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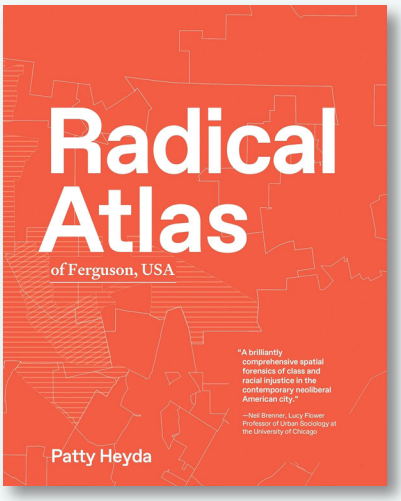

RADICAL ATLAS OF FERGUSON, USA

REVIEW 1 OF 2 FOR THIS TITLE

By Patty Heyda

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312 pages, 107 maps

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Review by: Shriya Malhotra, Independent Researcher

Patty Heyda's *Radical Atlas of Ferguson, USA* exemplifies what is arguably an increasingly necessary form of critical cartography, particularly so in an era where inclusive, crowd-sourced, and participatory mapping has been gaining traction by tapping into people's everyday personal and communal experiences. I, myself, see this atlas as an example of what Ruth Wilson Gilmore has called "activist scholarship" (2022, 448).

The city of Ferguson is located in what the atlas often refers to colloquially as *North St. Louis County* or *North County*: the northern part of the county of St. Louis, Missouri. This previously obscure, predominantly African-American suburb of St. Louis came to prominence in August of 2014, when Michael Brown, an eighteen-year-old African American man, was killed by a white policeman. An outraged populace took to the streets demanding justice and accountability—in demonstrations that later devolved into rioting and looting. Physically, demographically, and spatially defined by an industrial past, the developmental trajectory of Ferguson highlights the racialized injustices faced by people of color. That history, and the present reality, provides the setting for *Radical Atlas of Ferguson, USA*'s immense, almost forensic, exploration of gentrifying suburbia—an exploration that leverages the revelatory power of maps and of information design.

The *Radical Atlas* demonstrates how Ferguson's built and social environments have been constructed upon core racial and power inequities, and it does so by bringing together disparate narratives, indicators and variables visualized as maps and diagrams. Once a typical, middle-American landscape—a first-ring suburb of a major US city—Ferguson can also be taken as a paradigmatic example of how endemic, foundational inequities led both to the killing and to the subsequent unrest.

Heyda and her team aim to show how a seemingly benign suburb embeds and obscures systems of violence, racial segregation, and financial disenfranchisement, while also shielding those systems and their agents' actions from scrutiny and legal consequences. The atlas does so by organizing maps under categorical subheadings, each accompanied by a "mobilize" section offering actionable responses. In doing so, it brings home a much larger point: that racism's myriad manifestations are embedded in policy and designs that influence urban spaces.

Since the 1970s, urban design and planning in the United States has been substantially influenced by neoliberal economics—wherein public policy is directed by the concerns of private wealth and free market ideology—resulting in certain, typically racialized, segments of society being confined in compounding cycles of exclusion, inequality, and poverty. The consequences are visible in America's built, social, and economic environments. As Gilmore herself puts it in the **Antipode Foundation** film ***Geographies of Racial Capitalism with Ruth Wilson Gilmore***: "capitalism requires inequality, and racism enshrines it."

Mapmaking may not be the mode of response that first comes to mind when one considers racial justice, but Black intellectuals such as **Ida B. Wells and W. E. B. Du Bois** have, historically, used cartography to reveal to the general population the often hidden economic injustices rooted in race, and to communicate the realities those injustices create. By contrast, the more recent and visible practice of redlining—of drawing maps that explicitly identified and excluded (again, often racialized) neighborhoods from access to the financial services required to secure housing—is well known as a common tool in the hands of the agents of racial injustice. It is this latter technique, first developed in the 1930s, that is most widely seen as the primary relationship between maps and race.

