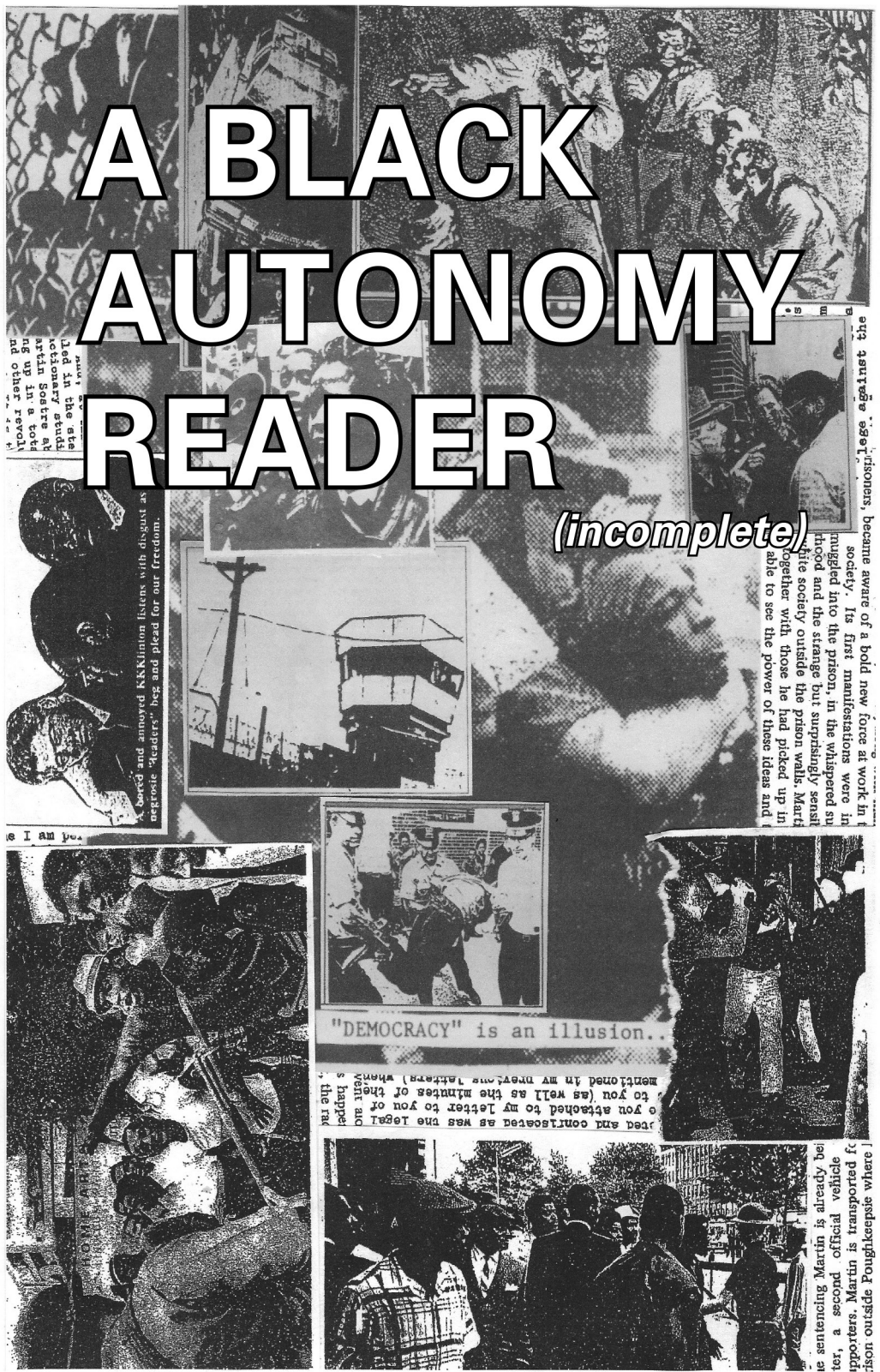


A BLACK AUTONOMY READER

(incomplete)



...led in the...
...actions...
...Martin...
...up in...
...nd other...

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...listens with disgust as...
...negroite "leaders" beg and plead for freedom.

...s I am yo...

"DEMOCRACY" is an illusion.

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...mentioned in my previous letters) when...
...vent and...
...s happen...
...the rat...

...prisoners, became aware of a bold new force at work in the...
...society. Its first manifestations were in...
...ruggled into the prison, in the whisped in...
...hood and the strange but surprisingly sens...
...ite society outside the prison walls. Mart...
...together with those he had picked up in...
...able to see the power of these ideas and t...

...e sentencing Martin is already bei...
...ter, a second official vehicle...
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Dedicated to
Eudine Cox McConney

Windrush Émigré & Anti-Racist Campaigner

Who I only learned more about after she'd passed
as she never wanted praise for what she did.

WORK IN I

Typeset in Caslon 11pt.
Available in other formats upon request.

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I think of being Black not so much as an ethnic category but as an oppositional force or touchstone for looking at situations differently. Black culture has always been oppositional and is all about finding ways to creatively resist oppression here, in the most racist country in the world. So, when I speak of a Black anarchism, it is not so tied to the color of my skin but who I am as a person, as someone who can resist, who can see differently when I am stuck, and thus live differently.

Ashanti Omowali Alston

Dare to look at the intersectionalities. Dare to be holistic. Part of the heart of anarchy is, dare to go against the grain of the conventional ways of thinking about our realities. Anarchists have always gone against the grain, and that's been a place of hope.

bell hooks

Foreword.

In 2016, American Anarchist organisation Black Rose/Rosa Negra Anarchist Federation published 'The Black Anarchism Reader'. It's an impressive collection with plenty of great discussions on lesser considered topics, individuals, and struggles.

I've always wanted to build upon this work with essays, interviews, and articles which have also had a great influence upon Black Autonomy and Anarchism from beyond the confines of the Especificist and Platformist Anarchist tradition.

In the British Isles, the majority of this conversation is held inside of over-priced books and academic papers; two things most people don't have access too. Many comrades have never read anything by our peers. I hope the publication of this can help to change that, for everyone.

There are inevitable shortcomings with such a project namely, there is certain to be going to be a key bit of writing here or there that I've missed and countless authors, events, and debates I've never read up on or have forgotten.

As Atticus Bagby-Williams & Nsambu Za Suekama put it;

... black anarchism is not an academic discipline and cannot be approached as such; Black Anarchist politics resides within a culture of oral tradition, letters from jailed and/or exiled revolutionaries, and self-published literature in the form of 'zines, primarily because many initial Black Anarchist intellectuals emerged from prison struggles.

*Black Anarchism and the Black Radical Tradition
2022*

This reader is gonna be a mess of ideas and will lack context and nuance at times. I encourage anyone reading this, upon seeing something they'd like to learn more about, to take the time to read further into it and come to your own conclusions. I don't agree with everything in this reader and I'd be shocked if someone could with a straight face tell me they did. My intention is to display the myriad of

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differing voices within Black Autonomy and Anarchism.

I'd love to see a world where every small collective, reading group, or social centre made their own readers on topics that they're passionate about. We should extend the conversation beyond just recommending academic books (*that no-one can afford*) that we all know they're not going to read. We should make our reading materials short format and accessible to a wide audience, as a companion series to this book I will be creating zines of the majority of the articles that aren't already zines.

Stylistically, the cover of this book is inspired by the collage artwork of anarchist comrade Ojore Lutalo, Yannic Lowery, and Njideka Akunyili Crosby and the dozens of talented black collagists that have drawn me back to the medium and the style over the years. The back cover is a half-toned photograph of *Sudanese Anarchists Gathering* on the streets of Khartoum 2021.

I put this together after many years of considering the idea beyond me because of the encouragement of friends. I hope that this reaches, not just those already in community with other radicals, but the isolated people, in the middle of nowhere, far from any activist hotspot or radical space, whether that distance be physical or sociological.

I hope that the glimpse at our massive collective experience of struggle depicted here can contribute to keeping the fire burning. Whether or not you are heard or seen by the activist circuit, whether or not the stuff you write, draw, paint, steal, destroy, or liberate ends up in books or in the magazines... Fuck them.

Travel at your own pace and live free as you can.

Mutt.

Seditionist Distribution

2024

P.S. Suggested listening.

Kokoroko – Could We Be More (2022)

Nala Sinephro – Space 1.8 (2021)

Hailu Mergia & Dahlak Band – Wede Harer Guzo (1970s)

Alfa Mist – Antiphon (2017)

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A Black Autonomy Reader
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The Principles of Anarchism

Lucy Parsons
(1905-1910)

Comrades and Friends: I think I cannot open my address more appropriately than by stating my experience in my long connection with the reform movement.

It was during the great railroad strike of 1877 that I first became interested in what is known as the "Labor Question." I then thought as many thousands of earnest, sincere people think, that the aggregate power operating in human society, known as government, could be made an instrument in the hands of the oppressed to alleviate their sufferings. But a closer study of the origin, history and tendency of governments convinced me that this was a mistake.

I came to understand how organized governments used their concentrated power to retard progress by their ever-ready means of silencing the voice of discontent if raised in vigorous protest against the machinations of the scheming few, who always did, always will and always must rule in the councils of nations where majority rule is recognized as the only means of adjusting the affairs of the people. I came to understand that such concentrated power can be always wielded in the interest of the few and at the expense of the many. Government in its last analysis is this power reduced to a science. Governments never lead; they follow progress. When the prison, stake or scaffold can no longer silence the voice of the protesting minority, progress moves on a step, but not until then.

I will state this contention in another way: I learned by close study that it made no difference what fair promises a political party, out of power, might make to the people in order to secure their confidence, when once securely established in control of the affairs of society that they were after all but human with all the human attributes of the politician. Among these are: First, to remain in power at all hazards; if not individually, then those holding essentially the same views as the administration must be kept in control. Second, in order to keep in power, it is necessary to build up a powerful machine; one strong enough to crush all opposition and silence all vigorous murmurs of discontent, or the party machine might be smashed and the party thereby lose control.

When I came to realize the faults, failings, shortcomings, aspirations and ambitions of fallible man, I concluded that it would not be the safest nor best policy for society, as a whole, to entrust the management of all its affairs, with all their manifold deviations and ramifications in the hands of finite man, to be managed by the party which happened to come into power, and therefore was the majority party, nor did it then, nor does it now make one particle of difference to me what a party, out of power may promise; it does not tend to allay my fears of a party, when entrenched and securely seated in power might do to crush opposition, and silence the voice of the minority, and thus retard the onward step of progress.

My mind is appalled at the thought of a political party having control of all the details that go to make up the sum total of our lives. Think of it for an instant, that the party in power shall have all authority to dictate the kind of books that shall be used in our schools and universities, government officials editing, printing, and circulating our literature, histories, magazines and press, to say nothing of the thousand and one activities of life that a people engage in, in a civilized society.

To my mind, the struggle for liberty is too great and the few steps we have gained have been won at too great a sacrifice, for the great mass of the people of this 20th century to consent to turn over to any political party the management of our social and industrial affairs. For all who are at all familiar with history know that men will abuse power when they possess it. For these and other reasons, I, after careful study, and not through sentiment, turned from a sincere, earnest, political Socialist to the non-political phase of Socialism—Anarchism—because in its philosophy I believe I can find the proper conditions for the fullest development of the individual units in society, which can never be the case under government restrictions.

The philosophy of anarchism is included in the word “Liberty,” yet it is comprehensive enough to include all things else that are conducive to progress. No barriers whatever to human progression, to thought, or investigation are placed by anarchism; nothing is considered so true or so certain, that future discoveries may not prove it false; therefore, it has but one infallible, unchangeable motto, “Freedom”: Freedom to discover any truth, freedom to develop, to live naturally and fully. Other schools of thought are composed of crystallized ideas—principles that are caught and impaled between the planks of long platforms, and considered too sacred to be disturbed by a close investigation. In all other “issues” there is always a limit; some imaginary boundary line beyond which the searching mind dare not penetrate, lest some pet idea melt into a myth. But anarchism is the usher of science—the master of ceremonies to all forms of truth. It would remove all barriers between the human being and natural development. From the natural resources of the Earth, all artificial restrictions, that the body might be nurtured,

and from universal truth, all bars of prejudice and superstition, that the mind may develop symmetrically.

Anarchists know that a long period of education must precede any great fundamental change in society, hence they do not believe in vote-begging, nor political campaigns, but rather in the development of self-thinking individuals.

We look away from government for relief, because we know that force (legalized) invades the personal liberty of man, seizes upon the natural elements and intervenes between man and natural laws; from this exercise of force through governments flows nearly all the misery, poverty, crime and confusion existing in society.

So, we perceive, there are actual, material barriers blockading the way. These must be removed. If we could hope they would melt away, or be voted or prayed into nothingness, we would be content to wait and vote and pray. But they are like great frowning rocks towering between us and a land of freedom, while the dark chasms of a hard-fought past yawn behind us. Crumbling they may be with their own weight and the decay of time, but to quietly stand under until they fall is to be buried in the crash. There is something to be done in a case like this—the rocks must be removed. Passivity while slavery is stealing over us is a crime. For the moment we must forget that we are anarchists—when the work is accomplished we may forget that we were revolutionists—hence most anarchists believe the coming change can only come through a revolution, because the possessing class will not allow a peaceful change to take place; still we are willing to work for peace at any price, except at the price of liberty.

And what of the glowing beyond that is so bright that those who grind the faces of the poor say it is a dream? It is no dream, it is the real, stripped of brain-distortions materialized into thrones and scaffolds, miters and guns. It is nature acting on her own interior laws as in all her other associations. It is a return to first principles; for were not the land, the water, the light, all free before governments took shape and form? In this free state we will again forget to think of these things as “property.” It is real, for we, as a race, are growing up to it. The idea of less restriction and more liberty, and a confiding trust that nature is equal to her work, is permeating all modern thought.

From the dark years—not so long gone by—when it was generally believed that man’s soul was totally depraved and every human impulse bad; when every action, every thought and every emotion was controlled and restricted; when the human frame, diseased, was bled, dosed, suffocated and kept as far from nature’s remedies as possible; when the mind was seized upon and distorted before it had time to

evolve a natural thought—from those days to these years the progress of this idea has been swift and steady. It is becoming more and more apparent that in every way we are “governed best where we are governed least.”

Still unsatisfied perhaps, the inquirer seeks for details, for ways and means, and whys and wherefores. How will we go on like human beings—eating and sleeping, working and loving, exchanging and dealing—without government? So used have we become to “organized authority” in every department of life that ordinarily we cannot conceive of the most common-place avocations being carried on without their interference and “protection.” But anarchism is not compelled to outline a complete organization of a free society. To do so with any assumption of authority would be to place another barrier in the way of coming generations. The best thought of today may become the useless vagary of tomorrow, and to crystallize it into a creed is to make it unwieldy.

We judge from experience that man is a gregarious animal, and instinctively affiliates with his kind—co-operates, unites in groups, works to better advantage combined with his fellow men than when alone. This would point to the formation of co-operative communities, of which our present trades-unions are embryonic patterns. Each branch of industry will no doubt have its own organization, regulations, leaders, etc.; it will institute methods of direct communication with every member of that industrial branch in the world, and establish equitable relations with all other branches. There would probably be conventions of industry which delegates would attend, and where they would transact such business as was necessary, adjourn and from that moment be delegates no longer, but simply members of a group. To remain permanent members of a continuous congress would be to establish a power that is certain sooner or later to be abused.

No great, central power, like a congress consisting of men who know nothing of their constituents’ trades, interests, rights or duties, would be over the various organizations or groups; nor would they employ sheriffs, policemen, courts or jailers to enforce the conclusions arrived at while in session. The members of groups might profit by the knowledge gained through mutual interchange of thought afforded by conventions if they choose, but they will not be compelled to do so by any outside force.

Vested rights, privileges, charters, title deeds, upheld by all the paraphernalia of government—the visible symbol of power—such as prison, scaffold and armies, will have no existence. There can be no privileges bought or sold, and the transaction kept sacred at the point of the bayonet. Every man will stand on an equal footing with his brother in the race of life, and neither chains of economic thralldom nor

menial drags of superstition shall handicap the one to the advantage of the other.

Property will lose a certain attribute which sanctifies it now. The absolute ownership of it—"the right to use or abuse"—will be abolished, and possession, use, will be the only title. It will be seen how impossible it would be for one person to "own" a million acres of land, without a title deed, backed by a government ready to protect the title at all hazards, even to the loss of thousands of lives. He could not use the million acres himself, nor could he wrest from its depths the possible resources it contains.

People have become so used to seeing the evidences of authority on every hand that most of them honestly believe that they would go utterly to the bad if it were not for the policeman's club or the soldier's bayonet. But the anarchist says, "Remove these evidences of brute force, and let man feel the revivifying influences of self-responsibility and self-control, and see how we will respond to these better influences."

The belief in a literal place of torment has nearly melted away; and instead of the direful results predicted, we have a higher and truer standard of manhood and womanhood. People do not care to go to the bad when they find they can as well as not. Individuals are unconscious of their own motives in doing good. While acting out their natures according to their surroundings and conditions, they still believe they are being kept in the right path by some outside power, some restraint thrown around them by church or state. So the objector believes that with the right to rebel and secede, sacred to him, he would forever be rebelling and seceding, thereby creating constant confusion and turmoil.

Is it probable that he would, merely for the reason that he could do so? Men are to a great extent creatures of habit, and grow to love associations; under reasonably good conditions, he would remain where he commences, if he wished to, and, if he did not, who has any natural right to force him into relations distasteful to him? Under the present order of affairs, persons do unite with societies and remain good, disinterested members for life, where the right to retire is always conceded.

What we anarchists contend for is a larger opportunity to develop the units in society, that mankind may possess the right as a sound being to develop that which is broadest, noblest, highest and best, unhandicapped by any centralized authority, where he shall have to wait for his permits to be signed, sealed, approved and handed down to him before he can engage in the active pursuits of life with his fellow being. We know that after all, as we grow more enlightened under this larger liberty, we will grow to care less and less for that exact distribution of material

wealth, which, in our greed-nurtured senses, seems now so impossible to think upon carelessly. The man and woman of loftier intellects, in the present, think not so much of the riches to be gained by their efforts as of the good they can do for their fellow creatures.

There is an innate spring of healthy action in every human being who has not been crushed and pinched by poverty and drudgery from before his birth, that impels him onward and upward. He cannot be idle, if he would; it is as natural for him to develop, expand, and use the powers within him when not repressed, as it is for the rose to bloom in the sunlight and fling its fragrance on the passing breeze.

The grandest works of the past were never performed for the sake of money. Who can measure the worth of a Shakespeare, an Angelo or Beethoven in dollars and cents? Agassiz said, "he had no time to make money," there were higher and better objects in life than that. And so will it be when humanity is once relieved from the pressing fear of starvation, want, and slavery, it will be concerned, less and less, about the ownership of vast accumulations of wealth. Such possessions would be but an annoyance and trouble. When two or three or four hours a day of easy, of healthful labor will produce all the comforts and luxuries one can use, and the opportunity to labor is never denied, people will become indifferent as to who owns the wealth they do not need.

Wealth will be below par, and it will be found that men and women will not accept it for pay, or be bribed by it to do what they would not willingly and naturally do without it. Some higher incentive must, and will, supersede the greed for gold. The involuntary aspiration born in man to make the most of one's self, to be loved and appreciated by one's fellow-beings, to "make the world better for having lived in it," will urge him on to nobler deeds than ever the sordid and selfish incentive of material gain has done.

If, in the present chaotic and shameful struggle for existence, when organized society offers a premium on greed, cruelty, and deceit, men can be found who stand aloof and almost alone in their determination to work for good rather than gold, who suffer want and persecution rather than desert principle, who can bravely walk to the scaffold for the good they can do humanity, what may we expect from men when freed from the grinding necessity of selling the better part of themselves for bread? The terrible conditions under which labor is performed, the awful alternative if one does not prostitute talent and morals in the service of mammon; and the power acquired with the wealth obtained by ever-so-unjust means, combine to make the conception of free and voluntary labor almost an impossible one.

And yet, there are examples of this principle even now. In a well-bred family each person has certain duties, which are performed cheerfully, and are not measured out and paid for according to some pre-determined standard; when the united members sit down to the well-filled table, the stronger do not scramble to get the most, while the weakest do without, or gather greedily around them more food than they can possibly consume. Each patiently and politely awaits his turn to be served, and leaves what he does not want; he is certain that when again hungry plenty of good food will be provided. This principle can be extended to include all society, when people are civilized enough to wish it.

Again, the utter impossibility of awarding to each an exact return for the amount of labor performed will render absolute communism a necessity sooner or later. The land and all it contains, without which labor cannot be exerted, belong to no one man, but to all alike. The inventions and discoveries of the past are the common inheritance of the coming generations; and when a man takes the tree that nature furnished free, and fashions it into a useful article, or a machine perfected and bequeathed to him by many past generations, who is to determine what proportion is his and his alone? Primitive man would have been a week fashioning a rude resemblance to the article with his clumsy tools, where the modern worker has occupied an hour. The finished article is of far more real value than the rude one made long ago, and yet the primitive man toiled the longest and hardest.

Who can determine with exact justice what is each one's due? There must come a time when we will cease trying. The Earth is so bountiful, so generous; man's brain is so active, his hands so restless, that wealth will spring like magic, ready for the use of the world's inhabitants. We will become as much ashamed to quarrel over its possession as we are now to squabble over the food spread before us on a loaded table.

"But all this," the objector urges, "is very beautiful in the far off future, when we become angels. It would not do now to abolish governments and legal restraints; people are not prepared for it."

This is a question. We have seen, in reading history, that wherever an old-time restriction has been removed the people have not abused their newer liberty. Once it was considered necessary to compel men to save their souls, with the aid of governmental scaffolds, church racks and stakes. Until the foundation of the American republic it was considered absolutely essential that governments should second the efforts of the church in forcing people to attend the means of grace; and yet it is found that the standard of morals among the masses is raised since they are left free to pray as they see fit, or not at all, if they prefer it. It was believed the chattel slaves would not work if the overseer and whip were removed; they are

so much more a source of profit now that ex-slave owners would not return to the old system if they could.

So many able writers have shown that the unjust institutions which work so much misery and suffering to the masses have their root in governments, and owe their whole existence to the power derived from government, we cannot help but believe that were every law, every title deed, every court, and every police officer or soldier abolished tomorrow with one sweep, we would be better off than now. The actual, material things that man needs would still exist; his strength and skill would remain and his instinctive social inclinations retain their force and the resources of life made free to all the people that they would need no force but that of society and the opinion of fellow beings to keep them moral and upright.

Freed from the systems that made him wretched before, he is not likely to make himself more wretched for lack of them. Much more is contained in the thought that conditions make man what he is, and not the laws and penalties made for his guidance, than is supposed by careless observation. We have laws, jails, courts, armies, guns and armories enough to make saints of us all, if they were the true preventives of crime; but we know they do not prevent crime; that wickedness and depravity exist in spite of them, nay, increase as the struggle between classes grows fiercer, wealth greater and more powerful and poverty more gaunt and desperate.

To the governing class the anarchists say: "Gentlemen, we ask no privilege, we propose no restriction; nor, on the other hand, will we permit it. We have no new shackles to propose, we seek emancipation from shackles. We ask no legislative sanction, for co-operation asks only for a free field and no favors; neither will we permit their interference.("?) It asserts that in freedom of the social unit lies the freedom of the social state. It asserts that in freedom to possess and utilize soil lie social happiness and progress and the death of rent. It asserts that order can only exist where liberty prevails, and that progress leads and never follows order. It asserts, finally, that this emancipation will inaugurate liberty, equality, fraternity. That the existing industrial system has outgrown its usefulness, if it ever had any, is, I believe, admitted by all who have given serious thought to this phase of social conditions.

The manifestations of discontent now looming upon every side show that society is conducted on wrong principles and that something has got to be done soon or the wage class will sink into a slavery worse than was the feudal serf. I say to the wage class: Think clearly and act quickly, or you are lost. Strike not for a few cents more an hour, because the price of living will be raised faster still, but strike for all you earn, be content with nothing less.

Domingos Passos – the Brazilian Bakunin
Renato Ramos and Alexandre Sami
(1937)

I woke at 5.00 am. Passos, who had been up and about for hours, was sitting on his bed reading *Determinism and Responsibility* by Hamon. I grabbed a towel and went downstairs to wash my face. When I came back from the yard, after drying off, I saw two individuals. It was a moment or two before I realized who they were. With revolvers drawn they spoke to me and asked me harshly:

“Where’s Domingos Passos?”

Anticipating another of the attacks that our comrade had been through so often before, I was keen to cover for him and said that he was not around. I told them:

“There’s no Domingos Passos living here!”

A Young Anarchist Militant

This brief extract from a 16 March 1923 declaration by the workman Orlando Simoneck, carried in the newspaper *A Patria*, clearly reflects a few features of the situation sampled by the Black youngster, carpenter by trade, anarchist and active member of the Civil Construction Workers’ Union (UOCC): by 1923 ‘Comrade Passos’ had become a special target for the Rio police as well as one of the best loved and respected worker militants in the (then) Federal District. Another feature of this comrade, rightly identified by Simoneck, was his relentless self-educational drive, his thirst for learning and culture, which found him spending his mornings poring over books in the little collection belonging to Florentino de Carvalho who lived in the same house in the Rua Barão in São Félix, only a couple of paces from the union local.

We do not know the precise year of Passos’s birth (it was probably towards the end of the 19th century), but, from the books of Edgar Rodrigues, we know that he was born in Rio de Janeiro state. We find his first appearance in social struggles of the time as a UOCC delegate at the 3rd Brazilian Workers’ Congress (1920) at which he was elected as travel secretary for the Brazilian Workers’ Confederation (COB). Passos had been selected for that post because he stood out in the ranks of the

organised proletariat on account of his intellect and oratorical gifts which he had honed in the day to day struggles of his trade. In 1920 Passos worked with the Rio de Janeiro Workers' Federation (FORJ) which had a daily newspaper in *A Voz do Povo*. Under the Epitácio Pessoa government, there was a severe crackdown with countless anarchist militants being jailed, tortured and murdered, trades unions shut down and labor newspapers pulped. In October 1920, the police dispersed a workers' parade down the Avenida Rio Branco with gunfire and, not content with that, stormed the UOCC headquarters, wounding 5 workers and rounding up a further 30.

High Hopes and Political Shifts

The labor movement was reeling from the onslaught and went into a decline from 1921 on. The 'yellow' unions expanded rapidly and came to contest hegemony in several trades with the revolutionary unions. Among anarchists, the high hopes vested in the Russian revolution were evaporating as news percolated through of the Bolsheviks' repressiveness.

On 16 March 1922, nine days ahead of the launching of the Communist Party of Brazil, the UOCC carried a document entitled 'Refuting the False Claims of the Communist Group' and declaring its repudiation of the state communists, the 'Bolshevists'. It was assuredly written by Domingos Passos. Throughout the 1920s Civil Construction workers were the steeliest and least compromising opponents of the Bolshevik doctrine. They were the very embodiment of critical awareness and in a number of regards took their toll of the communist cadres.

In July 1922, in the wake of the failure of the revolt by the lieutenants from the Copacabana Fort, the repression slapped a ban on the UOCC paper *O Trabalho*, to which Passos was a regular contributor. A new anarchist bastion in the press was under the charge of another UOCC militant, Marques da Costa, editor of the Labour Section with the newspaper *A Patria*.

A Driving Force

In 1923, with the police crackdown hot on his heels, Domingos Passos stepped down from the UOCC Executive Commission and turned his attention to propaganda and union organizing, travelling twice to Paraná to assist the local organisations. Like the intellectuals José Oiticica, Carlos Dias and Fabio Luz, Passos was frequently invited to give talks at union locals. He was also actively involved with workers' festivals, acting in plays, giving poetry-readings and talks on social themes. Such events certainly accounted for some of the few moments of pleasure that Passos enjoyed during his life as a laborer and political activist.

During the first half of 1923 he was one of the driving forces behind the relaunching of the Rio de Janeiro Workers' Federation (FORJ), the rival FTRJ organisation having been set up under communist control. When the FORJ resurfaced on 19 August 1923, Passos was elected on to its Federal Committee. Refloated by 6 unions (civil construction, the shoemakers, the coopers, the ships' carpenters, the 'gastronomics' and the Marechal Hermes General Trades Union) by mid-1924 the FORJ had recruited a further 5 significant trades: foundry-workers, brickworkers, ironworkers, steelworkers and stone-workers.

In spite of state repression and underhanded communist tricks, revolutionary syndicalism grew in strength under the auspices of the FORJ which was at that time working on the organisation of an inter-union conference in Rio and planning the 4th Brazilian Workers' Congress. In July 1924, all of this organisation effort was wiped out by the crackdown following a junior officers' revolt, in São Paulo this time. Union locals were attacked and shut down, and hundreds of anarchists were jailed. Domingos Passos was one of the first to be arrested and after 20 days of suffering at Police Headquarters he was held in the prison ship 'Campos' in Guanabara Bay. The months that he served on board were characterised by severe privation and restrictions. With other anarchists and hundreds of 'outlaws', he was to be moved to the 'Green Hell' of Oiapoque, the 'Siberia of the Tropics,' where ill-treatment and disease claimed over a thousand lives. Passos managed to escape to Saint-Georges in French Guyana. Meanwhile, fever drove him to seek medical treatment in Cayenne where he received a warm welcome from a Creole who helped him regain his strength. From Guyana he moved on to Belém where he remained for a time as a guest of the organised proletariat in the city.

São Paulo and Imprisonment

Domingos Passos was one of those who returned to the Federal District after the state of siege enforced by the Artur Bernardes government for nearly four full years (1922–1926). On reaching Rio de Janeiro at the start of 1927, he returned to union activity, but he was dogged by the after-effects of malaria. That year he moved to São Paulo, where he helped reorganize the local Workers' Federation (FOSP). He took part in the 4th Rio Grande do Sul Workers' Congress held in Porto Alegre. He was to the fore in the organizing of several pro-Sacco and Vanzetti meetings and rallies organised by the FOSP and its affiliates. In August he was jailed in the feared 'Cambuci Bastille' where he spent three months, subject to all manner of ill-treatment.

According to Pedro Catalo, his cell-mate, Passos left prison with his body covered in ulcers and half-naked and was sent to the jungles of Sengés in the still untamed interior of São Paulo state, to die. A short while later he managed to write to some

comrades, asking for money, which he received through an go-between. So ended the career of a man who had been one of the most influential and respected of the anarchist and revolutionary syndicalist activists of his day. Nothing more was ever heard of him, aside from the occasional, unconfirmed rumor. Not for nothing was Domingos Passos known to his contemporaries as the 'Brazilian Bakunin.' Few were as committed as he was to his ideals and suffered so much as a result. He put his all into the fight to emancipate men and women. He spent nearly a decade in prison and in tropical jungle conditions. Passos became a great beacon for libertarian and social activists in his day and in our own!

Squatting In Brixton in the 1970s
Remembering Olive Collective (Liz Obi)
(Undated)

Olive Morris came to Britain from Jamaica at the age of nine to live with her parents who migrated some years earlier. She went to school in South London and was subject to all the inequalities and institutionalised racism that existed both in the British school system and the society at large. She left school age sixteen without any formal qualifications, but through her own determination and belief in herself and her abilities, she managed to achieve her O- and A-level exams, while working full-time, and was offered a place on a degree course at Manchester University in 1975.

From the age of sixteen Olive was involved in grassroots political activity. She was a member of the Black Panther Movement's youth collective based at 38 Shakespeare Road. She was active in the campaigns and issues facing black people in 1970s Britain, e.g. police harassment, deaths in police custody, the campaign against the Sus law, bad housing conditions and homelessness, issues of injustice in the courts and the prison system and issues around education and the practice of assessing black school children as educationally sub-normal. She was at the forefront of the black women's movement and was a founding member of the Brixton Black Women's Group in 1974 and later established the Organisation of Women of Asian and African Descent (OWAAD). Her focus was not only the local campaigns in the communities of Brixton and Manchester where she lived but also the national and international issues of the day. Olive supported black and white workers on picket lines, marched against the 1971 immigration bill, demonstrated outside courts, defended herself inside court, demonstrated for the freedom of Angela Davis and the end to the Vietnam War, supported the liberation struggles of Mozambique, Guinea Bissau, South Africa and Zimbabwe and the workers movements in the Caribbean. When she went to live in Manchester to attend university she became active in an international students group and also organised women's groups in the black communities of Moss Side.

Olive died of Hodgkin's lymphoma on 12 July 1979. She was twenty-six years old and a highly regarded black community activist who made an indelible mark on the hearts and minds of the people who knew her.

Squatting In Brixton In The 1970s

Olive Morris is remembered – amongst other things – as a squatter. Like many other people, she began squatting because she needed somewhere to live and there were houses sitting empty all over Brixton. Squatting – moving into empty properties without the owner’s consent – has a long history and a new squatting movement was taking hold at the same time that Olive was getting politically active.

After the Second World War and the Blitz, squatting was an obvious, natural reaction to the lack of housing. According to 1946 government figures, over 50,000 people occupied disused army camps and squatting was spreading to other under-used buildings, including hotels and luxury flats in London. Eventually 850 of the camps were handed over to squatters, with some still being occupied up till the 1960s, but other prominent empties were sealed up and guarded.

Squatting kept a low profile until 1968 when a group of activists who had been watching the influential BBC drama about homelessness, *Cathy Come Home* (Ken Loach, 1966), set up the London Squatters Campaign. Their first, high-profile actions took place in December: symbolic short occupations of various empty apartment blocks. Soon after these media stunts, it became known that the Council gave one family in Notting Hill tenancy for the flat they’d squatted. Homeless families started moving into empty flats with the intention of staying.

Lots of families moved into council properties in Ilford, led by a group that became the East London Squatters. They garnered public support, especially after Redbridge Council hired heavies to beat them up and evict them. A lot of the early squatting groups emphasised the fact that they were helping families with children – people who the councils often already had an obligation to help – house themselves. They adopted names like the Lewisham Family Squatting Association, the Family Squatting Movement (who published the newsletter *Squat!*), and the Family Squatting Advisory Service established in September 1970. They tended to target publicly-owned housing to highlight the incompetence of councils in managing their housing stock. The local borough councils weren’t the only ones with vast stocks of empty public housing. The Greater London Council (GLC) also owned many properties across the city. The GLC was allegedly the first to offer squatters licences, that is, permission to stay but not a proper tenancy. Some of the boroughs copied this strategy, for example, the South East London Squatters group was successful in negotiating short-life deals with Lewisham Council.

These short-life licences depended on both the generosity and efficiency of the local authority. By the end of 1971 there were an estimated 1,000 people living in licensed squats, and far fewer in unlicensed squats. Over the course of 1972,

this balance shifted, as more and more people started squatting, and the council licensing schemes failed to keep up.

Some of the early groups chose to describe themselves as “self-help” housing groups. Fifty families joined Lambeth Squatters in its first year, and this number continued to grow. They seem to have been well-organised, with one group for North Lambeth and another for South Lambeth meeting every week. They were later able to negotiate short-life housing deals, and became known as Lambeth Self-Help Housing Association (LSHHA). By the end of 1973 they had negotiated 160 licensed squats in the borough (neighbouring Southwark, in comparison, had only forty-six).

The structure of the group was quite interesting. House allocations were done purely on the basis of democratic meetings held every week and attended by those who had applied for housing. They made the decisions themselves, about whose case was most deserving and would get the next available house. The Housing or Social Services departments referred many of the applicants, with at least 70% coming from within the borough. Members of the group then paid a weekly subscription to the group, rather than rent: £1 for a single person and £4 for a family.

As well as the family squatters, more counter-cultural squatting emerged, for example in the West End, in Piccadilly and Covent Garden. The issue wasn't just about homeless families with children, but about single people as well. In some cases, squatters wanted to try living more communally, not just in nuclear families. And some wanted a life more free of convention, work, the rat-race and capitalism. Some of the more hippie squatters were a great source of colourful stories for the mainstream press and probably an embarrassment to the more serious housing activists.

During this time, there had been a massive boom in property prices – over a period of three years the average price of a new home doubled – leading to speculation and rent increases. Speculators often left properties empty until they could make a profit from them; it wasn't necessarily in their interests to rent them to anyone. It was increasingly hard for anyone to find privately-rented accommodation unless they had enough money to cover the high rents and deposits landlords demanded.

From 1971 onwards there was an upsurge of squatting in Lambeth. There were at least 13,000 people on the waiting list for council housing. Thousands more lived in slum-like conditions, which included outside toilets, dodgy plumbing, huge rats, overcrowding and only paraffin heaters for warmth. The latter were particularly dangerous for families with young children and a regular cause of house fires.

People began to squat not just publicly-owned buildings, but also privately-owned ones. Olive, twenty years old at the time, and her friend Liz Obi, who was just eighteen, were reportedly the first to squat a privately-owned flat in Lambeth over the winter of 1972-3. The flat was above a disused launderette at 121 Railton Road.

The story goes that Olive and Liz were inspired after meeting some women from 207 Railton Road. This property was squatted and used as a local women's centre from 1972 to 1975. "Squat-historians" credit 207 Railton Road with encouraging the unlicensed occupation of at least 300 empties in the Brixton area. Other reports suggest that the women's centre did such a good job housing people that it received something like thirty-forty referrals a week from Lambeth's own Social Services department. Coin-a-matic, the launderette's owners, were quoted as saying that they wanted the building back, not to reopen the launderette but to store spare parts for their washing machines. Olive and Liz suffered at least three attempted illegal evictions. For example, on 22 January 1973 Olive came home to find Liz had been arrested for "possession of an offensive weapon" during an attempt at illegal eviction. Whilst at Brixton police station, the police threatened Liz with the refusal of bail because of her "NFA" ("no fixed abode") status.

When Olive went back inside the flat, five cops followed her and showed no intention of leaving. Olive's response was to climb up the back wall onto the roof of the building, and there is a pretty iconic picture of her doing so, which made it onto the cover of a 1975 issue of Squatting News Bulletin and also appeared on later editions of the Squatters' Handbook. She sat there until the police fucked off, which they did, about three hours later. She then re-squatted the place and it remained a squat until August 1999, which made it one of the longest-running squats in the country.

When Olive and Liz moved out – to a new squat in 65 Railton Road – other people moved in and founded a black bookshop called Sabarr. As well as a meeting space, various groups also used the address as a mailing address. These included the Black Workers' Movement and a coalition of groups called Black People Against State Harassment (BASH), which formed in 1978 as a reaction to the growing problems of racist policing, stop and searching, and general hassling of black people. By 1981, Sabarr Books had also moved further into Brixton and 121 Railton Road became an anarchist centre.

All sorts of radical groups used the space during its anarchist era. These included: the Anarchist Black Cross and Taking Liberties; the European Counter Network (ECN) and Contraflow; the Poll Tax campaign and the Trafalgar Square defendants

after the subsequent riots; Miners Strike solidarity; Pink Brick with its strap line, “lesbian and gay class war”; the Fare-Dodgers Liberation Front (FDLF); animal rights activists and the fearsome Brixton Hunt Saboteurs; anarcha-feminist magazines Shocking Pink then Bad Attitude; AnarQuist, an anarcho-queer group; and the first-ever Queerupton gathering.

In terms of Olive’s legacy, we can see a clear continuation of some of the things she did in the space. During the 1980s and 1990s, the Brixton Squatters Aid group loaned tools and a helping hand, and published a newsletter called Crowbar. There are still examples of squatters organising mutual aid and help for new squatters, for example, the fortnightly Practical Squatting nights that still happen in South London. The printing continued too: there was a big printing press and some smaller stencil printers upstairs, with a huge amount of radical propaganda produced in the building.

The 121 address was well-known around the world and was often the first place punks and other radicals would head to when they arrived in London. As well as a bookshop, an office space and mostly punk benefit gigs and industrial noise nights Dead by Dawn, 121 volunteers ran a cheap vegan café sometimes up to six nights a week. When we say “cheap”, we’re talking 50p per meal, although this went up to £1 in the last year or so to enable us to bulk-buy more organic stuff, which made it a popular choice for local squatters and contributed to the close-knit community that formed around 121. Despite so many years of occupation, Lambeth Council obtained a possession order for the building in 1999. You may have heard of a law called “adverse possession”: if you manage to keep a squat for twelve continuous years and, during that entire time, the owner fails to “assert their title” and you also fail to recognise anyone else as having title, you get to keep it. In the final court case about 121, the council produced a dodgy copy of a fax at the last minute, which reduced our continuous period to just eleven years, eleven months and two weeks! There have been a few examples of squatters gaining adverse possession, especially around Brixton, but this was not destined to be one of them.

