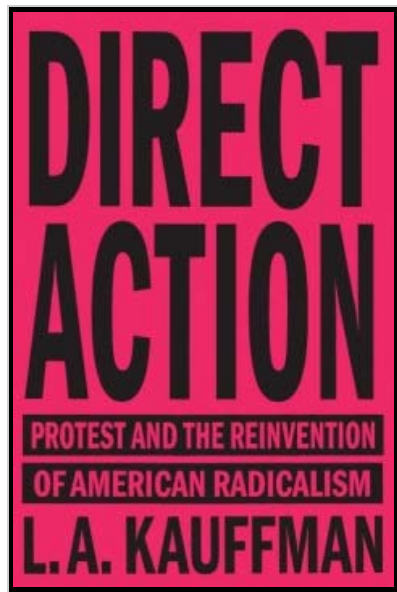


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Direct Action

by L.A. Kauffman

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Published: February 21, 2017

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From the Publisher: A vibrant, groundbreaking history of American radicalism since the Sixties What happened to the American left after the Sixties? This engrossing account traces the evolution of disruptive protest over the last 40 years to tell a larger story about the reshaping of American radicalism, showing how the direct-action blockades, occupations, and campaigns of recent activist movements have functioned as laboratories for political experimentation and renewal. Propelled by more than 100 candid interviews conducted over a span of decades, this elegant and lively history showcases the voices of key players in an array of movements – environmentalist, anti-nuclear, anti-apartheid, feminist, LGBTQ, anti-globalization, racial-justice, anti-war, and more – across an era when American politics shifted to the right, and issue- and identity-based organizing eclipsed...

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About The Author

L.A. Kauffman

L.A. Kauffman has spent more than 30 years immersed in radical movements, as an organizer, strategist, journalist, and observer. Her writings on grassroots activism and social movement history have been published in *The Nation*, *Mother Jones*, *n+1*, *The Baffler*, and many...

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What We Say

"What happened to the American left after the Sixties?" That is the question that has bedeviled activist and journalist L.A. Kaufmann, who has been on the ground at protest movements ranging from anti-apartheid to ACT UP/NY to Earth First! and beyond. She's wrestled with that query for years and the result is this scholarly work. Most imagine a splintering of the left from its anti-Vietnam focus to a hundred different issues. Instead, Kaufmann paints a history of direct action. She sees its roots stretching far back, but marks the beginning of the modern era to the May Day protest in DC on May 3, 1971. The motto of the action was "If the government won't stop the war/ We'll stop the government." Thanks to police action, it was

mostly disrupted before it began and has been seen as a failure. In fact, it rattled the Nixon administration and inspired many with its bold, media-friendly tactics. Kaufmann shows feminist/socialist techniques spreading to groups far and wide, ideas and tools such as group consensus, affinity cells and orgs that can plan actions and remain both nimble and harder to infiltrate by the police. ACT UP brought a real PR and media savviness to the table. Earth First! combined real world objectives with a larger statement. And again and again groups wrestled with not simply reaching out to other groups (such as people of color) but to embody diversity. The Seattle protests against the World Trade Organization fired up actions on a national and global scale and finally began to connect the dots between police brutality and economic inequality and globalization and the destruction of the environment. And thus the splintered issues began to merge again, so that #BlackLivesMatter could be media savvy, take advantage of the organizing skills of other groups, maintain its own identity and broaden the discussion from police shootings of black people to state violence against queers, the trans community and on. Kaufmann juggles an endless array of groups, with one protest blending into another. Yet she deftly shows where Occupy Wall Street came from and why they were having those seemingly endless discussions about trivial matters. More importantly, she asserts that it may have been swept aside by the state but ultimately inspired many effective and focused Direct Actions with clear objectives in its wake. Again, this is not a narrative history of Direct Action filled with stories and personalities, which could be thrilling and more engaging to a general readership. Nor is it the how-to manual I imagined at first glance. But it's thoughtful and interesting and ultimately hopeful for those who imagined the days of radical activism were stuck in the distant past. And someone should do a documentary film version: most of these protests involved photogenic moments and a film could viscerally and literally link these issues and actions in a way a wide audience will grasp immediately. -- Michael Giltz

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