# **Anti-Imperialist Modernism**

Race and Transnational Radical Culture from the Great Depression to the Cold War

Benjamin Balthaser

**University of Michigan Press • Ann Arbor** 

Copyright © 2016 by Benjamin Balthaser All rights reserved

This book may not be reproduced, in whole or in part, including illustrations, in any form (beyond that copying permitted by Sections 107 and 108 of the U.S. Copyright Law and except by reviewers for the public press), without written permission from the publisher.

Published in the United States of America by the University of Michigan Press Manufactured in the United States of America © Printed on acid-free paper

2019 2018 2017 2016 4 3 2 1

A CIP catalog record for this book is available from the British Library.

Balthaser, Benjamin, author.

Anti-imperialist modernism: race and transnational radical culture from the Great Depression to the Cold War / Benjamin Balthaser.

1. Radicalism—United States—History—20th century. 2. Anti-imperialist

pages cm. — (Class: culture)

Includes bibliographical references and index.

ISBN 978-0-472-11971-4 (hardcover : alk. paper) — ISBN 978-0-472-12150-2 (ebook)

movements—United States—History—20th century. 3. Social movements—United States—History—20th century. 4. Imperialism—History—20th century. 5. United States—Race relations—History—20th century. 6. United States—Social conditions—20th century. 7. United States—Politics and government—20th century. I. Title.

HN90.R3B335 2016 303.48'4—dc23

2015024781

## Acknowledgments

This book had its beginnings at one of the many spectacular global justice protests of the late 1990s and early 2000s, as I was struck by the sudden urgency to think beyond the nation in order to understand even the most local of struggles. As I finished the manuscript during the hot summer of 2014, activists sought to stop the U.S.-funded bombing of Gaza on both college campuses and even the streets of Ferguson. Again, I was compelled by the ways we must continually re-create the global connections between the policed streets of the United States and the violent clashes of U.S. imperialism abroad. While it may be a strange place to begin an acknowledgment, I can say without these social movements and the many thousands of known and unknown activists who took part in them, I doubt very much it would have occurred to me ask the questions I asked about the role of transnational movements during the late modern period in the United States. So my gratitude begins with people I do not know and do not know how to begin to thank.

I can, however, thank by name many people who have been near and dear to me over the years. For her influence as both scholar and mentor, I owe a singular debt of gratitude to Shelley Streeby for the bold approach to interdisciplinary research she set as my dissertation advisor, her support, her patient editing, and for the best one-word piece of scholarly advice I've received: "newspapers." I need to thank Michael Davidson for his guidance, time, and most of all, the example he set of grace and generosity. I would like to thank Bill V. Mullen for his friendship and guidance through the revision process, and for casually asking me at a reception, "So, what are you working on"? A special heartfelt thanks goes to Rachel Ida-Buff for reading ugly first drafts of my final chapters and for creating a writing group in which chapters of my manuscript made the evolutionary transition from awkward, half-finished dissertation to book, the members of which included Jim Buss, Joe

#### vi • Acknowledgments

Genetin-Pilawa, Wendy Kozol, and Robert Smith. I also need to thank fellow scholars and friends Sarika Chandra and Chris Vials for their advice and support while navigating the publishing process, and to Jake Mattox, Paul Mishler, Kyoko Takanashi, and Lee Kahan for reminding me how to be a supportive colleague while I finished the final revisions. And I need to thank the scholars, friends, and mentors along the way who offered personal time and support, advice, and made helpful suggestions: Aimee Bahng, Scott Boehm, Robert Caldwell, Roxanne Dunbar-Ortiz, Sarah Ehlers, Diane Feeley, Ross Frank, José Fusté, Armagan Gezici, John Higgins, Tania Jabour, Joo Ok Kim, Adam Lewis, Vincent Lloyd, Josh Mason, Curtis Marez, Natalia Molina, Yumi Pak, David Pellow, Chris Perreira, Rosaura Sánchez, Kyla Schuller, Chase Smith, Liz Steeby, Michelle Stuckey, Laura Tanenbaum, Nicole Tonkovich, Ana Velitchkova, Alan Wald, Jane Wang, William Willard, and Lisa Yoneyama.