A New Prisoner
Martin Sostre
(1973)

Listen, pig, are you really that naive to believe you can fool and pacify us with nightly bribes of ten-cent candy bars and cookie snacks while caging us like animals in your inhuman steel cages; by removing the wire screen from the visiting room but replacing it with the three foot wide table thrust between our mothers, wives, children and loved ones to maintain your inhuman separation; by changing the color of our uniforms from gray to green (and those of our jailers), while exploiting our slave labor for pennies a day; by establishing a phony furlough program which is programmed to exclude from eligibility 1690 prisoners out of 1700;1 by passing a token equalization bill? After Attica?! Well dream on, pig, until the next rude awakening overtakes you.

Your widely-publicized prison reform programs-a smoke screen not only to cover up the greatest domestic massacre in a century, but to conceal your current repressive pacification program consisting of the post-Attica multi-million dollar appropriation for guns, gas, chemical sprays, for training killers on their effective use, construction of additional gun towers and assault tunnels within your prison camps from which to shoot us down, building and reinforcing special treatment housing or maxi-maxi units (euphemisms for solitary confinement torture chambers), etc.-will have the same success as your Vietnamization Program in Vietnam upon which they are patterned. Indeed, as in Vietnam, your repressive prison pacification program, sub-nom prison reform, has already proven counter-productive in that it has set in motion dynamic revolutionary forces that will effect the overthrow of your racist-capitalist system.

Are you so spiritually dead and blind that you fail to perceive the cause, effect and consequences of your repressive acts? Are you so hung up on the repressive-genocidal aspect of your racist-oriented technology that, despite your resounding defeat by the heroic Vietnamese people who, bare-footed and bamboo-housed, neutralized your advanced technology with resolute human spirit and revolutionary war-fare, you still refuse to believe that your perverse technology cannot prevail over human spirit?

If Attica fell to us in a matter of hours despite it being your most secure maximum security prison-fortress equipped with your latest repressive technology, so shall fall all your fortresses, inside and out. Revolutionary spirit conquers all obstacles. "Every one of your prison camps has now become a revolutionary training camp feeding trained revolutionary cadres to each revolutionary foco in the ghetto. The recruits are the thousands of Black militants and revolutionaries framed and kidnapped from the ghettos in your desperate effort to put down the spreading Black Rebellion. While on the surface it appears you've cooled the ghettos, all you've done was remove the dynamic elements, dumped us in your prison camps where our diverse ideologies and experiences cross-fertilized, hardened and embittered us in your dehumanizing cages by abuse, 'breaking up our families, etc., to then return us to the ghettos as fully-hardened revolutionary cadres. Your oppressive mentality blinds you to these clear facts.

Do you not see that we've converted your prison camps into revolutionary training camps for cadres of the Black liberation struggle? More important, your prisons have become ideological crucibles and battlegrounds. Soon you shall reap the harvest.

The above capsulizes the ideology of thousands of Black revolutionaries being repressed in your prison camps. Although expressed in many ways-rhetorically and organizationally through -the many militant and revolutionary prisoners' groups formed in every prison in the U.S.-the basic ideology is the same: using our time in prison to get it together for our return to the ghetto. While I speak only for prison camps in New York State-and I've been tortured in the major ones: Sing Sing, Clinton, Attica, Green Haven, Wallkill, and Auburn-I have compared notes with many out-of-state prisoners serving time in New York prison camps and found that the identical ideological situation exists in out-of-state prisons.

We are all political prisoners regardless of the crimes invoked by white racist oppressors to legitimize their kidnapping us from the ghettos and torturing us in their cages. You don't believe it? Well, what crimes did our forebears commit when they were kidnapped from Africa, imprisoned aboard slave ships and brought to America where their labor was exploited for 350 years? Didn't you legalize these crimes against Black people and codify them in your slave codes? Didn't you legitimize your genocidal slaughter of the American Indians and theft of their land by legislating Indian laws and the Homestead Act? Were not these crimes politically motivated and formed the very foundation of United States capitalism? And are you not now the benefactor of this loot and enjoying a standard of living many times higher than your kin in Europe, South Africa and Australia?

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Yet, after our forebears were forced to build for you the richest country in the world with their blood and slave labor, the descendents of the white racist kidnappers, murderers and robbers who inherited the bloodstained loot have deluded themselves in the belief that they are the guardians of “law and order,” that their victims must recognize them as such, acquiesce in their oppression, and relinquish all claims to their stolen heritage.

The consequences of this self-delusion shall soon bear bitter fruit, as surely as the invasion of Vietnam effected the present ignoble defeat at the hands of the heroic Vietnamese people. The delusion of the oppressor will be submerged by the reality of the struggle waged by the oppressed.

So continue pursuing your Eichmann-like repressive policies which your sadistic racist pig torturers are seeking to enforce. Never will they succeed in breaking our spirit to resist injustices; or convince us that they are the lawful authority-nay, their very outlaw acts remove all doubt (if it ever existed) that they are the outlaws, since they violate not only the laws of ‘humanity but the constitutional and statutory laws they are duty-bound to uphold.

Indeed, they are much more than outlaws, they are mass murderers. No prisoner in the history of New York State-possibly of the United States-has ever borne the stigma of being the mass-murderer of 43 persons. Yet the mass murderers of 43 persons will not be indicted. They continue in office enjoying political largess and passing themselves off as upholders of law and order. The “people” who put them in office uphold and praise them for their savagery at Attica. They defend the deliberate premeditated murder at Attica, just as Eichmann defended his mass murders at his trial ‘by pleading that he was an innocent concentration camp administrator caught in the middle and “following orders.” But the Israeli Court, following precedents of the Nuremberg Tribunal, -rejected this defense on grounds that each individual is a free agent bearing responsibility for his or her individual acts.

The people support and acquiesce in the continuance in office of these mass murderers. They raise no outraged cry against them. They make no demand for their impeachment; no demand that the mass murderers be arrested, charged with murder and indicted. The message therefore is very clear: the white racist people of this oppressive racist society are our enemies who go along with every injustice perpetrated against us by their elected representatives. Their support of bestial, genocidal acts against us reflects their consciousness.

The McKay Report whitewashing the Attica Massacre is a case in point. Its statement, in regard to the taking of hostages, that “the holding of human lives for ransom is wrong and only leads to more violence and to a backlash that makes change more difficult,” evokes sardonic smiles when read by us, the real hostages whose human lives are being held for exploitative ransom—as were the human lives of our forebears—solely because we are Black. Or does the dictum that holding hostages leads to more violence, apply only when Blacks hold white hostages and not when Black hostages are held by Whites?

But if your dictum has universal validity, does it not then follow that the rising tide of Black rebellion in America by your 25 million Black hostages is the natural legacy of the “wrong” which you state “only leads to more violence”? Keep on tripping, pig, for reality will trip you up. Despite your self-delusion that you can pervert reality with lies, the fact is that “when everything has failed” (as it already has, since we cannot get justice from our oppressors) -“when a person is pressed to the wall” (as we already are)-“the taking of hostages may be the only way of reaching the outside world”—as Bill Kunstler correctly observed. The reality is that we politically aware prisoners, whom you cannot deceive into believing the lie that you murderous outlaws are the guardians and dispensers of law and justice, shall continue to employ all means necessary to free ourselves from your genocidal white racist oppression. Hostage-taking is to us as legitimate a means of struggle as was your seizure of agents of the Crown during the American Revolutionary War, and the seizure of British tea during the Boston Tea Party. We, and not our oppressors, are the sole deciders of what means to employ in our liberation struggle.

The Attica Rebellion not only was the direct consequence of your systematic denial of our basic human rights, but of your adamant refusal to accord us the civilized treatment ordered by Federal Courts in *Sostre v. McGinnis*, *Sostre v. Rockefeller*, *Sostre v. Otis*, and in many other decisions.’

Despite this fact being common knowledge to thousands of lawyers, judges, legislators, administrators and ordinary “people” familiar with the sweeping prison reforms ordered by Federal Courts in the *Sostre v. Rockefeller* and *Sostre v. Otis* decisions, and the millions of words written on the causes of Attica, why hasn’t this fact—the obdurate refusal of outlaw State officials to obey Federal Court orders—been exposed? It is due to the white racist conspiracy of silence inherent in oppressive-racist America when the victims of white atrocities are Black. When the 28 Attica Reform Demands presented to and accepted by Commissioner Russell Oswald on September 12, 1971, are viewed against the background of *Sostre v. Rockefeller*, *Sostre v. Otis* and other directives, it becomes clear that your refusal to comply with the directives of the Courts and implement the reforms

resulted in the Attica Rebellion fifteen months later. The following facts represent irrefutable evidence that, had the provisions of the Federal Court mandates been complied with, and had other legitimate grievances brought to your attention by us prior to September 1971 been redressed, not one person would have died or been injured on September 9–13, 1971.

The first three of the 28 Attica Reform Demands dealt solely with procedures to be adopted after the anticipated agreement between the State officials and rebelling prisoners, and the return of prisoners to their cells.

These three demands seek the provision of food, water and shelter (necessities of life which even animals in the zoo receive as a matter of course), 8 *Sostre v. McGinnis*, 334 F.2d 906 (2d Cir., 1964) ; *Sostre v. Rockefeller*, 312 F. Supp. 863 (S.D.N.Y., 1969), aff. in part and rev. in part, *Sostre v. McGinnis*, 442 F.2d 178 (2d Cir., 1970); *Sostre v. Otis*, 330 F. Supp. 941 (S.D.N.Y., 1971). 247, an Observers Committee to monitor this operation, complete administrative and legal amnesty for the rebels.

Reform Demand No. 4 sought “the application of the New York State Minimum Wage Law Standards to all work done by inmates. Every effort will be made to make the records of payment available to inmates.” This grievance (and many others) was brought to the attention of your prison officials on at least four occasions. Each time it was rebuffed and repressed—usually with force.

The first time it was presented was in July 1970 when slaves in the Attica Metal Shop presented their demand for a minimum wage. You responded out of your usual “gorilla” bag by throwing into solitary confinement the representatives presenting the grievance. Having no outlet for this legitimate grievance, and having it compounded by your additional injustice of punishing our representatives, we responded with a work strike in the Metal Shop. Warden Mancusi and Commissioner Oswald reacted by confining to solitary confinement all the leaders. In July and August 1970 the strike leaders were transferred to Auburn and other prison camps throughout the state.

Seeking to pacify with crumbs the spreading prisoner discontent with the five to thirty cents per day slave wage of New York State prisons, you then raised prison wages to twenty-five cents for the lowest job category, and up to one dollar per day for the highest. But you immediately raised the already outrageously high commissary prices — e.g., we are forced to pay 400 for a two-pound box of sugar while outside you pay 59/ for a fivepound bag — and cancelled out the few pennies raise in our slave wages. The second time this grievance was brought

to your attention was on November 4, 1970, during the Black Solidarity Day rebellion in Auburn Prison. In fact, it was the same militant leaders of the Attica Metal Shop strike that were transferred to Auburn Prison who led the Solidarity Day rebellion at Auburn.

The third time the unredressed slave labor grievance was presented to you was in July 1971 when the Attica Liberation Faction sent Oswald a list of grievances including the demand for higher wages. As usual, they were rebuffed.

The fourth time this labor grievance was brought to Oswald's attention was in July 1971 when prisoners in Green Haven presented to Warden Zelker and Oswald their list of grievances in the form of 13 Prisoners' Demands, headed 'by the demand for a Prisoners' Labor Union. The following is a copy of the Prisoners' Demands:

**Program of Black Vanguard for Liberation:
Why We Fight, Our Aims and Objectives**

1. Since our heritage of 350 years of Black slave labor was stolen and invested in the development of this continent of North America by our oppressors, our aim is to recover this stolen heritage by liberating, through revolutionary armed struggle and all means necessary, a portion of this developed land from our oppressor's control. We shall establish our Black independent nation on this liberated territory which is ours by right of our labor invested in its development, our blood shed in its behalf, and by right of birth and history.
2. Our armed struggle for liberation, like that in Africa, Asia and South America, is a just struggle. We seek not to steal someone else's land and property, but to recover our stolen heritage: the product of 350 years of Black slave labor stolen from our ancestors and employed by our oppressors to make the U.S. the richest country in the world.
3. We fight for the liberation of Black people held captive in ghetto-colonies inside the United States by the white racist oppressor. By liberation we mean complete freedom from the physical, political, social and economic control of the white racist U.S. government, and the establishment of our own independent Black nation.
4. Since our struggle for liberation in America is a part of the world revolutionary struggle for liberation against the common U.S. enemy and its allies, we will use the same means employed by all oppressed peoples to liberate ourselves: guerrilla warfare, first and foremost.
5. As a first step towards nationhood, we must obtain revolutionary

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bases from which to operate. We must seize areas in urban and rural Black communities from the control of the oppressor. From these liberated and expanding areas we will wage our war of liberation.

6. Our independent Black nation will be a Socialist nation based on the principle that people, and not property, are the most precious of all possessions. Having freed ourselves from 400 years of genocidal white racist capitalism, we are not about to imitate our white oppressors by establishing a Black capitalist nation.

Does the Vanguard program differ from the “we want” programs like day does from night? Don’t you wish we had remained mentally dead and in the “we want” trick bag while believing all the while we had the “key” to the problem of our oppression? It’s too late now, for once mental chains are broken there is no return to the status quo ante. We, the new politically aware prisoner, will soon galvanize the revolutionary struggle in America to its new phase that will hasten the overthrow of your exploitative racist society, recover the product of our stolen slave labor which you now enjoy, and obtain revolutionary justice for all oppressed people

MARTIN SOSTRE

Auburn Prison-Fortress

(in keep-lock for refusing to shave beard)

Why I Am An Anarchist
Lorenzo Kom'boa Ervin
(1979)

In the 1960s I was part of a number of Black revolutionary movements, including the Black Panther Party, which I feel partially failed because of the authoritarian leadership style of Huey P. Newton, Bobby Seale and others on the Central Committee. This is not a recrimination against those individuals, but many errors were made because the national leadership was too divorced from the chapters in cities all over the country, and therefore engaged in “commandism” or forced work dictated by leaders. But many contradictions were also set up because of the structure of the organization as a Marxist-Leninist group. There was not a lot of inner-party democracy, and when contradictions came up, it was the leaders who decided on their resolution, not the members. Purges became commonplace, and many good people were expelled from the group simply because they disagreed with the leadership.

Because of the over-importance of central leadership, the national organisation was ultimately liquidated entirely, packed up and shipped back to Oakland, California. Of course, many errors were made because the BPP was a young organisation and was under intense attack by the state. I do not want to imply that the internal errors were the primary contradictions that destroyed the BPP. The police attacks on it did that, but, if it were better and more democratically organized, it may have weathered the storm. So this is no mindless criticism or backstabbing attack. I loved the party. And, anyway, not myself or anyone else who critique the party with hindsight, will ever take away from the tremendous role that the BPP played in the Black Liberation movement of the 1960s. But we must look at a full picture of our organizations from that period, so that we do not repeat the same errors.

I think my brief period in the Panthers was very important because it taught me about the limits of – and even the bankruptcy of – leadership in a revolutionary movement. It was not a question of a personality defect on behalf of particular leader, but rather a realization that many times leaders have one agenda, followers have another.

Black Prisoner Organizing

I also learned this lesson during my association with the African People's Socialist Party during the 1980s. When I had gotten out of the joint I had met Omali Yeshitela while I was confined in Leavenworth (KS) federal pen, when he was invited to our annual Black Solidarity Bay festivities in 1979. This association continued when they formed the Black prisoners' organization, the African National Prison Organization shortly thereafter. ANPO was definitely a good support organization, and along with News and Letters Committees, the Kentucky branch of the National Alliance Against Racism and Political Repression, and the Social revolutionary Anarchist Federation (now defunct), they wrote letters and made phone calls to have me hospitalized after I had been infected with Tuberculosis, which saved my life. But the group folded when the proposed coalition of founding organizations collapsed due to sectarianism.

After I got out of prison, I lost contact with them as they had moved from Louisville to the West Coast. It was not until 1987 that I once again contacted them when we were having a mass demonstration against police brutality in my hometown. They were invited and came to the demo, along with ANPO and several left-wing forces, and for two years off and on, I had an association with them. But I felt APSP politically was always an authoritarian organization, and even though I was never a member, I became more and more uncomfortable with their organizational policies. In the Summer Of 1988, I went to Oakland, California to attend an "organizer's school," but I also wanted to satisfy myself about the internal workings of the group. For six weeks, I worked with them out of their national headquarters in the local community. I was able to determine for myself about internal matters and also about the politics of the group itself. I found out that about a whole history of purges, factional fights, and the "one man" dictatorial leadership style of the Party. While in Oakland, I was asked to attend a meeting in Philadelphia that Fall to re-establish ANPO.

I attended the Philly meeting, but was very concerned when I was automatically placed as part of a "slate" to be officers of the ANPO group, without any real democratic discussion among the proposed membership, or allowing others to put themselves forward as potential candidates. I was in fact made the highest-ranking officer in the group. Although I still believe that there should be a mass political prisoners' movement and especially a Black prisoners' movement, I became convinced that this was not it. I believe that it will take a true coalition of forces in the Black and progressive movements to build a mass base of support. I got to feeling that these folks just wanted to push the party and its politics, rather than free prisoners, and so I just dropped out and haven't dealt with them since. I was very disillusioned and depressed when I learned the truth. I won't be used by anybody – not for long.

The early stages of the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee was a contrast in many ways to any Black freedom group to come before or after. Part of the SNCC activists were middle class college intellectuals, with a small number of working class grassroots activists, but they developed a working style that was very anti-authoritarian and was unique to the Civil rights movement. Instead of bringing in a national leader to lead local struggles, like Dr, Martin Luther King Jr. and his group, the Southern Christian Leadership Council, was wont to do, SNCC sent in field organizers to work with the local people and develop indigenous leadership and help organised, but not take over local struggles. They placed their faith in the ability of the people to determine an agenda which would best serve them and lead themselves to obtain their goals rather than being inspired or told what to do by a leader SNCC itself had no strong leaders, even though it had persons in decision-making authority, but they were accountable to membership boards and the community in a way no other group in the civil rights movement was.

SNCC and the Soviet Bloc

SNCC was also a secular organization, in contrast to SCLC, which was formed by Black preachers and had co-opted their style of organizing from the Black church, with a religious authority figure who gave orders to the troops. Today most political commentators or historians still do not want to give full credit to the effectiveness of SNCC, but many of the most powerful and successful struggles of the Civil rights movement were initiated and won by SNCC, including most of the voting rights struggles and the Mississippi phase of the freedom movement. I learned a lot about internal democracy by being a part of SNCC, how it could make or break an organization, and how it had so much to do with the morale of the members. Everyone was given an opportunity to participate in decision-making, and felt part of a great historical mission, which would change their lives forever. They were right. Even though SNCC gave some lifelong lessons to all of us involved, even if it was destroyed by the rich and their own, who resorted to an authoritarian style in later years.

I also began to have a rethinking process after I was forced to leave the U.S. and go to Cuba, Czechoslovakia and other countries in the "Socialist bloc," as it was called then. It was clear that these countries were essentially police states, even though they had brought many significant reforms and material advances to their peoples over what had existed before. I observed also that racism existed in those countries, along with the denial of basic democratic rights and poverty on a scale I would not have thought possible. I also saw a great deal of corruption by the Communist Party leaders and State administrators, who were well off, while the workers were mere wage slaves. I thought to myself, "there has to be a better way!" There is. It is Anarchism, which I started to read about when I was

captured in East Germany and had heard more about when I was eventually thrown into prison in the United States.

Prison and Anarchism

Prison is a place where one continually thinks about his other past life, including the examination of new or contrary ideas, I began to think about what I had seen in the Black movement, along with my mistreatment in Cuba, my capture and escape in Czechoslovakia, and my final capture in East Germany. I replayed all this over and over in my head. I was first introduced to Anarchism in 1969, immediately after I was brought back to the U.S. and was placed in the federal lockup in New York City, where I met Martin Sostre who told me about how to survive in prison, the importance of fighting for prisoners' democratic rights, and about Anarchism. This short course in Anarchism did not stick however, even though I greatly respected Sostre personally, because I did not understand the theoretical concepts.

Finally around 1973, after I had been locked up for about three years, I started receiving Anarchist literature and correspondence from Anarchists who had heard about my case. This began my slow metamorphosis to a confirmed Anarchist, and in fact it was not until a few years later that I came over. During the late 1970s, I was adopted by Anarchist Black Cross-England and also by a Dutch Anarchist group called HAPOTOC (Help A Prisoner Oppose Torture Organizing Committee) which organised an instrumental defense campaign. This proved crucial in ultimately getting people all over the world to write the U. S. government to demand my release.

I wrote a succession of articles for the Anarchist press, and was a member of the Social Revolutionary Anarchist Federation, the IWW, and a number of other Anarchist groups in the U.S. and around the world. But I became disheartened by the Anarchist movement's failure to fight white supremacy and its lack of class struggle politics. So, in 1979, I wrote a pamphlet called "Anarchism and the Black Revolution," to act as a guide to the discussion of these matters by our movement. Finally, in 1983, I was released from prison, after having served almost 15 years.

For all these years, the pamphlet influenced a number of Anarchists who were opposed to racism and also wanted a more class struggle-oriented approach than the movement then afforded. Meanwhile I had fallen away from the Anarchist movement in disgust, and it was not until 1992 when I was working in my hometown of Chattanooga, Tennessee, as an anti-racist community organizer, that I ran into an Anarchist named John Johnson and once again made contact. He gave me an issue of Love and Rage newspaper, and as a result, I contacted Chris

Day of Love and Rage, and comrades in WSA in New York. The rest, as they say, is history. I have been back with a vengeance ever since.

All of a sudden, I see there are now others in the movement who understand the workings of white supremacy and they have encouraged me to rewrite this pamphlet I have gratefully done so. Why am I an Anarchist? I have an alternative vision for the revolutionary process. There is a better way. Let us get on with it!

What I Believe

All anarchists do not believe in the same things. There are differences and the field is broad enough that those differences can coexist and be respected. So I don't know what others believe, I just know what I believe in and I will spell out it simply, but thoroughly.

I believe in Black liberation, so I am a Black revolutionary. I believe that Black people are oppressed both as workers and a distinct nationality, and will only be freed by a Black revolution, which is an intrinsic part of a Social revolution. I believe that Blacks and other oppressed nationalities must have their own agenda, distinct world-view, and organizations of struggle, even though they may decide to work with white workers.

I believe in the destruction of the world Capitalist System, so I am an anti-imperialist. As long as Capitalism is alive on the planet, there will be exploitation, oppression and nation-states. Capitalism is responsible for the major world wars, numerous brush wars, and millions of people starving for the profit motive of the rich countries in the West.

I believe in racial justice, so I am an anti-racist. The Capitalist system was and is maintained by enslavement and colonial oppression of the African people, and before there will be a social revolution white supremacy must be defeated. I also believe that Africans in America are colonized and exist as an internal colonial of the U.S, white mother country. I believe that white workers must give up their privileged status, their "white identity," and must support racially oppressed workers in their fights for equality and national liberation. Freedom cannot be bought by enslaving and exploiting others.

I believe in social justice and economic equality, so I am a Libertarian Socialist. I believe that society and all parties responsible for its production should share the economic products of labor. I do not believe in Capitalism or the state, and believe they both should be overthrown and abolished I accept the economic critique of Marxism, but not its model for political organizing. I accept the anti-authoritarian critique of Anarchism, but not its rejection of the class struggle.

I believe in workers control of society and industry, so I am an Anarcho-Syndicalist. Anarchist Syndicalism is revolutionary labor unionism, where direct action tactics are used to fight Capitalism and take over industry I believe that the factory committees, workers' councils and other labor organizations should be the workplaces, and should take control from the Capitalists after a direct action campaign of sabotage, strikes, sit-downs, factory occupations and other actions.

I do not believe in government, and so I am an Anarchist. I believe that government is one of the worst forms of modern oppression, is the source of war and economic oppression, and must be overthrown. Anarchism means that we will have more democracy, social equality, and economic prosperity. I oppose all forms of oppression found in modern society: patriarchy, white supremacy, Capitalism, State Communism, religious dictates, gay discrimination, etc.

Reflections on the Black Consciousness Movement and the South African Revolution

Selby Semela, Sam Thompson & Norman Abraham
(1979)

This is a 1979 Situationist-influenced text describing the mass student and worker protests that, in 1976 and 1977, shook apartheid South Africa with mass protests and general strikes. Written by two exiled black South Africans — Norman Abraham and Selby Semela, a leading figure in “76” — and an American revolutionary — Sam Thompson — the text is critical of heirarchical, nationalist and vanguardist modes of struggle, and affirms, instead, “the real black proletarian struggle in South Africa”.

1: The 1976/77 Insurrection

“The school for the oppressed is a revolution!”

*Soweto pamphlet
1976*

The manner in which the violent uprisings that swept South Africa in 1976/77 have been defined by the international spectacular society and its pseudo-opposition exposes their willful determination to misinterpret, misrepresent, and misunderstand what was a decisive event in the history of proletarian struggle in that country. Everything emanating from established circles – from the Nat regime in South Africa to the racist white man or woman on a Johannesburg street and from the African National Congress and the Pan Africanist Congress (ANC and PAC) to pseudo-oppositional leftists the world over – has not only undermined but also distorted the events that occurred in South Africa.

For a start: what happened in South Africa cannot be encapsulated in alienated notions of time and space. It was not isolated to June of 1976. It was not restricted to Soweto. It was not merely the act of students. Nor was it simply a revolt, rebellion or unrest. It was creative revolution in the making, in the desperately clear moment of confrontation.

The events that shook the entire edifice of white South Africa, and threw into stark relief the notion of total revolution, began with relative inconspicuousness. A

group of Soweto junior high school students at a single school protested the use of Afrikaans (the official language of the oppressors) as a medium of instruction. The revolt of high school students against the enforcement of learning in the Boer language was significant in itself. It marked, from the outset, a highly advanced struggle to the extent that it was a rejection of the colonisation of consciousness which triggered off the insurrection, even when so many other material reasons for resistance existed.

Initially, however, the Soweto student protest followed the traditional defeatist lines of oppositional politics: the students boycotted classes. But in a community such as Soweto, where any contestation immediately brings down upon itself the entire repressive apparatus, symbolic protest cannot be contained to the symbol, but must overflow into the realm of real struggle. For a community that is all too well acquainted with lumpen criminality and with unrelenting brutality on a daily basis, violence is always a ready-at-hand implement to pit against the contradictions of daily life. The striking students were no exception. Not for them the “ponderous” problem of morality and constraint. A teacher who ignored student demands was stabbed by screwdriver-wielding youths. Police were stoned. Two government officials were killed by a young man from Soweto.

In a matter of days the students had gained the support of their parents, and had coerced the teachers into backing their demands. The authorities still refused to concede. Afrikaans remained as a medium of instruction.

At this point the confrontation between the students and the state (in the institutionalised form of the school) was contained to, at the most, a handful of campuses. How was the transformation made so that these grievances ignited the fury of all black South Africa? Those who sought the answer in the form of an effective and extensive centralised organization – be they the South African state on the search for scapegoats, or the international humanitarian conscience on the search for superstars – were in for a rude surprise. (Eventually the South African state was able to fabricate its scapegoats whom the international opposition were then able to turn into superstars. Thus symbiotically, the state and its pseudo-opposition succeeded in fooling themselves and almost everybody else except the real participants in the struggle, by recreating the events that began on June 16, in their own image.)

But there were no leaders – only a handful of militant individuals (prior to June 16), inspired by their frustration in the face of unyielding authority, who with the help of friends set out to organise something, the content of which, let alone the consequences, they were in no position to anticipate.

A group of students from Orlando West Junior High School – the first school to boycott classes – and some of their friends from other schools such as Morris Isaacson High School – as yet unaffected by the Afrikaans issue – arranged a general demonstration in protest of the state’s design to use the language of the oppressor as a language of instruction.

Once again the tactics, the form of protest – a demonstration – was a symbolic one, albeit more dangerous, since demonstrations of any kind in South Africa are, by statute, punishable offences. The organisers of the demonstration – the embryo of a later-to-be self-proclaimed leadership – proceeded to visit all local schools to gather support.

The response of the Soweto students who attended that demonstration on June 16 far exceeded the expectations of the organisers. As opposed to the anticipated couple of thousand demonstrators expected by the organisers, about 30,000 students gathered at Orlando West High School.

The placards carried by those gathered already portended things to come. There were slogans not only denouncing Afrikaans and Bantu Education, but such slogans as: “Power”, “Smash the system,” “Away with Vorster”, “We’ll fight until total liberation.”

In festive mood the students took their protest to the streets. Inevitably they were confronted by the brute force of the South African state, who, by ruse of history, understood the implications of the students’ actions even more clearly than most of the students themselves were able to at that time. Without warning the police opened fire on the singing and marching students. The students at the front of the procession began to retreat, but their flight was halted by the act of one person. One young woman stood her ground, then defiantly walked towards the police shouting: “Shoot me!” Inspired by this incredible act – so incredible that the police did not shoot—the students’ retreat turned into a regroupment and frenzied counterattack. Rocks were torn from the ground and hurled at the police. After a second volley of shots had left more students dead and wounded, the leadership suddenly reappeared, in the form of one Tsietsi Mashinini, who stood up on an overturned vehicle and exhorted his fellow students to disperse. He was promptly forced to scuttle when the students turned their rocks on him. While the leadership was thus “left in the bush part three,” so was their newfound style of contestation—demonstration; for the students did disperse, not to seek refuge at home from “inevitable” suicide, as the self-proclaimed leadership had urged, but to rampage through the streets of Soweto in a potlatch of destruction.

Within days spontaneous rioting had broken out in every major area of the country.

The South African blacks launched a vicious attack on apartheid, commodities and state power. The original grievance was quickly superseded, not because it was insignificant, but because the extremity of the insurrection put everything else in question along with it.

By August 1976, the white state was being forced to retreat on all fronts.

- Almost all schools had been attacked and many had been burnt down. The students were in almost daily confrontation with the police.
- Almost every beerhall in the black townships had been razed to the ground.
- Collaborators within the townships had been severely attacked. Not a single “respectable” black community figure was able to come forward as mediator.
- High school students and young “ex-thugs” prevented workers from going to work in Johannesburg, threatening taxi-drivers, blocking trains and sabotaging railroads. Workers quickly responded, and even after coercion had abated, strikes in Johannesburg and in Cape Town were 80 – 100% effective. Some of the workers who went to work went, not because they were intimidated by the system, but in order to sabotage white-owned technology and commodities.
- Coloureds and Indians had been drawn into the struggle, thus bridging an historical gap among the oppressed that had existed for generations.
- The Bophutatswana (a government-created black “homeland”) houses of parliament had been razed to the ground. All government appointed black leaders were in danger of losing their lives. Many lost their houses.
- Numerous black policemen had fled the townships. Several were killed. After nightfall one-time “lumpen criminals” joined with students and workers to attend to community needs.
- The worker stay-aways drew the adult population into the struggle. Before then they would leave to work in the white cities in the early morning and return after nightfall, while the students squared off against the state. During the stay-aways, the workers were drawn into the confrontation, being forced by the sheer magnitude of the bitter struggle to join the youth in their battle against the system.

For the remainder of 1976 and through to June of 1977, violence continued across the country. Within four months of June 16, about two hundred black communities

had been swept along by the tide of revolution. Major areas like Soweto, Guguletu, New Brighton, etc, are still shaken at times by new revolts.

Let the moralists and the humanitarians pretend the students were always peace-loving, and mere victims of the violence. The events in South Africa have exploded that insipid myth. In a situation in which state violence is institutionalised on such an overwhelming scale, one affirms one's humanity not by "turning the other cheek" and suffering with dignity, but by willfully and consciously accepting one's share of violence and by understanding that brute systematic force can only be destroyed by the creative violence of the masses.

In June 1977 the executive of a student organisation, whose credibility as a vanguard emerged out of the hero and/or agitator seeking of the South African press, was detained by the South African police. The recent trial of these individuals along with a great many others of the same type are important to note, for by means of these sham efforts of justice the South African state has attempted to delineate in time a quasi-official ending to the period of open class struggle in South Africa. The logic is: arrest the leaders, arrest the revolution. This official self-delusion of the state is mimicked by many of its opponents in exile. The exile's lament, in spite of his real anguish and homesickness, his glum belief that "the revolution has been suppressed again," is pitifully vacuous. It is designed only to convince his listeners that despite his present passivity he remains committed to a struggle in which his past participation is often very dubious anyway.

But the struggle has not been suppressed as is witnessed by the consistent reports of unrest and sporadic violence in the South African press. Such events underline the ongoing ferment that sustains the revolutionary spirit from day to day throughout South Africa.

2. The Soweto Students Representative Council

The repulsive absurdity of certain hierarchies and the fact that the whole strength of commodities is directed blindly and automatically towards their protection, leads us to see that every hierarchy is absurd.

Situationist International

*The Decline and Fall of the Spectacular Commodity Economy
(1965)*

If any organisation had grounds on which to ascribe itself a vanguard role in the 1976/77 period of the struggle, it was the Soweto Students Representative Council (SSRC). The SSRC, which emerged from the zealous superstar scouting of the South African press more than anything else, has since then laid firm claim

to the dubious honour of the avant-garde party. Internationally this claim has been contested by the old spinster/huckster organisations: the African National Congress (ANC), the Communist Party of South Africa (CPSA), and the Pan Africanist Congress (PAC). At home in South Africa, and among exiles in Botswana, Lesotho and Swaziland, the bidding of the old league nationalist-Stalinists have largely fallen on deaf ears. Unfortunately not so the pretensions of the careerists who were one-time leaders of the SSRC and who now parade under the title of the “Third Force”. There are many exiled students who seem quite contented to submit to the spectacle of their self-styled leadership and titillate themselves with the memory of their past participation in the struggle. Too bad for those in search of a shepherd that the hunt for a vanguard party will only find a fleeting shadow.

As for the leadership of the “Third Force,” it is one of the most hideous hierarchical freaks ever spawned by revolutionary experience, and history has never been lacking in grotesque examples. Concocted in the fashion of a passively consumable item, at a time when its later consumers were far from idle, it had to wait for exile before it could raise its ugly head. From outside South Africa the “Third Force” has joined the ANC and PAC in perpetuating the self-same myths that have always crippled proletarian struggle, and even indulges in the same ruthless and coercive tactics when it comes to dealing with others who do not subscribe to its own stupidity, and when it comes to expanding its tiny ranks.

The SSRC grew out of an organisation known as the South African Students Movement (SASM), although its relation to that organisation was extremely dubious. In the heat of the first week of the uprisings, a number of the earlier coordinators of the June 16 demonstration, wanting to lend legitimacy to their claims of leadership, hijacked the controls of the Black Consciousness Movement (BCM) organisation, SASM, from its elected executives who were based in Cape Town.

How could an open struggle that raged for almost two years, and spread the length and breadth of the country, involving at least two hundred cities or towns and hundreds of thousands of active participants, have been under the control of an ad hoc committee that only emerged full-fledged in August, almost two months after June 16, and a fortnight or so before its first self-appointed leadership went into exile?

All revolutionary history shows the part played in the defeat of popular struggle by the appearance of an ideology advocating popular struggle. Within the BCM the ideology of “mass action” lay latent almost from the start.

With the uprisings that began in Soweto, the ideology of “mass action” found the SSRC as its vehicle and came to the fore. The black proletariat’s spontaneous organisation of its struggle assured its early successes; but this gave way to a second phase in which the “fifth column” worked from the inside in the form of the SSRC as the vanguard movement. The mass movement sacrificed its reality for the shadow of its defeat.

Even though the SSRC did have widespread support amongst the Soweto high school students and gained international recognition, to justify it on the strength of its allegiance is to miss the point. Popularity of a hierarchical organisation does not condone the organisation, but exposes the degree to which the consciousness of its supporters has been colonised.

The most important point to recognise is that the SSRC owed its reputation to the very organisation of South African daily life, to institutions compatible with apartheid and the white state, which the proletariat in action was out to destroy. It was the press that gave it a name both literally and metaphorically. It was an intellectually intimidated community both at home and abroad which was highly susceptible to advertisable commodities that gave it pride of place on the stage of revolution.

Inside Soweto the SSRC’s ability to stabilise itself and to advance its vanguard aspirations at the very time that the struggle intensified, and when all other organisations were key Black Consciousness organisations (ANC and PAC having all but disappeared), is not testimony to its indispensability. On the contrary in Soweto the SSRC enjoyed a deep degree of very bourgeois respectability, being recognised by moderates (who highly condemned the folly of the struggle), as the only visible and legal organ still operable, and which seemed to be the only possible starting point for some sort of detente. High ranking officials in the South African Police shared the same opinion.

A concrete example of the SSRC’s moderation is to be found in one of its press releases in October, 1976. In this statement the SSRC leadership condemned anonymous leaflets which had been circulated in Soweto and which incited people to violence. Small wonder that as a result senior police officers in Johannesburg as much as thanked the SSRC for its collaboration, when the police issued a press statement immediately afterwards, in which they said that they felt that the township would be peaceful and law-abiding because the SSRC had repudiated the leaflets.

In acknowledging its authority, the police confirmed the SSRC’s legitimacy. To

be legitimised by one's immediate enemy is a sure sign of one's fundamental conciliation.

A look at the organisational structure of the SSRC is helpful in that it exposes with clarity the alienated and stultified social relations that characterised the "vanguard of Soweto." The self-appointed executive, dictatorially controlled by its chairman, deliberately distanced itself from its supporters until a group of several students under the chairman's direct control were elevated to the position of national leaders. The more their reputation grew, even amongst the students themselves, the less they participated in the struggle. Their activities revolved around the traditional and banal specialisations of the administrative and the propagandistic, while the masses they pretended to lead were out on the streets in their thousands. Where the leadership avoids the line of battle, its claim as supreme leaders rebounds invariably upon itself in the form of ridicule at its own cowardice. Not surprising then that the great SSRC leadership steers its bastard "party" from the safe helm of the Nigerian state.

In exile there are a barrage of students who in many cases have fled hot from the struggle at home. Everywhere they are captives of the ideologies of the world their revolution has demanded they destroy. There are those who have joined the old liberation organisations and sit in army camps in Stalinist countries throughout the world, being fed the cynical lie of a victorious return. There are those who still pay obeisance to the superficial power of the SSRC. They are merely museum pieces in different museums, all marked "revolutionary." Everywhere revolutionaries, but what has happened to the revolution? Everywhere the same alienation is preponderate, everywhere the spectacular consumption of ideology, everywhere obedience to hierarchy and the veneration of the past. To hell with the ideological variations, and the different names and faces. Under all the rhetoric there is nothing.

For those students who have evaded the pitfalls of those of their peers who have made their unhappy ways into the voracious jaws of either ANC, PAC, or Third Force, there awaits another odious misconception—the pitiful glorification and mimicry of the defeated revolutionary projects of the past. Once courageous participants in their own revolutionary history, they now content themselves with being dazzled by the pseudo-revolutionary glitter of the revolutions that have been lost, invariably in dedication to the solid temple of names radical—Lenin, Trotsky, Mao, Guevara, Cabral and all the rest.

3. Black Consciousness and the Black Consciousness Movement

Ever since June, 1976, much has been said of the Black Consciousness Movement (BCM). The more perceptive, less dogmatic cretins of the left, who ever-predictably impute vanguard explanations to every struggle, have used BCM as a surrogate vanguard to explain the events of 1976/77, seeing that there is not a single established party which could credibly fit the bill. Some even go so far as to blame the continued existence of the whole South African state on the fact that BCM was not sufficiently elitist, professional, organised: bureaucratic. Some take the opposite tack, and announce the BCM's vagueness as its greatest virtue: it is promoted in the image of a non-sectarian proletarian base up for grabs on the market of international constituencies.

It is high time that the miserable use to which the BCM has been put ever since 1976/77 be put to an end, that justice be done to its achievements. Which is to say, the BCM's shortcomings must now be criticized pitilessly. Its principal contribution to the struggle in South Africa is, at this point in time, mere dead weight; the more it is eulogised, the more a critical analysis of an experience laden with revolutionary lessons is suppressed. It is not enough to heap shit on the self-serving actions of those who praise it and of the exiles who continue to act in its name: the ideas and the activities that gave Black Consciousness and the BCM their life must be held responsible for allowing room for all the post-1977 BCM bullshit.

The main accomplishment of Black Consciousness had very little to do with elaborating the necessary goals and methods of the South African revolution; its main accomplishment was much more to leave in the dust the false goals and methods of the struggles of the forties and fifties, and at the same time to expose the ineffectual strategies of the traditional "liberation" organisations.

Because of the conditions forced upon it by the state, Black Consciousness deliberately side-stepped the whole question of what in fact its goals were. Pronouncing itself as revolutionary could serve no purpose other than to bring down the wrath of the police. To openly favour violence, or to attempt to lead people into any direct confrontation with the state could only have led to failure. On the other hand, although BCM claimed itself to be nonviolent, it did not engage in the impotent acts of civil disobedience practiced in a previous generation by the ANC and PAC (as well as by the American civil rights movement). "Non-violence" was simply a means of self-defence; it certainly was not a strategy, as is shown by any perusal of Black Consciousness literature, which constantly stresses the absurdity of expecting any significant changes by the state in response to moral pressure.