Radical Atlas of Ferguson, *USA* questions this assumption of an exclusionary correlation between race and cartography, and succeeds in turning it on its head. The challenge to power using maps is catalyzed by the fact that, in recent years, civil society groups have had better access to spatial analysis and mapmaking tools that help to identify metrics for justice and equity. Through visual analysis of the urban form, as well as through an examination of assorted variables of design and planning, the maps in this atlas demonstrate how urban development has been used to justify and advance agendas of power and control. In particular, these activist maps reveal how "layers of racial capitalism were entangled with scenes of cookie-cutter houses, strip malls and suburban politics" (15), and, more broadly, how the seemingly mundane built environments of suburban USA encode a form of hidden violence through exclusion.

This intent—to illuminate the complicity of economics, policy, and urban design, and to encourage "recognition, accountability and resistance" (9)—is laid out by the author in her "Introduction," which notes how this atlas represents an attempt to "remap the city as a political economic construct to understand how and why inequality is structured into the built environment, and how and why such limited improvement persists" (11). Teddy Cruz and Fonna Forman further remark in their "Foreword" that by identifying and visualizing the geographies of inequality, Heyda and her associates allow the assorted themes to be examined to reveal the "layers of violent contradiction inflected on space and people by the extra-local priorities of capital and its agents" (8). Collectively, the maps—and in particular the actionable sub-sections on mobilization—comprise a form of activism that, in my view, achieves the goals of its authors.

The *Radical Atlas of Ferguson*, *USA* project was not commissioned by any group or organization, but it does espouse a point of view. Patty Heyda led the atlas project as part of a course at the University of Washington in St. Louis, where she is currently a professor of architecture and urban design. Over 100 visuals, including photos, charts, and maps, were created with support from her students and research assistants.

As part of its introductory materials, the book provides an "Atlas Guide" (28–29) that "orients the reader to the exact frame, scale, and location in the region of each map" (18). The information underlying the maps is extensively documented near the end, in the "Sources" section.

Data underlying the atlas maps were gathered using a wide variety of methods—onsite observation, digital search engines, media interviews, news accounts, reports, scholarly research, and the transcription of historical, analog information—with a primarily focus on the situation in and around Ferguson between the years 2014 and 2023. Many of the maps overlay and combine disparately sourced data on a variety of themes, in order to highlight intersections and interrelationships between topics—including some that might at first seem unrelated—and illustrate the proposed correlations. Any spatial data that were adapted or spatialized from news articles or public or nonprofit reports are fully cited on the map and also listed here. Source citations for all spatial and statistical data, whether adapted or spatialized from news articles, public or nonprofit reports, are documented, by chapter and map, in the thirty-one page "Sources" section (272–303).

The atlas is organized into five chapters, each covering a specific theme or research category. "Territory" reviews contestation and separation; "Space" looks at material forms of neoliberalism to explore weaponization and violence; "Opportunity" examines systems of exclusion and privilege; "Politics" examines governance sectors including public and private; and "Justice" reviews human rights, freedoms, health access, and the environment. Each chapter is broken into thematic sections that are supplemented by infographics, photographs, and maps, and is headed with a brief preface, setting out the hypotheses to be expounded.

Two detailed visual timelines—"Privatization of public policy" (Figure 1) and "Civil rights & policy reactions, 1960–2020" (Figure 2) introduce and contextualize the

impetus for the project. The former "shows the shift from federally sponsored social programs (in blue) to public-private trickle-down models favoring business growth and private wealth accumulation (in orange)" (12) and the latter shows "Civil rights gains [and] reactive policy protecting access to wealth and power" (24). Between them, the timelines illustrate chronologically how neoliberalism has resulted in inequality by perpetuating structural poverty through its programs and policies.

