin R. Pineda, Andrew Dilts,
Elizabeth Jordie Davies, with a response by Deva R. Woody*

Deva Woody, *Reckoning: Black Lives Matter and the Democratic Necessity of Social Movements*. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2021. Pp. 304.)

Introduction

Deva R. Woody

Brown University

Providence, Rhode Island, USA

doi:10.1017/S0034670523000712

In *Reckoning*, I argue that social movements are democratic institutions that repoliticize public life. They are the method by which democracies remain, even as institutions tend, as Max Weber knew they would, toward unrepresentative, expropriating oligarchies and people respond with increasing disillusionment and disengagement from the activity of self-governance. I call this unfortunate but familiar political relation a politics of despair. On my account, social movements are the most effective way to counter this despair and bring a sense of efficacy and responsibility back into the polity, reminding ordinary people that they are political agents, and powerful decision-makers that their authority is given by the people and can be made void by them, too.

I argue that the Black Lives Matter movement specifically seeks to exceed thin conceptions of both equality and liberty and aim instead for a liberatory politics that puts at the center an acknowledgment that rights are of little use if they are functionally inaccessible, systemically blocked, and structurally maldistributed. Instead, the Black Lives Matter movement offers a radical,

Black feminist and pragmatist political philosophy, that suggests that overcoming the ills of the systemic inequalities that compounded during the twentieth century must be found through a reconception of what politics is for and what it can accomplish in the twenty-first. Chiefly, that one compelling option for a politics that could help to usher in the era after modernity is a politics of care.

The politics of care is an approach to power sharing and democratic governance that puts the lived experience of systematically marginalized people at the center of assessing the efficacy of policies, programs, and systems. Those who practice a politics of care seek to accomplish this by acknowledging that oppression causes social trauma that cannot be resolved by individuals on their own but must be addressed via political action and structural change; that interdependence is a fact that cannot and should not be avoided but should be supported by laws and policies that fund its most beneficial manifestations; that accountability is a necessary corollary to healthy interdependence; that the unapologetic and joyful embodiment of selves that are marginalized and read as deviant by the dominant culture and dominating socioeconomic and political structures are essential for the practice of freedom; and that abolition, restoration, and repair are the watchwords of a self-governing people in opposition to punishment, abandonment, and misery.