

The Global Imagination of 1968: Revolution and Counterrevolution

George Katsiaficas

PM Press (Jun 1, 2018)

Softcover \$24.95 (360pp)

978-1-62963-439-5

A world without hunger, without war or an international arms race, without militarized nation-states and arbitrary authorities: even now, in the twenty-first century, these goals seem out of reach, but that we can envision them at all is a legacy of the global imagination that emerged to rock the world half a century ago.

In 1968, world-historical social movements erupted in nearly every country; people were seeking freedom, not only from grinding poverty and social injustice, but to create themselves anew. The New Left, with its call for “individual autonomy amidst community” and an end to racial, political, economic, and patriarchal domination, had global appeal.

More than that, global insurgencies benefited from what George Katsiaficas calls the “eros effect,” in which “people’s ties to each other become more significant than patriotic allegiances or class and racial identities.” This term makes the concept of the “global imagination” of 1968 clear, encapsulating how, despite enormous cultural and political differences between nations, revolutionaries everywhere stood together in their dreams of freedom, taking action according to similar revolutionary norms and values and sharing a sense of solidarity.

Katsiaficas provides today’s activists with the wider historical context for action. *The Global Imagination of 1968* is a guide to mobilizing the creativity to resist, disrupt, and change the lingering racism and patriarchal structures, attitudes, and economic systems that still restrict our freedom—a challenging task now that the organs of social control are militarized and often act with impunity.

Despite what appears to have been the failure of the New Left, Katsiaficas declares that its passionate challenge to the establishment left an amazing legacy of global progress and the advancement of values and ideals that can fire the imagination and nurture the dreams of a new generation of activists.

KRISTINE MORRIS (July/August 2018)

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