Organisationally, Black Consciousness took the entire logic of Leninism – the “enlightened” party (“theory”) and the passive base (“practice”) – and turned it upside-down. Everything was staked on the activity of the masses at the level of their everyday life. This was extremely ingenious and absolutely necessary: not only as a means of self-defence against the State, which would, as a matter of course, seek out and destroy the leadership of any “revolutionary” group, but for the advance of the struggle itself.

As an organisational framework, the BCM had only one practical goal: the popularisation of the philosophy of Black Consciousness, either by word or by practical example. What is at the core of this philosophy? That the individual black man must recognise clearly his situation, overcome his intimidation, and decide upon his own solution. That in other words he put himself in a position where he has no need for an organisation.

The political groups that came into being out of Black Consciousness—most significantly the Black People’s Convention (BPC), South African Students Organisation (SASO), South African Students Movement (SASM), Black Allied Workers Union (BAWU), Black Community Programmes (BCP)—expressed the fundamental absurdity of vanguard organisation in South Africa—and in fact are a concrete case of the reality of avant-garde organisations in general. As organisations, these groups had no reason for existence other than to exist. They had no role to play as mediators between the masses and Power (the South African white rulers don’t negotiate with blacks), and in any case rejected that role. They had no role as mediators between theory and practice because they did not really have a theory—or, if you will, their theory was that the theory of struggle is made by those in struggle, not by a leadership elite. They took up the role of mediators against mediation.

The BCM did not really break with the logic of an hierarchical, avant-garde type organisation, but simply put off the question because of national circumstances. This is evident in the umbrella structure of the Black Consciousness Movement. While dealing with the “unorganised” blacks, the BCM heralded the individual; but when dealing in organisational terms, it put forward the ideology of the federation of autonomous organisations. A distinct hierarchy of those “organised” and those unorganised is implied. For those who are unorganised, the essential referent is “the system” But when one becomes organised, the referent becomes a matter of building the organisation. The organisation does not spring from a determined agreement of individuals on common activity, from defining what is really organizable in their activity, but rather acts to publicise itself—the organisation.

Black Consciousness, defined in as really broad and really vague terms as it was, had run, from the start, the risk of becoming an apologist for all the actions taken by those who claimed to be a part of it: stooges like Nthatho Motlana and Gatsha Buthelezi still pose as Black Consciousness advocates to legitimise their campaigns for better scraps at the white man's trough. At the time when the best of Black Consciousness theory was put into practice in the streets (and when the BCM organisations were left in the dust) – 1976/77 – the use of Black Consciousness as an apologia for specialists became the rule rather than the exception. The movement which claimed to have “analysed, assessed and defined the black community's needs, aspirations, ideals and goals” was never so stagnant as in the period when the black South African community was starting to do these things for itself.

Certainly, the point is not – according to the faded leninist dream – that the BCM was not there in 1976/77 to “lead” the struggle. Nor is the point that certain BCM members did not make important contributions in the struggle itself: some undeniably did (though one has seen in this and the preceding chapter the quality of the contributions made by others!) The point is rather that when it came to analysis, the remaining spokesmen of the BCM showed themselves capable of originality only in the sense of choosing which clichés most gloriously describe the struggle and their own participation in it. Nationalism re-emerged, less as a developed ideology, than out of wholesale approval of everything done by their black countrymen. Criticism of all but the most obvious targets — whites and sell-outs — became scarcer than three-legged dogs.

The conspicuous decline of the BCM into isolated groups of radical cheerleaders did not stem from a sudden eclipse of intelligence, and even less from the absence of things to criticize, analyse and precise. Rather, it stemmed from the fact that a radical analysis of conditions by the black proletariat in action necessarily implied the correction of numerous aspects—theoretical as well as practical — of Black Consciousness itself; and it was precisely before the critique of its own house that Black Consciousness trembled.

With the visible return of open struggle to South Africa, Black Consciousness was confronted with the choice of either shattering its entire petrified organisational edifice or of denying that this organisational edifice was both an edifice and was petrified. Faced with the amazing capacity of the masses for spontaneous organisation the BCM chose the alternative of presenting the movement in the streets as though it was simply an adjunct to the Black Consciousness Movement, with a capital “M” for movement. The distinction between BCM leaders and the masses—a distinction made in practice by the BCM leaders—was concealed by

pretending that everyone who acted intelligently in struggle was an honorary leader of a “movement” which had been left behind. The real history made by the masses was hierarchically accorded a substitute history — the history of mass support for the BCM; and it was this substitute history that the partisans of BCM proclaimed as the black proletariat’s essence and truth. “Mass support,” the BCM’s own corrective to hierarchical leadership, in fact became a rubric by which the really hierarchical leaders of the BCM affirmed their success and their authority in just about everything. This “success” and “authority” became an abstract standard for measuring all struggle.

Thus the Black Consciousness Movement found a refuge in the myth of its power, which was inversely proportional to its practical effectiveness. The further it became separated from practical contestation, the more important the myth became. The BCM never claimed to be a monolithic organisation; in actuality it was premised on the fact that it was not a monolithic organisation. The myth that Black Consciousness incorporated the activity of every rebellious black South African was exactly what became the semantic substitute for the monolithic organisation toward which the BCM logically tended, but whose inevitable symptoms of stultification the BCM leadership was sophisticated enough to want to avoid for as long as possible.

In mid-1979, however, the tireless bureaucratic work-mules in various BCM bureaucracies, realising that the ideology of mass support could no longer suffice now that the organisations were banned in South Africa and visibly decaying in exile, steered the BCM to its logical conclusion. The reality of organisation as a substitute for real struggle could no longer be diffused, and instead was affirmed openly. The BCM was made into an official liberation movement, with headquarters in Gaborone, and chapters in London, Bonn and New York. And the ideological *raison d’être* for its existence? To mediate, but not in a traditional leninist style, but rather in the wishy-washy fashion of a UN peace-keeping force. To mediate not between theory and practice, or between the masses and power, but to mediate between the ANC and the PAC. From the sublime to the most absolute form of cretinism! All the worms have crawled out of the corpse. The BCM’s official proclamation as an organisation spells out unfailingly that in its true colours as ideology and hierarchy, it is an enemy of real black proletarian struggle in South Africa.

Anarchy Can't Fight Alone **Kuwasi Balagoon** *(1980's)*

Of all ideologies, anarchy is the one that addresses liberty and equalitarian relations in a realistic and ultimate fashion. It is consistent with each individual having an opportunity to live a complete and total life.

With anarchy, the society as a whole not only maintains itself at an equal expense to all, but progresses in a creative process unhindered by any class, caste or party. This is because the goals of anarchy don't include replacing one ruling class with another, neither in the guise of a fairer boss or as a party. This is key because this is what separates anarchist revolutionaries from Maoist, socialist and nationalist revolutionaries who from the onset do not embrace complete revolution. They cannot envision a truly free and equalitarian society and must to some extent embrace the socialization process that makes exploitation and oppression possible and prevalent in the first place.

When I first became a revolutionary and accepted the doctrine of nationalism as a response to genocide practiced by the United States government, I knew as I do now that the only way to end the evil practices of the US was to crush the government and the ruling class that shielded itself through that government was through protracted guerrilla war.

Armed with that knowledge, I set out the initial organizing of the Black Panther Party until the state's escalation of the war against the Black people that was begun with the invasion of Africa to capture slaves made it clear to me that to survive and contribute I would have to go underground and literally fight.

Once captured for armed robbery, I had the opportunity to see the weakness of the movement and put the state's offensive in perspective. First, the state rounded up all the organizers pointed out to it by agents who had infiltrated the party as soon as it had begun organizing in N.Y. It charged these people with conspiracy and demanded bails so high that the party turned away from its purposes of liberation of the black colony to fund raising. At that point, leadership was imported rather than developed locally and the situation deteriorated quickly and sharply. Those

who were bailed out were those chosen by the leadership, regardless of the wishes of the rank and file or fellow prisoners of war, or regardless of the relatively low bail of at least one proven comrade.

Under their leadership, “political consequences” (attacks) against occupation forces ceased altogether. Only a Fraction of the money collected for the Purpose of bail went towards bail. The leaders began to live high off the hog while the rank and file sold papers, were filtered out leaving behind so many robots who wouldn’t challenge policy until those in jail publicly denounced the leadership.

How could a few jerks divert so much purpose and energy for so long? How could they neutralize the courage and intellect of the cadre?

The answers to these questions are that the cadre accepted their leadership and accepted their command regardless of what their intellect had or had not made clear to them. The true democratic process which they were willing to die for, for the sake of their children, they would not claim for themselves. These are the same reasons that the people’s Republic of China supported UNITA and the reactionary South African government in Angola; that the war continued in Southeast Asia after the Americans had done the bird; why the Soviet Union, the product of the first Socialist revolution is not providing the argument that it should and could through being a model.

This is not to say that the people of the Soviet Union, the People’s Republic of China, Zimbabwe or Cuba aren’t better off Because of the struggles they endured.

It is to say that the only way to make a dictatorship of the proletariat Is to elevate everyone to being proletariat and deflate all the advantages of power that translate into the wills of a few dictating to the majority.

The possibility must be prevented of any individual or group of individuals being able to enforce their wills over any other individual’s private life Or to extract social consequences for behavior preferences or ideas. Only an anarchist revolution has on its agenda to deal with these goals.

This would seem to galvanize the working class, déclassé intellectuals, colonized third world nations and some members of the petty bourgeois and alright bourgeoisie. But this is not the case.

That China, North Korea, Vietnam, and Mozambique would build round a Marxist ideology to drive out invaders and rebuild feudal economies in the midst

of western imperialisms designs and efforts to reinvade and recolonize is a point that can be argued in the light of the international situation it is one thing that they don't back the will of the people as much as they chose allies in the East-West wars fought on the ground of the non-white colonies. It is another thing that Anarchy ceases to inflame or take the lead in combating fascism and imperialism here in North America with the history of the Wobblies, the western federation of minors and other groups who have made their mark on history. It is a denial of our historic task, the betrayal of Anarchists who died resisting tyranny in the past, malingering in the face of horrible conditions. It is the theft of an option to the next generation and forfeiture of our own lives through faint hearts.

We permit people of other ideologies to define Anarchy rather than bring our views to the masses and provide models to show the contrary. We permit corporations to not only lay off workers and to threaten the balance of workers while cutting their salaries, but to poison the air and water to boot. We permit the police, Klan and Nazis to terrorize whatever sector of the population they wish without repaying them back in any kind. In short, by not engaging in mass organizing and delivering war to the oppressors we become Anarchists in name only.

Because Marxists and nationalists ain't doing this to a large extent doesn't make it any less a shame. Our inactivity creates a void that this police state with its reactionary press and definite goals are filling. The parts of people's lives supposedly touched by mass organizing and revolutionary inspiration that sheds a light that encourages them to unveil a new day, instead are being manipulated by conditions of which apathy is no less a part than poisonous uncontested reactionary propaganda. To those who believe in a centralized party with a program for the masses this might mean whatever their subjective analysis permits. But to us who truly believe in the masses and believe that they should have their lives in their hands and know that freedom is a habit, this can only mean that we have far to go.

In the aftermath of the Overtown rebellion, the Cuban community conceded as lost souls by Castro came out clearly in support of the Black colony. And predictably the Ku Klux Klan, through an Honorary FBI agent Bill Wilkenson, made no bones about supporting the rights of businesses and the business of imperialism. Third World colonies throughout the United States face genocide and it is time for anarchists to join the oppressed combat against the oppressors. We must support in words and actions, self-determination, and self-defense for third world peoples.

It is beside the point whether Black, Puerto Rican, Native American and Chicano-Mexicano people endorse nationalism as a vehicle for self-determination or agree

with anarchism as being the only road to self-determination. As revolutionaries we must support the will of the masses. It is not only racism but compliance with the enemy to stand outside of the social arena and permit America to continue to practice genocide against the third world captive colonies because although they resist, they don't agree with us. If we truly know that Anarchy is the best way of life for all people, we must promote it, defend it and know that the people who are as smart as we are will accept it. To expect people-to accept this, while they are being wiped out as a nation without allies ready to put out on the line what they already have on the line is crazy.

Where we live and work, we must Not only escalate discussion and study Groups, we must also organize on the ground level. The landlords must be contested through rent strikes and rather than develop strategies to pay the rent, we should develop strategies to take the buildings. We must not only recognize the squatters movement for what it is, but support and embrace it. Set up communes in abandoned buildings, sell scrap cars and aluminum cans. Turn vacant lots into gardens. When our children grow out of clothes, we should have places where we can take them, clearly marked anarchist clothing exchanges and have no bones about looking for clothing there first. And of course we should relearn how to preserve food; we must learn construction and ways to take back our lives, help each other move and stay in shape.

Let's keep the American and Canadian flags flying at half mast... I refuse to believe that Direct Action has been captured.

Beyond Nationalism But Not Without It
Ashanti Omowali Alston
(1983)

What motivates me more than anything else about anarchism and its relevance to Black revolution is that it has offered me some powerful insights into why we have not been able to recover from our defeat (the 60's revolution) and advance forward to the kinds of unities, organizations and activities that make for invincible revolutionary movements.

Anarchist Panther
Vol. 1 #1

...we have been taught either to ignore our differences, or to view them as causes for separation and suspicion rather than as forces for change. Without community there is no liberation, only the most vulnerable and temporary armistice between an individual and her oppression. But community must not mean a shedding of our differences, nor the pathetic pretense that these differences do not exist.

Audre Lorde

This great Audre Lorde quote, taken from Arsenal #4 (p. 4), introduces their discussion on the same theme. As a Black anarchist TIRED of primarily white anarchists just dismissing nationalism, I truly appreciate Arsenal and ONWARD taking this on as two of the newest newspaper/mags on the scene.

There are all kinds of Nationalisms and there are all kinds of reactions to nationalism. Personally, I have moved through and grown within some of the Black Nationalisms specific to the Black Community.

Black nationalism saved my life, in a sense, as a teenager in the 1960s. It “jarred” my unconscious acceptance of amerikkanism dogging my peoples and helped me see the larger picture. I am a 60's child. There was Malcolm, there was H. Rap Brown and Stokeley Carmichael of the Black Power movement, and then there was the Black Panther Party. All were nationalists, all represent an evolution of nationalism within the black community. Because of the totally racist, genocidal dynamic within this Babylonian Empire, the black nationalist understood that

we must primarily look to ourselves to free ourselves. And none of these thinkers felt it was necessary to ‘check in’ with The White Man – from the ruler to the revolutionary – to see if it was okay. It was about our survival as a people, not as that mythical “working class” or that equally mythical “citizen.” For me, as this teenager who had just witnessed the 60’s Rebellions in my own thoroughly racist hometown, nationalism was a lifesaver: “WE MUST LOVE EACH OTHER.” “BLACK IS BEAUTIFUL.” “WE MUST CONTROL OUR OWN COMMUNITIES.”

As an anarchist searching for some good anarchist shit from the 60’s to hold up and show “proof” that the anarchists were better on the position of Nationalism than the Marxists and Leninists, I found hardly anything! I found some positive stuff from a “libertarian” publication, but, to my surprise, they represented the “anarcho-CAPITALIST” tendency! Yet, I found them to be on point and consistent on RESPECTING nationalism and national liberation. (The Libertarian Forum of the late 60’s and early 70’s. Karl Hess, Joseph Peden, and Murray N. Rothbard). They at least understood that black people’s nationalist struggle was a struggle against the State, the Babylonian state. They also looked at what the nationalist groups were doing in their actual grassroots practice, like creating concrete defenses against repression and alternatives in survival institutions. Thus, they liked what the Panthers were doing on the ground through their programs and supported that kind of nationalism as being compatible with “anarchism on the ground.” Paul Goodman made similar observations of the early civil rights movement groups. But it was understood that these groups were dealing with issues of survival against genocide, and that these groups were developing their own analyses and programs to rally their communities. The libertarians of LF were, interestingly enough, critical of the Panthers when the Party turned toward Marxism and other authoritarian ideologies because in their “on the ground” practice, the survival programs were no longer spontaneous responses to specific oppressions but were increasingly kept under the tight control of the Party. Power to the People -vs.- Power to the Party?

Nationalism and statism are different because nationalism can be anti-state. But they can have commonalities in that nationalism may only be against a particular kind of state, such as a Racist State, or a Fascist State. Anarchism and nationalism are similar in that they are both anti-statist, but what does it mean when the specific anarchist movements within a specific country are racist and dismissive of any and all nationalism, be it reactionary or revolutionary? For me, even the nationalism of a Louis Farrakhan is about saving my people, though it is also thoroughly sexist, capitalist, homophobic and potentially fascist. Yet, it has played an important part in keeping a certain black pride and resistance going. Their “on the ground” work is very important in keeping an anti-racist mentality going. As a

black anarchist, that's MY issue to deal with cuz they'se MY FOLKS. But it points to where anarchism and nationalism have differences: most anarchists in the U.S. have NO understanding of what it means to be BLACK in this fucked up society. We do not have the luxury of being so intellectual about this excruciating boot on our collective neck, this modern-day middle-passage into the Prison Industrial Complex and other forms of neo-slavery.

As a postmodernist anarchist, identity politics is important to me. Every time I hear someone talk about my people as if we are just some "working class" or "proletariat" I wanna get as far away from that person or group as possible, anarchist, Marxist, whatever. As a postmodernist anarchist I also find my people's experience the foundation from which we will find our way to liberation and power. That's what I get from being the "insurrection of subjugated knowledges." My nationalism gave me that kind of pride because it was such a rejection of White thinking or at least a decentering of the primacy of white thought, capitalist, socialist, whatever. Folks outside of our experience need to respect that they ain't got no monopoly on revolutionary thinking and damn sure ain't got none on revolutionary practice. It is easy to sit back and intellectualize about our nationalism from the modernist, eurocentric framework of rational, scientific, materialist models. While one does that, it is our nationalism that constantly rallies our people to come together, remember our history, love ourselves, dream on and fight back. Black anarchists and anti-authoritarian revolutionaries understand the limitations of nationalism in terms of its historical sexism, hierarchy, or its modernist trappings in general. But we also recognize anarchism's modernist trappings in the form of American racist/class privilege when it comes to people of color.

The efforts of Lorenzo Kom'boa Ervin, Greg Jackson and others to build an organization/federation of black community partisans/organizers is an example of uniting black revolutionary nationalism and anarchism. The Black Fist organization and publication, even if called generally a people of color or third world anti-authoritarian organization, understood the necessity to be grounded in the experiences of black and brown communities. Thus, the experiences of the Panthers and the Brown Berets and similar groups were essential. The question seems to be whether white anarchists and anti-authoritarians can work with such groups. Even if those two groups no longer exist, their experiences are important.

White folks need to deal with being ANTI-RACIST ALLIES to folks of color communities and activists. Activists in particular because we are usually whites' entry point into any possible relationship with our communities. Anarchist theory and practice cannot take the form of a mere adherence to the founding fathers and canonical practices, such as Kropotkin, Bakunin, and the Spanish Civil War. Tired

of hearing it! Anarchism HERE in Babylon must reflect our unique problems and possibilities for struggle. Our struggles are not just against capitalism. Too simple. Our struggles are not just against racism. That's also too simple. There are all kinds of negative "isms" we are fighting against and, just as important, all kinds of worlds we are fighting for. That's why the whole idea and practice of "convergences" and "spokescouncils" are so important to activists in general to learn from and enhance because they are about making space for all "Voices" to be heard and factored into the decision-making so that whatever activities comes forth from it prefigures the kind of new worlds we truly want.

I end this by advising: WHITE ANARCHISTS: DEAL WITH BEING THE BEST ANTI-RACIST ALLIES YOU CAN. WE NEED YOU – AND YOU NEED US – BUT WE WILL DO THIS SHIT WITHOUT YOU.

To my folks of color: COME ENVISION: envision a world of worlds within our world where there's principled co-existence within the wonderful diversity of the Black Community.

Harlems / Spanish Harlems / Watts / hip-hop communities / villages of the Carolina coast / college communities / gay-lesbian-bisexual-transgender communities / zulu nation / new afrikan / religious communities that come together mainly on Saturday or Sunday / squatter communities / outlaw communities / kemetic communities / ibo-ghanaian-sierra leonean-ethiopian-rasta neighborhoods / nomadic poet-artist tribes / and then those of us who just be plain ignorant and harmless and crazy when we have to be and fun-loving and like to journey through and between communities and sometimes just create new mixed ones ... WHAT IF? ... and HOW?

Ella Baker said we can do it if we can trust ourselves and get away from leadership-led revolution; Kwesi Balagoon said we can do it if we willing to create a chaos that will shut this mutha down; Audre Lorde said we can do it if we LEARN TO LOVE AND RESPECT OUR BEAUTIFUL DIVERSITY and reject the tools of our oppressors; Harriet Tubman said, ain't a better way to live THAN AT-WAR FOR A RIGHTEOUS CAUSE; and Franz Fanon said if we smack that mutha across the face, drive that pig outta our territory at the point of a gun, it IS LIBERATING FOR THE SOUL.

Through the Imagination, All is possible.

**Anarchism + Black Revolution =
New Black Autonomous Politics
Black Autonomy Federation
(1994)**

First Published in Vol.1 No.2 of Black Autonomy (1994) The same text appeared as a statement of the Black Autonomy International In Black Autonomy Vol.3 No.1 published in 1997

The new autonomous politics is made up of the anti-authoritarian core of Anarchism and many of the tenets of revolutionary Black nationalism. This combination of all elements makes up something so new it has not been fully defined before now. We will attempt now to more sharply define what has been talked about for the last fifteen years, and also to place it within a historical context so that it can no longer be dismissed as an "eclectic mish-mash", or "corruption" of (both) ideals as the purists would claim.

And yet, it should not alarm Anarchist ideological "purists" when we speak of a Black anarchist politic. First, the early Anarchist movement in America always reflected the cultural, social and political ideals of the community that produced it. Thus we had a Germanic-dominated Anarcho-syndicalist tendency during the 1880's called the International Working People's Association which was strong in Chicago, Pittsburgh and other industrial cities; a Jewish Anarchist movement in New York and other cities during the 1900's, where in some whole newspapers were printed in Yiddish; an Italian movement in New York, New Jersey and other areas in the 1920-30's and so on. One ethnic group after another produced a unique, though no less valid, American Anarchist social movement.

So the question then becomes, why should anyone even be surprised to learn that there will be Anarchist movements which culturally and politically reflect those communities of Africans or Hispanics. In talking about Anarchist ideals, we are not talking about "orthodoxies" which cannot be revised, we are talking about ideas which will be picked up, used by millions of oppressed peoples, and adapted to their purpose and circumstances.

Anarchist purists and other Eurocentric ideologues will just have to shudder, because it is happening now and there is nothing that anybody can do to stop

it. Even as we are talking, the first slow steps toward building a core tendency of Black anarchists is a reality. Several men and women have been influenced by the ideas raised in pamphlets by former BPP and SNCC member Lorenzo Komboa Ervin in the 1970's, but they have taken those ideas, made them into a class weapon reflecting the African experience on this continent, and are taking the first step to free our people and our class.

It is important that we define ourselves, since we realize we are our own liberators. We demand that Africans be subjects of history, and not mere objects that Europeans decide what to do with.

This great Black sector of humanity has said "enough", and has now started to find its own voice. There will be no condescending saviors out of the mother country, we must begin to do this ourselves, although we know the revolutionary project to defeat the system of capitalism and enslavement requires millions of other allies who will help us. We will decide the agenda, the timetable, and the tactics of obtaining our freedom.

The new Black autonomous politic differs from European Anarchism in that we know that we are oppressed both as a distinct people and as workers for our labor power. But Anarchism places its greatest contradiction with the state and its ability to hold back a free lifestyle, and this is exactly what we cannot limit our critique to. This is a white world-view based on their priveleged place in this society. We realize that historically constructed "races" have been created under this system, which determine both the manner of life and death under this system, and that the State upholds this racial/class system. It is no accident, and it's true that racism has not been commissioned by individual white workers, but they have been the beneficiaries of our oppression, and whites are part of the social control mechanism of the state. It is nonsense to say something otherwise, like "we are all in the same boat" or all just workers like the American socialist and communist have done. We say this is a lie and part of a myth about the white working class as a vanguard and "working class heroes".

In addition, we say that people are super-oppressed because of their race under this system, not just their class. Anarchism's limitations to critique this type of oppression are quite obvious, and is what has resulted in an all-white movement, which is confused about how to intervene in struggles that involve people of other than European nationalities and how to analyse the nationalism of the oppressed. It has always been my project to extend the Anarchist ideals to cover new contingencies and other areas of struggle not foreseen by the initiators of the doctrine.

PROGRESS

The Black autonomists also disagree with many Anarchists and other white radicals because we know that the battle is not just against “racism”, or fascist vanguard elements like the Nazis or Klan, rather it is the system which produces fascism which must be destroyed. The capitalist system literally came into existence based on the enslavement and forced labor of African, Asian, and other oppressed peoples; the genocide of the Native Americans, and the brutal theft of the lands of the Hispanic peoples are other examples of this oppression. But Europeans of all classes benefited from this super-exploitation, and capital has created the hierarchical structure of race and class oppression we live under. It is extremely important to understand that this kind of racial stratification is not some deliberate ideological nonsense that people of color have created themselves, so-called “identity movements” as some vulgar socialists call them, but has been a function of the state from inception, with one’s place in society and class privileges riding on the outcome. If you are non-white, you will be treated one way, if you are white, another. So “racism” is a class doctrine, used by the state for super-exploitation of certain workers and peoples; in fact, we contend that it is the actual class relations in North American society.

So-called “white” people are a super-contrived nationality designed to help the capitalists keep workers of color in their place and safeguard the status quo. So rather than see the “white” industrial working class as a potentially revolutionary class, instead we see it as an opportunistic, collaborationist body which must be redefined and reorganized if it is to constitute a reliable ally and have any ability of fighting in its own interest as a new class.

As Black autonomists, we of course disagree with Marxists and other “radicals” who claim that an authoritarian party and strong leadership cultism is necessary to produce a social revolution. But we go further and say that neither they or the Anarchists can lead us as a people of color (or even themselves) to freedom, even though they have been conditioned as Europeans to command and rule over people of color. We can work with them on certain projects or in action on a campaign, but they will not determine the agenda or outcome of our struggles.

However, we differ with the Black Nationalists, although we share many basic ideas with them. We also believe in and treasure many of the traditions and history of our people, but believe it must be demystified and made into a culture of resistance, rather than personality cults or escapism from the reality of racism.

Further, we do not believe in a “race nationalism”, we are not xenophobic, do not entertain any racial mythology about Europeans, and are not seeking to build a Black state as the answer to our problems. In many respects, we know that Black

nation-state-ism will defeat our ability to obtain full freedom and has a limited program for social revolution. We are not immune from the laws of social nature. We believe the class politics which will show itself within any Black state, whether an Islamic, secular “new African” or otherwise will result in an extreme class differential and economic injustice. We believe that a bourgeois class and political dictatorship is inevitable, and that revolution will ensue even under such a Black state, which calls itself “African Socialist”.

We also believe that historically, Black nationalism has asserted itself most forcefully as a defensive doctrine to white racism, not as an anti-racist movement, but as a counter-power movement, that is, to organize an interest group which can battle for political power inside this system. This is what happened to the seemingly revolutionary “Black Power” current produced by the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee during the 1960’s; it was usurped by the Black petit bourgeoisie.

In addition, those who argue for a state never tell how it will be obtained, and many of those arguments made are vague and fanciful. Who really believes that America will just grant an Islamic state or give up five southern states to Africans just because a small faction calling itself a “government -in-exile” or even the the majority of us want it. Why, it would require years of a bloody struggle, and a major organising campaign. In addition, the only group which even talked about conducting a plebiscite to find out what form African people believe our independence should take was the Panthers. Even though we have good relations with many of these organizations, we have a hard time taking these people on this issue seriously and have always considered this wishful thinking or a flight of fancy. But then it is not up to us, but to the Black masses themselves.

So far, we have made little more than the arguments that many socialists and Anarchists have made for years against certain kinds of nationalism. However, it would be extremely unfair to not point out that groups like the Black Panther Party, League of Revolutionary Workers, (and even the SNCC in the late 1960’s), though calling themselves “revolutionary black nationalists”, in fact did not call for or actually struggle to obtain a nation state in Africa or on the existing land-territory of the United States. It appears that they had adopted some variant of socialist doctrine, and had as their primary motivation the toppling of the existing capitalist state/empire. Their position radically differed from the Cultural (Afrocentric), Religious, and other variant of nationalist tendencies.

The BPP especially was an advanced political formation which did much pioneering theoretical and organizing work on race and class issues, and although

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we have many disagreements with their vanguardist and authoritarian political structures, we have much in common philosophically.

We too believe in armed self-defense, but we believe it is the people at-large, not a political party which must be organized in self-defense units. We too believe in armed struggle, but believe the masses extending an insurrection to a social revolution will be the likely unfolding scenario, not a vanguard party seizing power “in the name of the people” or a small secret army. But, in common with the Black Panthers, the Black autonomists believe that even before capitalism is defeated, we can begin to turn our communities into dual power communes, from which we can wage a protracted struggle with capitalism and its agents.

We believe in common with the Panthers and the League of Revolutionary Black Workers that the Black working class will be the decisive factor in any such struggle, not the middle class. And in common with SNCC, we think the role of the organiser is not to lead people, but to empower them and let them take over their own local struggles. We also believe that our communities are colonies or semi-colonies which are totally under the control of the state. But we do not believe in politics or electoralism in any form, and reject coalitions with Liberals or social democrats.

Finally, like the Panthers, and contrary to today’s Nation of Islam and its spokesmen, we believe that there were historical, socio-economic factors which accounted for both slavery and racism, not because whites are “ice-people”, “devils”, or other such nonsense. This system produces racism/white supremacy and its this capitalist system which must be destroyed to get rid of it!

So this is who we are: fighters for human rights, self-determination, and freedom for our people and our class.

The Panthers proved how dangerous Black revolutionaries can be to this system. Now we will finish the job!

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A New Script Bilal Nine (1983)

Representing in Bell Park, Houston anarchists and other anti-authoritarians gathered to discuss issues and actions. During the meeting, one of the participants goes through this whole ramble about his experiences with cholos and other gang members out in the South West. He goes through this chest-beating rant on how he tells the bangers there how stupid they are for banging and how cool he is (or at least that's the gist of what he was telling us and these "stupid" gangtas) for being a revolutionary anarchist. Wow, I guess that phucked 'em up and they'd bow their heads in shame, but the gangstas would repent their "stupidity" by becoming a "cool @ dude" like their "revolutionary" savior.

Now before you all start trippin' thinking "mcoming of that " Hey, you white radicals must treat us colored people with the respect of sacred cows (like the liberals and Marxists) tip or playing "P.C." cop, let me point out that I'm assuming the following contexts: (A.) The guy could' ve been on that radical white male paternalistic tip. (B.) Maybe he was just to show us all at the gathering what a cool rapport he has with tha gangstas and it just came out wrong, or: (C.) He just wasn't thinking.

Well, what the phuck are you getting at Bilal?
Sew this shit up, O.K.?

O.K., I've read somewhere recently that Lorenzo Komboa Ervin, ex- Panther, now a straight up [Black autonomist] anarchist, has outwardly accused the Love & Rage network of sleeping on the issue and attempts of racially diversifying the Love & Rage movement. This is the same shit that he, as well as Afrikan fighters have had to face: the inherent Eurocentrism that's on thè d.l. in most white dominated movements. Blax must study the past failures made by individual Afrikan fighters (activists) as we choose the roads of liberation. As an Afrikan anti-authoritarian, I had to glare at the sad truth of what bougee black nationalism would do to the Black massive. Black gays and lesbians, non-Muslims or Christians, Ifa practitioners, women, and scientific Black revolutionists would find themselves under a boot- heel if they are to live under the present Black nationalist leadership here in amerikkka.

The Marxist-Leninists would definitely try to fade any attempts of people of color in determining their own autonomy. All you gotta do is look at the various left groups in their politics regarding people of color.....in that they either try assimilating one or two ideas of some past Afrikan fighters like Malcolm X, Assata Shakur, or Fred Hampton to their own.

At the same time, they will have the nuts to condemn the bougee nationalists to deter a person of color; leaving only two doors—one open for the Blax to join the left ranx, and the second door closed to self-determination of Afrikans. Do they want to be subjected to a carbon copy of a system that they've been oppressed under, or no? But the most scandalous game players are the fronts that the left play up in the same way Nike, Fila, or a malt brew company use a Black face to sell their product. I wanna be like Mike, I wanna be like Cornel (West), I wanna be like Angela (Davis), I wanna be like Carl (Dix), etc..

Front lawn jockeys for the amerikkkan left plantation. I love it when they parade these symbolic puppets for recruitment during times of uprisings and riots to pose as “leaders” who will guide us to a righteous form of revolution as dictated by the vanguard party. Like the Progressive Labor Party (PLP) did with “Leathia” during the L.A. uprising. ,Not saying that racial barriers shouldn't be faded for the common purpose of overthrowing our enemy, the main purpose of the Bell Park gatheringwasto figureout how toreach out to each other in order to get action and political work rolling in Houston. But if Blax and people of color don't examine the past roles that were played in our fight for liberation, self-determination, and self definition, by “allies” of the past that have phucked us and made our own progressives impotent in their vanguard party cages, then we shouldn't even think of stepping to anyone as an ally today. `

Authoritarian Leftists: Kill the Cop in Your Head

Greg Jackson

(1996)

Pamphlet produced by the staff of Black Autonomy, A Newspaper of Anarchism and Black Revolution. First printing, April 1996

It's difficult to know where to begin with this open letter to the various European-american leftist (Marxist-Leninist and Marxist-Leninist-Maoist, in particular) groups within the United States. I have many issues with many groups; some general, some very specific. The way in which this is presented may seem scattered at first, but I encourage all of you to read and consider carefully what I have written in its entirety before you pass any judgments.

It was V.I. Lenin who said, "take from each national culture only its democratic and socialist elements; we take them only and absolutely in opposition to the bourgeois culture and bourgeois nationalism of each nation". It could be argued that Lenin's statement in the current Amerikkkan context is in fact a racialist position; who is he (or the Bolsheviks themselves) to "take" anyone or pass judgment on anyone; particularly since the privileges of having white skin are a predominant factor within the context of amerikkkan-style oppression. This limited privilege in capitalist society is a prime factor in the creation and maintenance of bourgeois ideology in the minds of many whites of various classes in the US and elsewhere on the globe.

When have legitimate struggles or movements for national and class liberation had to "ask permission" from some eurocentric intellectual "authority" who may have seen starvation and brutality, but has never experienced it himself? Where there is repression, there is resistance... period. Self-defense is a basic human right that we as Black people have exercised time and time again, both violent and non-violent; a dialectical and historical reality that has kept many of us alive up to this point.

Assuming that this was not Lenin's intent, and assuming that you all truly uphold worldwide socialism/communism, then the question must be asked: **Why is it that each and every white dominated/white-led "vanguard" in the United States has in fact done the exact opposite of what Lenin Proclaims/recommends when it comes to interacting with blacks and other people of color?**

Have any of you actually sat down and seriously thought about why there are so few of us in your organizations; and at the same time why non-white socialist/communist formations, particularly in the Black community, are so small and isolated? I have a few ideas...

I. A fundamentally incorrect analysis of the role of the white left in the last thirty years of civil rights to Black liberation struggle...

By most accounts, groups such as the Black Panther Party, the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee, the League of Revolutionary Black Workers, American Indian Movement, and the Puerto Rican Independence Movement “set the standard” for not only communities of color but also for revolutionary elements in the white community.

All of the above groups were ruthlessly crushed; their members imprisoned or killed. Very few white left groups at the time fought back against the onslaught of COINTELPRO by supporting these groups, with the exception of the smaller, armed underground cells. In fact, many groups such as the Progressive Labor Party and the Revolutionary Union (now known as the Revolutionary Communist Party, USA) saw the repression of groups they admired, and at the same time despised, as an opportunity to assert their own version of “vanguard leadership” on our population.

What they failed to recognize (and what many of you generally still fail to recognize) is that “vanguard leadership” is developed, it doesn’t just “magically” happen through preachy, dogmatic assertions, nor does it fall from the sky. Instead of working with the smaller autonomous formations, to help facilitate the growth of Black (and white) self-organization (the “vanguard” leadership of the Black masses themselves and all others, nurtured through grassroots social/political alliances rooted in principle), they instead sought to either take them over or divide their memberships against each other until the group or groups were liquidated. These parasitic and paternalistic practices continue to this day.

The only reason any kind of principled unity existed prior to large-scale repression is because Black-led formations had no illusions about white radicals or their politics; and had no problems with kicking the living shit out of them if they started acting stupid. Notice also that the majority of white radicals who were down with real struggle and real organizations, and were actually trusted and respected by our people, are either still active... or still in prison!

II. The white left’s concept of “the vanguard party”...

Such arrogance on the part of the white left is part and parcel to your vanguardist

ideas and practice. Rather than seeking principled partnerships with non-white persons and groups, you instead seek converts to your party's particular brand of rigid political theology under the guise of "unity". It makes sense that most of you speak of "Black/white unity" and "sharp struggle against racism" in such vague terms, and with such uncertainty in your voices; or with an overexaggerated forcefulness that seems contrived.

Another argument against vanguardist tendencies in individuals or amongst groups is the creation of sectarianism and organizational cultism between groups and within groups. Karl Marx himself fought tirelessly against sectarianism within the working class movement of 19th century Europe. He was also a staunch fighter against those who attempted to push his persona to an almost god-like status, declaring once in frustration "I assure you, sir, I am no Marxist". It could be argued from this viewpoint that the "vanguardist" white left in the US today is generally, by a definition rooted in the day to day practice of Marx himself, anti-Marx; and by proxy, anti-revolutionary.

Like your average small business, the various self-proclaimed "vanguards" compete against each other as well against the people themselves (both white and non-white); accusing each other of provacteurism, opportunism, and/or possessing "the incorrect line" when in fact most (if not all) are provacateurs, opportunists, and fundamentally incorrect.

The nature of capitalist competition demands that such methods and tactics be utilized to the fullest in order to "win" in the business world; the white left has in fact adapted these methods and tactics to their own brand of organizing, actively re-inventing and re-enforcing the very social, political, and economic relations you claim to be against; succeeding in undermining the very basic foundations of your overall theory and all variants of that theory.

Or is this phenomenon part and parcel to your theory? In volume four of the collected works of V.I. Lenin, Lenin himself states up front that "socialism is state-capitalism". Are you all just blindly following a dated, foreign "blueprint" that is vastly out of context to begin with; with no real understanding of its workings?

At the same time, it could be observed that you folks are merely products of your environment; reflective of the alienated and hostile communities and families from which many of you emerge. American society has taught you the tenets of "survival of the fittest" and "rugged individualism", and you swallowed those doctrines like your mother's milk.

Because the white left refuses to combat and reject reactionary tendencies in their (your) own heads and amongst themselves (yourselves), and because they (you) refuse to see how white culture is rooted firmly in capitalism and imperialism; refusing to reject it beyond superficial culture appropriations (i.e.-Native american “dream catchers” hanging from the rear-view mirrors of your vehicles, wearing Adidas or Nikes with fat laces and over-sized Levis jeans or Dickies slacks worn “LA sag” style, crude attempts to “fit-in” by exaggerated, insulting over-use of the latest slang term(s) from “da hood”, etc), you in fact re-invent racist and authoritarian social relations as the final product of your so-called “revolutionary theory”; what I call Left-wing white supremacy.

This tragic dilemma is compounded by, and finds some of its initial roots in, your generally ahistorical and wishful “analysis” of Black/white relations in the US; and rigid, dogmatic definitions of “scientific socialism” or “revolutionary communism”, based in a eurocentric context. Thus, we are expected to embrace these “socialist” values of the settler/conqueror culture, rather than the “traditional amerikkkan values” of your reactionary opponents; as if we do not possess our own “socialist” values, rooted in our own daily and cultural realities! Wasn’t the Black Panther Party “socialist”? What about the Underground Railroad; our ancestors (and yes, even some of yours) were practicing “mutual aid” back when most European revolutionary theorists were still talking about it like it was a lofty, far away ideal!

One extreme example of this previously mentioned wishful thinking in place of a true analysis on the historical and current political dynamics particular to this country is an article by Joseph Green entitled “Anarchism and the Market Place, which appeared in the newsletter “Communist Voice” (Vol #1, Issue #4, Sept 15, 1995).