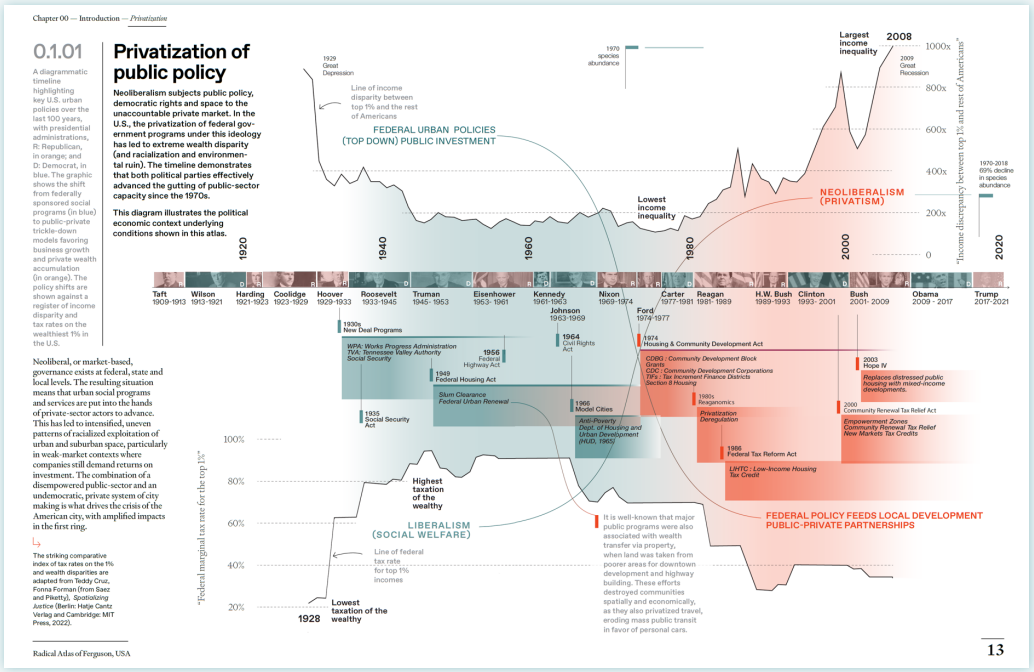

Figure 1. 0.1.01, Privatization of public policy (12–13).

By making visible the ways in which privatization has acted to the detriment of marginalized communities in and around Ferguson, the subsequent maps reveal inherent contradictions in city planning, policy, and design by showing how tax incentives, housing codes, urban planning design, and policing can both affect and often increase racial-based inequalities.

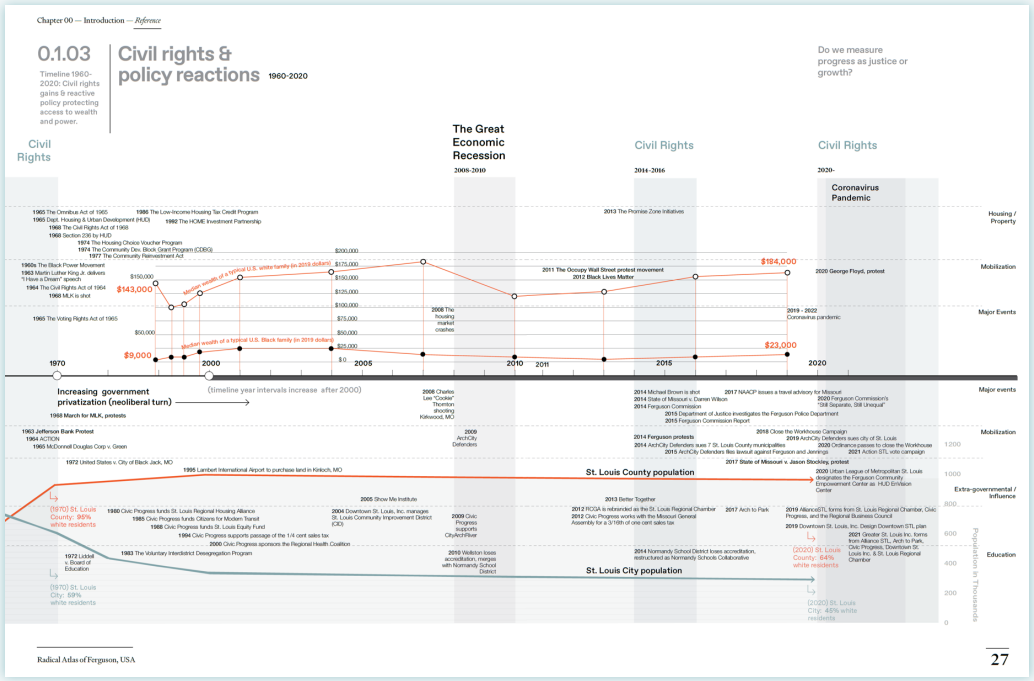

Figure 2. 0.1.03 Timeline of civil rights & policy reactions, 1960–2020 (26–27).

