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*Rights in Transit: Public Transportation and the Right to the City in California's East Bay* by Kafui Ablode Atttoh  
(review)

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Historical Geography, Volume 47, 2019, pp. 227-230 (Review)

Published by University of Nebraska Press

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1353/hgo.2019.0008>



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## BOOK REVIEWS

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*Rights in Transit: Public Transportation and the Right to the City in California's East Bay.* Kafui Ablode Atttoh. Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2019. Pp. xvi+155, photographs, maps, charts, notes. \$28.95, paperback, ISBN 978-0-8203-5420-0. \$99.95, hardcover, ISBN 978-0-8203-5421-7.

Mobility (and immobility) are wielded in cities to structure the way that everyday life is experienced and reproduced across space. Understanding this importance, Atttoh moves beyond a narrow conception of public transportation as one of many services provided to citizens and toward its reconception as a marker of a broader political economy. He writes, “When public transportation service is threatened, it not only makes it harder for . . . riders to accomplish the very basic tasks of getting to work or school, but it also fundamentally threatens—borrowing from . . . Henri Lefebvre—their ‘right to the city’” (3). Atttoh contends that transportation is necessary not only for an individual’s need to move for their daily life but also for the creation of a city that provides for all its citizens. To make this argument, he analyzes public transportation through different facets of the transportation process in Oakland and San Francisco, California, from court decisions on the legal role of public transportation in the city, to transit workers’ fights for rights from the early 1900s to the present, to plans for new forms of public transportation (including some that are not public at all).

Beginning with an understanding that “rights talk” is unpopular for a multitude of reasons, Atttoh reaffirms his decision to frame transportation as a right, arguing for a conception of rights that is more than

libertarian “negative rights” or a “moral minimum.” Instead, the author writes that Lefebvre’s “right to the city” is a more complete way to understand transportation rights as it argues for a “rescuing of the city as a place of meaning, of social encounter, of interaction, of working-class solidarity, and of political consciousness . . . defending the city as a site of radical politics and rejecting its newly alienating qualities” (12). He goes on to contend that the struggle for transportation rights is an extension of Lefebvre’s fight against the isolating nature of the modern city, or idiocy, as he borrows from Marx and Engels. The failure to provide equal transportation is the extension of capitalist urbanization “in producing cities defined by alienation, isolation, and exclusion of the economically disadvantaged” (20). It is with this assertion of the necessity of transportation for the reclamation of the city by the working class that Attoh frames the chapters that follow.

Chapter 1 explores the contested nature of legal rights. It shows how differing ideas of what is a “right” can be employed by the courts in order to either expand the duties of transportation providers toward their riders, such as through safety requirements, or absolve them of responsibilities for equal provision of service. Attoh argues that legal contestations deploy ideas of individual and civil rights that are often too narrow, potentially crystalizing unjust policies, which provides proof that an expanded conception of rights based on political economic understandings must be used.

Chapter 2 argues that in order to create a transportation system that works equally for everyone, it is necessary to move beyond “horizontal equity,” or the provision of equal opportunity to all individuals and groups, and toward “vertical equity,” or creating “policies [that] work against structural or historical injustices” (53). Attoh explains how these policies and outcomes are the result of organizing work by groups such as the Alliance for AC Transit and the organizations that followed in its footsteps, who understood that transportation is part of a broader city-making project that either upholds or overturns the isolating “idiocy” of urban life.

Chapter 3 examines the struggles for workers’ rights by transportation employees in the Bay Area. Attoh explains that these contestations create turmoil in the call for transportation justice as labor strikes and demands for increased wages disproportionately affect people who are transportation dependent. After chronicling the long history of trans-

portation labor struggles in the Bay Area, Attoh argues that these struggles are as equally a means of urban spacemaking as riders' organizing. The lives of riders and drivers are intertwined and constrained by a larger urban political economy. To call for transportation rights is to call for the rights of riders and workers alike.

Chapter 4 looks for a path forward considering the future of transportation planning. Specifically, Attoh looks at the possibilities and problems of transit-oriented development, Complete Streets, and bus rapid transit. Where these ideas have the ability to create a more integrated transportation network and accessible city, Attoh finds that even the most progressive transportation advocates become critics when new bus lanes or widened sidewalks threaten the convenience of their lives. Tellingly, he writes, "principles often disappear at the very moment that people stand to lose materially" (101).

Because the book attempts to cover both the history and current politics of transportation in the Bay Area in a little more than a hundred pages, there are points at which it falls flat. The book's attempt to bring in the political theory of "rights" seems to at times muddy the argument being made that transportation is part of a broader urban political economic structure. Because it is the central contention of his book, Attoh's disavowal of liberal "rights talk" as overly individual yet framing his call through the language of "rights talk" could be more clearly distinguished. More concerning is the complete absence of discussions of the politics of race, which given the book's use of the Bay Area, a space with a very particular and explicit racialized history, is surprising. While Attoh dismisses "civil rights" as too identity-driven, he appears to fall into the trap many Marxist political economists do, of undervaluing the role of white supremacy in the workings of capital. While we might be able to chalk this up to a lack of space, an explicit discussion of racial capital might have provided the nuance that sits beneath the surface of so many of the stories Attoh tells.

This book serves multiple disciplines. For planning, of which the author is generally critical, it draws into question some of the field's most taken-for-granted ideas. For geography it provides an analysis of spatial contestations of capital through the lens of public transportation, moving away from the all-too-often econometric modeling and hypothesizing that it often relies on. Despite some theoretical loose ends and attempts to cover what might be too much in the space allotted, this book

undoubtedly pushes the study of transportation in geography in new, and necessary, directions.

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*Extraction Empire: Undermining the Systems, States, and Scales of Canada's Global Resource Empire, 2017–1217.* Pierre Belanger, ed. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2018. Pp. 800, color photographs, maps, figures. \$55.00, paperback, ISBN 978-0-262-53382-9.

*Extraction Empire* is part exhibition guide, part compendium, part edited collection, and part insurgency manual aimed at exposing Canada's historical birth within and ongoing complicity with systems of global colonial "extractivism." At eight hundred glossy pages and weighing in at more than two kilograms (four pounds), it is a literally and figuratively unwieldy attempt to marshal disparate scholarly and activist literatures toward a critical convergence on mineral and energy industries in Canada and beyond. Informed by scholarship but a decidedly unacademic approach to these questions, *Extraction Empire* generates some interesting insights through its juxtaposition of essays, poems, images, and artifacts, but it labors under its idiosyncratic structure, polemical framing, and lack of empirical insight.

As a collection, *Extraction Empire* has its origins in an installation prepared for the 2016 Venice Biennale, created under the direction of urbanist and landscape architect Pierre Belanger. The installation featured a short film, screened subterraneanly through a hole in the ground, aimed at documenting the historical implication of mineral extraction in the colonization of Canada and that nation's subsequent emergence as a leading center of global mining capital by the end of the twentieth century. The subsequent collection bears the marks of this particular origin in its at times confusing and repetitive but also stimulating organization and content. A good deal of the material included appears to only indirectly reference mining, dealing with topics such as parks, urban planning, and Indigenous resurgence, its inclusion justified by its links to the "empire" side of the book's framing.

It's difficult to know how to approach or use this book, given that its structure resembles more bricolage than narrative inquiry. The vol-