The librarians at the San Francisco Labor Archive and Research Center were an immeasurable help guiding me through the labor newspapers of the 1930s. I give my special thanks to Labor Archive librarian Catherine Powell, who invited me to present my second chapter with the long-standing Bay Area Labor Historians' Workshop, where I met many intellectuals and activists who lived intimately the material I presented. I would also like to thank the librarians and activists at the Southern California Library, who allowed me to roam through the many pamphlets and posters in their upstairs holdings. And the librarians at the Billy Rose Theater Division of the New York Public Library, the UCLA film archive, the National Archives Pacific Northwest Region, the American Philosophical Society, and the Library of Congress were more patient than I deserved with my many requests and questions as I completed my archival research. I would like to offer a special thanks to Tabitha Erdey of the Nez Perce National Historical Park for sending me unsorted images of Archie Phinney. I want to express a sincere thanks to editors Curtis Marez and Sarah Banet-Weiser and the blind reviewers of American Quarterly for their suggestions regarding articles that eventually became chapters 6 and 2 respectively. And an overwhelming debt of gratitude goes to the blind reviewers of the University of Michigan Press, who gave me needed critical feedback to make this a better book, and also opened up whole new avenues of meaning to explore in the revision process. And of course, a big thanks to the University of Michigan Press editor LeAnn Fields for helping me through the process and for being real about deadlines and possibilities, and to UMP's editorial assistant, Christopher Dreyer, who calmed me during a panic attack about footnotes.

I would also like to thank the militant, democratic staff and membership

of Western Massachusetts' United Auto Workers Local 2322: my work for this union has taught me how to bridge the gap between theory and praxis. And I would also like to express my appreciation for the Western Massachusetts Global Action Coalition, ARISE for Social Justice, Jews for Justice in Palestine (Chicago), Jewish Voice for Peace (Chicago), and the Students for Economic Justice for giving me my post-baccalaureate and postgraduate political education. And to Martín Espada, all I can say is you taught me that poetry and politics do mix, and I stayed in school because you showed me literature is valuable. And to Daniel Mahoney and Yago Cura, dear friends, for continuing to give us the needed music of your poems. And to Jim Foley, former colleague and forever comrade, who showed us why thinking globally matters and the way to, in the face of death, pay the price for insisting on the truth with courage, humanity, and grace.

I would like to thank the Indiana University New Frontiers in the Arts and Humanities for their generous travel and writing support, as well as to the Indiana University, South Bend office of research for providing necessary release time over the summer to complete this project. And I would like to thank the following students at IUSB for helping me to grow as a scholar and teacher, and for their questions, enthusiasm, and sharp insight: Lucas Burkett, Libby Elmore, Stephanie Merryfield, Lexi Millard, Chad Morgan, Ashley Peterson, Maureen Pickard, Hannah Stowe, Muhammad Shabazz, Jeff Wimble, and Nick Wort, some of whom have become friends and will someday or soon become colleagues. I would also like to thank the following faculty, staff, and (former) graduate and undergraduate members of UCSD, including Ayhan Aytes, Jodi Blanco, Erin Brodwin, Gary Fields, Rishi Ghosh, David G. Gutierrez, Michelle Gutiérrez, Ariana Hernandez-Reguant, Daniel Hoài Tiến Nguyễn, Sara Johnson, Erin Malone, Luis Martin-Cabrera, Maki Matsumura, Kelli Moore, Matt Shindell, Sabrina Strings, Diego Ubiera, and Winnie Woodhull, who helped enrich my thinking, broadened my intellectual and political horizons, and guided me through the seven years of graduate school as valuable mentors, comrades, and in many cases, good friends.

And I would like to thank Sid Resnick, Joe Dimow, and Henry Foner for generously giving of their time to tell me their personal experiences as activists in the Great Depression. Your contributions to the world made it a better place. As we used to say in Yiddish, may the memory of the righteous be a blessing.

And no acknowledgment would be complete without expressing my love and thanks to my wonderful parents, Susan and Lawrence Balthaser, whose care, support, humor, and faith in me throughout the years has made all the

#### viii • Acknowledgments

difference. And my thanks for my brother Nicholas, who kindly refrains from reminding me what we all know: that he is really the smart one in the family. And I would like to thank my aunt and uncle, Judy and Robert Tolchin, for their patience with my untidy presence in their house over the years. And finally, I need to express my love and thanks to my late grandfather, Hyman Mozenter, who as a union organizer, victim of the Cold War blacklist, and unrepentant revolutionary set an example for the entire family and is the reason I write what I write.

### Contents

	Introduction. Anti-Imperialist Modernism: Transnational Radical Culture from the Great Depression to the Cold War	1
1	This Land Is My Land: Cuba and the Anti-Imperialist Critique of a National-Popular Culture in the United State	tes 38
2	<ul> <li>Travels of an American Indian into the Hinterlands of Soviet Russia: Native American Modernity and the Popular Front</li> </ul>	83
3	• The Other Revolution: Haiti and the Aesthetics of Anti-Imperialist Modernism	118
4	The Strike and the Terror: The Transnational Critique of the New Deal in the California Popular Front	150
5	<ul> <li>An Inland Empire: Fascism, Farm Labor, and the Memory of 1848</li> </ul>	182
6	• Cold War Re-Visions: Red Scare Nationalism and the Unmade <i>Salt of the Earth</i>	224
	Notes	253
	Bibliography	287
	Index	301