In it he asserts that anarchism is nothing more than small-scale operations run by individuals that will inevitably lead to the re-introduction of economic exploitation. He also claims that “it fails because its failure to understand the relation of freedom to mass activity mirrors the capitalist ideology of each person for their self.” He then offers up a vague “plan of action”; that the workers must rely on “class organization and all-round mass struggle”. In addition, he argues for the centralization of all means of production.

Clearly, Green’s political ideology is in fact a theology. First, anarchism was practiced in mass scale most recently in Spain from 1936–39. By most accounts (including Marxist-Leninist), the Spanish working class organizations such as the CNT (National Confederation of Labor) and the FAI (Federation of Anarchists of Iberia) seized true direct workers power and in fact kept people alive during a massive civil war.

Their main failure was on a military, and partially on an ideological level: (1.) They didn't carry out a protracted fight against the fascist Falange with the attitude of driving them off the face of the planet. (2.) They underestimated the treachery of their Marxist-Leninist "allies" (and even some of their anarchist "allies"), who later sided with the liberal government to destroy the anarchist collectives. Some CNT members even joined the government in the name of a "united front against fascism". And (3.), they hadn't spent enough time really developing their networks outside the country in the event they needed weapons, supplies, or a place to seek refuge quickly.

Besides leaving out those important facts, Green also omits that today the majority of prisoner support groups in the US are anarchist run or influenced. He also leaves out that anarchists are generally the most supportive and involved in grassroots issues such as homelessness, police brutality, Klan/Nazi activity, Native sovereignty issues, [physical] defense of womens health clinics, sexual assault prevention, animal rights, environmentalism, and free speech issues.

Green later attacks "supporters of capitalist realism on one hand and anarchist dreamers on the other". What he fails to understand is that the movement will be influenced mostly by those who do practical work around day to day struggles, not by those who spout empty rhetoric with no basis in reality because they themselves (like Green) are fundamentally incapable of practicing what they preach. Any theory which cannot, at the very least, be demonstrated in miniature scale (with the current reality of the economically, socially, and militarily imposed limitations of capitalist/white supremacist society taken in to consideration) in daily life is not even worth serious discussion because it is rigid dogma of the worst kind.

Even if he could "show and prove", his proposed system is doomed to repeat the cannibalistic practices of Josef Stalin or Pol Pot. While state planning can accelerate economic growth no one from Lenin, to Mao, to Green himself has truly dealt with the power relationship between the working class and the middle-class "revolutionaries" who seize state power "on the behalf" of the latter. How can one use the organizing methods of the European bourgeoisie, "[hierarchal] party building" and "seizing state power" and not expect this method of organizing people to not take on the reactionary characteristics of what it supposedly seeks to eliminate? Then there's the question of asserting ones authoritarian will upon others (the usual recruitment tactics of the white left attempting to attract Black members).

At one point in the article Green claims that anarchistic social relations take on the oppressive characteristics of the capitalist ideology their rooted in. Really? What about the capitalist characteristics of know-it-all ahistorical white "radicals"

who can just as effectively assert capitalistic, oppressive social relations when utilizing a top-down party structure (especially when it's utilized against minority populations)? What about the re-assertion of patriarchy (or actual physical and mental abuse) in interpersonal relationships; especially when an organizational structure allows for, and in fact rewards, oppressive social relationships?

What is the qualitative difference between a party bureaucrat who uses his position to steal from the people (in addition to living a neo-bourgeois lifestyle; privilege derived from one's official position and justified by other party members who do the same. And, potentially, derived from the color of his skin in the amerikkkan context) and a collective member who steals from the local community? One major difference is that the bureaucrat can only be removed by the party, the people (once again) have no real voice in the matter (unless the people themselves take up arms and dislodge the bureaucrat and his party); the collective member can receive a swift punishment rooted in the true working class traditions, culture, and values of the working class themselves, rather than that which is interpreted for them by so-called "professional revolutionaries" with no real ties to that particular community. This is a very important, yet very basic, concept for the white left to consider when working with non-white workers (who, by the way, are the true "vanguard" in the US; Black workers in particular. Check the your history, especially the last thirty years of it.); i.e. - direct community control.

This demand has become more central over the last thirty years as we have seen the creation of a Black elite of liberal and conservative (negrosie) puppets for the white power structure to speak through to the people, the few who were allowed to succeed because they took up the ideology of the oppressor. But, they too have become increasingly powerless as the shift to the right in the various branches of the state and federal government has quickly, and easily, "checked" what little political power they had. Also, we do not have direct control over neighborhood institutions as capitalists, let alone as workers; at least white workers have a means of production they could potentially seize. Small "mom and pop" restaurants and stores or federally funded health clinics and social services in the 'hood hardly count as "Black capitalist" enterprises, nor are any of these things particularly "liberating" in and of themselves.

But white radicals, the white left of the US in particular, have a hard time dealing with the reality that Black people have always managed to survive, despite the worst or best intentions of the majority population. We will continue to survive without you and can make our revolution without you (or against you) if necessary; don't tell us about "protracted struggle", the daily lives of non-white workers are testimony to the true meaning of protracted struggle, both in the US and globally.

Your inability or unwillingness to accept the fact that our struggle is parallel to yours, but at the same time very specific, and will be finished successfully when we as a people, as working-class Blacks on the North American continent, decide that we have achieved full freedom (as defined by our history, our culture, our needs, our desires, our personal experiences, and our political idea(s)) is by far the primary reason why the white left is so weak in this country.

In addition, this sinking garbage scow of american leftism is dragging other liberating political vessels down with it, particularly the smaller, anti-authoritarian factions within the white settler nation itself and the few [non-dogmatic and non- ritualistic] individuals within today's Marxist-Leninist parties who sincerely wish to get away from the old, tired historical revisionism of their particular "revolutionary" party.

This seemingly "fixed position", along with many other fixed positions in their "thought", help to reveal the white left's profound isolation and alienation from the Black community as a whole and its activists. Yet, many of them would continue to wholeheartedly, and retardedly, assert that they're part of the community simply because they live in a Black neighborhood or their party headquarters is located there.

The white left's isolation and alienation was revealed even more profoundly in the criticisms of the Million Man March on Washington. In the end, the majority of the white leftist critics wound up tailing the most backward elements of the Republican Party; some going as far as to echo the very same words of Senate majority leader Bob Dole, who commented on the day after the march that "You can't separate the message from the messenger." Others parroted the words of House majority leader Newt Gingrich, who had the nerve to ask "where did our leadership go wrong?"

Since when were we expected to follow the "leadership" of white amerikkka; the right, left, or center without some type of brutal coercion? Where is the advantage for us in "following" any of them anywhere? What have any of them done for us lately? Where is the "better" leadership example of any of the hierarchical political tendencies (of any class or ideology) in the US and who do they benefit exclusively and explicitly? None of you were particularly interested in us before we rebelled violently in 1992, why the sudden interest? What do you want from us this time?

Few, if any, of the major pro-revolution left-wing newspapers in the US gave an accurate account of the march. Many of them claimed that only the Black petit-bourgeoisie were in attendance. All of them claimed that women were

“forbidden” to be there, despite the widely reported fact that our sisters were there in large numbers.

“MIM Notes” (and the Maoist Internationalist Movement itself) to their credit recognize that white workers are NOT the “vanguard” class: yet because they themselves are so profoundly alienated from the Black community on this side of the prison walls they had to rely on information from mainstream press accounts courtesy of the Washington Post. And rightfully alienated they are; who in their right mind actually believes that a small, “secret” cult of white campus radicals can (or should) “lead” the masses of non-white people to their/our freedom? Whatever those people are smoking, I don’t want any! I do have to say, however, that MIM is indeed the least dogma addicted of the entire white left milieu that I’ve encountered; but dogma addicted nonetheless.

I helped organize in the Seattle area for the Million Man March. The strong, Black women I met had every intention of going. None of the men even considered stopping them, let alone suggesting that they not go. Sure, the NOI passed on Minister Farrakhan’s message that it was a “men only” march, but it was barely discussed and generally ignored.

The Million Man March local organizing committees (l.o.c.’s) gave the various Black left factions a forum to present ideas and concepts to entire sections of our population who were not familiar with “Marxism”, “anarchism”, “Kwame Nkrumah”, “George Jackson”, “The Ten-Point Program”, “class struggle”, etc.

It also afforded us the opportunity to begin engaging the some of the members of the local NOI chapter in class-based ideological struggle along with participating community people. Of course, it was impossible for the white left to know any of this; more proof of their profound isolation and alienation. At the time, despite our own minor ideological differences, we agreed on one point: it was none of your business or the business of the rest of the white population. When we organize amongst our own, we consider it a “family matter”. When we have conflicts, that is also a “family matter”. Again, it is none of your business unless we tell you differently. How would you like it if we butted in on a heated family argument you were having with a loved one and started telling you what to think and what to do?

This brings me to two issues that have bothered me since January, 1996. Both comments were made to me by a member of Radical Women at the International Socialist Organization’s conference at the University of Washington. The first statement was: “I don’t recognize Black people as a ‘nation’ like I do Native people.”

My first thought was “who the fuck are you to pass judgment upon a general self-definition that is rooted in our collective suffering throughout the history of this country?”

She might as well join up with the right-wing Holocaust revisionists; for this is precisely what she is practicing, the denial of the Black holocaust from 1555 to the present (along a parallel denial, by proxy, of the genocide against other non- white nations within the US). Our nationalism emerged as a defense against [your] white racism. The difference between revolutionary Black nationalists (like Huey P. Newton and the Black Panther Party) and cultural nationalists (like Farrakhan and the Nation of Islam) is that we see our nationalism as a specific tool to defend ourselves from groups and individuals like this ignorant person, not as an exclusive or single means for liberation.

We recognize that we will have to attack bourgeois elements amongst our people just as vigorously as we fight against white supremacists (“left”, “center”, or “right”). The difference is that our bourgeoisie (what I refer to as the “negrosie”) is only powerful within the community; they have no power against the white power structure without us, nor do they have power generally without the blessing of the white power structure itself. Our task, then, is to unite them with us against a common enemy while at the same time explicitly undermining (and eventually eliminating) their inherently reactionary influence.

The second stupidity to pass her lips concerned our support of Black-owned businesses. I pointed out to her that if she had in fact studied her Marxism-Leninism, she would see that their existence goes hand-in-glove with Marx’s theory that revolution could only ensue once capitalism was fully developed. She came back with the criticism, “Well, you’ll be waiting a long time for that to happen”.

Once again, had she actually studied Marxism-Leninism she would know that Lenin and the Bolsheviks also had to deal with this same question. Russia’s economy was predominantly agricultural, and its bourgeois class was small. They decided to go with the mood and sentiments of the peasantry and industrial workers at that particular moment in history;..seize the means of production and distribution anyway!

Who says we wouldn’t do the same? The participants of the LA rebellion (and others), despite their lack of training in “radical ‘left-wing’ political theory” (besides being predominantly Black, Latino, or poor white trash in Amerikkka), got it half right; they seized the means of distribution, distributed the products

of their [collective] labor, and then burned the facilities to the ground. Yes, there were many problems with the events of 1992, but they did show our potential for future progress.

Black autonomists ultimately reject vanguardism because as the white left [as well as elements of the Black revolutionary movement] has demonstrated, it erodes and eventually destroys the fragile ties that hold together the necessary principled partnerships between groups and individuals that are needed to accomplish the numerous tasks associated with fighting back successfully and building a strong, diverse, and viable revolutionary movement.

The majority of the white left is largely disliked, disrespected, and not trusted by our people because they fail miserably on this point. How can you claim to be a “socialist” when you are in fact anti-social? How do you all distinguish yourselves from the majority of your people in concrete, practical, and principled terms?

Obstacles to the Development of Anarchism in Africa & Anarchism's Future in Africa [Excerpt]

Sam Mbah and I.E. Igariwey

(1997)

Obstacles to the Development of Anarchism in Africa

Anarchist theory, to put it mildly, is seen in Africa as a fringe, leftist ideology; one indication of this is that anarchism usually receives no more than a passing nod in the syllabi of African university classes. This is paradoxical because in no other continent have anarchist tendencies been as strong as in Africa, and because in modern times the prospect of turning mass action into class struggle remains brightest in Africa. We shall now consider some of the factors that have worked against the development of anarchism in Africa.

Colonial Education

One of the unpleasant realities we encountered while writing this book was how little the contemporary African, including the African political or social scientist (who has probably taken a course or two on comparative political ideologies), knows about anarchism. In terms of literature, virtually nothing is to be found on the bookshelves of universities and bookstores. This is not surprising, however; in his critique of marxism, Ron Taber points out that for over 70 years, anarchism was eclipsed by marxism. Nowhere has this subordination of anarchism to marxist "socialism" been more profound than in Africa.

Much of the dearth of anarchist literature in Africa is a result of the colonial educational system and the concomitant hegemony of Western imperialist literature in Africa. Colonial education in Africa did not seek to educate large numbers of students; rather, European educators selected what they considered the cream of the crop for advanced schooling. One result of this is that only a relatively small proportion of Africa's population has been and is literate. A corollary of this was the emergence of an academic elite who considered themselves superior to the rest of the people. Because its philosophical and ideological assumptions were taken from European class societies, and not from communal and relatively unstratified African societies, colonial education was disintegrative rather than unifying.

Traditional African education, in contrast, emphasized the interdependence of individuals within the community rather than competition between them.

It instilled a group social consciousness and fostered an egalitarian spirit; this in turn naturally led to an emphasis on common endeavors and the sharing of the products they generated. On the other hand, colonial education emphasized individualism and made social existence competitive. The communal spirit was supplanted by the concept of the isolated self and greed, materialism, and an unbridled desire for domination. Consequently, Africa has become a continent of atomistic, antagonistic, and competitive groups strongly committed to tribal loyalties and dominated by ethnocentric views.

In sum, colonial education has led to a high level of illiteracy in Africa combined with very low political consciousness, even among the educated. Neither Eurocentric nor Afrocentric scholars have researched anarchism as it relates to Africa. This has ensured that anarchism as a systematic body of thought remains an esoteric, if not unknown, subject to many Africans.

The Legal System

African legal systems are a hangover from the colonial past. For example, as in other former British colonies, the legal system in Nigeria is simply an imitation of British common law and equity. It views native laws and customs as barbarous to the extent that they do not reflect European standards and value systems.

Colonial laws were formulated essentially to maintain “law and order,” and this remains the cardinal aim of post-colonial African laws. This contrasts sharply with the pre-colonial African system of rights and freedoms. Traditional African societies had an intense sense of humanity and respect for human dignity. Pre-colonial Africans enjoyed most of the rights that today would fall under the rubric of civil and political rights, such as freedom of association, freedom of movement, and freedom of expression. Basic economic and social rights, like the right to the use of a piece of land, the right to work, and the right to an education, were also common in traditional African societies. And these rights were recognized and protected. “Adjudication,” if it can be called such, typically consisted of a fair “hearing” for opposing parties before the entire village or a council from it; the decision reached was respected and usually considered final. Post-colonial African legal systems, though, conceive of law as a body of rules for the preservation of the state and the perpetuation of order and stability. In many places any advocacy of the overthrow of the state is considered treason and is punishable by death.

In an attempt to humanize African legal systems, in June 1981 the 18th assembly of heads of state and government of the Organization of African Unity adopted the African Charter on Human and Peoples Rights. (Their collective conscience had been pricked by Idi Amin’s Uganda, Jean Bedel Bokassa’s Central African

Republic, and Marcias Nguema's Equatorial Guinea.) This charter sought to nudge Africa's legal systems away from their heavy colonial influences; it was somewhat influenced by African tradition with its emphasis (relative to Western traditions) on the individual as part of a group and the correlation of rights with duties. However, the Charter falls far short of prescribing new laws that could guarantee the rights, liberty and economic well-being of the majority of the people.

For instance, Article 13 of the Charter guarantees as follows the right to participate in government: "every citizen shall have the right to freely participate in the government of his country, either directly or through freely chosen representatives in accordance with the provisions of the law." In analyzing this proviso, we can see that the accommodating clause, "in accordance with the provisions of the law," strips the article of any meaningful human rights content. Equally, "the right to freely participate" is vague and meaningless and is of no consequence. The objective interpretation of the clause is that one is "free" only to the extent specified in the applicable national laws. Kotey argues that against the background of the African experience of one-party states, military dictatorships, and "revolutionary" autocracies, to offer the African people the right to participate in the governance of their countries within the parameters established by national law is to offer nothing at all.

In sum, African legal systems remain an impediment to the development of anarchism in Africa. The extant body of laws is capitalist inspired and is designed to perpetuate the status quo and the state system. In most parts of Africa, military dictatorships and civilian autocracies have introduced decrees and statutes that prohibit workers from organizing themselves into unions. In some countries, in fact, strikes and other forms of workers' actions are absolutely prohibited. To the extent that it sees nothing fundamentally wrong with the state system in Africa, The African Charter cannot address the issue of class antagonisms and oppression on the African continent.

And at the same time, as long as Africans continue to support the Western/colonialist-inspired legal system — and, importantly, to accept its underlying philosophies and rationale — African legal systems will remain an important obstacle to both human freedom and the development of anarchism in Africa.

The Military Class and the Status Quo

As discontent continues to heighten and the possibility of revolutionary action increases, the African military continues to act to maintain the status quo. Roger Murray explains military intervention as an attempt to prevent the radicalization of the people and revolutionary situations. Underlying this is the fact that the military is a central component of the national ruling class in all African countries

and thus benefits from both continued government rule and from alliances with foreign investors and, in many cases, bribes from them.

The military itself perceives its function as protection of the state from both internal and external threats. This becomes obvious when one examines military coups. Professor Nnoli notes that in the January 1966 coup in Nigeria, the coup plotters had no intention, either stated or implied, of advancing the interests of the poor. "Their interest was [in] the reformation of the system, in other words, to achieve the interests of the privileged classes without imposing undue strains on the system." Yet some commentators have dubbed this particular military coup as "revolutionary." To dispel such illusions, all one needs to do is to look at the concrete economic, social, and human rights results of African military coups. The results are invariably enrichment of the military, continued impoverishment of the majority, and woeful abuses of human rights.

To summarize: as the radicalization of mass consciousness increases, the military intervenes under the guise of attempting to stop society from sliding into a state of "anarchy" — a deliberately misused catchword for chaos and disorder. What the military succeeds in doing is to temporarily roll back the gains of working people and peasants in their attempts to build better lives for themselves.

Ethnic Versus Class Consciousness

The national question in African politics derives from Africa's colonial history and present-day neo-colonialism. The process of colonialization in Africa in which ethnic groups were arbitrarily regrouped into artificial political bodies has resulted in increased ethnic tensions and social and economic discrimination. Onigu Otite has noted that unequal access to political and economic resources among the various ethnic groups inevitably transforms ethnic divisions into antagonisms. Capitalist competition over control of the machinery of government plays on ethnic sentiments and sets groups against each other. Thus issues are distorted and simplified as ethnic- rather than class-based. In a paper presented to the Nigerian Anthropological and Sociological Association, Dr. Inyang Eteng exposes the successes of the Nigerian ruling class in utilizing ethnicity and religion to conceal "the class basis of most of the country's basic problems." According to Eteng, "the pernicious consequence of ethnic [consciousness] is to encourage communal hatred, corruption, violence, religious manipulation, interethnic conflict and to undermine the growth of class consciousness in favour of ethnic/state consciousness."

All of this makes it difficult for anarchism to take root in Africa because the bosses find it easy to atomize the working class by fanning the embers of ethnicity. The labor movement, for instance, becomes polarized along ethnic lines, and issues are

seen through ethnic prisms. In Nigeria, when the National Union of Petroleum and Natural Gas Workers (NUPENG) called a general strike in 1994 to demand an end to military dictatorship, the leadership of NUPENG branches in the northern part of the country resisted the strike. Their reason? They felt an ethnic identification with the military dictator, who is a northerner.

Religious and Cultural Factors

Religion is a profound feature of African life. Long before the earliest contact with Europeans, Africans had developed religious belief systems and ritual practices. This religious belief pattern was culture-based to a great extent, and it found expression in myths surrounding life and death questions. As we saw in Chapter three, certain beliefs and rituals actually solidified the communal nature of traditional African societies. But, like all religions, traditional African religions had conservative/reactionary aspects. The preeminent place accorded the supreme being or god in the affairs of men required every member of society to act and think in prescribed manners; holding beliefs perceived to run contrary to mainstream societal mores and values led to dire consequences.

Despite the compatibility of anarchism and the traditional African way of life, African culture still frowns on any set of ideas that conflict with religious beliefs or that promote values that lie outside the so-called mainstream, especially if they involve the overthrow of the existing system. This is not surprising, however, given the close affinity between spiritual and temporal powers.

Religion will continue to be an inhibiting factor despite such material factors as capitalist exploitation, social and economic inequality, and governmental tyranny — all of which inspire despair, upon which religion, especially imported Western religion, feeds. If war is the health of the state, despair is the health of religion. Until African workers and peasants find belief systems that provides them with real hope of happiness in the here and now, they will continue to grasp at religion's false hope of happiness in the hereafter.

International Solidarity

As stated earlier, anarchism as a systematic body of thought is only now beginning to find adherents in Africa. Much remains to be done. High in priority is the need to make people aware of the theoretical bases of anarchism, and to understand that anarchism is at the least as credible as other ideologies. In Africa today, as in too many other places, the word anarchism is synonymous with violence and chaos. But the image of anarchism will change if sufficient literature becomes available on the subject. To this end, anarchist groups in Africa need to set up a press to produce leaflets, pamphlets, and newsletters. There is also the need for alternatives

to the state electronic media, which along with state- and corporate-controlled newspapers is almost the only source of information for workers at present.

Africa remains a continent where no single ideological model can be judged to have been successful. Unlike America and Europe, where capitalism and “communism” have been institutionalized and practiced with qualified and limited successes, Africa presents an historical opportunity for any ideology capable of lifting people out of their present-day misery. Existing anarchist groups on the continent must and will play an important historical role in this regard.

Africa also needs international support for its emerging anarchist groups, which have only begun to challenge the state/capitalist system. Without international support, these groups, whom the governments view simply as troublemakers, stand little chance against the organized terror of the state. Because of the alliance between the state and international capital, local ruling classes are bound to receive the support of their international collaborators in crushing any perceived threat to the status quo.

In the last resort, will the local ruling classes call in foreign troops in an attempt to maintain their privileges, as occurred in Shaba Province in the Congo in the 1960s? Of course they will. Clearly the fight against international capital and against the state system must proceed internationally if it is to have any hope of success.

ANARCHISM'S FUTURE IN AFRICA

Anarchism in a World Context

The prospects for anarchism on the African continent are, in the final analysis, inextricably tied to the future of anarchism worldwide. Owing to its internationalist outlook and platform, the future of anarchism must be appraised within a global context; any attempt to localize it is bound to yield a distorted outcome. The obstacles to anarchism are, in the main, global; only their specifics are determined by local circumstances as is the case in Africa.

The crises of capitalism and, lately, marxist “socialism” worldwide have, historically speaking, assured the future of anarchism. Marx’s devastating critique of capitalism as a mode of production remains overall as valid today as when Marx himself first unleashed it. But the admirable logic and systematic approach of marxism has, ultimately, been undone by marxism’s internal contradictions.

Marxism’s overt attachment to the state system and its structures, as the convulsions in the Soviet Union, Eastern Europe, Africa and Asia have clearly demonstrated,

is a fundamental flaw. It has made a mockery of marxism's stated goals (freedom, socialism, and a classless society). The fact that there are still a few authoritarian state socialist outposts — China, North Korea, and Cuba — does not disprove this conclusion. Two outcomes in these nations seem very likely: a collapse of the state socialist ideology and system, as occurred in Eastern Europe, as these states lose their capacity to hold out on their own (Cuba, North Korea); and a transformation from state socialism to state capitalism — indeed, to a system with notable similarities to Italian-style fascism (China).

Either way, state socialism, like capitalism, is doomed. Throughout history, the overall tendency in the development of human society has been toward social equality and greater individual freedom. The pace has seemed agonizingly slow and there have been innumerable setbacks, but the overall trend is undeniable. Change has been the one constant in this development, and it almost certainly will be the one constant in the future. Given the endemic and irresolvable crises of both capitalism and state socialism, humanity's next step must almost inevitably be toward greater individual freedom and greater social equality — that is, toward anarchism, and especially toward anarchism's social expressions, anarchosyndicalism and anarchocommunism.

Marxist “communism” is a failed experiment. It simply didn't deliver the goods (freedom, social well-being and social equality); and given its history in the 20th century, it seems obvious that it cannot deliver the goods.

Neither can capitalism, including the laissez-faire variety of which American “Libertarians” are so enamored. Mere elimination of the state while retaining a capitalist economy would not eliminate hierarchy, domination, and the class structure. It would not and could not lead to a truly positive freedom. The best that it could produce would be a somewhat increased freedom from external interference.

Nearly a century ago, Emma Goldman defined “positive freedom” as the “freedom to [do].” While gross disparities exist in the distribution of wealth and income, it seems obvious that this positive freedom will exist meaningfully for only a small number of individuals — and social equality will remain an illusion. Of course, positive freedom is a relative, not an absolute, freedom; the best that we can strive for is equal positive freedom. And we cannot achieve that under any form of capitalism.

So, marxist “socialism” promised (but failed to deliver) equal positive freedom, while brutally suppressing the “negative” freedoms (freedom from restraint/coercion); and

capitalism has delivered only severely restricted negative freedoms. And it does not even contemplate equal positive freedom. Humankind can do better.

WORK IN

Anarchism — The Way Forward for Africa

The relevance of anarchism to human society has nowhere been more obvious than it is in Africa. Given the multitude of problems that stare the peoples of Africa in the face, the debilitating socioeconomic conditions under which a great majority of them live, and the overall economically deprived status of Africa vis-a-vis the other continents, anarchism is really the only liberating concept capable of turning “the dark continent” in a truly forward-looking direction.

Things have gone haywire for too long; only a drastic cure can satisfy an increasingly angry, bitter and restive population stretching from Cape Town to Cairo. Conditions include the seemingly endemic problem of ethnic conflicts across the continent; the continued political and economic marginalization of Africa at the global level; the unspeakable misery of about 90% of Africa’s population; and, indeed, the ongoing collapse of the nation state in many parts of Africa.

Given these problems, a return to the “anarchic elements” in African communalism is virtually inevitable. The goal of a self-managed society born out of the free will of its people and devoid of authoritarian control and regimentation is as attractive as it is feasible in the long run.

At the global level, human civilization is passing through a period of transition occasioned by the collapse of marxist “socialism” and the evidently insuperable crisis of capitalism and the state system. So, where do we go from here? As we noted earlier, all advances in human history to this point have been made possible by humanity’s quest for both freedom and human solidarity. Since this craving seems a natural instinct and, as such, is not going to disappear anytime soon, it follows that the continued evolution of society will be in the direction of freedom, equality, and community.

The process of anarchist transformation in Africa might prove comparatively easy, given that Africa lacks a strong capitalist foundation, well-developed class formations and relations of production, and a stable, entrenched state system. What is required for now is a long-term program of class consciousness building, relevant education, and increased individual participation in social struggles. Meanwhile, the crises and mutations in capitalism, marxist socialism, and the state system, individually and collectively, cannot but accelerate. For Africa in particular, long-term development is possible only if there is a radical break with both capitalism and the state system — the principal instruments of our arrested development and stagnation. Anarchism is Africa’s way out.

PROGRESS

The Voice from Below - Zambian Workers Speak Out **Sakhela Buhlungu and Lucien van der Walt** *(1997)*

Descriptions of workers resistance in Zambia during the transition to multiparty politics after being a single party state throughout the 70s until 1991. Showing the grassroots resistance workers put up to privatisation of formerly state owned firms and the associated job cuts.

Shopfloor workers and lower level management in Zambia are extremely critical of the economic policies of the MMD (Movement for Multiparty Democracy) government. Interviews conducted with shopstewards at Nitrogen Chemicals of Zambia (NCZ) give an insight into these views.

The factory

NCZ was established as a parastatal in 1968 to produce mine explosives. It later diversified into other chemicals and 1 fertilizers. Based at Kafue, an industrial town outside Zambia's capital city, Lusaka, the NCZ is a large plant, but its capacity is underutilised and it is poorly maintained.

As is typical in the parastatal sector, the plant used to offer employment to large numbers of workers in relatively protected conditions. However, in line with trends in other sectors of the economy, NCZ has been shedding workers and many employees work fewer shifts than they are paid for. In 1992, the workforce numbered 1600. By 1996, this had been reduced to 1073.

The union

The union at the plant, the National Union of Commercial and Industrial Workers (NUCIW), has been hard hit by the retrenchments, losing at least 400 union members in the process of downscaling. It is one of the unions which disaffiliated from the ZCTU at the federation's 1994 conference. In 1994, the NUCIW had a total membership of 26 000. At the time of the interviews, it had 900 members at NCZ. The union is based on strong shopfloor structures, illustrating the resilience of the labour movement despite decades of repression and government attempts at co-option.

Against privatisation?

Whereas the national union leadership of both the ZCTU and the breakaway unions accepts privatisation almost uncritically, workers at NCZ have responded, as one shopsteward put it, with “mixed feelings” Edgar Sinyanga, vice secretary of the shopstewards committee, says that workers hope that the factory will prosper in private hands. Mboma Mboma, the treasurer of the committee, adds that the government does not have the money to fund the enterprise, and that privatisation is the “cheapest way to keep the company going”.

On the other hand, Mboma Mboma notes that workers fear that the factory’s new owners will not be bound by law to observe conditions and standards set through collective bargaining in the past. Workers also fear further job losses, citing mass redundancies at other privatised plants. Indeed, the prospective buyers of NCZ have indicated that they would shed half of the current labour force.

Plant management shares these fears. The human resources manager, FB Chola, points out that new owners will bring in their own management teams. Since most of the bidders are foreign, this would lead to the ‘de-Zambianisation’ of economic control.

National union leaders argue that only comprehensive economic liberalisation can lay the basis for economic recovery. The shopstewards at NCZ agree with their diagnosis of the causes of decline, but are ambivalent on the measures necessary to reform the economy. They do not see private investment as the only key to growth. On the contrary, they argue for additional government investment and a more professional approach as alternatives to privatisation. They were very interested in the experiments in ‘commercialising’ (rather than fully privatising) parastatals that have taken place in South Africa.

Worker control?

Workers do not, however, hold to nationalisation as an innately progressive or worker-friendly project. They do not express a principled opposition to a market economy. For the union activists, the bottom line is the protection of jobs and working conditions. Nonetheless, they feel strongly that they had been robbed of the opportunity to express their views on alternative forms of restructuring. Instead, the ZPA simply announced the sale of the company.

At company level, the union also had very little opportunity to influence the process, even though an NUCIW shopsteward sits on the NCZ board. Although union involvement in company decision making, which was established during Kaunda’s regime, is clearly not working, shopstewards still feel that such systems should be retained. This is unlikely under privatisation.

Worker unity

Concern that workers' interests are protected also informs the shopstewards' views on the disaffiliation of their union from the ZCTU. They believe that it is very important for workers to speak with one voice through a united national trade union movement. They believe that trade union disunity has contributed to the government ignoring their views on economic restructuring.

Michael Hichintu, the vice-chair of the shopstewards committee, says that the general membership of the NUCIW was not consulted about disaffiliation. The majority of members are demanding that the union should rejoin the ZCTU: "We have demanded that the national union leadership should come and address the workers, but they do not come. If they do not come to address us soon, workers at our factory will consider leaving the NUCIW and re-affiliate directly to ZCTU."

This contrasts with the attitudes of national union leaders. Whereas they seem to place the greatest importance on competing with one another for positions in union elections (as was shown by the acrimony at the 1994 ZCTU congress that contributed to the split), the NUCIW workers place a premium on solidarity as the means to defend their interests.

Old divisions

Differences between trade union leadership and rank-and-file membership are by no means a new development in Zambia. Such conflicts were common in the 1960s and 1970s when the Kaunda government sought to enlist the unions in a project of rapid economic development. This was done by banning strikes in much of the economy, making conciliation procedures compulsory in the remainder and by extending direct control over the unions.

The ZCTU itself was formed on the orders of government which wanted a federation which could be closely monitored. Systematic attempts were also made to co-opt union head offices into the national political elite.

All of these efforts failed to halt worker resistance. Although the national union leaders committed themselves to policies such as wage restraint and increasing the pace of work, mineworkers in particular continued to resist work discipline. There was an increase in the number of strikes, in some cases in direct opposition to the ZCTU itself. While union leaders reaped rewards from their 'co-operative' attitude, workers were not rump to tighten their belts any further.

In the late 1970s the ZCTU moved into opposition against Kaunda and conflicts between union leadership and membership were reduced. They seem set, however, to take off once again.

Unity with management?

While workers and management at NCZ share similar concerns and fears over the process of restructuring, there is not necessarily a convergence of interests. Faced with redundancy, management tends to stress its unity with workers. According to Chola, “management believe that relations with the union are very cordial and there is close consultation:’ He argues that the union is a “social partner with management in efforts to improve efficiency and avoid redundancies.”

By contrast, workers do not identify with, or seek to defend the interests of management. The existence of a common threat does not remove their belief in the distinctiveness of their own interests, or raise their low opinion of management’s abilities. The solutions the NUCIW shopstewards put forward are, in fact, bad news for management.

The workers’ proposal that the state intervene more effectively in the NCZ implies current management would be replaced by more effective and skilled personnel. Workers are also convinced that their interests would be best articulated through a strong and united workers’ movement. This clearly excludes management from any real participation.

It also contrasts with the views held by the national leadership of the NUCIW. While union leaders are strongly wedded to the ideals of economic liberalisation, workers at NCZ express serious reservations about both privatisation and nationalisation. Their primary concern is the defence of workers’ interests. the policy that best advances this aim is the one they will support.

Whether this perspective will, over time, provide a comprehensive alternative to the current challenges facing the Zambian working class remains to be seen.

Unions and shopfloor militancy

Economic liberalisation has resulted in retrenchments, deteriorating work conditions, massive inflation and a government reluctance to pay severance packages. These conditions have met with a militant, if uneven, response from workers.

- A central site of conflict is the civil service. Workers in the Zambian United Local Authorities and Allied Workers Union (ZULAWLJ) embarked on a two month strike at Mufumbwe local council for higher wages in 1995. In Livingstone workers who had not been paid for two months also went on strike. In February 1996, the Civil Servants Union of Zambia (CSUZ) organised a week-long countrywide strike to demand payment of a 45% wage increase granted by the

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Industrial Court. They were joined by National Union of Public Service Workers (NUPSW) members. Further strikes took place in Livingstone in March, October and December of that year. After seven months of negotiation, the CSUZ was able to announce wage increases ranging between 36 and 70%, and a number of allowances.

- Retrenched workers have also organised protests demanding their severance packages. In January 1996, retrenched workers protested at the Livingstone office of Zambia Railways. In July former workers from the Kafila council launched a legal action to prevent the sale of the council houses in which they live. In September, 140 retrenched workers from the liquidated United Miing Company protested at the Chingola Civic Centre against non-payment of their severance packages. President Chiluba, who was visiting the area at the time, reacted angrily to protestors, telling them not to intimidate the government.

- A number of militant standoffs have occurred. In March 1996, three senior managers at Hybrid Poultry Farm in Lusaka were nearly lynched by 200 irate workers striking against their alleged mismanagement and bad attitude towards workers. The workers were members of the National Union of Plantation and Agricultural Workers (ONPAW). In October, the Managing Director of the Medical Stores narrowly escaped a similar fate, following an angry meeting on the future of the enterprise. The MD took the opportunity to escape as NUPSW officials addressed the workers. The workers then turned their anger on other managers, grabbing their car keys and jeering at them to walk home or catch a minibus. Workers passed a vote of no confidence in management.

- Other actions took place throughout 1996. In April, 2000 railway workers were dismissed for striking for better wages, but were later reinstated. In May, workers at the newly privatised Dairy Produce Board protested the decision by the company's new South African owners, Bonnita Zambia Limited, to retrench 200 of the company's 240 workers without retrenchment packages. In September, Zambia National Union of Teachers (ZNUT) members struck sporadically in Kitwe and Chingola against an inadequate wage increase. In September, junior nurses and other medical personnel at the University Teaching Hospital embarked on an illegal strike for higher wages and allowances. The strike was not supported by either the CSUZ or the Zambia National Union of Health and Allied Workers, who asserted that negotiations were already underway. The strikers were joined by other clinics. In October 1996, mineworkers striking over the non-payment of bonuses at the Nchanga division of Zambia Consolidated Copper Mines (ZCCM) were forced to work at gun point. They responded by sabotaging equipment underground. A number were dismissed as the strike continued, and the MUZ

had to battle to get those arrested for damaging equipment released.

- Both the CSUZ and the ZCTU attacked a 30-million kwacha, tax free gratuity fund for Members of Parliament in July, asking why it was only workers who were obliged to accept wage restraint. Academics at the Copperbelt University struck over the same issue. Their government later denied all reports of the gratuity.

Understanding Patriarchy
bell hooks
(2004)

Patriarchy is the single most life-threatening social disease assaulting the male body and spirit in our nation. Yet most men do not use the word “patriarchy” in everyday life. Most men never think about patriarchy—what it means, how it is created and sustained. Many men in our nation would not be able to spell the word or pronounce it correctly. The word “patriarchy” just is not a part of their normal everyday thought or speech. Men who have heard and know the word usually associate it with women’s liberation, with feminism, and therefore dismiss it as irrelevant to their own experiences. I have been standing at podiums talking about patriarchy for more than thirty years. It is a word I use daily, and men who hear me use it often ask me what I mean by it.

Nothing discounts the old antifeminist projection of men as all-powerful more than their basic ignorance of a major facet of the political system that shapes and informs male identity and sense of self from birth until death. I often use the phrase “imperialist white-supremacist capitalist patriarchy” to describe the interlocking political systems that are the foundation of our nation’s politics. Of these systems the one that we all learn the most about growing up is the system of patriarchy, even if we never know the word, because patriarchal gender roles are assigned to us as children and we are given continual guidance about the ways we can best fulfill these roles.

At church they had learned that God created man to rule the world and everything in it and that it was the work of women to help men perform these tasks, to obey, and to always assume a subordinate role in relation to a powerful man. They were taught that God was male. These teachings were reinforced in every institution they encountered— schools, courthouses, clubs, sports arenas, as well as churches. Embracing patriarchal thinking, like everyone else around them, they taught it to their children because it seemed like a “natural” way to organize life.

As their daughter I was taught that it was my role to serve, to be weak, to be free from the burden of thinking, to caretake and nurture others. My brother was taught that it was his role to be served; to provide; to be strong; to think,

strategize, and plan; and to refuse to caretake or nurture others. I was taught that it was not proper for a female to be violent, that it was “unnatural.” My brother was taught that his value would be determined by his will to do violence (albeit in appropriate settings). He was taught that for a boy, enjoying violence was a good thing (albeit in appropriate settings). He was taught that a boy should not express feelings. I was taught that girls could and should express feelings, or at least some of them. When I responded with rage at being denied a toy, I was taught as a girl in a patriarchal household that rage was not an appropriate feminine feeling, that it should be not only not be expressed but be eradicated. When my brother responded with rage at being denied a toy, he was taught as a boy in a patriarchal household that his ability to express rage was good but that he had to learn the best setting to unleash his hostility. It was not good for him to use his rage to oppose the wishes of his parents, but later, when he grew up, he was taught that rage was permitted and that allowing rage to provoke him to violence would help him protect home and nation.

We lived in farm country, isolated from other people. Our sense of gender roles was learned from our parents, from the ways we saw them behave. My brother and I remember our confusion about gender. In reality I was stronger and more violent than my brother, which we learned quickly was bad. And he was a gentle, peaceful boy, which we learned was really bad. Although we were often confused, we knew one fact for certain: we could not be and act the way we wanted to, doing what we felt like. It was clear to us that our behavior had to follow a predetermined, gendered script. We both learned the word “patriarchy” in our adult life, when we learned that the script that had determined what we should be, the identities we should make, was based on patriarchal values and beliefs about gender.

I was always more interested in challenging patriarchy than my brother was because it was the system that was always leaving me out of things that I wanted to be part of. In our family life of the fifties, marbles were a boy’s game. My brother had inherited his marbles from men in the family; he had a tin box to keep them in. All sizes and shapes, marvelously colored, they were to my eye the most beautiful objects. We played together with them, often with me aggressively clinging to the marble I liked best, refusing to share. When Dad was at work, our stay-at-home mom was quite content to see us playing marbles together. Yet Dad, looking at our play from a patriarchal perspective, was disturbed by what he saw. His daughter, aggressive and competitive, was a better player than his son. His son was passive; the boy did not really seem to care who won and was willing to give over marbles on demand. Dad decided that this play had to end, that both my brother and I needed to learn a lesson about appropriate gender roles.

