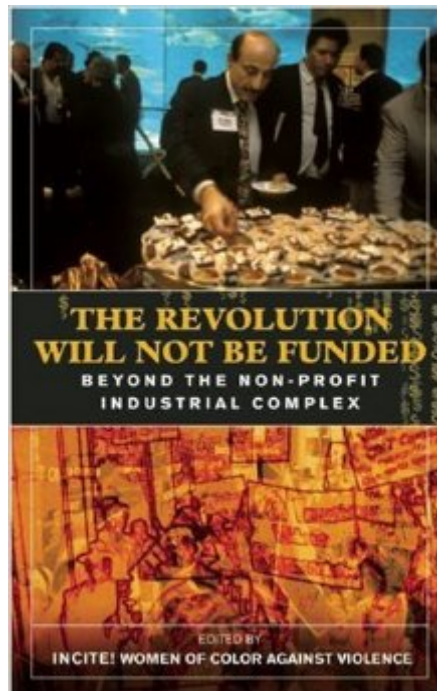


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The Revolution Will Not Be Funded: Beyond The Non-Profit Industrial Complex



Synopsis

A \$1.3 trillion industry, the US nonprofit sector is the world's seventh largest economy. From art museums and university hospitals to think tanks and church charities, over 1.5 million organizations of staggering diversity share the tax-exempt 501(c)(3) designation, if little else. Many social justice organizations have joined this world, often blunting political goals to satisfy government and foundation mandates. But even as funding shrinks and government surveillance rises, many activists often find it difficult to imagine movement-building outside the nonprofit model. The Revolution Will Not Be Funded gathers original essays by radical activists from around the globe who are critically rethinking the long-term consequences of this investment. Together with educators and nonprofit staff they finally name the "nonprofit industrial complex" and ask hard questions: How did politics shape the birth of the nonprofit model? How does 501(c)(3) status allow the state to co-opt political movements? Activists or careerists? How do we fund the movement outside this complex? Urgent and visionary, The Revolution Will Not Be Funded is an unbelated exposé of the "nonprofit industrial complex" and its quietly devastating role in managing dissent.

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Customer Reviews

The Revolution Will Not Be Funded is lucid book composed of writings by various left activists and grassroots organizers - edited by INCITE! a Women of Color collective and written mostly people of color. It is one of the best sources of analysis of why activism and organizing in a non profit group or

organization is fraught with contradictions and may even be a dead-end for your political aims. It takes aim at the "Non Profit Industrial Complex", which like the Military Industrial Complex or the Prison Industrial Complex, is a penetrating system designed to benefit the needs of status-quo at the expense of the dis-empowered - precisely the people we are concerned about. The opening chapter explains how 501(c)3 non profits are a relatively new US phenomenon, established to both provide tax breaks for the wealthy and large corporations, and also to control the radical energies of people who threaten to upset the power structure. In short, while most non profits deal with non political issues like libraries, cultural events or Red Cross-type activities -- it is the progressive political nonprofits that concerns us. Typically, there is money, and sometimes a seductively large amount, to fund projects like a health outreach program, a battered woman's shelter, a poor people's food program, a march on Washington for racial equality, etc.. Almost never, is there money to fund global projects that mobilize people to CHANGE the system that results in racism, people without guaranteed health care, battered women, starving people, etc.. Soon, the activists in the non-profits are occupied with hob-nobbing with and filling in forms for their foundation sponsors.

Edited volumes are always a mixed bag, and this one is no exception. It is unusual in that there is a clear trajectory in the quality. The first two essays are academic mumbo jumbo, classic examples of a distinct style of pseudo-critical posturing in which militarizing one's vocabulary (they intervene in discourses! they interrogate concepts!) passes as actually doing something. This kind of opaque writing moves through a series of cliches (hiss at patriarchy, denounce capitalism) without nary a thought for evidence but quite certain of its profundity. This is more offensive and embarrassing here in that these writers, who have guaranteed lifetime employment (tenure), criticize people for their participation in the hustle for grants, as if the people who have to do it are unaware of the problems. That's breathtaking in a genre that prides itself on being self-reflexive. After that, however, the essays steadily improve, with the degree of insight varying inversely to the author's connection to academia and maybe half to two-third should be required reading for people who work in nonprofits. The biggest criticism I have of even the best essays is that they don't offer much on alternatives. Detailed descriptions of the daily life of US grassroots organizing before the rise of nonprofits would have been especially helpful. Several quite interesting essays use grassroots organizing in the Americas south of the US border as a model of engaging people with nonprofit organizations, but even they don't give a sense of what that would mean in this country. A group in New York City that became a 501(c)(3) and then returned to being all volunteer receives a lot of attention for seemingly successfully doing just that.

As an organizer working in and out of the confines of non-profit organizations, I give my highest recommendations for this extremely important collection of essays. I often wonder how I've gotten to a point where I spend less time in the community, and more time sitting in front of my computer writing grant proposals, calculating budgets and writing final reports for foundations and government agencies. As many of the authors in the book suggest, shouldn't we be accountable to our constituents rather than foundations, which serve as little more than tax shelters through which "white capital is circulated among white people and works to maintain systems of white supremacy"? Through the proliferation of non-profits and foundations, radical social movements in the US have been co-opted to a point where the movement eerily resembles the oppressive capitalist social order we claim to be challenging, giving rise to the Non-Profit Industrial Complex. Collaboration is stifled when fierce competition for funding and stringent, narrow grant guidelines divide groups that are working towards the same goal. Perhaps most disheartening is the NPIC's power to shape our approaches and tactics for social change. As Dylan Rodriguez points out, "[m]ore insidious than the...constraints exerted by the foundation/state/non-profit nexus is the way in which [it]...grounds an epistemology--literally, a way of knowing social change and resistance praxis--that is difficult to escape or rupture." This epistemology is responsible for the belief that activists must conform to 501(c)(3) status for legitimacy and funding and that social services serve a greater need and purpose than the arduous task of social change.

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