Chapter 5—entitled "Justice"—is particularly strong. It focuses on social and human rights through sub-sections on "Liberty," "Health," and "Environment." Maps in the "Health" section show how environmental justice necessitates racial justice, as well as necessitating investment in policies that are more equitable in their redistribution of wealth equity. The "Liberty" section offers an overview of the predatory criminal justice system, "where police and courts in North St. Louis County profit off of poverty as a mechanism for making up austere municipal revenue shortfalls" (218). Through these maps, the cyclical nature of poverty and the ways in which it is compounded and enmeshed with inequality becomes clearer.

The maps in the *Radical Atlas* have the potential to inform the construction of more accountable frameworks for urban research and design intervention by exposing

crucial, but often missing or suppressed, information. In addition to identifying and making pertinent patterns visible, they also identify specific areas for intervention and improvement—often annotating them with explicit interpretive guidance. For example, the "Development" section of the "Politics" chapter examines neighborhoods that need investment to help improve residents' lives, by offering maps of food deserts (Figure 3, 178; Figure 4, 179) that reveal which communities have easy access to healthy foods, which do not, and how the solution lies in quality and not simply quantity. A comment on map 4.C.19 (Figure 3) notes that the construction of a large grocery store in the middle of a food desert offers "helpful surface level, not structural, changes" (178). Another map points out that there remains a "persistent mismatch of jobs, education and income in Berkeley, MO, [a city adjacent to Ferguson] despite it being home to two major Fortune 500 companies" (192). Similarly, a map on page 216, showing the locations where **Arch City Defenders**—a local coordinating organization for pro bono legal advocacy—has filed lawsuits has a note telling us that the group "works to hold accountable those in power, to stop the criminalization and profit off of poverty in the region" (217). These cartographic annotations lend credible depth to the visuals.

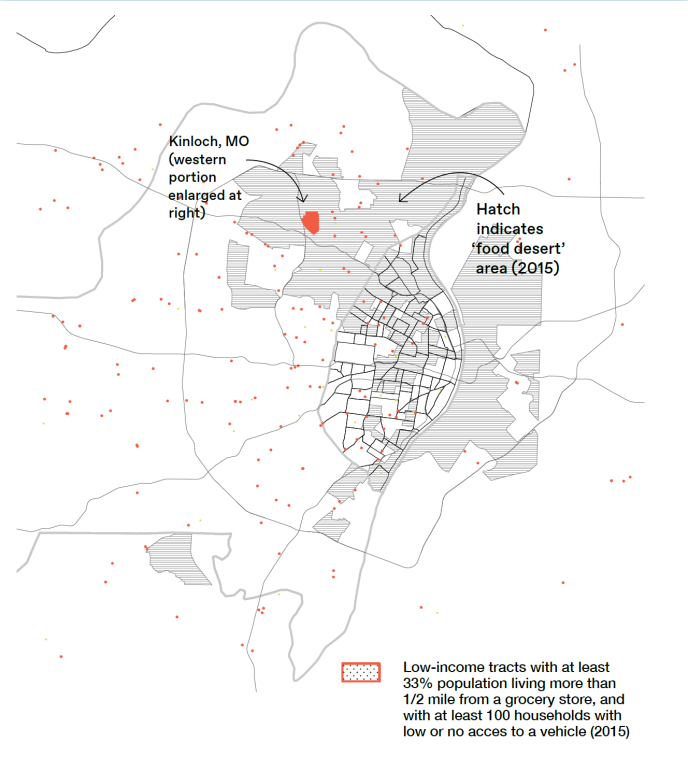

Figure 3. 4.C.19 Food desert (178).

The maps in this atlas are designed to explicitly debunk some very well-entrenched narratives and to advance more equitable distributions of justice by spurring a rethink and repositioning of established "systems of race and power" (18). To do this, the *Radical Atlas* offers the reader a heavy load—almost an overload—of rigorously objective visual information while at the same time unabashedly espousing a clear political advocacy counter-agenda of its own. Still, although a large part of the atlas makers' goal is to problematize entrenched assumptions, at least some of the *Radical Atlas* maps might be thought to play a bit fast and loose with conflating correlation and causality, and, in the process, stretching the

Figure 4. 4.C.19 Food desert, western portion of Kinloch, MO (179). This map makes clear the reality of an inaccessible resource located in a food desert. Most of the households in the western portion of Kinloch do not have access to vehicles, or to adequate public transportation, and are therefore reliant on local retail food outlets. In practice, this means small, nearby corner stores with limited inventories and often higher prices. The large—and perhaps economically efficient—regional distribution center is not accessible to retail customers; no one can shop at the facility.

