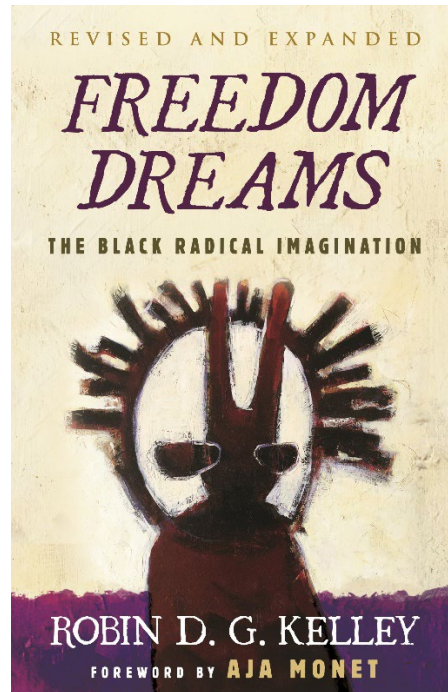


*Freedom Dreams: The Black Radical Imagination* by Robin D. G. Kelley

Readers' Guide Discussion Questions



1. Kelley acknowledges that in the twenty years since *Freedom Dreams* was first published, his own vision for freedom has grown. In his introduction, he offers other “paths of the Black radical imagination” (p. xxxii) that he would examine if he were to write the book again today, including queer and trans liberation, mutual aid, disability justice, and decolonization and Indigenous thought. Choose one of these themes as a lens to reexamine one of Kelley’s chapters. For example, how might the concept of disability justice help us to think about reparations in new ways?
2. In the preface, Kelley writes, “Unfortunately, too often our standards for evaluating social movements pivot around whether or not they ‘succeeded’ in realizing their visions rather than on the merits or power of the visions themselves” (p. xlvii). How would you define success for a social movement? Based on your definition, were any of the movements discussed in *Freedom Dreams* successful?
3. Kelley argues that social movements are like poetry and that, through struggle, activists develop “poetic knowledge” (p. 9). How would you describe “poetic knowledge” in your own words? How does poetic knowledge differ from what Aimé Césaire calls “scientific knowledge” or other forms of knowledge?
4. In the movements that Kelley writes about, what patterns do you see with respect to how gender is (re)imagined in these movements’ visions for the future? What role did the gender binary (womanhood/manhood) play? How did the intersections of class, race, and sexuality challenge and/or reinforce this binary?

5. Kelley introduces a few “questions” that radical movements have contended with throughout history—the Negro Question, the Woman Question, and the Nation Question. How would you write out these questions in your own words? Reflecting on Black feminists’ criticisms that movements tended to treat all Black people as men and all women as white, what relationships do you think these questions have to one another?
6. Why did Black Americans feel a sense of “Third World solidarity” with formerly colonized countries around the world? How did this global connectivity influence Black American radical thought?
7. Kelley writes that Black feminists expand “the definition of who constitutes a theorist, the voice of authority speaking for Black women, to include poets, blues singers, storytellers, painters, mothers, preachers, and teachers?” (p. 154). How does Kelley use the arts throughout this book to support his historical and political arguments? Did Kelley’s book make you think differently about who can contribute to developing political theory and knowledge?
8. How have the Black radical movements that Kelley writes about used violence (either offensive or defensive) to realize their freedom dreams? Based on reading his introduction and epilogue, what do you think is Kelley’s own opinion about the role of violence in revolution?
9. What argument is Kelley making about the relationship between the surrealism movement and Black radical social movements? Why does Kelley believe that we should understand surrealism as more than an artistic movement? Reflect on contemporary artistic movements in visual arts, film, television, music, etc. What connections do you see between these artistic movements and contemporary radical social movements?
10. For this edition, Kelley chose to restore his original epilogue, a short piece of speculative fiction that imagined a revolution led by “Maroon poets.” How does this epilogue reflect the goals and strategies of today’s radical political movements? In what ways do the activists and organizations that Kelley writes about in his introduction mirror the dream he writes about in the epilogue?
11. Aja Monet’s foreword opens with a description of what liberation looks like to her—in other words, her own version of a “liberated zone” (p. 203). To develop a description of what liberation means to you, think about what sights, sounds, smells, tastes, or feelings you would use to describe your own liberated zone. Where is this zone? Who would be with you? What would they be doing? What would it take to get there?
12. In his introduction and epilogue, Kelley lists and discusses many revolutionary initiatives happening all over the US and the world. Take a few minutes to research what transformative initiatives are happening in your local community. What kind of “fascist nightmares” (p. xviii) are these initiatives fighting against? What kind of dreams for the future are they trying to realize?