One evening my brother was given permission by Dad to bring out the tin of marbles. I announced my desire to play and was told by my brother that “girls did not play with marbles,” that it was a boy’s game. This made no sense to my four- or five-year-old mind, and I insisted on my right to play by picking up marbles and shooting them. Dad intervened to tell me to stop. I did not listen. His voice grew louder and louder. Then suddenly he snatched me up, broke a board from our screen door, and began to beat me with it, telling me, “You’re just a little girl. When I tell you to do something, I mean for you to do it.” He beat me and he beat me, wanting me to acknowledge that I understood what I had done. His rage, his violence captured everyone’s attention. Our family sat spellbound, rapt before the pornography of patriarchal violence. After this beating I was banished—forced to stay alone in the dark. Mama came into the bedroom to soothe the pain, telling me in her soft southern voice, “I tried to warn you. You need to accept that you are just a little girl and girls can’t do what boys do.” In service to patriarchy her task was to reinforce that Dad had done the right thing by, putting me in my place, by restoring the natural social order.

I remember this traumatic event so well because it was a story told again and again within our family. No one cared that the constant retelling might trigger post-traumatic stress; the retelling was necessary to reinforce both the message and the remembered state of absolute powerlessness. The recollection of this brutal whipping of a little-girl daughter by a big strong man, served as more than just a reminder to me of my gendered place, it was a reminder to everyone watching/remembering, to all my siblings, male and female, and to our grownwoman mother that our patriarchal father was the ruler in our household. We were to remember that if we did not obey his rules, we would be punished, punished even unto death. This is the way we were experientially schooled in the art of patriarchy.

There is nothing unique or even exceptional about this experience. Listen to the voices of wounded grown children raised in patriarchal homes and you will hear different versions with the same underlying theme, the use of violence to reinforce our indoctrination and acceptance of patriarchy. In *How Can I Get Through to You?* family therapist Terrence Real tells how his sons were initiated into patriarchal thinking even as their parents worked to create a loving home in which antipatriarchal values prevailed. He tells of how his young son Alexander enjoyed dressing as Barbie until boys playing with his older brother witnessed his Barbie persona and let him know by their gaze and their shocked, disapproving silence that his behavior was unacceptable: There is nothing unique or even exceptional about this experience. Listen to the voices of wounded grown children raised in patriarchal homes and you will hear different versions with the same underlying theme, the use of violence to reinforce our indoctrination and acceptance of

patriarchy. In *How Can I Get Through to You?* family therapist Terrence Real tells how his sons were initiated into patriarchal thinking even as their parents worked to create a loving home in which antipatriarchal values prevailed. He tells of how his young son Alexander enjoyed dressing as Barbie until boys playing with his older brother witnessed his Barbie persona and let him know by their gaze and their shocked, disapproving silence that his behavior was unacceptable:

Without a shred of malevolence, the stare my son received transmitted a message. You are not to do this. And the medium that message was broadcast in was a potent emotion: shame. At three, Alexander was learning the rules. A ten second wordless transaction was powerful enough to dissuade my son from that instant forward from what had been a favorite activity. I call such moments of induction the “normal traumatization” of boys.

To indoctrinate boys into the rules of patriarchy, we force them to feel pain and to deny their feelings.

My stories took place in the fifties; the stories Real tells are recent. They all underscore the tyranny of patriarchal thinking, the power of patriarchal culture to hold us captive. Real is one of the most enlightened thinkers on the subject of patriarchal masculinity in our nation, and yet he lets readers know that he is not able to keep his boys out of patriarchy’s reach. They suffer its assaults, as do all boys and girls, to a greater or lesser degree. No doubt by creating a loving home that is not patriarchal, Real at least offers his boys a choice: they can choose to be themselves or they can choose conformity with patriarchal roles. Real uses the phrase “psychological patriarchy” to describe the patriarchal thinking common to females and males. Despite the contemporary visionary feminist thinking that makes clear that a patriarchal thinker need not be a male, most folks continue to see men as the problem of patriarchy. This is simply not the case. Women can be as wedded to patriarchal thinking and action as men.

Psychotherapist John Bradshaw’s clear-sighted definition of patriarchy in *Creating Love* is a useful one: “The dictionary defines ‘patriarchy’ as a ‘social organization marked by the supremacy of the father in the clan or family in both domestic and religious functions.’” Patriarchy is characterized by male domination and power. He states further that “patriarchal rules still govern most of the world’s religious, school systems, and family systems.” Describing the most damaging of these rules, Bradshaw lists “blind obedience—the foundation upon which patriarchy stands; the repression of all emotions except fear; the destruction of individual willpower; and the repression of thinking whenever it departs from the authority figure’s way of thinking.” Patriarchal thinking shapes the values of our culture. We are

socialized into this system, females as well as males. Most of us learned patriarchal attitudes in our family of origin, and they were usually taught to us by our mothers. These attitudes were reinforced in schools and religious institutions.

The contemporary presence of female-headed households has led many people to assume that children in these households are not learning patriarchal values because no male is present. They assume that men are the sole teachers of patriarchal thinking. Yet many female-headed households endorse and promote patriarchal thinking with far greater passion than two-parent households. Because they do not have an experiential reality to challenge false fantasies of gender roles, women in such households are far more likely to idealize the patriarchal male role and patriarchal men than are women who live with patriarchal men every day. We need to highlight the role women play in perpetuating and sustaining patriarchal culture so that we will recognize patriarchy as a system women and men support equally, even if men receive more rewards from that system. Dismantling and changing patriarchal culture is work that men and women must do together.

Clearly we cannot dismantle a system as long as we engage in collective denial about its impact on our lives. Patriarchy requires male dominance by any means necessary, hence it supports, promotes, and condones sexist violence. We hear the most about sexist violence in public discourses about rape and abuse by domestic partners. But the most common forms of patriarchal violence are those that take place in the home between patriarchal parents and children. The point of such violence is usually to reinforce a dominator model, in which the authority figure is deemed ruler over those without power and given the right to maintain that rule through practices of subjugation, subordination, and submission.

Keeping males and females from telling the truth about what happens to them in families is one way patriarchal culture is maintained. A great majority of individuals enforce an unspoken rule in the culture as a whole that demands we keep the secrets of patriarchy, thereby protecting the rule of the father. This rule of silence is upheld when the culture refuses everyone easy access even to the word "patriarchy." Most children do not learn what to call this system of institutionalized gender roles, so rarely do we name it in everyday speech. This silence promotes denial. And how can we organize to challenge and change a system that cannot be named?

It is no accident that feminists began to use the word "patriarchy" to replace the more commonly used "male chauvinism" and "sexism." These courageous voices wanted men and women to become more aware of the way patriarchy affects us all. In popular culture the word itself was hardly used during the heyday of contemporary feminism. Antimale activists were no more eager than their sexist

male counterparts to emphasize the system of patriarchy and the way it works. For to do so would have automatically exposed the notion that men were all-powerful and women powerless, that all men were oppressive and women always and only victims. By placing the blame for the perpetuation of sexism solely on men, these women could maintain their own allegiance to patriarchy, their own lust for power. They masked their longing to be dominators by taking on the mantle of victimhood.

Like many visionary radical feminists I challenged the misguided notion, put forward by women who were simply fed up with male exploitation and oppression, that men were “the enemy.” As early as 1984 I included a chapter with the title “Men: Comrades in Struggle” in my book *Feminist Theory: From Margin to Center* urging advocates of feminist politics to challenge any rhetoric which placed the sole blame for perpetuating patriarchy and male domination onto men:

Separatist ideology encourages women to ignore the negative impact of sexism on male personhood. It stresses polarization between the sexes. According to Joy Justice, separatists believe that there are “two basic perspectives” on the issue of naming the victims of sexism: “There is the perspective that men oppress women. And there is the perspective that people are people, and we are all hurt by rigid sex roles.”...Both perspectives accurately describe our predicament. Men do oppress women. People are hurt by rigid sexist role patterns, These two realities coexist. Male oppression of women cannot be excused by the recognition that there are ways men are hurt by rigid sexist roles. Feminist activists should acknowledge that hurt, and work to change it—it exists. It does not erase or lessen male responsibility for supporting and perpetuating their power under patriarchy to exploit and oppress women in a manner far more grievous than the serious psychological stress and emotional pain caused by male conformity to rigid sexist role patterns.

Throughout this essay I stressed that feminist advocates collude in the pain of men wounded by patriarchy when they falsely represent men as always and only powerful, as always and only gaining privileges from their blind obedience to patriarchy. I emphasized that patriarchal ideology brainwashes men to believe that their domination of women is beneficial when it is not:

Often feminist activists affirm this logic when we should be constantly naming these acts as expressions of perverted power relations, general lack of control of one’s actions, emotional powerlessness, extreme irrationality, and in many cases, outright insanity. Passive male absorption of sexist ideology enables men to falsely interpret this disturbed behavior positively. As long as men are brainwashed to equate violent domination and abuse of women with privilege, they will have no

understanding of the damage done to themselves or to others, and no motivation to change.

Patriarchy demands of men that they become and remain emotional cripples. Since it is a system that denies men full access to their freedom of will, it is difficult for any man of any class to rebel against patriarchy, to be disloyal to the patriarchal parent, be that parent female or male.

The man who has been my primary bond for more than twelve years was traumatized by the patriarchal dynamics in his family of origin. When I met him he was in his twenties. While his formative years had been spent in the company of a violent, alcoholic dad, his circumstances changed when he was twelve and he began to live alone with his mother. In the early years of our relationship he talked openly about his hostility and rage toward his abusing dad. He was not interested in forgiving him or understanding the circumstances that had shaped and influenced his dad's life, either in his childhood or in his working life as a military man.

In the early years of our relationship he was extremely critical of male domination of women and children. Although he did not use the word "patriarchy," he understood its meaning and he opposed it. His gentle, quiet manner often led folks to ignore him, counting him among the weak and the powerless. By the age of thirty he began to assume a more macho persona, embracing the dominator model that he had once critiqued. Donning the mantle of patriarch, he gained greater respect and visibility. More women were drawn to him. He was noticed more in public spheres. His criticism of male domination ceased. And indeed he began to mouth patriarchal rhetoric, saying the kind of sexist stuff that would have appalled him in the past.

These changes in his thinking and behavior were triggered by his desire to be accepted and affirmed in a patriarchal workplace and rationalized by his desire to get ahead. His story is not unusual. Boys brutalized and victimized by patriarchy more often than not become patriarchal, embodying the abusive patriarchal masculinity that they once clearly recognized as evil. Few men brutally abused as boys in the name of patriarchal maleness courageously resist the brainwashing and remain true to themselves. Most males conform to patriarchy in one way or another.

Indeed, radical feminist critique of patriarchy has practically been silenced in our culture. It has become a subcultural discourse available only to well-educated elites. Even in those circles, using the word "patriarchy" is regarded as passé. Often in my lectures when I use the phrase "imperialist white-supremacist capitalist patriarchy" to describe our nation's political system, audiences laugh. No one has

ever explained why accurately naming this system is funny. The laughter is itself a weapon of patriarchal terrorism. It functions as a disclaimer, discounting the significance of what is being named. It suggests that the words themselves are problematic and not the system they describe. I interpret this laughter as the audience's way of showing discomfort with being asked to ally themselves with an antipatriarchal disobedient critique. This laughter reminds me that if I dare to challenge patriarchy openly, I risk not being taken seriously.

Citizens in this nation fear challenging patriarchy even as they lack overt awareness that they are fearful, so deeply embedded in our collective unconscious are the rules of patriarchy. I often tell audiences that if we were to go doorto-door asking if we should end male violence against women, most people would give their unequivocal support. Then if you told them we can only stop male violence against women by ending male domination, by eradicating patriarchy, they would begin to hesitate, to change their position. Despite the many gains of contemporary feminist movement—greater equality for women in the workforce, more tolerance for the relinquishing of rigid gender roles—patriarchy as a system remains intact, and many people continue to believe that it is needed if humans are to survive as a species. This belief seems ironic, given that patriarchal methods of organizing nations, especially the insistence on violence as a means of social control, has actually led to the slaughter of millions of people on the planet.

Until we can collectively acknowledge the damage patriarchy causes and the suffering it creates, we cannot address male pain. We cannot demand for men the right to be whole, to be givers and sustainers of life. Obviously some patriarchal men are reliable and even benevolent caretakers and providers, but still they are imprisoned by a system that undermines their mental health.

Patriarchy promotes insanity. It is at the root of the psychological ills troubling men in our nation. Nevertheless there is no mass concern for the plight of men. In *Stiffed: The Betrayal of the American Man*, Susan Faludi includes very little discussion of patriarchy:

Ask feminists to diagnose men's problems and you will often get a very clear explanation: men are in crisis because women are properly challenging male dominance. Women are asking men to share the public reins and men can't bear it. Ask antifeminists and you will get a diagnosis that is, in one respect, similar. Men are troubled, many conservative pundits say, because women have gone far beyond their demands for equal treatment and are now trying to take power and control away from men...The underlying message: men cannot be men, only eunuchs, if they are not in control. Both the feminist and antifeminist views are rooted in

a peculiarly modern American perception that to be a man means to be at the controls and at all times to feel yourself in control.

Faludi never interrogates the notion of control. She never considers that the notion that men were somehow in control, in power, and satisfied with their lives before contemporary feminist movement is false.

Patriarchy as a system has denied males access to full emotional well-being, which is not the same as feeling rewarded, successful, or powerful because of one's capacity to assert control over others. To truly address male pain and male crisis we must as a nation be willing to expose the harsh reality that patriarchy has damaged men in the past and continues to damage them in the present. If patriarchy were truly rewarding to men, the violence and addiction in family life that is so all-pervasive would not exist. This violence was not created by feminism. If patriarchy were rewarding, the overwhelming dissatisfaction most men feel in their work lives—a dissatisfaction extensively documented in the work of Studs Terkel and echoed in Faludi's treatise—would not exist.

In many ways *Stiffed* was yet another betrayal of American men because Faludi spends so much time trying not to challenge patriarchy that she fails to highlight the necessity of ending patriarchy if we are to liberate men. Rather she writes:

Instead of wondering why men resist women's struggle for a freer and healthier life, I began to wonder why men refrain from engaging in their own struggle. Why, despite a crescendo of random tantrums, have they offered no methodical, reasoned response to their predicament: Given the untenable and insulting nature of the demands placed on men to prove themselves in our culture, why don't men revolt?... Why haven't men responded to the series of betrayals in their own lives—to the failures of their fathers to make good on their promises—with some thing coequal to feminism?

Note that Faludi does not dare risk either the ire of feminist females by suggesting that men can find salvation in feminist movement or rejection by potential male readers who are solidly antifeminist by suggesting that they have something to gain from engaging feminism.

So far in our nation visionary feminist movement is the only struggle for justice that emphasizes the need to end patriarchy. No mass body of women has challenged patriarchy and neither has any group of men come together to lead the struggle. The crisis facing men is not the crisis of masculinity, it is the crisis of patriarchal masculinity. Until we make this distinction clear, men will continue to fear that

any critique of patriarchy represents a threat. Distinguishing political patriarchy, which he sees as largely committed to ending sexism, therapist Terrence Real makes clear that the patriarchy damaging us all is embedded in our psyches.

Psychological patriarchy is the dynamic between those qualities deemed “masculine” and “feminine” in which half of our human traits are exalted while the other half is devalued. Both men and women participate in this tortured value system. Psychological patriarchy is a “dance of contempt,” a perverse form of connection that replaces true intimacy with complex, covert layers of dominance and submission, collusion and manipulation. It is the unacknowledged paradigm of relationships that has suffused Western civilization generation after generation, deforming both sexes, and destroying the passionate bond between them.

By highlighting psychological patriarchy, we see that everyone is implicated and we are freed from the misperception that men are the enemy. To end patriarchy we must challenge both its psychological and its concrete manifestations in daily life. There are folks who are able to critique patriarchy but unable to act in an antipatriarchal manner.

To end male pain, to respond effectively to male crisis, we have to name the problem. We have to both acknowledge that the problem is patriarchy and work to end patriarchy. Terrence Real offers this valuable insight: “The reclamation of wholeness is a process even more fraught for men than it has been for women, more difficult and more profoundly threatening to the culture at large.” If men are to reclaim the essential goodness of male being, if they are to regain the space of openheartedness and emotional expressiveness that is the foundation of well-being, we must envision alternatives to patriarchal masculinity. We must all change.

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The Dragon & The Hydra
Russell Maroon Shoatz
(2014)

Foreword by Julius Gavroche

Russell Maroon Shoatz, activist and writer, was a founding member of the revolutionary group Black Unity Council in 1969, as well as a member of the Black Panther Party and the Black Liberation Army. In 1972, he would be convicted for a 1970 killing of a Philadelphia police officer. He would spend 49 years in prison (22 of which in solitary confinement), being released in October of 2021 on grounds of compassion, only to die in December of the same year.

While not describing himself as an anarchist, Shoatz's history of decentralised slave and indigenous rebellions in the Americas looks "a whole lot like anarchism". For Shoatz, it was in the diffused, archipelago like resistance of autonomous maroon communities, that colonialism and plantation slavery would find its greatest opposition, to which the colonial would be forced to respond.

Against the "Dragon" of colonial authority, Shoatz celebrates the "Hydra" tradition of a black-indigenous "anarchism" that did not bear this name, but from which anarchists, and others, must learn.

THE DRAGON & THE HYDRA

"You have fifteen, twenty, fifty years of civil wars and people's struggles to go through, not only to change the conditions but in order to change yourselves and make yourselves fit for political rule." – Karl Marx addressing the IWMA, the body that would later become the First International.

Marx's words hit close to home. I've been involved in such movements for forty years, a product – originally – of the Black Liberation Movement of the 1960s, and subsequently being held as a political prisoner in the U.S. since 1972. Over that period, I've participated in a number of mass and party formations. It never fails to amaze me how much energy and time is dedicated towards establishing various groups' claims to being the so-called vanguard of some struggle for justice, when in

the end most of these exercises turn out to be sterile, when they don't degenerate into fratricidal conflicts.

Furthermore, I'd hazard it to say, that the entire history of Marxist Leninist social change has known few other methods, leading me to further say that a sober analysis of that history points to a struggle for supremacy – not only over the bourgeois ruling class, but also against the working class and all other oppressed people; against any and all formations either of the latter pull together that escape their control. Thus, their mantra of doing everything to seize power for the working class and oppressed is a farce.

If there has ever been a Marxist Leninist Vanguard party who has found itself in power and did not subsequently follow that script, I'm not aware of it. While arguments can always be found to rationalize why it was/is necessary to resort to such measures, and many such arguments do make sense – initially – a closer look always seems to force adherents to fall back on the mantra of the flawed individual(s) who did not hold true to Democratic Centralism's (DC) principles, which are themselves wide open to interpretation and manipulation, in order to seize the initiative in a struggle for domination – as opposed to trying to make a “concrete analysis of concrete conditions,” as V.I. Lenin instructed.

At the same time, history has shown that such ruthless methods are effective: if the objectives of those who used the DC methods were simply to seize power, then their record during the 20th century was impressive. It has proved itself as brutally efficient and capable of outdoing anything the bourgeois forces are capable of.

Nevertheless, in the end those who gained power using DC method have always ended up using it to defeat the aspirations of the workers and oppressed, and subsequently install the users of it as a new oppressive ruling class.

How could it be expected to produce any other outcome? DC concentrates more power in the hands of a relative few than any mechanisms the masses the former purport to be serving can muster: a recipe that's bound to conflict with the vagaries of flawed humans.

Stan Goff, in his masterful *Full Spectrum Disorder* (2004, Softskull Press), believes that DC as practiced by Lenin and his Bolsheviks did have a democratic basis, whereby an open and intense democratic struggle was carried out in order to arrive at positions and policies. Then all the party workers would move in a decentralized, free wheeling manner to make possible the implementation of those decisions (in the teeth of czarist repression), which ultimately had the effect of centralizing their

combined efforts, only later to change their methods. This led to a more all around centralization and very little democracy, if any. Without a doubt, any number of other Marxist/Leninist/Maoist (style) groups have had similar experiences.

Yet, if the clear historical tendency is to always gravitate towards less democratic and more oppressive forms of control, then quite frankly for one to say their use of historical materialism is leading them to formulate correct liberation ideas, theories and plans by using DC is ludicrous!

The Contemporary Situation

Here we are at the beginning of the 21st century, facing a global crisis unknown heretofore in the entire history of humankind. The threats to our collective existence are so multidimensional, it would take many other works to detail them all. Consequently, I'll limit myself to those that I believe are paramount to helping us break out of self-imposed mental roadblocks that hinder our efforts to move forward.

The main threat to humankind, the flora and fauna and our entire biosphere, is capitalist imperialism: a totally out of control, predatory, global system of accumulation and oppression that's on a collision course with the limitations of our planet: daily devouring children, women, people of color, the poor, workers of all stripes, wildlife and the environment in pursuit of profits.

All of our problems primarily rest on the artificial divisions that have been engendered between the oppressed for hundreds of years: divisions based on gender, race, ethnicity, culture, geography, sexual preferences, age and otherwise. These divisions have been fostered, historically, by those who have sought to use them in their pursuit of power and material gain.

Under imperialism, the overwhelming majority of our planet's humans are, ultimately, workers. Thus, Marx's address to the IWMA still holds true today. Albeit, he underestimated the degree of opposition the workers would face and the length of time it would take for them to overcome all of the obstacles in their path.

Marx, superb analyst that he was, due to the Eurocentric predilections that entrapped him, overlooked or dismissed important workers struggles that fell outside of Europe; or he at least failed to study them with the same intensity that he devoted to those European situations upon which he (primarily) based his otherwise well-based analysis. That set in motion other willful neglecting of formulating a proper evaluation of these 'other' struggles up until today even. A thorough study, evaluation, adaptation (wherever applicable) and understanding of

some of these workers struggles will help us move forward in our struggle against imperialism. There, we'll find proven, workable alternatives to the flawed DC forms of organizing: ones that mirror Stan Goff's analysis of the strengths of the early Bolsheviks' use of that form.

Back to the Future

First off, let me state that I'm not an anarchist. Yet, a lot of what you'll read here is gonna look a whole lot like anarchism! To that I will only quote an unknown ancient, who after racking his brain to formulate answers to vexing problems, only later to discover that those who had come along before him had already expounded on what he thought were his intellectual inventions, is supposed to have blurted, "confound those ancients, they've stolen all of our best ideas."

Therefore, to the anarchist reader, what follows cannot properly be termed anarchism, simply because the practitioners themselves never knew that word, nor were they in contact with people of that view, as anarchism is a European ideology and these parties – for the most part – were Africans and Amerindians with very limited input by a small number of outcast Europeans. Further, all of the struggles here written about had pretty much taken off and gained success prior to that concept's spread – under its classical anarchist thinkers and practitioners.

Still, the affinity between anarchism and the following is not rejected; on the contrary, it's welcomed as a sister set of ideas, beliefs and concepts – as long as the anarchists understand that they stand on equal footing, in a spirit of inter-communal self determination.

Historical overview

The following is a short outline of various workers struggles against early European imperialism, as practiced in Suriname, Jamaica, a number of southern areas of what is today the U.S., and finally Haiti. I'll outline how workers who had been enslaved fought longer than Marx's, "fifteen, twenty, fifty years of civil wars and peoples struggles..." in order to ultimately be able to exercise their own forms of self-determination and 'political rule.' And although all of them were as stratified as we are today, they were still able to democratically derive methods and policies that were collectively pursued by decentralized formations of their own making. And once winning their freedom from the various imperialist powers, unlike the later states ruled by Marxist vanguard formations, they never again relinquished their worker's-based autonomy, until this day, with one exception (Haiti) which deserves special attention.

Afterwards, I hope that you do your own in depth research and study, because to most people the bulk of this history will be unfamiliar. Then you can decide whether such organizational forms and methods would be useful to us in our struggle to save ourselves and the planet.

Suriname

“We must slay the Hydra.” That was the Dutch imperialists’ main concern in Suriname from their earliest days there.

(Hydra: In Greek mythology, a many headed monster whose heads regrew when struck off. It was finally killed by Hercules. Also the largest and longest constellation in the sky, but with no particular bright star.)

On the northern coast of South America, this tropical country borders Guyana and French Guyana and fronts the Caribbean Sea, with Brazil to its south. Geographically above one-third, again, as large as Cuba.

The first European interlopers to visit the area were the British, which were followed by the Dutch. Always it changed hands between them, but the Dutch were the main imperial power to occupy the country from the mid 1600s, up until the 1970s. All during that period, the overwhelming majority of the indigenous Amerindian populations were either suppressed, forced to flee to less hospitable areas, or exterminated.

The Dutch at that time were one of the world’s major imperial powers, vying alongside of the British, Spanish, Danish, Portuguese and the French for control of North and South America, the Caribbean and other places in the world.

The Dutch West Indies Company was one of the first, and a major corporation in the world. And in Suriname, it launched plantation-based production of cash crops on a large scale, using enslaved workers imported from different parts of Africa. Added to that were a number of other plantations run by other European ‘entrepreneurs,’ along with their overseers, shop-keepers, militias, artisans, administrators, bureaucrats and sailors, and a small percentage of (mostly) poor white women who had been exiled from Europe.

Compared to the enslaved Africans and the suppressed Amerindians, one could compare everyone else – but the small number of plantation operating entrepreneurs and administrators – with what we today recognize as the technologically-advanced countries’ labor aristocracy and petty bourgeoisie with those elements being fully dependent for their livelihood and protection of their persons and property, from

the enslaved workers and remaining indigenous people, on the Dutch military, militias, the imperial court and the big mercantilists.

I made those comparisons because we all too often fail to point out that the enslaved Africans were transported across the Atlantic to assume the role of workers, and just about everyone else associated with their plight were also – first and foremost – other workers, similar to our plight today. And the issue of race did not – could not – change that basic fact! So keep that in mind as we develop this work.

Amongst the Africans were many different ethnic groups from different areas of the continent, all speaking different languages and with many varied religious and cultural practices. To give an idea of the stratification of these Africans, the fact that they all had dark skins meant next to nothing to them in terms of solidarity. Where they originally came from everybody had dark skin: friends and enemies alike! Further, it was the practice of the plantation owners to try to purchase workers from different backgrounds in order to keep them divided as much as possible. And because the work was so brutal and the food was so inadequate, most plantations were really death camps, where the African workers were literally worked to death in a few years, only to be replaced with newly-imported enslaved workers, who would also go on to make handsome profits for the owners. Thus, the turnover itself was a powerful check on the formation of any solidarity between the enslaved workers.

Be that as it may, almost from the first importation of enslaved Africans, there developed a tradition of flight from slavery: Africans ran away to the forests, swamps and highlands. These fugitives came to be known as Bosch Creoles: Dutch for Bush Creoles, or “born in the forest” and later bush negroes, who we’ll call Maroons throughout our study, as a generic name that has come to be used as an accepted way to describe fugitive, enslaved people throughout the western hemisphere.

Throughout the western hemisphere, we witness these collective Maroons developing and using a very effective form of decentralized organizing that not only served to help them defeat their former enslavers, but has helped them remain autonomous from all unwanted overseers for hundreds of years – until our time.

It must be recalled that the Suriname Africans were from many different backgrounds, so when they would come together as Maroons that would have to be factored in. They had to organize using democratic methods, and the glue that held them together was their collective focus on defeating their enslavers’ attempts to control them; that centralized their efforts.

There remained, however, one class of their communities who did not fit into that category: those Africans who did not flee, but were forced by maroon raiders to leave the plantations. They did not enjoy a say in their communities' affairs until they had proven themselves.

But as a general rule, individuals and small groups would flee the plantations to join the Maroons, and on occasions large conspiracies were organized that saw the enslaved workers preparing the ground work for maroon guerrillas to raid plantations and liberate scores at a time.

This example exhibits decisions arrived at by truly democratic means, and then carried out in a centralized manner, all done by otherwise decentralized groups. Long before our later Bolsheviks!

Over a 150 year period, the various Maroon communities of Suriname would wage a guerrilla war with the Dutch and English slavers to remain free. Today in Suriname their direct descendants still occupy the areas their ancestors fought on, and most of them have never suffered under slavery – even before the U.S. signed its own Declaration of Independence in 1776.

Even as this is written they remain autonomous from the government of Suriname – which gained its independence from the Netherlands – whose Dutch ancestors we're discussing in 1975. In fact, the descendents of the early Maroons were again forced to fight another guerilla war against the newly-independent government in 1980: a successful effort on the part of the Maroons to maintain their autonomy and control over the lands they've historically occupied.

Their decentralized methods had their drawbacks. Their enemies in the imperialist camp were able to manipulate various Maroon communities into signing 'treaties' that gave those communities their freedom from enslavement and land to use – in exchange for them cooperating in the hunting down and capturing of other fugitives. By doing that, the enslavers could avoid the all but useless wars designed to capture or kill the skillful Maroon guerrillas, and everyone on the Maroon communities fell in that category: at the drop of a hat, the women and children in those communities could pack their belongings and escape to pre-arranged and built-up alternative settlements, while the men (and some women) busied themselves in fighting rear guard actions against the pursuing colonial soldiers.

It turns out, however, that although the treaties did solve some of the imperialist's problems, the Suriname Maroons never really fulfilled their obligations to help the imperialists hunt and capture other Maroons. A narrative of the Dutch forces'

generations-long wars designed to either capture or kill the Boni Maroons is instructive in that regard (see *The Boni Maroon Wars in Suriname*).

By the mid-18th century, the Dutch had been forced by over a century of Maroon guerilla warfare to sign treaties with three of the most powerful Maroon communities: the Ndjuka, Saramaka and the Matawai. All of these Maroon communities had evolved over generations from fugitive African – from any different backgrounds – into new ethnicities which adopted the already mentioned names. Most importantly, they had soundly defeated all of the imperialist forces fielded to capture or kill them, while continuing to expand their numbers and offer an ever-growing threat to the Dutch colony.

The treaties came with yearly ‘gifts’ of all kinds that the Dutch would deliver to the Maroons: textiles, pots and pans, guns, powder, axes, knives, mirrors, nails, liquor and just about anything agreed upon during the periodic sit-downs between the parties. The underlying objectives of the imperialists were to both rid themselves of a dangerous enemy and turn them into valuable allies.

Yet once it became known to the still enslaved African workers that they could no longer rely on the Njuka, Saramaka and Matawai for refuge and protection, they began to seek out smaller Maroon concentrations. In the early 1700s, one of those small groups was headed by an African named Asikan Silvester. Born into this group was a child called Boni. His mother was a fugitive African and his father either African or Amerindian. Subsequently, the group chose Boni to be its new head, after Asikan became too old to serve in that position. This group of Maroons would eventually become known to the Dutch as a new center of resistance, and for the next two generations Boni would lead them, and they would be known to history as the Boni Maroons – becoming an ethnicity. Thus, the Boni Maroons just replicated what the imperialists thought they were suppressing by the signing of the treaties with the other Maroons. Consequently, they would not sign any more treaties with either the Boni’s or any other Maroons – up until the end of the slave period.

Boni – for his part – would lead his group to aggressively wage war on the imperialists until his death in his mid-sixties.

Yet even while the Boni’s became the main fighting force amongst all of those Maroons who were still at war with the Dutch, they still observed and respected the democratic wishes of any fugitives or Maroon groups they dealt with; never trying to centralize all control in their hands. Although they were past masters in the use of coordinated guerilla campaigns amongst all of the decentralized groups – during which a unified command was essential – they still never demanded that

everyone integrate themselves into the Boni community; or put themselves directly under Boni outside of when participating in agreed-upon guerilla campaigns and during raids. Thus, the Dutch recorded their knowledge of the frequent coming together of the decentralized fighters of Kormantin Kodjo, Chief Puja, Boni and Baron during large campaigns, while separating and remaining decentralized and autonomous otherwise.

Unlike the ‘treaty Maroons,’ they never became dependent upon the imperialists for anything, instead relying on their raiding capabilities to capture guns, powder, cannons, and other useful items. Moreover, they had perfected methods of large-scale open field agriculture that allowed them to raise harvest and store more food than they could consume – along with more farm animals than they could use to supplement their diets.

Dutch soldiers recorded discovering Boni and related Maroon fields that took them an hour one way and 30 minutes the other way to mark off for destruction, along with so many domesticated chickens they had to slaughter the excess after feasting on them for days. They and their Maroon foes always noted how much better the Maroons were fed, and how much better physical specimens the Maroons showed themselves to be. It became a prime motivator of the Dutch-led troops to hunt for and locate Maroon food stores and farm animals in order to supplement their own poor diets.

During the Dutch’s final major campaign in the second Boni war, an expeditionary force of 1600 Dutch regulars and European mercenaries, accompanied by thousands more Colonial soldiers and enslaved African workers and ‘free negro rangers’ was also unsuccessful, causing the commander to return to Europe with less than a dozen of his force he’d led to Suriname; and to die himself within a year. From then until the ending of slavery, the Dutch relied on treachery, trying to manipulate the various treaties and (still) fighting Maroons against each other. And although they did succeed in getting a younger, less-experienced generation of treaty Maroons to assassinate Boni, Chief Puja and Kormantin Kodjo (who were old men, who had turned over their leadership to younger maroons), the other fighting Maroons continued to exercise their autonomy until slavery was abolished. And today the Boni Maroons still live autonomously in Suriname proper, where there’s more than 70 thousand direct descendants of the ‘bush negroes.’

The Dutch imperialists tried their best to slay the Hydra! They failed. Was it because the Maroons decentralized formations prevented the Dutch from concentrating their superior resources against any one centralized leadership – any bright star? I think so.

Have the various bush negroe ethnicities been able to maintain their autonomy over hundreds of years, against all oppressive forces, through their refusal to allow themselves to be subjected by any broad centralizing forces? I think so again.

Jamaica

Across the Caribbean from Suriname – in Jamaica – from as early as the 1650s there developed similar decentralized Maroon communities, only there they were fighting against the local enslavers of the British Empire. After generations of unsuccessful campaigns by the British against the Maroon guerrillas, they too hit upon the necessity of trying to divide the fighting Maroons from their main source of new recruits: the enslaved African workers. So the British offered the Maroons ‘treaties’ similar to those in Suriname.

To force the British to adopt such methods, the Maroons fought tenaciously, skillfully and bravely for over 100 years! And even though there (also) we witness a number of decentralized groups, they roughly became to be recognized as the Windward and Leeward Maroons: the former located in the eastern (windward) end of Jamaica, and the latter on the westward (leeward) side. And history records the most noted Maroon of the Windwards as an African womyn named Granny Nanny – who even had a town named after her in the Maroon’s liberated territory. Indeed, Nanny Town became the center of the resistance to British plantation imperialism in Jamaica, the headquarters from which the Maroon bands almost succeeded in driving all of the imperialists from the island altogether – even though British soldiers captured and burned Nanny Town on a number of occasions.

The dominant personality amongst the Leewards was an African man named Kodjo. History records Kodjo as leading a tightly controlled and centralized operation. When the Windwards had to make a trek across the island during one fierce suppression effort, seeking the Leewards help, even Kodjo could not force them to abandon their autonomy.

Telling, it was Granny Nanny who led a segment of decentralized Windwards to resist signing the treaties the longest. She went as far as to have the British envoys killed on more than one occasion, and only submitted after Kodjo and all of the male Maroon heads had capitulated.

After that, these Maroons were used to help the British hunt and capture new runaways, as well as suppress revolts amongst the still enslaved African workers; although they fiercely clung to the freedom and autonomy they and their ancestors had fought for!

In fact, over a generation later their descendents would again engage the British in the Trelawny War in the middle of the 1790s, during which a mere 267 Maroon guerillas fought thousands of British soldiers, local militia and enslaved Africans to a complete stand still. They, however, were also tricked and placed on boats to be deported to Canada – and later to Africa after accepting a truce.

Even so, from then until our time, the descendents of those remaining Maroon communities in Jamaica still continue to occupy the lands they fought on, and they've never recognized any overlords; neither the later British or black governments!

The United States

It's ironic that those of us who live in the U.S. continue to neglect to thoroughly study and critique the wealth of documented history about the anti-imperialist and anti-expansionist struggles that have occurred here since the Europeans first started colonizing this area, other than the well-known Native American suppression and genocide.

Like the volumes of works written about the Civil Rights, Black Liberation struggle of the 1960s and 1970s, the early Labor Movement, Womyn's Suffrage Movement, Abolitionist Movement and Reconstruction period, there's a mountain of other revolutionary material we can learn from. And not surprisingly, that information concerns the struggles of enslaved workers on these shores prior to the abolition of chattel slavery. In fact, it mirrors the already mentioned struggles in Suriname and Jamaica, with the important distinction that it encompasses multi-racial aspects – more so than either of the former cases. Namely, in the U.S. – until the abolition of slavery – Africans, Amerindians and Europeans (in some areas) allied themselves to fight against the imperialist and expansionist powers. That phenomenon was also evident in the Caribbean and South America, but due to the large percentages of enslaved Africans, compared to enslaved Amerindians and Europeans, most of those struggles were primarily between the enslaved Africans and the European imperialists.

Thus today in the U.S., such emotionally charged epithets as hillbilly and poor white trash are totally divorced from their historical roots. The first people to be labeled as such were the descendents of the indentured European workers, who had escaped that status and allied themselves with both the Amerindian and Africans who had also escaped from slavery or servitude, all of whom combined into Maroon communities in areas that are now a part of the United States.

Initially, the derogatory 'poor white trash' label was reserved for the rebellious, unexploitable and non-conformist early Europeans who the colonial and imperial

elites could neither control, nor use, to increase their power; thus the 'trash' label. And later the hillbilly label and imagery were used to similarly isolate those runaways who moved into the southern Appalachian mountains to also escape their former indentured status. Both segments were staunch enemies of the imperialists and colonists, who many times allied with Africans and Amerindians, also fugitives from enslavement. At times, these three groups formed tri-racial Maroon communities. At other times, they were firmly allied, though living separately – except in the case of the Amerindians and Africans who mixed freely. Consequently, from the 17th century until the abolition of slavery in the U.S., there were also Maroon communities in areas stretching from the pine barrens of New Jersey, down the east coast to Florida, and in the Appalachian mountains and later to migrate to Mexico's northern border regions. The best known (but little studied) ones were those that occupied the dismal swamp of Virginia and North Carolina and the Seminoles of Florida, which contrary to popular belief have never been an Amerindian tribe, but instead – from their beginnings – an ethnic group made up of Africans and Amerindians who came together to form the ethnicity: just like the Boni Maroons were formed in Suriname.

All of this replicated the decentralized organizing forms of the Maroons in Suriname and Jamaica. And although their political histories fall short of them winning and maintaining the degree of autonomy achieved in Suriname or Jamaica, the descendents of the Seminoles in Mexico and the U.S. still fiercely guard their communities against the Mexican and U.S. governments: in Florida they're recognized as a semi-autonomous tribe, and the Africans (Seminole negroes) in Oklahoma, Texas and Mexico also distinguish themselves from their neighbors – while calling Blacks in the U.S. 'state negroes.' According to New Afrikan nationalist cadre from the U.S. who have worked around them, the African Seminoles never considered themselves citizens of the U.S. like African-Americans do.

Finally, the legendary history and present posture of the people of the Southern Appalachians – in still refusing to fully integrate into the fabric of the U.S. – rests more on a forgotten history of their ancestors' struggle to remain free from any servitude or domination, than they or we understand. Instead, we've adopted the bourgeoisie myth about them being hopelessly backwards and ultra-racist, although in reality true hillbilly culture and practice is really isolationist and independent, reflecting the autonomist spirit of their ancestors.

Haiti

The history of Haiti provides an excellent laboratory in which to test my thesis. What would become the country of Haiti was once known as San Domingo or

Saint Domingo, the western part of the island of Hispanola in the Caribbean. Today the country of the Dominican Republic occupies the larger eastern part of the island.

There, between 1791 and 1804, we witness one of the most titanic struggles ever engaged in between (enslaved) workers and their overlords. It is through an examination of the events surrounding that struggle that we can clearly measure the strengths and weaknesses of our dragon and hydra: centralized and decentralized forces of change. Here is a much neglected goldmine of historical contribution to our search for historical lessons – on par with the great French revolution of 1789. For generations prior to the French revolution – that set the stage for the Haitian revolt two years later – Maroon guerrillas and communities had been operating throughout the entire island of Hispanola. And later many of their descendents would distinguish themselves amongst the multitudes of the little-known heroic figures of those times. Most notably, the intrepid Mackandal, in the pre-revolutionary period (CA 1750s), organized and led a select group of African Maroons and enslaved plantation workers in a conspiracy designed to overthrow the French and colonial powers by massive and bewildering use of a vast array of poisons: against individuals, livestock, supplies, water and any African workers who were believed to be sympathetic to, or in league with, the French.

After years of terrorizing the island, Mackandal slipped up and was betrayed and subsequently burnt at the stake, fatally crippling his tightly organized, centralized movement.

By that time, in just about all of the areas, original Amerindians had been exterminated, only to be replaced by an endless supply of enslaved Africans. The latter produced so much sugar and other agriculture crops that San Domingo became the crown jewel of the French empire and the backbone of the French economy. So Mackandal's terror campaigns were quickly pushed to the back of the exploiters' minds.