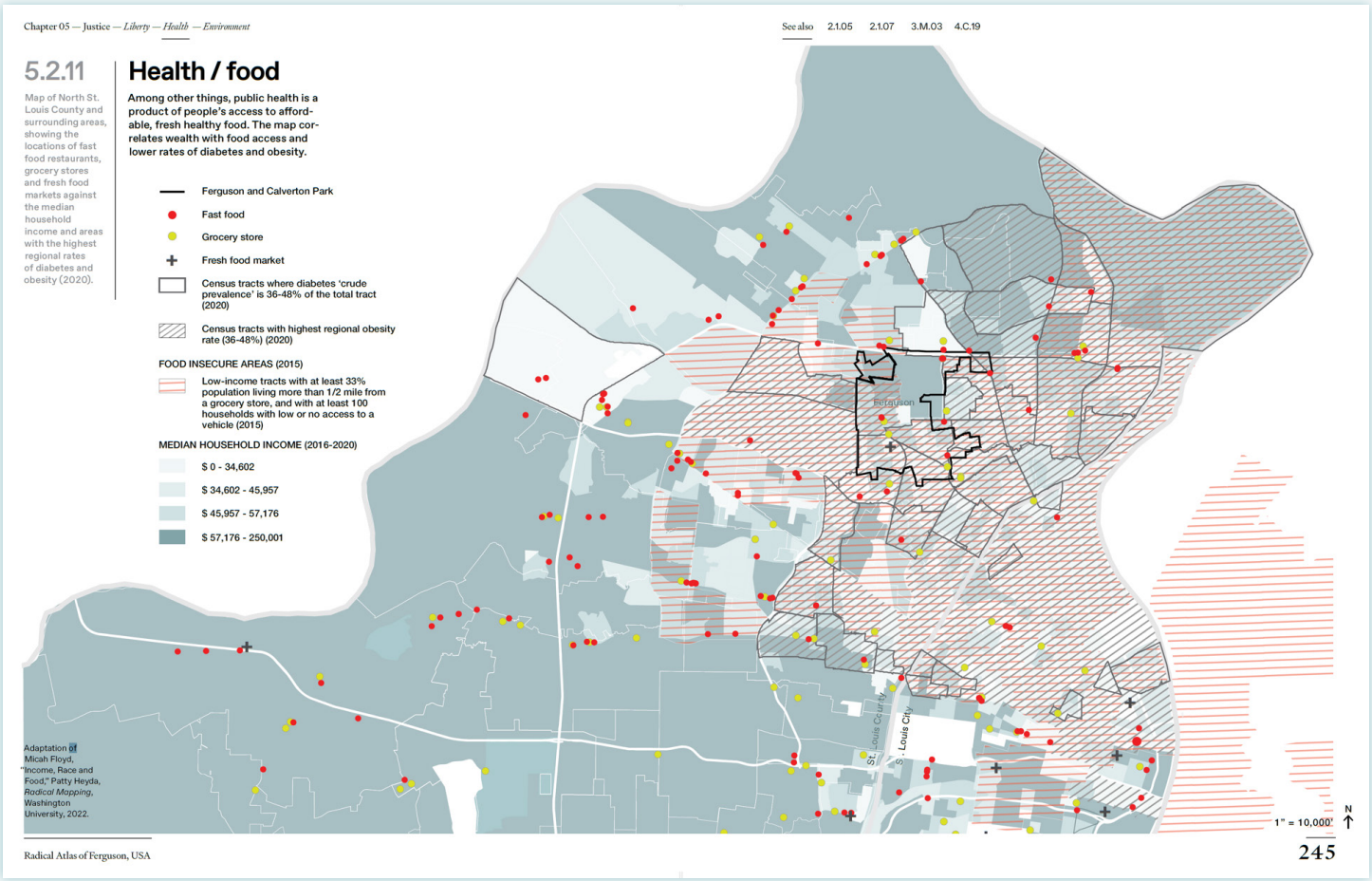

Figure 5. 5.2.01 Health / food (244–245).

reader's credulity a bit far. Similarly, in some of the graphics, the limits of design—both graphic and information—and of cartography, become evident. In some instances the mapmaker's design choices tend to over-simplify the reality they purport to depict, while some of the graphics are simply a bit hard to understand. Creating simple, accessible, and persuasive graphics of a complex, nuanced situation is not easy, and a graphic that is not easily understood will often be ignored or misinterpreted by a reader. In at least a few of these maps there is a risk that either the graphic or the rhetorical aspects, or both, might overwhelm or confuse at least some of the atlas' readers.

Nevertheless, the book is a fantastic example of activist scholarship and of communication and information design through maps. As a collection, these maps offer relevant and contextualized representations of pertinent socio-economic information while challenging dominant power structures. As an exercise in mapping the politics of inequality, it is a substantial contribution to cartography—particularly as an example of forensic, grassroots, and critical cartographies leveraging the power of maps for activism oriented towards social justice. Although targeted mainly at an audience of students and faculty in architecture and urban planning programs, and at people engaged directly with urban policy, this visually appealing compendium is useful for anyone interested in mapping for social justice, or in exploring the role of visual and spatial analysis enabled by new research tools that support grassroots, critical, and collective cartography.

That said, there exists some room for criticism. One question concerns the title: what is it, exactly, that makes this *Radical Atlas* "radical"? There is no question that Heyda is exploring a complex situation, and is providing a cogent and coherent statement and analysis framed in a manner radically at odds with that espoused by the dominant power structures, but does that make the cartography, and by extension, the atlas itself, radical? It could be argued that it represents what Mark Denil (2011) has called "a cartography of radicals and not a radical cartography" (2011, 19). While a cartography of radicals is in no way

illegitimate, we should remember that "a politically or socially challenging map should not be mistaken for a cartographically challenging map" (2011, 19).

The absence of interviews is another noticeable weakness. While the atlas exhibits an admirable visual multidimensionality, it doesn't always manage to show depth, complexity, and interrelationship of many issues—something that could potentially be captured by allowing people on the ground to speak for themselves—and comes off as a bit of an academic exercise.

Urban planning and development have historically, in the United States, been underpinned by systemic racism. With these maps, Patty Heyda presents a fantastic good example of alternative uses of cartography—one recalling Laura Kurgan's work (2013) surrounding racialized incarceration. This sort of mapping project, similar to initiatives like those of the Forensic Architecture group, reveals how structural racism underpins much of the American system, resulting in harm and (barely) hidden violence. *Radical Atlas of Ferguson*, *USA* is an invaluable showcase for the potential of critical cartography for grassroots activism and radical social justice: "By mapping Ferguson through layers of spatio-political complexity and contradiction, the atlas unravels stories that underline how and why the event [the 2014 murder of Michael Brown] and its urban responses came to be, with glimpses of how and why people are so resilient and creative in the face of such systemic oppression" (17). These maps illustrate how long standing urban planning practices have entrenched poverty and racial inequality spatially and physically into the built environment—and the atlas succeeds in identifying areas for intervention and change, realms necessitating social justice, and the intersections of variables such as poverty, race, class, and health.

I personally enjoyed reading and reviewing this atlas because I have always loved maps: as informative works of art and design, for how they work, what they reveal, what they indicate about power and how they attempt to deal with changes in space. This atlas is ultimately an ambitious experiment into the power of spatial analysis and sense making—something Cruz and Forman call "urban forensics" (9). Overall, it is a wonderful and important contribution—particularly with its examples of health mapping, which reveal how a multitude of factors (including geography) contribute to community well-being. It effectively builds upon what Gilmore refers to as "engaged scholarship" and "accountable activism," something she says

> Always begins with the politics of recognition . . . plenty of bad research is produced for all kinds of reasons, and plenty of fruitless organizing is undertaken with the best intentions. Activist scholarship attempts to intervene in a particular historical-geographical moment by changing not only what people do but also how all of us think about ourselves and our time and place, by opening the world we make. (2022, 447–8)

As part of this genre of work, the *Radical Atlas of Ferguson*, *USA* offers readers the optics to begin working towards systemic change and justice.

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