But within two years of the outbreak of the French revolution, and the subsequent turmoil caused by it in that colonial possession, a new generation stepped into Mackandal's shoes.

One dark night, a large assembly of the colony's Africans met at a secret ceremony; both enslaved workers and Maroon guerrillas met on a mountain outside of town. They represented thousands of other Africans – both on the many plantations and in the fugitive communities in the mountains. The ceremony and last minute plans were being overseen by Boukman and an enslaved female – they were both Vodun

(Voodoo) spiritual leaders. There was no need to haggle over any last minute plans. They knew better than Karl Marx's (later) "wage slaves" that "they had nothing to lose but their chains." And the horrible treatment that their 'masters' heaped on them added a sense of desperation for them to kill or be killed once they revolted! Yet, Boukman and the female offered more inspiration than centralized leadership. And when the revolt was launched shortly thereafter, it was led by scores of decentralized bands of African workers, Maroon guerrilla groups –who were all joined shortly thereafter by separate Mulatto-led groups.

Before the well-known Toussaint L'Ouverture came on the stage, the Haitian revolution was being led by figures that the decentralized groups propelled forward: the Maroons Jean Francois, Bissou and Lamour Derance, and the rebel-enslaved workers Romaine the Prophetess and Hyacinthe the fearless leader of the battle of Croix des Bouquets. And the Mulattos had a number of their own independent groups and distinguished leaders plus there was also a small segment of whites who were in league with the anti-slavery wing of the French Jacobins, and who loosely allied themselves with one rebel group or another.

Within two years of the beginning of the French revolution, and continuing for twelve harrowing years, the Haitian revolutionaries would go on to militarily engage and defeat first their colonial enslavers, and afterwards a succession of armies fielded by Spain and England, as well as a traitorous Mulatto army, and finally tens of thousands of Napoleon Bonaparte's veteran French 'revolutionary' troops.

The victorious Africans would go on to found the country of Haiti in 1803/1804; the only country in world history established by formerly enslaved workers.

What better example could we use to weigh Marx's words about the "workers" engaging in, "fifteen, twenty, fifty years of civil wars and peoples struggles... in order to change yourself and make yourself fit for political rule?" (ref. cited)

The Marxist giant, C.L.R. James, who penned the classic *Black Jacobins* (1963, Random House) dissects that struggle. In it, James compares the Haitian revolutionary army led by Toussaint and later Jean Jacques Dessalines and Henry Christophe with the later Russian Bolshevik party: "[Toussaint and]...his Black army generals filling the political role of the Bolshevik party" (James, 283). This brilliantly led, tightly organized and courageous army represents my dragon here. And James' book does much to rescue them from the shadows of history from our study. They are the ones who would surface as the most notable elements, while scores of the decentralized receded to the background.

So on first reading about them, you would think that this centralized dragon was the revolutionaries' best weapon. But, the European empire builders of France, England, Spain – and the U.S. wannabes – were not going to give up, even though they all had been defeated, or were afraid to directly intervene (in the case of the U.S.).

As it turned out, however, with Toussaint – backed by the 'revolutionary' army – assuming the governance of the island, the imperialists pressured and maneuvered him into a position where he and his (dragon) army began to impose intolerable conditions on the revolutionary masses of workers. And, "in the north around Plaisance, Limbe, Dondon, the vanguard [masses] of the revolution was not satisfied with the new regime" (James, 275–276).

And astonishingly, in the teeth of Napoleon's renewed threats and the hostile machinations of the British and Americans, "Toussaint submits, along with his generals" (James, 325–327).

Thus, at one swell swoop, these leaders had been forced to play the role of neo-colonial compradors, our dragon had been corralled, hand-cuffed and chained, and they subsequently then set out to use the 'revolutionary army' to deliver the masses back into slavery! Simply because Napoleon feared them, his secret plan was to place all of Haiti's Africans into chattel slavery, and he sent his brother in law and (eventually) sixty thousand more French troops to accomplish his aims.

Recognizing the weaknesses of the dragon forces, and the true intentions of the French "[Lamour] Derance and the petty chieftains, North, South and West, each in his own district summoned Blacks to revolt" (James, 327).

So, here we see the hydra doing battle with the (now) traitorous dragon and the French imperialists.

"It is a recurrent tale this (Dessalines and his generals hunt down these 'Brigands'). Once more, the masses had shown greater political understanding than their leaders" (James 338–339 and footnote 39). Our formerly heroic revolutionary army had been reduced to suppressing the revolutionary masses and forcing the latter into, "...fighting Black generals [who were] trying to crush the 'Brigands' for the French," [propelling our hydra back to center stage]. "The little local leaders... beat off [their and the French] attacks...causing the French to be more open to yellow fever" (James, 346–347).

Consequently, we witness the decentralized hydra elements launching the revolution, being displaced by Toussaint's army – the dragon – only to resume their leadership roles during a crisis that saw the dragon capitulate to the French, thus showing itself as the most indispensable weapon the revolutionaries developed.

Later, as is well-known, Toussaint was kidnapped and taken to France where he later died in prison, opening the way for his chief lieutenant Jean Jacques Dessalines to (again) switch back to the rebels' side, rally the revolutionary army to also switch back to the masses' side, and along with the hydra forces go on to totally annihilate the remaining French forces on the island and declare independence and appoint himself the new country's emperor.

An excellent soldier, Dessalines showed himself to be a cruel tyrant over the Haitian people. Thus, he was assassinated by them within a few years of assuming power.

He was replaced by another general from the dragon forces: Henry Christophe, who was appointed president in 1807, but by 1811 had declared himself king. He too would be killed by his own people in 1829.

Thus, we can clearly see how Haiti's dragon forces played a very ambivalent role in the rebel fight for independence: They started out as tenacious and brilliant fighters against all of the European imperial and colonial elements, and the traitors amongst the Mulatto's, who were all but bent on keeping the enslaved Africans underfoot. During the course of the revolutionary struggle, they all opportunistically switched to the French imperialist's side, and went on to attempt to drown the still revolutionary masses and their decentralized group in blood; hoping that way the French would allow them to serve as a new elite class of African policemen against a re-enslaved African worker's class.

Failing to suppress the rebels, the dragon forces rejoined the hydra elements and lent their weight to totally defeating the French, only to once again turn against the revolutionary masses by establishing themselves as a dictatorial and exploitative African elite.

For its part, the decentralized hydra forces never veered from their objectives of winning as much freedom from servitude and oppression as possible. From the pre-revolutionary times of Mackandal, up through the 1791–1804 Haitian revolutionary war, and even down to our time, they've continued to struggle towards those ends. And it's highly instructive to know that in addition to fighting the French during their revolution, they were also under attack by Toussaint's

dragon forces, who displayed hatred and fear of everything from their refusal to relinquish their maroon/decentralized organizational formations, to their practice of their traditional Vodun (Voodoo) spiritual systems, the latter which did a great deal to inspire their soldiers to martyr themselves for the cause of freedom. And the treacherous attacks carried out on them by Christophe and Dessalines – even while both sides were allied against the imperialists – were early signs that the dragon forces were ultimately concerned with power for its own sake.

Then, after being pushed to the side after the French were driven out, the decentralized hydra elements were forced to – again – go underground and eventually morph into semi-secret Vodun societies that until today remain a little recognized or understood autonomous element amongst the oppressed Haitians. Wade Davis' classic *The Serpent and the Rainbow*, as well as *Voodoo in Haiti*, by Alfred Metraux (1972, Shocken Books), paints a fascinating picture of how these decentralized elements went from centuries of being Maroon guerrillas, to revolutionary fighters, later to be forced underground only to surface as today's Bizango, Zobop, Bossu, Macandal, Voltigeurs and other semi-secret Vodun societies, thereby constituting a major segment of Haitian society that no domestic or foreign oppressors have ever been able to eradicate; although the dictator "Papa Doc" Duvalier was able to manipulate some of them by integrating them into dreaded "ton ton macoute" secret police.

And in another Stan Goff book, *Sex and War*, he tells us, "there are Maroons in Haiti again, with the wave of repression sweeping the country in the wake of the last U.S.-crafted coup d'etat (February 29, 2004)... twice in 2004 I visited one of these Maroon communities in the Central Plateau".

And it's hardly the case that we must restrict our study of the strengths and weaknesses of centralized and decentralized groups as I have. What about the history of how decentralized forces defeated Napoleon's army in Spain; how decentralized forces have defeated every known invader in the border regions of what is today Afghanistan and Pakistan, and how decentralized insurgents are today defeating the U.S. and her allies in Iraq?

Some Parting Words from a Farsighted Marxist

C.L.R. James penned *The Black Jacobins* many years before he would later crystallize his theories about the ideas here. Yet on this in the Introduction to *Marxism for Our Times: C.L.R. James on Revolutionary Organization*, edited by Martin Glaberman (1999, University Press of Mississippi) we learn, "in 1948 James wrote what was eventually published as 'Notes on Dialectics.'" This was a study of working class organization in light of dialectics and marked the ultimate

break with Trotskyism, the rejection of the vanguard party. The importance of this break and the theoretical validation of the James viewpoint was demonstrated eight years later in the Hungarian Revolution of 1956 and later the French revolt of 1968, the Czech spring of 1968, and the solidarity movement in Poland in 1980... On the one hand, no group of the left or of the right was in any way prepared to accept the possibility of proletarian revolution in totalitarian dictatorships of Eastern Europe or in a democratic country such as France. All of their assumptions proved false: that the working class needed a party to lead it in revolution; that the working class needed a press and a network of communication; that what was needed was some crisis in the society such as a depression or a war. With none of these factors in place, the workers of Hungary in forty-eight hours took over all of the means of production in that society, created a form of dual power, forced the Community Party to re-organize under another name, and was crushed by nothing in Hungarian society but by an invasion of Soviet tanks.”

[And in his own words] “James wrote: ‘Now if the party is the knowing of the proletariat, then the coming of age of the proletariat cans the abolition of the party. That is our universal, stated in its boldest and most abstract form...The party as we know it must disappear. It is disappearing. It will disappear as the state will disappear. The whole laboring population becomes the state. That is the disappearance of the state. It can have no other meaning. It withers away by expanding to such a degree that it is transformed into its opposite. And the party does the same... for if the party does not wither away, the state never will’” (C.L.R. James, *Notes on Dialectics*, London: Allison and Busby, 1980 175–76).

“On the other hand, even after the fact, the left could not deal with events that demolished their theories of the necessity of a vanguard party, and proceeded to ignore the movements in Hungary, in France and in Poland – movements which Marx or Lenin would have pounced on to study and to hone and bring up to date their revolutionary theories” (Glberman’s *Introduction to Marxism for Our Times*).

Conclusion

It’s clear that today’s center of gravity, the aspects on which all else is dependent and rests is the shared (global) consciousness of the multitudes of the earth’s workers and oppressed peoples, that their lives are daily becoming more and more intolerable, hence, solidifying them ideologically around the necessity for revolutionary change (like our earlier Maroons were solidified around the need to escape enslavement), and the ability of these multitudes to communicate with each other and share ideas and methods about the best ways to proceed towards that goal.

WORKS

Therefore, the global hardships brought about by today's imperialists and their voracious accumulation of wealth, and their destruction of the environment and cultures will propel the multitudes to use any and all means to bring about the needed changes –or perish. And modern means of communications will provide them with the means to both update and imitate the earlier hydra's strengths, avoid its weaknesses –while guarding against the tendency of the dragons to concentrate oppressive power in its hands.

Thus, since both the shared needs and necessity for change is already present, along with the tools to communicate, then our final consideration is whether or not these masses must centralize their organizing (not to be confused with the obvious need to coordinate their efforts!). To that I answer with an emphatic, 'no!' and further, I contend that such centralization will only make it easier for our oppressors to identify and level repression upon us –prolonging the crisis our generation must deal with.

The historical records of our dragon hydra are clear. The choice is yours as to which you will choose.

**Black Autonomous Movements
- New Dynamics in Black Liberation**
Robert Saleem Holbrook
(2011)

“The main threat to humankind, the flora and fauna and our entire biosphere, is capitalist imperialism: a totally out of control, predatory, global system of accumulation and oppression that’s on a collision course with the limitations of our planet: daily devouring children, women, people of color, the poor, workers of all stripe, wildlife and the environment in pursuit of profits.”

Russell Maroon Shoats
The Dragon and the Hydra: A Historical Study of
Organizational Methods

“Two features of the new mass movement must be the intention of creating dual power institutions to challenge the state, along with the ability to have a grassroots autonomist movement that can take advantage of a pre-revolutionary situation to go all the way. Dual power means that you organize a number of collectives and communes in cities and towns all over North America, which are, in fact, liberated zones, outside of the control of the government. Autonomy means that the movement must be truly independent and a free association of all those united around common goals, rather than membership as the result of some oath or other pressure.”

Lorenzo Kom’boa Ervin
Anarchism and The Black Revolution

In the city of Philadelphia in response to the unprovoked brutal beating of a Black man the Askia Coalition Against Police Brutality was created to educate the community about police brutality and to confront police repression while prisoners and their families united to form the Human Rights Coalition, an organization committed to defending the human rights of prisoners. In Miami the Take Back the land movement, a Black collective, moves homeless families into empty or abandoned houses the city has neglected and has even named a section of reclaimed houses “Umoja” (Unity) Village. In Oakland, the once base of the Black Panther Party, the spirit of community based resistance thrives as community activists representing numerous grassroots organizations have organized a People’s

Hearing on Racism and Police Repression to challenge police brutality and racism while across the Bay in San Francisco antipoverty activists from the POOR Magazine and Poor News Network raise awareness of economic injustice within communities of color. In St. Louis the Organization for Black Struggle mobilizes grassroots activists and organizations towards community empowerment while in New Orleans grassroots activists within the Black community are at the forefront of rebuilding Black neighborhoods devastated by Hurricane Katrina by demanding government attention and reconstruction.

All throughout the Black colonies of the empire (the United States) local activists and organizations are mobilizing to meet and address the problems and injustice they suffer at the hands of a corporate state that is not accountable to the people, especially poor and working class communities. These activists and organizations for the most part belong to no Black national or centralized movement but instead are ordinary people taking control of their spaces and struggling to live with respect and to enjoy a life of quality and substance. Most of them are Mothers, Fathers, Brothers, Sisters, Friends, Neighbors, etc who have grown tired of depending upon unaccountable career politicians and corrupt political parties to deliver for them. They have decided to seize their own destinies and depend on their own communities to solve problems the state is not interested in solving.

I. HISTORICAL CONTEXT

It is in the spirit and tradition of Black Resistance and Liberation that these communities act. They are the legacy of the Black Liberation Movement (BLM) which at one time represented a strong force within the Black community demanding Self-Respect, Self-Determination, Community and Individual Empowerment and the peoples' control over the resources of their own communities. The BLM was exemplified by Malcolm X, the Black Panther Party, Student Non-Violent Coordinating Committee, the Revolutionary Action Movement, the Congress of Racial Equality, the Republic of New Afrika, Black Liberation Army, etc. These organizations shook the foundation of the empire as their members challenged the racist status quo of America by demanding not only the recognition of Black people's human rights but also our human rights and right to self-determination, community liberation and the complete restructuring of the system through revolution, not integration. They didn't want to accommodate with capitalism, they wanted to destroy capitalism and build a new community and society based on revolutionary values and culture.

These movements of local resistance in the tradition of Black Liberation constitute the legacy of not only the BLM but also the legacy of COINTELPRO, the U.S. government's internal counterintelligence program that systematically destroyed,

through assassination, false imprisonment and disruption, the national Black Liberation Movements of the 1960's and 70's that had by 1968 gained legitimacy and mass support within the Black community. Contrary to popular impression the movements did not gain mass support by shouting Black Power or strutting around with guns threatening armed confrontation with the police. These are images the state publicized to create the impression these movements were criminals hell bent on violence and destruction. These false impressions allowed the state to justify its repressive actions towards the movement, actions which included assassination and false imprisonment of young leaders of the BLM. In 1968 the Attorney General of the United States stated that the Black Panther Party constituted the greatest threat to the internal security of the United States. Within two years, by 1970, over 28 Black Panther Party members were assassinated by police agencies across the country and hundreds more were imprisoned on a host of false charges filed to neutralize the strength and popularity of the movement.

The official justification for this massive level of repressive violence against the Black Panther Party and the Black Liberation Movement according to the government was their members commitment to violence, however when the COINTELPRO papers were released by the U.S. Church Committee in hearings on the COINTELPRO program in the 1970's it was revealed the government's major concern with the Panthers was the massive support they gained within the Black community from their programs that addressed the needs and service of the people. The Panthers and by extension the BLM was at its peak of legitimacy and influence in 1968 within our communities. The year of 1968 was the high tide of the Black Liberation Movement as well as Third World Liberation movements around the world. Capitalism and Imperialism was on its heels, anything seemed possible in these times as the United States was being defeated in Vietnam and urban rebellions were rocking the major cities of the United States and Europe, while guerrilla movements and student activists inspired by the Cuban Revolution confronted U.S. imperialism in Latin America.

Just when it seemed anything was possible and international capitalism was on the verge of collapse, COINTELPRO kicked into high gear and the U.S. government unleashed its full inventory of weapons, repression and dirty tricks on the Black Liberation Movement devastating its members and organizations until it became a hollow shell of its former strength. This is where we find ourselves today, sidelined by the civil rights movement and traditional politicians interested in business as usual within the Black communities a.k.a. Black colonies of the empire. The BLM has been reduced to scattered formations across the United States' urban colonies (Black communities).

Yet as we see today the spirit of the movement lives on as everyday in every urban colony there are ordinary people of color, activists, organizing and mobilizing their communities around issues such as police brutality, political representation, control of community resources, education, mass imprisonment, etc. The same issues that our communities mobilized around in the 60's and 70's. The potential of Black resistance therefore still remains within our communities. Although these local formations of activism are not formally connected they are interrelated nevertheless and speak to the new ethos in the Black liberationist tradition and that is local autonomous movements challenging state repression within their own spaces and with their own ideological positions based on the challenges they face. These autonomous movements constitute a Black Autonomous Movement, though no one has formally adopted that name, their actions constitute such a movement in this phase of our people's struggle within the United States.

II. AUTONOMOUS STRUGGLE

The concepts of autonomy and autonomous struggle actually are not a new experience within our people's history of collective struggle. Within traditional Afrikan society, specifically West Afrikan culture, villages ruled themselves autonomously within larger tribal and ethnic federations. In the United States during slavery escaped slaves, commonly referred to as "Maroons" created autonomous fugitive communities within the dismal swamps of Virginia and North Carolina. Autonomy therefore is nothing new within our collective experience of resistance and struggle. While the origin of the word autonomy has its roots in the Greek language meaning "self" plus "law" its concept is universal and is based on the foundation of all democratic movements: consensus. Anyone involved in grassroots activism understands that nothing can be accomplished without consensus and this is the strength of the Black autonomous movements in the Black colonies. These movements are born of local problems and grievances lead by longtime activists who live within the oppressed communities. No "national" or "vanguard" movement is dropping leaders in on the people explaining to them the correct political line or how best to organize within their own territories. Through consensus these communities have developed solutions to confront the problems they are faced with.

It is necessary to clarify that autonomy and autonomous struggle is about creating alternative and revolutionary systems of community and government within and in opposition to the capitalist and corporate democracies of Western societies. The reality is as radical activists we are not presently in a position to, nor are the people presently inclined to, overthrow the government. So we must carve out our own spaces by meeting the needs of the people within whatever spheres of influence we have within our communities. In doing this we are creating systems of dual power,

which is building up autonomous alternatives to the current power structure that controls our communities.

The survival programs of the Black Panther Party are examples of dual power structures created within oppressed communities. In the 60's and 70's the Panthers provided free health clinics, free breakfast programs for children and free grocery packages to senior citizens. They also developed independent schools called Liberation Schools that provided students with an empowering education that instilled cultural pride and a commitment to community and service in the name of the people. The Panthers were able to generate massive community support around these programs and their politics because they identified a need in the community the government wasn't providing and they stepped in to fill the void. Systems of dual power within our neighborhoods enable us to rely upon ourselves while at the same time developing an infrastructure that would hold revolutionary potential and experience should one day in the future the conditions become ripe for revolution or local, regional or national uprisings. Again this ties in with the concept of the Panthers Survival Programs. The Panthers labeled them survival programs because they were programs to provide until the revolution while simultaneously building community support and empowerment. The community is relying on itself, not the state or local government.

Other examples of dual power and autonomous infrastructure that support community needs are community gardens created on abandoned or vacant lots/fields within our neighborhoods that would develop empowering relations among neighbors and could also be used to grow organic food that could be distributed (free) to community members. After school programs and child care (by responsible community members), food co-ops that would provide a space to purchase healthy foods at discount charges (or free if possible), Adult GED and Adult Basic Education classes, Alternative Schools (not Charters!) that could operate after school to offer a education that promotes free thought, cultural/community pride and responsibility, etc. Another empowering tactic that should be considered is the occupation of abandoned houses—there is no excuse for people to be homeless or neighborhoods lacking community centers when there are so many abandoned houses. Activists should seize these abandoned houses and turn them into community center hubs that provide programs that will unite the community. In turn the support these programs will generate from the people will make it difficult for the city or police to enforce an eviction order because we will have turned something that was run down, abandoned and considered worthless into a vital component of the neighborhood that the people could take pride and collective ownership of.

In developing these autonomous programs it must be emphasized that the objective is not to secure nonprofit funding or corporate sponsorship, that undermines the purpose of autonomy. Corporate and nonprofit funding also ties the organization down in bureaucratic paperwork that consumes time and eventually burns activists out as it turns activists into clerks. Whenever possible funding from corporate nonprofits should be avoided, however if it is necessary, then activists must approach the funding not as sponsorship but rather as means to an end otherwise they will surrender autonomy to corporate oversight. They should also (if necessary) seek nonprofit funding from the most progressive foundations they can find but again, this option should be avoided if possible.

Another trap autonomous activists and movements must avoid is electoral politics that consume movements in false promises and expectations. A perfect example is the Obama frenzy. Nothing has changed under this man, his notable achievement of being the first Black President has brought us the same results the first Black mayors brought our cities in the 70's and 80's = nothing! Autonomous movements therefore are not geared toward campaigning for electoral politics. If movements do decide to participate in electoral politics, they should only do so knowing that they are only voting for the lesser of two evils and should understand that autonomy is independence from electoral politics that only promote and preserve the status quo. If autonomous activists decide to pursue an electoral strategy it should be local and concentrated on electing block representatives (or block captains) within the neighborhood that would be answerable to the needs and concerns of the people in his/her community while also preserving distance from the established political machine that runs the city. This strategy would not be pursued to reform the political establishment but rather to pressure it from below and erode its legitimacy. Whatever member of the autonomous movement occupies the block captain position should donate her/his paycheck towards the programs the movement is running within the community, otherwise he/she would just be another reformist politician/activist. The United States electoral system is morally bankrupt and merely an extension of corporations and international capitalism. The extension of corporate power and profits is more important than people and democracy in this political system, and we should harbor no illusions about reforming it—our objective is to exist outside it or preferably, to abolish it.

The concept of autonomy and dual systems of power therefore should become more appealing when we consider the real possibility that the nation could go bankrupt or face financial collapse bringing on rapid inflation and loss of social services. It's not far-fetched to consider this scenario considering how close the nation's (and world's) economy came to collapse during the financial crisis in 2008, a crisis that global capitalism has yet to emerge from as of the date of this writing.

In the event of another financial meltdown and possible government bankruptcy, communities would be left to fend for themselves. If anyone is in doubt about this just consider the absence of government in New Orleans following hurricane Katrina. The Black community was left to fend for itself as police officers and emergency services pulled out of the city and prevented people fleeing the flood water from escaping, in some instances using deadly force. The objective of the police was to prevent Black people from entering and overrunning the white, rich suburbs that surround the city. If the nation faces financial bankruptcy, we would be derelict in our duty if we believe that the government wouldn't leave our communities to fend for themselves. If it ever comes to this we should be prepared, and this is what autonomy prepares and develops us for (i.e. self-government).

We certainly, however, don't need a national emergency to justify self-government. We face a state of emergency within our own neighborhoods every day when it comes to the state of police brutality, mass imprisonment, unemployment, poverty, poor educational resources and lack of affordable health care. These are the range of issues autonomous activists confront everyday within our neighborhoods. To quote an activist from the book *We Are Everywhere*:

Understanding autonomy includes community owned and run health care, education and social support, direct democracy in zones liberated by the people who live in them, not as enclaves to withdraw to, but as outward looking communities of affinity, engaged in mutual cooperation, collective learning, and unmeditated interaction.

This is autonomy and every day that we confront injustice and initiate solutions to our problems, collectively and individually, we are creating liberated spaces within our neighborhoods and most importantly within our minds because we rid ourselves of the mentality that some leader has to swoop into our communities and save us from injustice. Autonomy therefore first starts in the mind, it is the governing of self based on the revolutionary ideas and principles that the community and I can address and solve our own problems. This should not be interpreted as neighborhood separatism or a reason to carve our neighborhoods into enclaves, that is not autonomy. Autonomy unshackles the mind from reliance on government or outsiders to solve our own affairs. It breeds a confidence of self-determination and creates innovative solutions to problems we are confronted with by placing the people on the frontline in charge of uniting to liberate our own spaces.

Anyone involved in present day community advocacy will recognize this image of people power in motion. Anyone who has ever been in a community center

or neighborhood living room, or even a prison cell, brainstorming with fellow activists on how to mobilize people, protests and programs with limited resources, volunteers and time understands the feelings of empowerment these experiences breed. This is autonomous struggle that liberates the individual while he or she empowers the community. It is actual empowerment, it is something tangible that we can feel while transforming our lives and communities.

Autonomous struggle therefore removes the “beloved leader” and “top down” method of organizing from the movement. It promotes and inspires consensus building thinking and decentralized organizations. Too many Black organizations, even ones claiming revolutionary politics, have adopted the corporate leadership structure complete with board of directors or central committees that consult amongst themselves and issue directives to the people or communities they claim to serve instead of involving these communities in the decision-making process, which would empower the community as opposed to the organization. This approach is contrary to autonomous movements which operate from a decentralized posture making decisions rapidly, fluidly and at the service of the people and community by directly engaging them in the process. Previous attempts at centralized leadership of the Black Liberation Movement has been met with resounding disappointment and failure.

For those of us who have been shackled by the outdated politics and rhetoric of the Civil Rights and Black Liberation Movements autonomy should be music to our ears, allowing those of us who were born in the 70’s and 80’s the opportunity to fashion our own ideas and solutions to the social and racial injustice we are confronting. It is our time to rebuild and refashion the movement as Fanon so eloquently puts it: “Each generation must, out of relative obscurity, discover its mission and fulfill or betray it”. In this regard, we are not only breaking free from the political reality the state has imposed on us and our communities we are also breaking free from the “messiah” dependence that many of our people and communities used to be trapped in that operated under the assumption Black people must be led to the promised land by a Black leader or organization. No, that is not the case, we will lead ourselves. Any leaders or leadership that emerges would flow from an activist’s history and track record of struggle and uncompromising positions when it comes to confronting state injustice as well as commitment to consensus building and new ways of meeting the needs of the community. Also any decisions the leadership arrives at would be the collective decision of the movement after consensus meetings and debate. So the concept of leadership in autonomous movements does not involve a leader directing—rather she/he is being guided by the informed decisions of the movement’s members.

There are good reasons for stripping leadership of corporate-style decision-making processes. How many times has the community's interest been compromised or betrayed by national Black leaders like Jesse Jackson or Al Sharpton swooping in to take the lead of a protest that local activists initiated only to have them hold a photo-op press conference with local politicians, push aside the local activists and cut a deal that leaves the core grievances in place while highlighting themselves as responsible negotiators then they hop in a plane and fly off back to their headquarters. These great compromisers take the steam and the initiative out of local activists campaigns and protests. They are more interested in symbolism than substance. Autonomous movements and activists on the other hand focus on substance as opposed to symbolism. Also this critique should not be interpreted so broadly as to imply that no national movement or national movements should exist but rather that movements that possess national structures should allow for autonomy at the local and regional level.

In leading ourselves and developing our own generational ideas and solutions, we should not hesitate to look to other regions of the world that have a history of autonomous struggle. At this moment Latin America is the region with the most dynamic examples of autonomous movements carving out spaces for themselves within urban and rural societies traditionally neglected by their governments. A recommended book to read on these movements is *Dancing With Dynamite: Social Movements and States in Latin America* by Benjamin Dangl. Another idea from Latin America that activists operating within autonomous radical organizations/collectives in the United States should adopt is networking through an umbrella organization similar to the People's Global Action network, a global network of autonomous movements that shares ideas, tactics and strategies related to grassroots resistance and activism. There needs to be an autonomous congress or collective within each city that would allow activists and grassroots organizations to network and share ideas, coordinate protests and, if possible, share resources. These grassroots organizations need to break out of their own spheres of activism, focusing on their issues exclusively, and develop multi-issue campaigns in concert with other grassroots organizations that would connect antipoverty activists with anti-police brutality activists, social justice activists with housing and health care activists, prisoner rights activists with human rights activists, etc. Alliances of solidarity are important in autonomous movements—it prevents the movements from becoming isolated.

III. AUTONOMOUS CULTURE

Autonomous activism and movements also create an autonomous culture, a revolutionary culture that is directly in opposition to the capitalist “Me First” culture of consumerism that dominates the social, civic and political landscape

of our communities. When we are attacking the legitimacy of the state, or rather identifying its illegitimacy, we are also in the process of developing a revolutionary culture that revolves around a system of values based on camaraderie, ethnic solidarity and solidarity with all activists that share our vision of building a new society that eliminates oppression and exploitation, and promotes collective economics and a social and civic medium in which feelings of love, sincere support and commitment are the mediums of exchange as opposed to individualism and the pursuit of a materialistic consumer culture. A person should not be judged on their financial worth but rather on their human qualities. The pursuit of happiness, authentic expression and self-determination in the individual and collective spheres is the cornerstone of autonomous movements.

To quote Che, “At the risk of sounding absurd, I will say that the true revolutionary is guided by feelings of great love.” In this context autonomous movements and communities are not automated enclaves, they are vibrant enclaves with positive and progressive energies where conservatism, patriarchal, or homophobic attitudes should have no place. These traits being stagnant and in the path of personal and communal development. The values of our society are not rigid moral codes that place us in judgment over one another but are righteous moral values that respect the individual and the community—they are communal values. The environment we seek to create will allow for the full development of an individual’s potential and a new culture and society that releases the full potentialities of human beings. While this may sound like a simple goal, when you think about it, it is truly revolutionary considering we inhabit a society that is completely in opposition to the values we hold and strive to replicate within our communities.

So the culture we are building is an empowerment culture, a communal culture as opposed to a consumer culture and this can only be built through action and mutual cooperation amongst ourselves:

One of the great strengths of traditional Afrikan societies was their communal democratic composition. This great communal tradition was founded on the deep understanding of the unity of life. Our Afrikan elders understood that the land, the air and the water are God’s gift (or nature’s gift) to all living things. God and Mother Nature did not invent the idea that land, the airwaves and the water are private property. Put another way, the great Afrikan communal tradition teaches us that true liberation cannot exist under a system that allows a few to control the land, water and airwaves.

Oba T’Shaka

IV. CONCLUSION

“You have the emergence in human society of this thing that’s called the state. What is the state? The state is this organized bureaucracy. It is the police department. It is the army, the navy. It is the prison system, the courts, and what have you. This is the state, it is an organized oppressive organization.”
Omali Yeshitela

In conclusion the concept of autonomy and dual power is not about reformism, its about liberating ourselves from the oppressive state. We’re not out to be better politicians than the politicians or make the police better police or the corporate state a better corporate state. Autonomy is independence, as best possible, from these entities which we view as illegitimate. Our relationship with government one of opposition and if any relationship is necessary it must be one of pressure and confrontational politics. We can’t pretend to be on the same page, we’re in an all together different book. A book of resistance that the oppressed peoples of the world are presently writing and each autonomous movement and member is a chapter being written in this book of love and struggle.

The Incomprehensible Black Anarchist position Hannibal Balagoon Shakur (2012)

Black brothers, Black sisters, i want you to know that i love you and i hope that somewhere in your hearts you have love for me. My name is Assata Shakur (slave name joanne chesimard), and i am a revolutionary. A Black revolutionary. By that i mean that i have declared war on all forces that have raped our women, castrated our men, and kept our babies empty-bellied. I have declared war on the rich who prosper on our poverty, the politicians who lie to us with smiling faces, and all the mindless, heart-less robots that protect them and their property.

Assata Shakur

I was born into the flames of slave insurrection. My first recorded ancestor was a runaway slave named Felix. In between him and me have been several butchered half lives. My grandfather, the oldest ancestor I've had the pleasure and privilege to interact with, was, as a young man, captured and tortured with "electro-shock therapy" for months on end as a consequence of his very material defiance and resistance to this "constitutional violence" that Wilderson describes in "the vengeance of vertigo". As a result he was introduced to this "performative contingent violence" forever carving into our family tree the scars of his/our subjugation. In the same way that many families pass down the stories of how grandparents met and the idiosyncrasies of ancestors long past, I was passed a narrative, a framework for my own identity, of pure unflinching antagonism. I can only imagine this is part and parcel of the reason Michigan pigs pumped 40 bullets into my cousin's chest a few months ago or why my other cousin is serving a life sentence. It's difficult to make distinctions between Oakland and Monroe, between prison and plantation when past and present meet in these spaces and moments. What joins us, stronger than our own blood even, are the subjective and objective vertigos.

A lot happened in 1986, some fascist doctor plucked me from my mother and introduced me to violence at the same time my lungs introduced me to air. He told my mother he wanted to break my collarbone to get me out because I was too big and healthy. Assata Shakur was settling into her new home, in exile, Cuba. Mutulu Shakur had been captured and charged

with helping her escape from a maximum security men's prison. A month and a half before I was born Winnie Mandela gave a historical speech endorsing the political nature and necessity of mass guerilla resistance to the apartheid state in South Africa. "We will dismantle the apartheid state even if we only have rocks and boxes of matches". A month after I was born, the apartheid state declared a state of emergency. In 1985, cocaine-related hospital emergencies in the US rose by 12 percent, from 23,500 to 26,300. In 1986 that figure then increased 210 percent, from 26,300 to 55,200, as the crack solution to the "panther problem" unfolded in communities that were the direct site of insurrection, like Watts and Oakland specifically, and all black neighborhoods in general. Sadly, my namesake, Kuwasi Balagoon died in December of 86 in a torture camp. His cause of death: the state... biological warfare. In Richmond, CA unguarded trains full of US military firearms and explosives were routinely left in the back of the North side neighborhood. I dodged my first bullet likely from one of those guns in 89 when I was three but that would not be the last. That was constitutional violence. When the state decides they want to assassinate or grand jury summon me for what comes next that will be contingent violence.

Hannibal Balagoon Shakur

If we are to survive this wave of repression, if Anarchy is to become a vehicle of the people, we must direct our energy to the new infrastructure. Programs that meet essential needs of the people must meet them with the explanation of why they are necessary. Programs that perpetually treat the symptoms of capitalism without feeding the mental struggle of the people must be replaced by comrades who pull no punches. We must show our friends and our neighbors that nothing can do more for them than they can do for themselves through Anarchism. We must show that "non-profits", and NGO's whose politics consist of liberal obscurities and multicultural tokenism, will not put more food on their table, put more homeless families in clean homes, will not put more police terrorists to an end than Anarchism.

It is beside the point whether Black, Puerto Rican, Native American and Chicano-Mexicano people endorse nationalism as a vehicle for self-determination or agree with anarchism as being the only road to self-determination. As revolutionaries we must support the will of the masses. It is not only racism but compliance with the enemy to stand outside of the social arena and permit America to continue to practice genocide against the third world captive colonies because although they resist, they don't agree with us. If we truly know that Anarchy is the best way of life for all people, we must promote it, defend it and know that the people who are as smart as we are will accept it. To expect people to accept this, while they are being

wiped out as a nation without allies ready to put out on the line what they already have on the line is crazy.”

Kuwasi Balagoon

It's a shame that now the false media image of the white Anarchists is going unchecked. It's a shame that white "radicals" can think of only themselves when they say the word Anarchist. New Afrikans are not free. Our majorities lie within the pelican bay plantations and secret torture camps that exist throughout America. Yesterday we were slaves and today we are slaves. In the same vein that slave owners outlawed and prevented slaves of the past from written communication, slaves today find their correspondences disrupted and destroyed. As New Afrikans our political formations are completely repressed. What is popular among New Afrikan Anarchists will never find the same platform or footing as what is popular among negro capitalists and negro reformists. What we have to say, the voices that spring forth from the underworld of the plantation, will not find the same attention among white radicals as nihilist voices will. We will not find the same attention among the broader movement to end capitalism. We are written out of existence by negro nationalists who speak for "the black community" and white radicals who speak of themselves as "the Anarchists". This dichotomy has done nothing to increase support from either side. White Anarchists want to speak for all poor people and negro nationalists want to speak for all black people. Neither formation wants to hear what we have to say. Comrades have been dealing with these contradictions for some time. Sometimes I fear those of us with our ears to the plantation are too few and far between to influence the broader, "free", population. This is in fact the impetus for this communiqué. You say working class and think of what you perceive to be the bottom, people working all day at minimum wage to feed and house their families. This is working class but this is not the bottom.

Elsewhere I have argued that the Black is a sentient being though not a Human being. The Black's and the Human's disparate relationship to violence is at the heart of this failure of incorporation and analogy. The Human suffers contingent violence, violence that kicks in when s/he resists (or is perceived to resist) the disciplinary discourse of capital and/or Oedipus. But Black peoples' subsumption by violence is a paradigmatic necessity, not just a performative contingency. To be constituted by and disciplined by violence, to be gripped simultaneously by subjective and objective vertigo, is indicative of a political ontology which is radically different from the political ontology of a sentient being who is constituted by discourse and disciplined by violence when s/he breaks with the ruling discursive codes. When we begin to assess revolutionary armed struggle in this comparative context, we find that Human revolutionaries (workers, women, gays and

lesbians, post-colonial subjects) suffer subjective vertigo when they meet the state's disciplinary violence with the revolutionary violence of the subaltern; but they are spared objective vertigo. This is because the most disorienting aspects of their lives are induced by the struggles that arise from intra-Human conflicts over competing conceptual frameworks and disputed cognitive maps, such as the American Indian Movement's demand for the return of Turtle Island vs. the U.S.'s desire to maintain territorial integrity, or the Fuerzas Armadas de Liberación Nacional's (FALN) demand for Puerto Rican independence vs. the U.S.'s desire to maintain Puerto Rico as a territory. But for the Black, as for the slave, there are no cognitive maps, no conceptual frameworks of suffering and dispossession which are analogic with the myriad maps and frameworks which explain the dispossession of Human subalterns.

Frank B wilderson III

We must put into context comrades who have already lost their children to the plantation state's foster care system. These comrades, who are subject to sensory deprivation, beatings and electrocution torture, work for a measly few cents an hour. Not because they want to but because they will be further isolated and punished if they do not comply with the production demands of the plantation. These comrades, many of whom have taken up arms against the banks and the slave catchers, are largely invisible to us simply because we don't see them at any events and we don't drink with them after the demo and they don't come to dance parties. What's more is we have allowed, through sheer neglect, the prison to become a factory that produces sociopaths who snitch on our comrades to get freedom and then come and wreak havoc on our communities. We have allowed that by our inaction. We have allowed rape to become just another gadget on the pig's utility belt. The brothers know this intimately. Every time we see a pig we see ourselves being raped. Current plantation trends are going largely unnoticed.

Prison has always been the final gate in the repressive apparatus of a state. It serves the purpose of social and political control, although it manifests itself differently in different nation-states and in different political periods. Nevertheless, the prisoner is, with few exceptions, always a scapegoat and considered a deviant. Prison is not only a class weapon; it is also an instrument to control "alien" populations. In the United States, these "alien" populations are formerly colonized peoples — former slaves, Native Americans, Latin Americans, Asians, and Pacific Islanders — and they have all too often been considered the internal enemy. They are the people most needing control and are therefore the majority of those locked down in U.S. prisons. The United States is the world's primary example

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of a country that deals with its social, economic, and cultural problems by incarceration. But this is its history. Prisons are the logical outcome of the country's foundation on the genocide of Native Americans, the enslavement of Africans, and the "manifest destiny" of imperial settlerism — from sea to shining sea.

Marilyn Buck

Do we still have the will of John Brown? Or that of Nat Turner and Harriet Tubman? Are we still committed to abolishing prisons? Where are our ties with slaves? Not individual ties but collective ties. Fundamental ties. So long as the prison exists it's inhabitants will inevitably find themselves in a struggle to destroy it. That struggle must not be isolated from that of the outside. It must not be isolated from populist efforts. Critical infrastructure must be organized to expedite the flow of information through the walls. Collectives must be on standby to strike with direct action in retaliation for acts of repression against prisoners. Prisoners must provide networks of protection and support for anti-state guerillas that are captured. All comrades must orient themselves to the eventuality of their capture. It must be clearly understood that the struggle in no way ends when you "get caught". It only intensifies. In the same way comrades oriented themselves to the infrastructural needs of the camp when we took Oscar Grant plaza, things like food security and medical needs, we must orient ourselves to the material needs of the broader community and prisoners as integral members of that community. A genuine effort to keep prisoners, individually and the prison population in general, up to date on all current events is required here. I've heard comrades speaking of the "patriarchal nature" of prisoner formations, how these things preclude radical engagement of anarchism. This, coupled with the fact that there's no anarchist "set" at any level comparable to "nationalist sets" within the prison system, has led me in search of a clearer analysis, or at least one that fits my intended narrative that of the seldom heard often felt incomprehensible black anarchist. Anarchism like anything else finds a radical new meaning when it meets blackness. While anarchists have an endless list of critiques directed at the culture that permeates prisons, little is articulated in the way of actually changing these cultures, as if these were inherent character traits impervious to stimulation and engagement. There exists a fear even, of prisoners, of the calcifying nature of their abject conditions.

Well, we're all familiar with the function of the prison as an institution serving the needs of the totalitarian state. We've got to destroy that function; the function has to be no longer viable, in the end. It's one of the strongest institutions supporting the totalitarian state. We have to destroy its effectiveness, and that's what the prison movement is all about. What I'm saying is that they put us in these concentration camps here the same as

they put people in tiger cages or “strategic hamlets” in Vietnam. The idea is to isolate, eliminate, and liquidate the dynamic sections of the overall movement, the protagonists of the movement. What we’ve got to do is prove this won’t work. We’ve got to organize our resistance once we’re inside, give them no peace, turn the prison into just another front of the struggle, and tear it down from the inside. Understand? A good deal of this has to do with our ability to communicate to the people on the street. The nature of the function of the prison within the police state has to be continuously explained, elucidated to the people on the street because we can’t fight alone in here. Oh Yeah, we can fight, but if we’re isolated, if the state is successful in accomplishing that, the results are usually not constructive in terms of proving our point. We fight and we die, but that’s not the point, although it may be admirable from some sort of purely moral point of view. The point is, however, in the face of what we confront, to fight and win. That’s the real objective: not just to make statements, no matter how noble, but to destroy the system that oppresses us. By any means available to us. And to do this, we must be connected, in contact and communication with those in the struggle on the outside. We must be mutually supporting because we’re all in this together. It’s one struggle at base.

George Jackson

If we really mean class war, we need all the warrior elements of our class to be actively engaged. With the new developments of the Pelican Bay Short Corridor Collective, we are witnessing a moment that possesses great potential for the unification of our struggles. When people are subjugated and oppressed at the level we see today, psychologically and materially, we must orient ourselves to the undoing of that hegemonic hold. We must orient ourselves not to weeding out people but to weeding out of people injustice and oppression. We are, myself my close comrades and hopefully you too, endeavoring here to transform the criminal consciousness into a revolutionary consciousness and there already exists a principle basis established by comrades like George Jackson and Kuwasi Balagoon. Now is the time for us to aggressively push forward and show the world we aren’t afraid to fight the fascist, to show them we are prepared to make the same sacrifices that they already have.

It’s gonna be kill me if you can not kill me if you please!!!!

A ZACF anarchist in the Landless People's Movement

Lekhetho Mtetwa

(2013)

Lekhetho Mtetwa, a member of the Zabalaza Anarchist Communist Front (ZACF) discusses his role in the Landless People's Movement (LPM), formed in South Africa in 2001. While the LPM was affiliated to Via Campesina, and linked to the Landless Workers Movement (Movimento dos Trabalhadores Sem Terra: MST), its activities centred on urban squatter communities, rather than farm occupations or organising alternative agrarian systems. Then-living in a squatter camp in Protea South, Soweto, Mtetwa served as the local secretary; by 2013, this was the key LPM branch. Several attempts were made by political parties to capture Protea South LPM, using patronage and promises, leading to the eventual implosion of the branch. Mtetwa provides an essential analysis of the rise and fall of the LPM, and the role that anarchists can play in such social movements.

Part 1: Lekhetho Mtetwa:

The Landless People's Movement fights for the people's rights

I am from the Landless People's Movement (LPM), a movement that engages the people on land issues. People have been protesting for their right to land, while the state is trying to privatise and control land, and also push shack-dwellers away from the cities. The eviction of people is ongoing, so we fight for the "right to the city," and for the right to land and housing.

Another issue we address is unemployment: land is not enough. The workers and the unemployed should occupy factories and workplaces, so that we can have jobs and meet our needs.

What does the word 'state' mean? The state rests on violence against the working class. At election times, politicians make empty promises, but after the elections they deploy violence against us, the working class. Our structures have been attacked by police and by vigilantes. In 2004, we had comrades who were arrested and tortured when they campaigned at election time, saying "No Land! No Vote!" In 2007, on the 3rd September, we were barricading roads, and we lost one comrade: he was knocked over by a van that rode away. The police attacked us, although we were exercising and demanding our rights.

I am involved in the LPM in Protea South, Soweto, where we are shack-dwellers. The state wants to remove all the shack dwellers, and to then use the land for houses for other people. This is a major issue that we are fighting. Forced removals are what we are facing. Housing is what we want: to be housed properly.

We also face a lack of consultation from our so-called elected municipal councillors: they do things, without consulting the community. The politicians rely on the votes of our grandparents: they use them to get elected, promising this and that to get at the end of the day more votes.

These are the problems that we are facing. To organise and fight for the things I have mentioned, we as LPM Protea South usually have a protest march or barricade the streets, so we can be seen by the state as fighting for our demands. Normally we make it a point that no-one from our community goes to work during the protests. There are shops in our area: we make it a point that no-one opens on that day also.

If each and every person joins the struggle, we can make changes. We need to fight the struggle together: even fighting for our rights in Protea South is not only a fight for LPM members only, but for everyone who lives in in this community and in this world. We are fighting for everyone who needs land and freedom.

All social movements should organise all the ordinary people to take direct action to defeat the state and the capitalists. If we always talk and talk without action, we are like an empty vessel. We need to be creative, and I push the idea of a poor people's summit, to build for big day of action and to allow struggles to be linked up.

Part 2: Lekhetho Mtetwa: Rebuilding the Landless People's Movement from below

Lucien van der Walt (LvW): Thanks very much for agreeing to be interviewed. Can you tell me a bit about yourself and about the Landless People's Movement (LPM) and its work?

Lekhetho Mtetwa (LM): I am Lekhetho Mtetwa, secretary of the LPM in Protea South, from Chiawelo, in Soweto.

The LPM was set up in Protea South in 2001, and the person who introduced it was Maureen Mnisi. She became its chairperson for plus-minus 11 years, and was also Gauteng LPM chair.

How did I join? I raised issues in a public meeting, around land, and people said, "You know what, come and join us." And I was given light on how the LPM

movement works, by word of mouth. Later I was given the documents of the movement. Eventually I was selected as a secretary, because I was politically strong. Initially I was co-opted onto the committee, later I was elected.

The LPM fights for the rights of the people, for housing, land, and jobs and against evictions. It fights so that the people may be able to support their families.

It doesn't support elections to the state, including to town councils. LPM focuses on the needs of the youth, and the community. We take the demands, and go to the local councillor, and present the demands. If nothing happens then, we take our demands to the top. And if nobody listens, then we march on government offices, and present a memorandum, and we barricade the roads, and stay-away from work.

LVDW: Can you tell me more about the current situation of the LPM? How is it doing these days?

LM: We are trying our best to rebuild the movement, and most of the support we have, we are getting from our community – and also from other social movements, which support us.

The LPM was, at one stage, claiming to be a country-wide organisation. Today, though, the main branch is in Protea South, Soweto. One of the issues is that there is not a structure linking different branches, even if they did exist. But as far as I know, the only other existing branch involves comrades in Durban. But there is nothing which I heard from that side for some time, about what they are maybe doing.

We have contacts with them, but there is nothing we have planned together. Understanding the problems, let us remember our branch of the LPM and other branches also, have faced repression. In our case has included arrests and assaults, and also attacks from vigilantes from nearby better-off areas in Soweto. But there are also internal challenges. Recently there was a change in the leadership of the LPM branch in Protea South: I am the secretary of the new leadership. This change was linked to a fight against people who were using the movement for their own benefit, including trying to push it to join political parties, and provide votes. This is part of a bigger problem of nepotism, favouritism and opportunism that we see in some movements, and that we fight.

The earlier leadership tended to be top-down, not always even elected. We have changed that. What we are doing now is involving each and every person in our

community, so that they can be part of us. What I am trying to say is that, as “leadership,” we are not saying that, because we are the leaders or office-bearers, we will control and do everything. Instead, before we take things forward, we call a mass meeting wherein the community brings up suggestions and issues. Then we sit down as a committee, look at these matters, and then work out a way ahead. Then after that, we go back to the community: if they agree with everything, then we go further with everything; that is what we do; otherwise we again take the points and again change the plan, and again go back to the community.

Our focus is our branch’s work, where we try our best to make the LPM movement go back to what it was before, but better. At this present moment we are trying to rebuild the movement within our community, and from there, we are planning to start other branches in other places.

LVDW: In the past, the LPM used the slogans “No Land! No Vote!” and then “No Land! No House! No Vote!” once it helped form the Poor People’s Alliance along with Abahlali baseMjondolo and others in 2008. Do these slogans still get used?

LM: Yes, it doesn’t end. It doesn’t end as long as we are living under the circumstances under which we are living.

LVDW: And in the long-run what would be your vision of a new, a better South Africa? And what would be required to make this into reality?

LM: For me, I want to see everyone owning land and resources together, in common; everyone having a house, people living equal lifestyles and having useful jobs.

We should introduce the anarchist principles: all movements should come together and fight the system and in that way, build for revolution. We will then be able to defeat the state and the capitalists and thereafter the working class and poor people will be the ones controlling everything – everything which the bosses and politicians are owning and controlling at this present moment.

LVDW: How do you think we can create, solve the job problem in South Africa?

LM: By kicking out the bosses and taking over the factories and workplaces. That is the only way.

LVDW: Thanks very much for your time.

LM: Thanks a lot, com.

Guns, Cars, Autonomy

Anon
(2014)

*The following is a transcript of a conversation between two friends shortly after the insurgency in Ferguson, Missouri. **Bart** was there and **Nikola** wasn't, but both have participated in anti-police uprisings in the last several years on the West Coast and in the Midwest. We're publishing this in an effort to explore the complexities of recent events in the United States, but also to contribute to the ongoing discussions and attacks against the existing order, everywhere.*

Nikola: One of the most interesting experiments by rebels in the Bay Area in the past years was the establishment of Oscar Grant Plaza (the home of Occupy Oakland also known as the Oakland Commune) as a police-free zone in the fall of 2011. The logistics of this experiment were actually fairly simple: whenever the police attempted to enter the encampment, a crowd would gather around them and force them to leave. At times this meant screaming, while at others it was merely a matter of informing the officers that they would have a riot on their hands if they intruded. People at the encampment took several measures to defend themselves from the presence of the police. Materially, communards stockpiled materials to build barricades and projectiles to be used against any unwanted police presence. They re-appropriated police barricades for their own purposes and built barricades of their own. They tore up the paving stones of the plaza to be hurled at police raiders. Culturally, the police-free environment reproduced itself by fostering hostility toward the police, and a culture of street-based resistance to them. When the camp fell under siege, the cops and their stations fell victim to a chaotic wave of retribution. As demonstrations and riots against the police reach their limits in time, we consistently ask ourselves how to sustain these suspensions of order longer than a few days. One possibility is that the cultivation of zones free from the police could provide an answer this dilemma.

If by maintaining a police free zone, the Oakland Commune offered a contribution to the struggles of everyone who works to create territories against the police – to make their homes, neighborhoods and cities entirely hostile to police occupation – it could be argued that the re-cent uprising in Ferguson significantly expanded upon this experiment. It seems as though the revolt in Ferguson is unprecedented

in recent years, if not in many peoples' lifetimes, in terms of the duration but also the intensity of what happened. It also appears that, similar to the situation in Oakland, people in Ferguson were able to seize space and to create a police-free zone in a way more combatively than had been done before.

Bart: I would agree to a degree. I think there were steps taken towards creating a liberated space, or an autonomous zone. In general, I think a riot is a situation where a space is opened that is free of police or the State's laws. So every night that there was rioting there were these temporary lawless and police free zones opened up. What made this different from other riots though, is how sustained the rioting was. Also how after three days of rioting, people reclaimed the burned down QT as central hub of activity for the uprising. I think the significance of the QT was that it expanded the autonomy and lawlessness of the rioting at nights into the daytime. It would be dishonest to say the lawlessness and anti-police sentiment of the riots completely transferred to the QT. There were times when high ranking police officers came into the parking lot to make statements to the press. But it did at least create an environment that was incredibly hostile to them, and usually any time a squad car or low ranking officer came into sight, they were attacked or shouted out of the area. It was obvious to the police and to the participants of the rebellion, that the QT was our space, not the space of the police or the capitalists.

Nikola: It does feel like its easier for people who weren't there to see the more spectacular things – the looting, the arsons, the molotov cocktails – but unfortunately the efforts to create space without police is harder for people to see from afar. It seems obvious that this was really central to the ferocity of what was happening. What did it feel like to be at the QT? What was that space like? Also what were some of the more specific ways that people prevented the police from coming there or other areas that had been carved out?

Bart: Well for the most part the QT was this incredibly festive and joyful place in the daytime where people were doing graffiti, driving up with giant barbeques and giving away hundreds of hot dogs; everyone brought water to share, nothing cost money, everything was free. It be-came a weird cultural center as well. There were rappers, people break dancing, a teenage step-crew came in. There was a joyful street fair atmosphere at times. At the same time people would be handing out masks for the night, sharing stories from the nights before. At one point I hung out with a man who shared pictures of all the shoes he'd looted the night before and we traded stories. People were talking about what to do if they gas this way, what to do if they come from that way. So while it was this festive and celebratory atmosphere it was clearly also a space where people were forming strategies and talking and connecting. Since it was the central gathering point, everyday you'd

come back and you'd start to see people and recognize faces; maybe you'd have talked to someone the night before or you'd engaged in something with them and you'd be able to see them again and talk; you'd begin to form relationships and share ideas. That was really exciting.

Toward the night the police would eventually push towards the QT, but the QT itself was about half a mile from where most of the conflicts happened, so often they'd only be able to reach it after hours and hours of street fighting. It took them so long because they were terrified of coming into the crowd, especially during the day when there would be thousands of people around. The St. Louis area has a history of police being shot at, and police are very aware of that. The police know people are armed and willing to shoot. From the beginning of the uprising, rebels made this very clear: one of the first things to happen after they killed Mike Brown was shots being fired into the air. And then Sunday, the first night of rioting, during the looting, people were again firing shots. I can think of one particular situation where the police tried to push in, and people formed a line to fight them off. As the standoff was ending, the police cowardly gassed the crowd and left. Instantly there were gunshots at the police all up and down that mile stretch of road. You could hear gunshots everywhere, and see people jumping out of cars to shoot; shooting at them, shooting in their general direction. People learned that you didn't even need to shoot at them, but simply shooting in their general direction or making it known that you were armed was enough to keep the police back. So the guns kept them at bay. It was the first time in my life that I've ever seen that level of blatant armed action in a riot or demonstration or whatever you want to call what was going on up there.

Secondly, the other thing that I'd never seen before, specific to this situation was the car culture and the way cars were used in a few ways to confuse the police, block them and also just tie them up. West Florissant, the major street where all the rioting and looting and fighting was happening, is a four lane highway. And so up and down the strip people were using it as a cruising ground with countless cars packed with people, blaring music, with half a dozen kids on the hood, honking horns, and everyone screaming. This created a situation where it was impossible for the police to drive into the crowd; the cars were so dense. And also the general noise added to the insanity of the situation, so it was totally nuts to be out there. It was a situation that was completely uncontrollable and they had no idea what to do. If they came in on foot, they were attacked; if they came in cars, the cars would get stuck and they were attacked. Also a lot of the guns were kept in peoples' cars, so people were mobile and armed. At times cars were also weapons. On one night cars actually crashed into police lines. People would use the cars as barricades; everyone would drive and park their

cars across the street and form lines behind them. I remember at one point two young girls parked their cars hood to hood blocking all four lanes of traffic and on the other side of the cars, facing the police, everyone had guns. The cars were used as barricades to shoot from, as a means to stay mobile, as celebratory parade vehicles, and in general a way to confuse and intimidate the police. So I really think these two things particular to Ferguson, the gun culture and the car culture, helped to create and keep this autonomous police-free zone. Not to mention the fact that there were thousands of people participating.

Nikola: I'm under the impression, from a few accounts, that it wasn't just the QT that the police were afraid to enter. I've heard that they mostly limited their activity to West Florissant and that there were certain streets and certain neighborhoods they wouldn't enter.

Bart: That's definitely true. Particularly the neighborhood where Mike Brown lived, Canfield Apartments, off Canfield Ave. The police would not drive down that street. People quickly learned that, but enforced that also. And so as the night went on and the police would force people off the main strip, people would fall back a block or half a block and that was often where people would shoot at the police from. They'd drive down the strip and get shot at from the side streets. Anytime a cop did come into the side streets, people would fall back further into the neighborhoods. If a cop tried to follow further they'd get shot at from the bushes, from the houses, from cars. People burned trash in the streets so they couldn't come in. And so it was a repeated thing, night after night, that people would be fighting in west Florissant until the overwhelming police presence (including teargas and rubber bullets) forced them off the main street. They'd then either fight to keep the police out of the neighborhoods or they'd wait until the gas cleared to go fight on the street again.

Nikola: Thinking back to the Oakland Commune encampment, it is obvious that creating a space where police couldn't enter was crucial to that struggle. But what I found especially wonderful was that it was more than just a defensive zone; that it became a base of sorts from where other attacks could be carried. On several occasions demonstra-tions would leave from the camp; because media cameras weren't al-lowed in, it was relatively safe for people to change clothes and put on masks there. On probably a dozen instances in the first few weeks of the camp, nearby police offices and vehicles were trashed. Do you feel that the space carved out in Ferguson, at the QT and elsewhere, helped to spread offensive maneuvers, beyond being a space to gather and to defend?

Bart: I think there were bits of both. There were points at night where people would be there, and would get organized to go loot somewhere further away. And maybe people would have taken the initiative to do that even if they hadn't been in Ferguson on that strip, but I really do think that everyone being there together allowed people to begin to act collectively. We were out there one night and people started chanting "Walmart! Walmart!" and everyone started running to their cars, doing donuts, and peeling out. Walmart was four miles away from where the riots were taking place, and so without the context of a place where people could discuss "oh we should go loot Walmart!" and feel safe and comfortable enough to do that, I don't think that would have happened. In some ways it did allow for that type of spreading. But, in other ways I think it didn't, because people were so attached to this space they'd liberated (and it did really feel like a liberated space) that people couldn't imagine expanding or leaving. People were so focused on the QT and Canfield and West Florissant that it seemed hard to imagine the rioting spreading to somewhere else. That space had become so important to people, and because of that people were willing to do a lot to defend it. So to a degree it was used as a space to plan out attacks or expropriations in other parts of the city, but the rebellion never really spread far beyond that central area.

Nikola: Its inspiring to hear you talk about part of Ferguson as a liberated space because this is the same way that many of us thought of the Oakland Commune encampment. The first thing that happened when we took the plaza was to change the name to Oscar Grant Plaza, and with that it was almost as if a spell had been cast over the space. Things felt different when you were within it. A lot of people talked about time feeling different when in that space; the concerns and pressures of their relationships and jobs and all the things that would usually weigh on them seemed to melt away when people walked into the camp. I think that in that space more things felt possible and to me that was something I haven't experienced elsewhere – this immense opening up of possibilities and the ability to talk to people in a way that previously felt impossible. It feels like an entirely different world, so far removed from a life of work and responsibilities and indignities. In a sense this is maybe what's at stake in creating spaces like this: creating magic places where we can discover new things about ourselves.

Bart: Definitely. In a lot of ways it felt similar. One of the small roles anarchists had was to push for a name change for the QT; people start-ed calling it Mike Brown Plaza, sort of reminiscent of the occupation movement. It was clear knowledge that we hadn't been given the right to assemble or protest or whatever. Everyone knew we could only do what we were doing because we had taken it. And because of that knowledge that we had taken the power away from the police, Mayor and Governor, the space became incredibly important to people. So yeah, a similar

thing happened. Time didn't make sense there. Some-how you'd be there and all of a sudden eight hours would have disappeared. I remember one night, we were all hanging out, there had been a lot of looting, the liquor store was on fire and we were all just sitting around watching it burn and this man said "fuck, what time is it!? I have to go to work tomorrow." Our friend laughed because she also had to go to work in the morning and she asked, "do you really want to know?" and he replied "no, fuck that; time doesn't matter. Fuck work, that doesn't matter." and he just went back to partying. So yeah, things changed, and like you said, the ability to talk to people really changed. St. Louis is an incredibly segregated place where racial tension is visceral and real, but up there the tension eased. People could see who was there. People could see, oh you're here, I'm here too, this is a thing we share in common and can bond over. This was especially true between the militants in the uprising. A mutual respect was developed between people who were fighting. So it became much easier to talk to people. These identities, these constrictions that society puts upon us to keep us separate, began to fade away, even if for the briefest moments. Obviously there were still pretty intense dynamics around race and gender or peoples perceived backgrounds or motivations, but in some way it did begin to dissolve.

Nikola: Thinking back again to the Oakland Commune, and how important the camp was in creating these types of possibilities and relationships, it becomes obvious that the downside of course is that so much seemed to disappear after the camp was raided and taken from us. Once the police enforced a total militarized occupation of the space and made it impossible to reclaim, it did really feel like the beginning of the end. From there it felt like any attempt to create similar spaces or keep up momentum were outright crushed. So I'm wondering how the eventual fencing off and re-occupation (by police) of the QT affected what was going on in the riots, if at all.

Bart: I mean it could be a coincidence, but it felt real that the day they fenced off the QT (ten days or so after the initial rioting), was the first night that social peace returned to the streets of Ferguson. Once they'd taken this space away people didn't feel the ability to congregate and lost this very socially important space. So a lot of the combativeness disappeared. Also people were tired and the national guard was on the streets, and so this combined with recuperation by leftists and religious leaders helped to end things. It was a really big blow to the uprising to lose the QT, and then lose the streets of West Florissant.

Nikola: For me, this brings up the questions of anarchists' relationship to spaces like these where previously unimaginable types of rebellions are playing out. Others who've participated in moments like these, where the activity of everyday people

vastly outpaces what anarchists are doing, have posed the question of how to act alongside them or not. It seems as though there are two ideas. One of which is to be there, among others, to share the knowledge and tactical perspectives we have; to be within the crowd helping to push things where we can. Another idea is that rather than participating in the streets in these specific places (the plazas, etc), we could be advancing our own projectuality elsewhere and could find other openings and moments to act and carry out our intentions. Based on your experiences in Ferguson, how do you think about this question?

Bart: I don't think this is really a dichotomy where you have to choose one or the other. In Ferguson I think it was incredibly important to be up there, particularly as a largely white group, to take steps to dissolve the segregation and racial tension that exists in this city by acting in solidarity with others; also to make connections. Also many of us have never experienced this type of rebellion and I think it was important for people to get that sort of experience in the streets; to experience what it feels like to collectively struggle and fight back. I don't think that necessarily means that people shouldn't do other things too. When we were up there, we found ourselves rapidly outpaced by other rebels. So even if you believe in an anarchist vanguard, that wasn't a possibility because people were already so much more advanced than what most anarchists were prepared for. Also, due to certain racial tensions, those perceived as white outsiders needed to limit their ways of engaging, to follow rather than take initiative. It was such a tense environment that things could really go any direction in any moment, which felt really weird. At the same time it felt amazing to be up there with people struggling together. So I do think it was very important for us as anarchists to be participating in the heart of the uprising.

In addition though, as anarchists we have developed this set of specialized skills we've learned over the years as anarchists in the streets, and we should be thinking about how to use these skills in critical moments in different parts of the city that could have a big impact or help things to spread to another place. One of the cooler things that happened in a different place, involved all the gas and pepperspray supplies being shipped in. There was a distribution center in Minnesota where wildcat workers refused to ship any gas to Ferguson. Not that this is necessarily specific to anarchists, but it is interesting to note that there are key places where our enemies can sustain a critical blow by not getting the supplies or reinforcements they need in the streets. It can limit their capability to act. I think anarchists should be doing both, we should be in the streets and we should be thinking of ways to help the situation expand and last longer; to sabotage the attempts of the police to regain social peace; to imagine ways things can spread; to watch and study the city for other sparks that could be fueled; showing signs of disruption all over the city, even graffiti or small attacks – everything was noticed in those weeks.

Nikola: It seems like some of the other things anarchists can do in these situations include encouraging people to wear masks, attacking surveillance systems, trying to undermine more sinister or subtle types of recuperation or leftist attempts to seize control. These things are almost constants that we should expect and have some strategic perspective around.

Bart: I can say for sure that anarchists did create a culture – almost single handedly – of wearing masks. Where the first few nights people were openly saying “why would I wear a mask!? I’m proud of what I’m doing, I want people to know I’m doing this” while committing crazy felonies, later in the week it was almost a fashion statement to have a shirt tied around your head. I think another way anarchists helped to create a safer space for people to engage in more combative action was by attacking the media crews and pushing them out of the streets, or at least back towards police lines. Before this happened there would be dozens of film crews, taking footage of looters, many of whom had no masks on, or had visible tattoos.

Nikola: It seems like there are potentials when these situations erupt—both in the epicenter and at the margins—for all sorts of people, including anarchists, to find some sort of individual self-realization and also to push their own projects further. In doing so they might also help to spread the social conflict and I think it is at the intersection of these possibilities that some of the most exciting things happen. It feels pretty clear that a lot of what we’ve talked about already has been in one way or another about identity and I think that its in these conflictual situations that we can actually understand how identity works against us. A basic contention that a lot of people coming out of struggles in the Bay Area, whether the Oscar Grant rebellion or the occupations, is the idea that identity is a tool of the state used to keep people apart and to enforce the social roles that people are expected to play. It also becomes clear that, in these moments of rupture, identities start to break apart and collapse. As a consequence, this is where the state tries to regain control first, through the logic of identity and through a reimposition of the identity categories that were previously falling apart. It seems, from your account and others, that this was also at play in Ferguson.

Bart: This is definitely true, and I think the state in the Bay has perfected the modern day use of Identity as a form of control, especially in situations like the Oscar Grant Rebellion. Having watched what happened there, it is really interesting to see the parallels, word for word, in how the state responded here. After the first night of rioting, almost instantly the Sheriff came out and said “this is a small group of white, anarchist, outside agitators that came in and stirred things up”. To me it was obvious that this was an attempt to try and preemptively put a stop to

any sort of racial unity. Historically, racializing situations has been one of the first measures the state takes to put down rebellions. Whether it was class rebellions against the state in the sixteen and seventeen hundreds or anti-police rebellions in the past decade. The term “outside agitator” was actually first used in the US in the 60’s by a southern Sheriff to describe whites coming down to collaborate and struggle with blacks against segregation. Being in this uprising was the closest I’ve ever felt to people taking real steps to break apart their identities based on race, gender, class, anarchist, etc. Obviously these identities weren’t actually gone, and there were still many dynamics at play based on them, but they started to weaken. And so that was one of the first things that the state (and the many micro-states, or anyone who sought to gain control of the situation) attempted to re-instate. It was visible when the police talked about ‘white anarchists’ and instantly some leftist groups picked up this same language. There was also a strong push by more ‘radical’ groups such as the Nation of Islam, and the New Black Panther Party, to racialize things. They were in the streets trying to push a line that this was a black issue, and it was a struggle for black power. Unlike the leftists and politicians, these groups were in the streets every night, but it was still obvious that their attempts to racialize things was only to gain control of a crowd and push their political agenda.

Nikola: It seems like gender was also a key factor. I’ve heard accounts of Al Sharpton and others calling for “strong black men” to step forward to help police the demonstrations, and for the young men participating in the riots to “grow up and be a man” by helping to end the rioting, or also calling for women to go home “to be with their children”. It seems like gender was an obvious axis along with race that politicians used to try to put things down.

Bart: Yeah, it was actually really funny to see the back and forth of these same groups. The leftists who were trying to gain control would be out there talking about how all the rioters were young men and there weren’t elderly people or women in an attempt to discredit the riots. Firstly, this just wasn’t true, there were so many types of people out there fighting. Even funnier was that their response was to create things like Al Sharpton’s ‘disciples of justice’ who were 100 black men that he called on to control things. They were really pushing these gender roles that women needed to go home or fall to the back, “there are women and children out here, its dangerous” or one night the Nation of Islam was out there saying “take your women home!” When you step back and look at the situation its apparent that the people discrediting the riots for being largely men in their 20’s were either the same parties or working with the same parties who were trying to push women and children off the streets at night, trying to stop the fighting in the name of defending the “women, children and elderly” that were in the streets. But the thing is, in the streets at night, when it was conflictual, people just weren’t

taking it. Any time people were trying to racialize things or enforce strict gender roles that men should be the combatants and women should go home, people would actively refuse it, shout at them, tell them to go home, say “fuck you, this is our struggle”.

Nikola: There’s a really subtle way, that is also very intentional, where we can see in the Bay and in Ferguson, where the state, the media, the leftists, the police, are all pushing the same line. It is an attempt to take this crazy racialized violence, this day to day campaign of extermination against primarily young black men, and to turn it into this limited “issue” about a few racist cops or the need for a handful of small reforms to policing or prosecution. In doing so they mystify the fact that race isn’t an ‘issue’ but that race and racial violence is the foundation of...

Bart: American society!

Nikola: Yeah, all the misery that is inflicted on people here.

Bart: Yeah, it makes sense why they immediately try to reduce things to an issue. Because these rebellions and moments like this really break open the potential for what can happen. People were talking about how this isn’t an issue, it isn’t just about Ferguson, it isn’t a black and white thing. Its a people versus the blue, its a systemic thing. This is way past an issue, it was a breaking point. This wasn’t just an antipolice riot, it was an insurrection against dominant society, against the way things exist, against class, against white supremacy. It was no longer just about a bad cop, or justice. What people want is freedom, and up there we were starting to figure out how to take steps to get that. And this is terrifying to the leftists and the politicians and anyone with any sort of comfort in this world that they might lose. So it makes sense that these groups would join forces in order to calm things down and restore peace. The left talks about taking steps toward reform and all this bullshit, but people could see through it, that it was an attempt to push them back into the same ‘ole cages they always are in.

Nikola: With that, another way of thinking about the question is the look at the question of anarchist identity. And that in the same way that the gendered and racial barriers that keep us apart and prevent us from acting in certain ways, the anarchist identity also dissolves in these moments. On the one hand you have all sorts of people, anarchists or not, spreading anarchic activities, arson, looting. And then on the other hand you have all sorts of people who weren’t anarchists being called such by the media. So for those of us who are anarchists and choose to participate in these struggles, it almost stops mattering who is an anarchist and who isn’t. Or maybe it matters to us, but in the broader sense doesn’t.

Bart: Ideally I'd like to think that the anarchist identity would also dissolve in a situation like this. When there's an uprising it makes sense to lose ones identity; Not to lose ones' ethics or ideas or desires or the tensions one holds with the world from an anarchist perspective, but to lose the way that any identity can be used against us. We saw this play out when the state labelled people as anarchists and tried to use that to separate militants out in the street. I think its important to let go of these identities and let go of any social baggage we have from participating in an anarchist scene, for better or worse. One thing that I can think of, and by no means do I intend to talk shit, but I can remember during the London riots, a situation where the whole country is burning, the FAI claimed responsibility for an attack against two or three cars. And while I highly respect the attack and the individuals who risked their safety to carry this out, it doesn't make sense in my mind to isolate oneself and set oneself apart in that way. We should be acting, but we shouldn't be acting in order to separate ourselves from people. So yeah, I think it was important for the anarchist identity to dissolve alongside all other identities.

Nikola: In a certain sense, moments like these are clarifying in terms of why we fight and why we do what we do. I'd say that for anarchists, especially those of us who desire insurrection, what is at stake is not a fight to affirm an anarchist identity or ideology, but to actually fight for anarchy.

Bart: Definitely.

Nikola: The final thoughts and questions I have are about whats to come in the coming months and whats to happen now. The space that was created in Ferguson is gone but the tensions that led to this revolt still exist. And the thousands of people who participated in this revolt carry with them their experiences and the self-transformations they went through. All that continues, and so it seems intuitive that things will continue also. It is just a matter of how we can make things spread and also how those of us not in Ferguson can express our solidarity when it is needed.

Bart: Firstly, I just don't know. The city feels like it will never be the same after this uprising. Things feel different and the tensions are still there. In ways it feels like a steam cap was blown and a little bit of anger was released over the twelve days of rioting. It is hard to connect with people because of how spread out and alienated the city is, but I think its important to keep showing signals of disorder, having visible attacks and signs of resistance. Also the Left is finally starting to get a foothold and organize these large days of action. These are totally recuperative, but at the same time there are still large groups of people who refuse to be controlled by these politicians and activists, and so it makes sense to engage

in them. Whether simply to disrupt or push them in different directions. I also think it makes sense to act in conjunction but outside of these events. We are at a very crucial moment, where everything is being noticed, and that gives us a situation where, as anarchists, we might be able to introduce new analysis, new tactics and hopefully spread things into new terrains, both literally and figuratively. As for what anarchists elsewhere can be doing... while I think solidarity at-tacks are always impressive and wouldn't discourage them, I think that on a broader sense only anarchists see them. This isn't necessarily a bad thing, it gives us warmth and strength to see others attacking, but I think it makes sense for rebels to think about how things might spread and how they can act in ways that inspire rebellion in their own places. If not also acting in ways that could impact or deter the efforts of police in Ferguson. So I'm not entirely sure how this can look, but I know people are creative.

Learning from Kwame Nkrumah's Failures in Ghana **Tokologo African Anarchist Collective** *(2015)*

Taken from issues #5/6 of their newsletter.

Ghana, West Africa, was a British colony called “Gold Coast” until 1957. It became the first independent country in “black” Africa after reforms and struggles in the 1940s and 1950s. The new president, the brilliant Kwame Nkrumah, and his Convention People’s Party (CPP), had fought for independence. Now they aimed at major changes in the society, even speaking of socialism. And Nkrumah proposed a united African government for the continent: Pan-Africanism.

But by the mid-1960s, hopes were fading. There were good reforms in education and services and self-respect for Africans that helped remove colonialism’s damages. But the CPP has become a dictatorship, with a personality cult around Nkrumah. Unions and struggles were suppressed. The economy was in trouble. A new elite hijacked independence and resources. When the military seized power in 1966, people celebrated in the streets. Today Ghana is one of the poorest African countries.

What went wrong and what can we, anarchists in Africa, learn from this experience? Nkrumah’s is the key model for African nationalists, and the test case showing the strengths and limits of African nationalism as a project – a project based on building multi-class parties, to capture the state, with the enemy seen primarily in terms of imperialism, and colonialism, with the solution seen as an independent state.

So, the lessons of Ghana are essential and remain widely applicable to countries like South Africa, where African nationalism has been and remains a very powerful current. We can learn, most of all, that revolutions and struggles are easily hijacked by elites for their own purposes. These purposes always go against the interests of the masses.

Using the state is the sure way to create a new elite. Nkrumah’s slogan, “Seek ye first the political kingdom and all things shall be added unto you,” is not useful. We say instead: All power to the working and poor people.

British Colonial Ghana

The “Gold Coast” colony included African societies like the Asante kingdom (empire), which had class divisions, a ruling elite, and a history of slavery and slave trading. The colony was ruled by British officials, African kings and chiefs, and the small African educated and business elite linked to mission and state schools.

But Britain was in charge. Society was top-down. There was no pretence of “democracy.” Although the British provided railways and hospitals, there was much poverty and racism. The economy was based on selling raw materials (metals and cash crops) to Britain. This meant it depended on British prices, and these were often low and there was always pressure by the British state to produce more.

Decolonisation

After World War Two (1939–1945) there was massive unrest by the unemployed in the in Sekondi-Takoradi (“Tadi”) port zone and Accra, by farmers and black ex- soldiers. There were riots in 1948 after 3 people were shot at a march in Accra. The Trade Union Congress (TUC) formed 1945, called a general strike in 1950.

Britain started political reforms in the 1940s, allowing unions (1941) and then allowing more elected representatives in the Legislative Council (1946) but these were elections by chiefs

The elite-led United Gold Coast Convention (UGCC) (1947) wanted electoral reforms, moving the chiefs aside, so the businessmen who led UGCC would have more say. Like the ANC and other South African parties, UGCC was formed and dominated by the frustrated African elite. It kept its distance from the unrest, and from Nkrumah’s calls to use mass action (“positive action”) to win more radical changes. Nkrumah had 4 university degrees earned in the USA, where he lived from 1935- 1945, and returned to his homeland in 1947 after 2 years in Britain.

This led to the formation of Nkrumah’s breakaway CPP (1949), aiming to ride the mass struggles to full state independence. In 1951 there were the first parliamentary elections (the country was still ruled by Britain), which the CPP won, making Nkrumah Prime Minister. After more elections, the CPP led Ghana into independence.

Consolidation of New Elite

But the new CPP government developed into a one-party state. The state became a hothouse for a new elite. The old elite, the chiefs, were either marginalised or pulled into the CPP. A law in 1958 allowed detention without trial. By 1962 the state controlled the main newspapers, and could censor news.

Access to state power was key to the growth of the new African elite: frustrated under colonialism, it used state salaries, contracts and corrupt deals to enrich itself. Reports of wrongdoing were widespread.

The more that state wealth helped the elite, the more the elite clung feverishly to office, suppressing rivals and protests, and pushing for more state ownership of resources.

1964 saw the CPP become the only legal party, centred on a personality cult and network around Nkrumah, now President-for-Life. CPP party branches and related organisations like youth groups enforced control across the country. The CPP ensured its people were in key positions in various government agencies.

As anarchists we know the state cannot be used by the mass of the people. It is a top-down institution that always puts power in the hands of a small elite. As the old British elite and African chiefs moved out of the new state, the CPP-centred new elite moved in. The nature of the state meant that the new elite, just like the old, looked on the people as a source of labour, money, and taxes – and a threat to be controlled, with guns if needed.

Moving to State-Capitalism

Nkrumah correctly saw Ghana would remain an economic “colony” of Britain (or the USA) if its economy did not change. He started efforts to industrialise the economy (building factories and infrastructure) so it could move beyond raw materials and create jobs. At first this meant encouraging foreign (mainly British and US) investment, but this left colonial-era relations in place, and did not work.

The difference with the past was that the new Ghanaian political elite benefited more. But the effects on industry were small.

So Nkrumah’s CPP started to push state-led industrialisation. This included efforts like setting up a massive hydro-electrical scheme at Volta dam, state-run industries, and trade protection, called “import- substitution-industrialisation.”

But although Nkrumah called the system “socialism” (and was partly inspired by the Marxist system in Russia), the reality was the new state industries were, as elsewhere, just state capitalism. They were based on wage labour and on producing goods and services for sale. And, again, the new state elite milked the new projects for its benefit.

The growing role of the state was not socialism, it was just the expanding grab of the new elite to access wealth and build capitalist industries. The top-down

approach in state industries was the same as the topdown system in the state and the CPP.

World Economic Chains

Also, independent national capitalist development in a world dominated by international capitalism was unlikely. To fund the new system, the CPP-led state relied on money from exports, especially cocoa. Cocoa prices boomed in the 1950s and early 1960s. The money went to the state through “marketing boards.” This meant farmers sold to state boards at low prices, which then sold the goods overseas at much higher prices, making big profits.

But the price of goods like cocoa started to fall in the early 1960s, and the state lost money. It then borrowed heavily, going into massive debt.

Attacking the People

The new system did not put power in the hands of ordinary people. The CPP-centred new elite in the state controlled it, decided priorities and targets. The role of the working class and peasantry was to provide labour, funds and raw materials. The radical language and even the genuine socialist views of some CPP leaders (like Nkrumah who was himself generally free of corruption, unlike his followers), did not change this.

The new elite exploited the people, and the new state relied on the repression and control of the working class.

The 1958 Industrial Relations Act centralised unions into a single CPP-run body, with the only negotiating and legal rights. Urban workers were increasingly called a selfish elite (“labour aristocracy”), sabotaging the nation with wage demands. Almost no legal strikes were arranged by the CPP-run TUC. In many sectors all strikes were banned.

In 1961, a huge strike spread from Sekondi-Takoradi, including the railways, against rising taxes and a “forced savings” scheme. It drew in the unemployed and the small traders in the markets: the “common folk” against the CPP elite. After the strike, Nkrumah arrested leaders and politicians involved.

End of an Illusion

Many people had great hopes in Ghana and Nkrumah. The victory over Britain was inspiring and the “black star” of Ghana seemed to show the light to a new, prosperous Africa, free of the legacy of colonialism, racism and strife.

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But using the state and a political party led straight to the opposite: a new elite captured decolonisation, for its own benefits.

Working class and poor Ghanaians continued to suffer while the new local elite and its foreign partners (initially Britain and the USA, later the Marxist USSR and its colonies) became wealthier. Mass support was built through a personality cult, with Nkrumah treated as Superman.

In 1966, the military led a coup against Nkrumah. He was out of the country. There is no doubt that the American CIA helped the military plot.

But this does not explain why people danced in the street with happiness when Nkrumah was overthrown.

They included Sekondi-Takoradi workers, who had been staunch CPP supporters in the 1950s. The masses had no more illusions and did nothing to stop the coup. Nkrumah left office in disgrace.

Everything had become managed by the party and the state, not the people. And that was where the problems started. Imperialism and the CIA played a role in undermining independent Ghana, but the local elite, which hijacked the decolonisation struggle, is just as guilty of destroying it.

And Nkrumah's nationalist vision, even in its Marxist phase, despite its heroic intentions, helped pave the way, with its statism, authoritarianism and multi-class capitalist project.

Interview With Michael Kimble
Michael Kimbel
(2015)

Could you tell us a little about yourself?

There's not much to say about myself, there's nothing unique about me or my situation. I'm a proud Black gay anarchist that sincerely wants to bring about radical change, and when I say radical, I mean extreme and I don't think nothing can be more extreme than the total destruction of this social order, system of domination or whatever you want to call it.

What was life like growing up in Alabama? What sorts of obstacles and struggles did you have to face?

My life in Alabama, at least the early years of my existence, was beautiful. I was born and raised in the Black community of Birmingham, Alabama called Powderly (Westside) and it was rural, dirt roads, hogs, etc. At about 7 years of age our house burned to the ground and we relocated to another neighborhood on the Westside called Westend. It was considered a middle-class neighborhood. We owned two houses in this neighborhood. Both of my parents worked. But little did I know, being so young, that my parents were having problems in their marriage and financially. Eventually, my parents divorced and we lost the homes. Me, my sister, and three brothers moved with our mother to the Southside for about three years and then to the Northside to the housing projects. This is when I began to have social problems. I was ostracized by the kids in the projects, but never being a wimp, I never allowed anyone to beat me up without fighting back. After the kids learned that I would fight back I was accepted as a peer. That was my biggest obstacle, being accepted or fitting in. In the projects there was a lot of gay (drag queens) people in my peers' family, so it was nothing unusual. The thing was, would you fight. Outside was different.

Could you talk a bit about why you got locked up in the late '80s?

I got locked up in 1986 for the murder of a white guy that wanted to do harm to me and a friend who was out one night walking. We had our arms around each

other and this guy started fucking with us, calling us fags, niggers, and all kinds of disrespectful, homophobic and racist shit. When he attacked after confronting him, I pulled a pistol I had on me and shot him. The media tried to turn it into a racially motivated murder and all kinds of things. I really didn't know any of this until I had a chance to view my Pre-sentence Investigation Report (PSI) and this was after I had already been in prison awhile. I took the case to trial and received a life sentence and here I am 29 years later, still in prison because of a homophobic racist. I have no regrets about it.

You've talked before about your political development while in prison – from communism to anarchy. Could you tell us about how that happened? Were there experiences, events, relationships, or writings that pushed you in the direction of anti-authoritarian action?

Yeah, I became a communist in my early years as I've said before, because it spoke to the oppression of Black, gay, poor people and of course prisoners, and espoused the idea of creating a world free of these oppressions. I became a part of the New Afrikan Independence Movement (NAIM) which was very vocal at the time and it seemed that all the warriors from the Black Liberation Movement was part of the NAIM. And they were active in the prisons as far as legal (lawsuits, letter, phone campaigns, education) support and visiting prisoners. And of course, they participated in cultural programs as well in the prisons here in Alabama. Also around this time the ABCs had begun to be visible through their support of "political prisoners/prisoners of war" from the previous decades' movements (BLA, BPP, UFF, anti-imperialists, WUO, etc)¹, so I started receiving literature and newspapers (The Blast, Love & Rage, Bulldozer, Fifth Estate, etc.) and started to learn about anarchism and it resonated with me. Shit, I was against authority, against oppression and started to see the contradictions between statehood (government) and freedom. Anarchism was/is talking about doing away with all this, and putting into practice now and not waiting on the future. And I've been a staunch anarchist since.

Does being gay affect your ability to organize and struggle collectively in prison?

No doubt. First, you have to understand the mindset of prison, which isn't much different than on the outside, just smaller. On the one hand, you have the belief that being gay equals weakness, then on the other you have guys putting up a front as being very macho as a form of defense in a world of predators and/or you have guys that are political that are coming from a religio-cultural/nationalist orientation. These last guys mentioned are the guys most likely you'll be interacting with doing any organizing. And many of them are gang members and are what is called O.G.s

(Original Gangstas), gang members who are not as active in gang culture as when they were younger but still has a connection to it and are looked up to by younger gang members. All the stigmas on the outside are magnified, but one can still work with most of these guys if one has built a reputation as being one who will stand up and not take shit from anyone, pigs or prisoners, and sincere about what they say they are about. They know, they live around you daily for years. But again, it's a struggle in and of itself just getting past all the psychological bullshit floating around in these guys' head. You know, they've been told for years that something is wrong with being gay, non-conforming to traditional gender roles. So, being gay kind of blunts your voice and efforts. But as an anarchist, I rage on because of my own self-interest in bringing about disorder on the inside and contributing to the total annihilation of prisons and the system that birthed them.

What was it like being a revolutionary prisoner in the '90s, when much of the anti-imperialist movement had fallen apart and the anarchist struggle was only beginning to pull itself out of its multi-decade lull in the US?

To tell you the truth, I was so caught up in battle in these prisons I was not really focused on the outside happenings. I was preoccupied with trying to build on the inside. Of course, we were reaching out and felt the decline, but people were still trying to interact with us. I wasn't expecting too much out of the burgeoning anarchist movement since it was obvious that it was in its infancy.

Have you noticed any changes in the methods and forms of anarchist prison solidarity since you got locked up?

My experience with anarchists on the outside has not been that extensive, but from what I've observed, has been anarchist groups such as the ABCF which was most active around prisons, has been material and emotional support mainly for those of the old, established movements, organizations of decades past, whom they classify as political prisoners/POWs. That has changed to a large degree, now you have anarchists who are into the material, emotional support, but also demos, attacks against prisons, etc. That's something I never saw in the 1990s in the U.S. It's about becoming accomplices now.

You've expressed criticisms of the Political Prisoner/Prisoner of War (PP/ POW) concept before. Can you elaborate on why you oppose the label and your experiences with the concept and its proponents?

First, the concept being used by most groups is based on the United Nations (UN) definition of who and what constitutes a PP/POW, so definitely I have a problem

with that. As a matter of fact, I reject it. The UN is just another state institution based on domination and control of populations. Then the concept as practiced is elitist, discriminatory, and creates celebrities, and really just legitimizes the state and its legal system. The U.S. has over 2 million bodies in its warehouses, but only about 100 are considered PP/POWs by the groups. It's a joke. It overlooks the men and women who are fighting in these prisons and suffering because of it. Oh, I've had debates about all this with anarchists. It caused our correspondence to end. I get a headache talking about it just as I do religion. Recent anarchist struggles have had prison as a central focus, both because of the state's targeting of anarchists and because of anarchists taking offensive action against prison society.

Are there actions or struggles that have been inspiring to you recently?

The support and solidarity that was shown and given to the Free Alabama Movement (F.A.M.) here by anarchists who put on demos around the country, the June 11th events, the solidarity I've been given in the last year or so, and the actions carried in solidarity with prisoners and against prison society around the world, the banner drops, the weekly noise demos in California at the jail is all inspiring. I'll just be glad when I see that kind of constant stuff going on here in Alabama.

What are your feelings on the recent anti-police struggles occurring in the U.S.?

I'm loving the anti-police demos, rebellions. I was listening to the radio a few nights ago when it came across the air that two pigs had been shot in Ferguson. I was so excited that I didn't even go to sleep that night. I'm glad that young, Black people in Ferguson hadn't allowed these race pimps to extinguish their righteous anger and desire to fight, and inflict retribution on the pigs. I'm thinking that we will see more of these attacks in the near future, because the pigs are not stopping murdering Black folks. What choice do we have other than to fight back? That's two actions of retribution. NY action and the Ferguson action. There's more I'm sure I haven't heard of.

In some of your writings, you express an opposition to civilization. Could you talk about that and how it differs from a critique of the state and capital alone?

I don't think one can separate a critique of the state and capital from a critique of civilization. Civilization gave birth to the state and capital, which brought all kinds of oppressions and tools to manage that oppression such as surveillance, greed, domination, and all the other shitty things people find logic in doing to each other and the environment. Civilization is explained away by capital as being advancements in efficiency and quality of life, but remember the life expectancy of

a Black male in the U.S. is about 25 years. He is expected to be dead or in prison by 25 years of age. Civilization has caused a disconnect between people and the earth. Civilization has given birth to all kinds of diseases; drugs that don't cure anything but have you buying them to "manage" the disease, feed their greed; pollution; patriarchy; racism; prisons; etc. Civilization is the root cause of the misery which we term oppression and must be dismantled, ruthlessly and utterly destroyed.

How can anarchists build stronger relationships with comrades on the inside?

Through interaction, listening, becoming accomplices, treating prisoners as equals and not romanticizing prisoners' situations. There's nothing noble about being in prison. Just showing revolutionary solidarity and all that entails. I keep saying this and will continue to do so: people need to check out Os Cangaceiros, you know, the group in France during the 70s, 80s, 90s, to see how one form of solidarity looks.

What would you like to see from U.S. anarchist struggle in the coming years?

I'd like to see anarchists becoming more active through building genuine comradeship, friendships with those of us inside and see more attacks against prisons, companies, institutions that erect, sustain, and profit off of people being kidnapped and held in prison. Also I think it's time for anarchists to start building something for those anarchists that are leaving the prisons through parole, End of Sentence (E.O.S.), or otherwise. Some of us will be needing housing, clothes, etc. once out. You know, something we can plug into. Most times we have to apply at a halfway house and that's a whole new problem because all the ones I know of are religious oriented and require one to participate in religious shit.

Struggle in Alabama prisons is heating up. What's going on there currently?

Well, we just had a national call-in day for the distribution of condoms since STDs seem to be a major problem among prisoners. Then on March 1, 2015, the F.A.M. called for a work strike (shutdown). It lasted 3 days and only at prison (St. Clair). I'm kind of pissed about that. Why only 3 days? It was supposed to be indefinitely. I started a hunger strike on the 2nd of March to show my solidarity and didn't get word that it was over until like the 9th or 10th. The explanation I'm getting for the shortness of it all is that this was a test run to show guys what to expect. Shit, we (Holman and St. Clair) just had a shutdown in January of 2014 and it lasted 15 days, so the guys know what to expect. But again, I wasn't there so I don't know, but I suspect that some "reasonable" and "responsible" prisoners talked "sense" into the rebels' heads and squashed it.

Here at Holman in the lockup unit guys are protesting the replacing of hot meals with sack lunches if you have your tray slot open. So, there's been a lot of urine and feces thrown, and fires burning. The pigs have backed off of that for now, but we're waiting to see what's next. I've come off of my hunger strike.

Anything else?

Yeah, I think as we see more struggle on the outside the more you'll see shit popping off on the inside. Anarchists have to be ready for this and need to be thinking about what they are willing to contribute to the destruction of the state by attacking prisons. Let me back up to the second question you asked. Don't get me wrong, there was grave injustices inflicted against me while growing up in Alabama. There was certain sections I wouldn't go through because most likely I would be arrested, simply for being a Black person. Even in the 1980s there was what was called "Jew Town," a street of stores that still had "Whites Only" signs in the store windows. But I felt safe in my hood. Plus, I really didn't have any reason to go to these place that was antagonistic towards people of color. But you know what, when I was about 12 or 13 years old a whole bunch of us kids used to go bike riding through these racist neighborhoods and not one of these bigots said anything. Oh yeah, they gave us these nasty looks, but shit, we didn't give a fuck. We were bad asses and did basically whatever.

Now, being gay was something else. I was fucked with through ridicule by friends and family, but it wasn't like it was with race antagonisms. Although it was accepted by the folks in my hood to be gay, right next door in the other hoods was different. People ridiculed, harassed, and even beat up those that they saw as gay. I've been called many names and had a lot of fights growing up. But you know, I got locked up so young and this was not my first time being locked up. I had been going through the juvenile system for quite a while. So, I was saved from a lot of the stuff on the streets. Yeah, jail saved me from the streets, but not from all the shit that goes on against gay folk while locked up. I never had witnessed a rape, but I have witnessed cruelty. You know, as kids we look for all kinds of reasons to put other kids down. We look for differences and along with the prejudices society has put in our head, it's not hard for us to find. This world is so sick that if it doesn't understand it, can't control it, it tries to destroy it. And kids are being taught this at home, church, school, just about everywhere they turn. No wonder there's such a high rate of teenage suicide.

Black Panthers in London: Who were they and why should they interest anarchists?

Carlus Hudson

(2016)

The text of a talk given at the Autonomous Centre of Edinburgh on 17/12/2016. The author (Carlus Hudson) would like to point out these are more notes/transcript for a talk rather than a properly written article.

I'm going to talk to you about the history of the British Black Panther movement, focusing specifically on the groups in London in the late 60s and early 70s. There were groups elsewhere in the UK and before and after the period I'm focusing on, but the most readily available source material I've so far been able to draw from is London in the late 60s and early 70s. My own research specialism is student anti-racist activism in Britain in the 1970s, which I'm doing my PhD on in Portsmouth at the moment, so what I've looked at with the Black Panthers runs parallel to that and some of the content of my masters thesis. I'd not consider myself an expert in this particular topic, but I hope to at least promote greater interest in it.

To do that I'm first of all going to say a bit about why the topic's so important today for anarchists and the way I'll be approaching their history, before I go into the history itself and the insights it offers. This is an extremely important topic because, very simply, anarchists' engagement with feminism and anti-racism is long overdue. Most of us may be aware of what's termed 'manarchism' that shuts down most experiences of oppression and struggle against it in favour of an extremely narrow idea of class struggle. This idea of class struggle in the anarchist movement, with its parallels in Socialist Workers' Party style Leninist politics, tends to be very dismissive of feminism and anti-racism. It generalises them together into what's termed 'identity politics', and stereotypes identity politics as being about getting more women and PoC into corporate boardrooms, abolishing freedom of speech on university campuses, and people being wankers on tumblr instead of getting involved in what they see as real revolutionary class struggle.

This very narrow idea of class struggle only speaks to a small section of the global working class and arguably only to the least oppressed among them. I don't believe that it's just a coincidence that anarchist and more broadly revolutionary politics have remained so marginal in society when they've been dominated for so long

by this very socially-conservative and doctrinaire attitude to class that sees it in very abstract, purely economic terms or construes it as its own kind of identity politics for the 'white male working class'. It doesn't speak to the vast majority of those who have most to gain from an anarchist-communist society, and its principal achievement so far has been the co-option of its language by the populist right over the past year. When politicians now talk about the 'white working class' or 'those left behind by globalisation', there's little to distinguish that rhetoric from the crudest articulations of class politics from the organised Left.

In reality the vast majority of workers must not only contend with class oppression as its own social and economic system, but also with the ways in which class oppression as it is imposed on them through sexism, racism and other oppressions. This oppression takes place in the workplace, in the family, in communities and as enforced by the state directly. Resistance to oppression and fighting for or building a society freed from these things must take place starting from this position if it is to be of any relevance or use to anyone. This approach can be called intersectional anarchism. It's influenced by Kimberle Crenshaw whose idea of intersectionality means studying oppression in terms of overlapping experiences of sexism and racism. This idea has spread into many spheres of radical politics and culture, and often extends to include class-based, colonialist, and many other forms of oppression. Conventional identity politics focuses on one primary type of oppression – be it in terms of class, gender, race or anything else – and other oppressions are just derived from or are distractions from it.

Intersectionality claims that identity and oppression have a multiplicity of causes and expressions, and you can't challenge one oppression without dealing in some way with others. It takes revolutionary struggle beyond the social conservatism of 'anarchism' and is very different kind of politics from the worst stereotypes of liberal identity politics.

The Black Panthers in London offer a historical example which may at least help anarchists active today to get their bearings on what they want their politics to be and represent, especially in relation to the issues I've just introduced. Because this movement has received very limited attention by historians and anarchists, far less than the movement in America, this talk will be weighted more towards telling the story of what actually happened rather than going as in depth with analysis as I'd like. But I hope to provide some commentary and provoke greater interest in a topic that a lot to offer. There's no way we should expect or even desire to simply take what they did then and carry it out now as if nothing's changed since – there's more than enough historical re-enactment done by revolutionaries already. Nor should we consign the Black Panthers entirely to something of their time with

nothing relevant to us today. The history of the British Black Panthers has insights for anarchists today, and our collective work in understanding them and the wider fight against overlapping oppressions has barely begun.

Many of the sources available on the Black Panthers in London are police and court documents held at the National Archives. They show the extent of the state's hostile response to the movement. In addition to some of these documents, I've made use of interviews of the activists involved in the movement – mostly carried out by an oral history project called Organised Youth. There is a great deal of source material also held by the Institute of Race Relations, the George Padmore Institute, and the Black Cultural Archive. I feel it's important to recommend them here to anyone interested in knowing more about this extremely rich history.

I'd like to turn to the story of how and why the Black Panther movement rose in Britain. Much like their counterparts in the US, the Black Panthers in Britain emerged as a response to the frustrations of black people with the failures and limitations of more moderate movements. The civil rights movement in the US was very successful in ending segregation but had made little progress in dealing with issues such as police racism. In Britain, there was immigration from countries that had recently gained independence from the British Empire. Between 1948 and the 1960s, there was a policy of open-door immigration from the Commonwealth, which began to be closed by the Conservatives in 1962 and then tightened further by Labour in 1968. Labour's Commonwealth Immigrants Act was later found to be racially discriminatory by the European Court of Human Rights. While immigration law was being tightened, efforts to lobby the Labour Party to pass legislation against racial discrimination had produced only a very timid Race Relations Act. This Act was even used to persecute anti-racist campaigners. Disillusionment with the Labour Party, the failure of much of the trade union movement to fight against racism in the workplace, the rise of the far right after Enoch Powell's rivers of blood speech, the international backdrop of the Vietnam War, and discrimination in housing, education and by the police, all contributed to a situation that called for a more radical and militant anti-racist politics

The largest moderate group, the Campaign Against Racial Discrimination, was disintegrating by 1967. Their orientation towards the Labour Party had left behind many who were looking for something more radical. This political vacuum was filled by the Black Panther movement. Their ideology Black Power, where it began in the US, was initially quite separatist and nationalist, but developed strong internationalist and revolutionary socialist strands rooted in the ideas of self-organisation and liberation.

An important catalyst for the movement in Britain was the Dialectics of Liberation conference in London, June 1967. This was set up by a number of radical psychiatrists, including R. D. Laing who's more famous for experimenting with LSD in the treatment of schizophrenia. Most of the currents of the 1960s counterculture and anti-war movement were represented: critical theorist Herbert Marcuse, plenty of students, a few Maoists and Marxist writer CLR James, to name a few. One of the future leaders of the Black Panthers in the US – Stokely Carmichael – debated the beatnik poet Allen Ginsberg on the use of political violence.

This debate was, for the sake of this presentation anyway, the most interesting part of Dialectics of Liberation. Carmichael very strongly advocated black people arming and defending themselves, while Ginsberg was opposed to that and much preferred non-violence and, in his own words, 'flower power'. Carmichael saw liberation as needing a coherent strategy with specific objectives, while the tone of the conference was much more focused on self-expression and creating free and alternative spaces

For anyone here who ever attended a General Assembly during the Occupy movement and sat through endless meta-discussions and abstract arguments nominally about tactics, the clash between Carmichael and Ginsberg should sound like a very familiar one. What the Panthers offered black people was a politics that stood up for them and their rights. This was something which other movements and organisations had previously not been able or willing to do.

In Britain the Black Panthers were organised more loosely than they were in the US, functioning more like a network with varying politics, ranging from Black Nationalism to Marxism, but sharing the unifying ideology of Black Power. Ties between the British and the US movements were largely informal, and the US served as a source of inspiration for Black Panthers in Britain. One former Panther Leyla Howe was interviewed a few years ago by Organised Youth, and said that her 'moment of inspiration' came from seeing Huey Newton on TV with a black beret and a gun, talking about black people standing up for themselves.

So that's how the movement came about in Britain. I'm now going to look at how they operated, especially in London. I'm going to start with one of the major organisations, the Universal Coloured People's Association. This group was a vanguardist and conspiratorial organisation, influenced heavily by Leninism, and led by Nigerian-born playwright Obi Egbuna. Egbuna was arrested, tried and locked up for inciting to murder police, and there's an extensive file in the National Archives on this court case. Much of the evidence the police put forward indicated that Egbuna was the head of a paramilitary organisation. It included a Black Panther oath of allegiance where members were to be willing to sacrifice

their lives for their cause, reference to weapons caches which were never ultimately found or be proven to even exist, and a bomb recipe.

Egbuna wrote a book in prison, *Destroy This Temple*. In it he played up to the role the police had placed him in. He compared himself to a character in a Dostoyevsky novel, and to Frankenstein's monster but in the sense that the white supremacist and imperialist system around him was Dr. Frankenstein and therefore responsible for creating him. Egbuna's way of doing politics was deeply hierarchical, dominating and violent in the worst sense of the word. Some of Egbuna's theoretical accounts of the challenges for black people in Britain and around the world were ok, but the problems in the way he and his group organised were immense. To be honest, saying his politics had 'immense problems' does not even come close to describing it: in his book he justified the rape of white women by black men. On this level his politics were deeply misogynistic, authoritarian, and plainly abhorrent. It's worth noting that the most the police and court documents say about Egbuna's attitudes to women were that he was a 'womanizer' – the state simply wasn't concerned with what was actually awful about Egbuna, and the investigation put a lot more time and resources into investigating his links with another Leninist party.

In contrast to Egbuna, other leaders of the movement such as Althea Jones-LeCointe and CLR James looked to community-based organising. I don't think either of them or the Black Panthers they worked with could be described as Anarchist, but they took the Panthers in a far more open, libertarian and participatory direction – and I'm now going to talk a bit about them.

Althea Jones-LeCointe was interviewed by Organised Youth. Far from Egbuna's misogyny and desire for control, Jones-LeCointe expressed her politics in the form of a question she posed back to her interviewers: 'what challenges you?' What she then put forward was an idea of politics which started with the individual's own experiences and the issues they faced, moving onto the need of then finding others to fight alongside for liberation. It's about understanding yourself, educating yourself, and acting for yourself. Politics becomes working with people in solidarity rather than for others in a paternalistic way. In the interview, Jones-LeCointe was adamant about the need to challenge male chauvinistic behaviour within Black Panther organisations. I wouldn't say she sounded too enthusiastic about the idea of separate black women's organisations when she was asked about them, but she respected the right of black women to self-organise in whatever way they saw as necessary to their emancipation.

Much of this should sound very appealing to anarchists. It's a politics which doesn't place trust or responsibility in the hands of politicians or the state. Nor

does it place those things in an essentialist idea of identity, where you have people who claim to speak for all workers, women or all black people and for what they should think and do. The onus is on every individual to come to terms more fully with who they are, who or what oppresses them, and work with others who share their experiences to liberate themselves and each other. This, for Jones-LeCointe was what Black Power and the Panthers were all about.

This was practiced in one of the movement's biggest campaigns: the Mangrove Trial. There was a restaurant in Notting Hill set up by Frank Critchlow, the Mangrove, which was described by historians Bunce and Field as 'the beating heart of Notting Hill's West Indian community'. 'Black people who wanted advice on housing or legal aid went there, as did black radicals who wanted to discuss the revolution in the Caribbean, or the fortunes of the American Black Power movement' The police raided this restaurant numerous times, officially over licensing issues and drug raids, though the raids didn't produce any evidence. The Black Panthers helped organise a protest against police harassment, after being involved by one of the staff at the Mangrove, Darcus Howe. Howe, Critchlow and a number of others were arrested, and they became known as the Mangrove Nine. The Panthers were very successful in using the trial to expose institutional racism in the police and courts, and to mobilise their community against it. All of the Mangrove Nine were acquitted.

The Mangrove campaign should be of great interest to anarchists – it was an excellent example of direct action against state oppression, but also in defence of a community. By defending a restaurant which provided advice on housing and legal issues to people who faced a great deal of discrimination, they defended a system of mutual aid and the self-organisation of black people in London. They linked the particular oppression in front of them to what was described in one Black Panther publication, Black People's News Service, as a politics for the 'Liberation of ALL oppressed People, and primarily the liberation of Black People totally from every form of enslavement and exploitation.' I don't think there's much in this to disagree with from an anarchist point of view, and there's a great deal to learn from it.

The Mangrove campaign was the largest immediate success of the Black Panthers in Britain. Many of the issues they campaigned on were addressed in the coming years, as their photographer Neil Kenlock pointed out in an interview with VICE and another with Organised Youth. More moderate and reformist groups had only managed to obtain the most limited concessions from the government on discrimination, and nothing at all on immigration legislation. After the Black Panthers were most active in Britain, a much stronger race relations act was put in place and talk of repatriation of immigrants was off the table. Another Black

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Panther, Lynton Kwesi Johnson, said in an interview with Organised Youth that the issues the Panthers organised around had changed from when they started and the movement had ‘served its purpose’ – they became more aware of the position of racism in Britain within a global capitalist, imperialist system and activists shifted their attention accordingly.

By means of conclusion, while the Panthers never achieved the overthrow of white supremacy, capitalism or imperialism – and never attempted anything that could be called anarchism, they were very successful in the Mangrove campaign in mobilising their community to take matters into their own hands and directly fight the injustices done to them. Egbuna’s very different approach based in domination and patriarchy shows in extreme the dangers that can come with political organising, tendencies which I think anarchists ought to do a lot more to address in our own organisations and projects. Overall, it is the revolutionary, internationalist, self-organisational spirit of the Black Panthers that make them so important for today’s anarchists – anarchists looking for a struggle that is intersectional, and in the hands of everyone who is ready to stand up to liberate themselves.

On A Black Feminist Anarchism

Zoé Samudzi

(2017)

Partial transcript of a talk given at the Orange County, California Anarchist Bookfair in 2017. Due to the audio quality of the youtube upload, some words are doubtlessly missing from the transcript due to them being indecipherable over the background noise.

In her 1983 literary work *In Search Of Our Mothers' Gardens* Alice Walker described a womanist as;

A woman who loves another woman, sexually and/or non-sexually, she appreciates and prefers womans culture women's emotional flexibility - she's committed to the survival and the wholeness of an entire people, she's not a separatist except periodically for health - she loves the spirit, she loves the struggle, she loves herself, regardless

I have a really complicated relationship with political theory particularly as someone who studied political science as an undergraduate, my relationship to political theory especially to the kind of horribly white supremacist values of rationality and objectivity. As generally a knee-jerk reaction to the whiteness and the US-centricity of it. With regards to anarchism specifically I often feel alienated to the theory because of the non white and non western globality of the politics of the ideology that has all of a sudden been turned into this "white" politic.

Anarchistic values of horizontalism, of mutual aid of voluntary participation of non, extra or markably anti-state organisation existed prior to Pier Joseph Proudhon self description of anarchist in the mid 1800s or William Godwins in the 1790s and I say this in the same vein as that Russell Means of the American Indian Movement sought to resist being Europeanized he said that;

Like capitalism, Marxism is right smack in the middle of european tradition and the hegelian dialectic is a secularising theory that is even further despiritualized and despiritualizes humanity that we also end up seeing in industrialization and Marx's materialism.

I want to share a confession that's made me a bit unpopular in different anarchist communities that I've tried to involve myself in. I don't read canonical anarchist

theory, and I have no intention to. I've read some of and deeply value Emma Goldman's development of Anarcho-Feminism but I've never read Kropotkin, Bakunin and I don't plan to anytime soon. My most important and foundational left politics have been derived from observing organisations and political formations themselves.

The Black Panther Party taught me what it would look like to apply Maoism to a racialized resistance politic for community self determination.

The Zapatista's Zapatismo taught me about the synthesis of articulated indigenous practices and sovereignty and socio-cultural organisation with familiar principles and ideology.

African liberation leaders like Thomas Sankara taught me what a culturally relevant post-colonial formation and an agrarian revolution might look like on the continent before being assassinated.

Brazil's Landless Workers Movement & South Africa's Shack Dwellers Movement and they're about land reclamation and about widespread democratisation processes beginning with the most poor and the most disenfranchised communities in the country. Taught me what it meant to organise around reclaimed resources.

Indigenous peoples and First Nations peoples taught me what sovereignty meant and in addition to these global struggles I'm deeply inspired by the myriad ways that black people have resisted in the Americas and throughout the African diaspora.

Boaventura de Sousa Santos (I do read a tonne of theory, I just don't read white dudes) developed a concept of societal fascism which describes the mechanisms and logics of state formation wherein whole populations are excluded prior to or after the formation of a social contract.

Pre contractual exclusion refers to populations that have never been part of and can never be a part of the social contract. So in the United States think of Indigenous people, of black people and post contractual exclusion or rejection from the contract means that a given population could enjoy condition access to the contract, think of immigrants who had to appeal to a proximity to whiteness. Think of poor white people who are part of the contract through the merit of their whiteness but are excluded because of their working classes.

Black people, obviously as I said exist within the former realm of exclusion because black people are residents within a settler colony. Predicated upon the

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genocide of Indigenous people and the enslavement of African people. Despite formal emancipation in 1865, Blackness can only be perpetually relegated to the afterlife of slavery as long as the settler project continues to exist.

Though we're formally drawn to the laws of the land, Black America can be understood as an extra-state entity because they are not a part of the social contract. Because of this location I understand blackness in so many ways to be anarchistic. African Americans - that is, the ethno-social identity of descendants of enslaved african people have innovated new cultures and social organisations. Much like Anarchism would require us to do outside of the state structure of a revolution happening tomorrow.

Black radical formations are fundamentally anti fascist despite often and generally functioning outside of antifa spaces. Black people have engaged in anarchistic resistances since our arrival in the Americas, from slave ship and plantation rebellions during enslavement to post emancipation labour and prison camp uprisings.

To Harriet Tubman's literal removal of enslaved people from the custody of their owners, to the creation of maroon societies in the south to combatting the historic and present collusion between state law enforcement and white supremacist groups. Assertions of black personhood, humanity and liberation have always called into question both the foundation and the legitimacy of the American state.

Given this particular positionality and the historical relationship that Black people do have to the state. I'm developing an analysis from this particular position as opposed to simply analysis of the position. That is, I'm trying to develop a decolonized dialectic. Marx and Engels have provided us with an admittedly useful dialectical tools for understanding history, state formation, class, these are tools that have been adopted and adapted by countless resistances to colonialism worldwide.

I find Cedric Robinson's critique of marxism's shortcomings to be incredibly useful, particularly when he writes about the non-universal applicability of orthodox western political thought. Processes of industrialization and proletarianization, the failure to account for the inherently racial character of capitalism. In his 1997 article *Identity Politics and Class Struggle* Robyn D.G. Kelly writes that "Class is lived through race and gender".

Highlighting both the inextricability of race and gender with class and the necessity for an anti-capitalist identity politic that instrumentalizes unique experiences and

understandings form a particular social positionality in racial capitalist regimes. It's not simply enough to centre blackness - to toss it into your analysis of how oppression functions and how the state functions - I specifically want to centre black womanhood because of the ways in which race is inextricably linked and co-constituted through gender.

If Anarchism is to be of any use to me, I must have an Anarchism that speaks directly to my needs and vulnerabilities as a Black woman and to Black women of all stripes and all identities. If you're unaware there have been a spate of kidnappings of Black girls and disappearances of Black women across the country. There are ongoing bold murders of Black trans women. Because Black women's safety is a non priority of the state and every predator knows this.

We are being hunted, but this hunting season is grossly un-and-under addressed because of the degendering of anti-racist politics. Because of the way that Black womanhood is made invisible through diversity language around women and people of colour that overlooks the intersections of race and gender. Because of the erasure of Black womanhood though "women of colour" because of the understandings of the ways that state violence against Black bodies tends to focus on the humiliation and emasculation and almost sole targeting of cisgender Black Men.

I hope to speak to a Black Feminist Anarchism, An identity politic, A dialectic and an analytic framework that specifically addresses these urgent material needs.

First, womanism is the social theory based on the race and gender oppression of black women rooted in materiality, lived experience and embodied knowledge. Womanist theologian Delores Williams describes this embodied activism with being associated with traditions and resistance that are formed from different conditions, events, social-cultural and contextual meaning and all of the different values that these things have within blackness.

Womanism offers two things for me in particular, it offers the opportunity to break from traditional definitions of womanhood. Where cis black womanhood is othered and black trans womanhood is doubly othered in the way that it presents a threat to gender hegemony and to the gendered anxiety of us as cis women.

The second thing that it presents to me is the emphasis of kinship and community over individuality. Womanism seeks to reconcile black womens relationships with one another and with nature most notably our deeply commodified and violated bodies over which we have historically had very little agency. Our physical environment and our spirituality.

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Black feminism says that sexism and misogyny gender identity, class depression and racism are inextricably linked in a mutually constitutive web of (to quote Patricia Hill Collins) “interlocking systems of oppression” and within this tradition of course Kimberlé Crenshaw’s intersectionality, which builds off of the Combahee River Collective’s “simultaneity of oppressions” and even 19th century Black feminist works like that of Anna Juliet Cooper.

Black Feminism too seeks to ground political understandings and anti capitalist critiques in embodied knowledges and in lived experiences and also present a non-essentialized and non-biologized critique of Black women hoods identity and position within history. A useful historical revisionism that highlights racial capitalism’s critical subjugation and Black nationalism’s exclusion of black Women, it presents a response to the racist exclusion of Black Women from Women’s issues.

Issues around safety, deservingness, agency, autonomy and class oppression. In understanding black womens unique subjugation by the state means understanding race & gendered labour extraction within capitalism most incisively the ways black feminism is a mentality for understanding how the anti-black settler state is a illegitimate construction, unlike what Jacobin and their class fetishizing ilk of all sectarian stripes might tell you, intersectionality does not undermine marxism.

What does it mean to understand black women’s subjugation it means to understand the ways in which black women’s labour was central to the development of the capitalist state and the american slaveocracy. Sarah Hale’s book No Mercy Here outlined the myriad ways in which gendered anti-blackness forms the construction of the Jim Crow system. This paved the way for the contemporary systems of mass incarceration, school to prison pipelining that we see today.

Hale’s book makes direct comparison between the hyper-imprisonability of black women’s gender deviance and the redeemability of white femininity and the ways in which these constructs were made oppositional and ratified through judicial sentencing that enforced black womens rejection.

Black women were thought to be as strong as men and were frequently used for all kinds of labour, whereas white women were only employed in fields for particularly bad behaviour. Where black men were 1.4 times more likely than white men to be arrested, black women were 6.4 times more likely than white women to get arrested. It became evident that white womens normativity is made more and more concrete through the triple labour the domestic, industrial and sexual (euphemistically called ‘social reproductive’ labour) as black women became play things for prison guards and male approximate punishment.

White women ultimately became exempted from chain gang labour; there was legislation barring white women from chain gangs. They were the only demographic protected from carceral punishment in this way, this codifies the race/gender normativity and highlights the ways in which carcerality and punishment operate in service of white womanhood and how carceral gendering enforced both white women's superiority and black womans distance from innocence.

So then when we look at contemporary anti-racist politics, we look at the ways that black humanity and personhood continues to be evaluated through the impossible to obtain lens of innocence within the white liberal imagination. In *Against Innocence: Race, Gender and the Politics of Safety* Jackie Wang makes a constructive framework for black personhood and victimisation that resonates very deeply with me and sits at the bedrock of what we're talking about. She writes on this phenomenon saying that innocence becomes the precondition for launching antiracist campaigns.

Campaigns where empathy can only be established if and when black people can pass rigorous tests of moral purity so for example;

We can agree, for the most part, that Tamir Rice was egregiously victimised because he was a child. Empathy was a product of his youthfulness and that's the same with Aiyana Jones but Mike Brown was not enough of a victim because he may or may not have committed strong arm robbery. Darren Wilson's testimony added to the process of what Frank B. Wilderson III refers to as 'niggerization' we now know that Mike Brown did not commit strong arm robbery but whether or not he did, should not affect if we believe that extrajudicial assassination is suddenly a reasonable punishment for robbing a convenience store.

We did not however see this overwhelming outpouring of empathy for CeCe McDonald a black trans woman who was convicted of second degree manslaughter after killing an attacker that violently confronted her with first racist and transmysoginistic language and then smashed a drink against her face.

She accepted a plea bargain of 41 months in prison in 2012, served 19 months in two different mens facilities (which is another story) prior to her release in 2014. Given the epidemic of murders of Black trans Women, is defensive violence not warranted? Is she not innocent enough? What makes her less innocent (and we're not using these measures of Guilt and Innocence that the state arbitrarily lays out)

What makes her less innocent is than say Marissa Alexander who fired a warning shot after her husband attacked and threatened to kill her. There was far more

outcry about the gendered engagements of women invoking stand your ground laws then there were about the perfectly reasonable use of any form of violence in response to the assault on black trans women's personhood.

Perhaps because in the case of Alexander, White liberals particularly White feminists were able to apply their carceral logics of protecting the world from scary brown men that sits in the roots of so many anti domestic and intimate partner violence interventions. Where so many anti-racist logics, even ones that merged from radical spaces appeal to innocence - we continue to rely on the logics of white imaginary and draw upon exceptional cases to buttress our arguments.

Ultimately in doing so, we affirm illegitimate modes of governance and social regulation in an illegitimate state, reliance upon empathy fails to produce a politics that unequivocally affirms black humanity. Doling out our own judgements of who we perceive to be innocent and who we perceive to not be innocent enough fails to actually articulate the states relationship to a production of blackness.

To return to Frank B Wilderson III;

If one were to ask the police why they shot a Black person, they would say 'I shot you because you were black, you are black because I shot you'.

We are blackened, we are named black by the logics of violence that are born out chattel enslavement in the americas, colonial subjugation in the continent - Innocence defences can only ever be flawed because the disciplinary and extractive systems around us (the ghetto, the plantation, the prison, the colony) can only ever define us solely through our criminality, our deviance, our ongoing existence as both capital and a heavily subsidised labour force for the state. We can never be innocent and the issue is not the brutalised and slain black individual we decide to immortalise with hashtags after death but rather our fundamentally criminal subject position. The state does not produce anti black sociality, the state is anti black sociality.

If it isn't yet obvious, my almost single minded focus within a black feminist anarchist is that of safety. We should be able to rely on mainstream feminism because we're women but we're precluded from white supremacist notions of womanhood, an exclusion which is doubly compounded for trans women. White women are only virtuous and worth protecting because black women are not. Protecting white women includes a regulation of public space and criminalization of personhood that still victimises black women.

We're unable to rely upon popular criticism of police misconduct that fails to understand that the violence and murder of black people is not an indiscretion and bad behaviour on behalf of police officers, it's not something that can be trained away by diversity training. But it's rather the output of white supremacist settler colonial machinations. It can never not happen again as long as the state continues to exist. Never mind that the african-american policy forum which Kimberlé Crenshaw is a member of had to coin the 'SayHerName' hashtag in 2015 because of black women's exclusion from this narrative in the memorialization of victims of police violence.

How can you indict the state for violence against black bodies when we're still failing to highlight the racialized gendered violence that has characterised it since its inception and that the state has imposed and the means by which the state has imposed this violence against black women's bodies.

Furthermore, how do we have the audacity as anti-capitalists, anarchists, or however we define it. To name anti blackness while failing to have black people in organising spaces? How do we entertain these lazy rejections of identity politics when our politicised ways of knowing and resisting and understanding are a product of the embodied knowledge that come from our marginalised identities.

Wang discusses the ideas of the zones of intelligibility, that is spaces of being and habitation that are understandable to white people. She highlights the fact that perhaps there was so much support that was mobilised for Travon Martin & Oscar Grant, because both were murdered in places that were intellegible and understandable to white imaginations. Travon Martin was killed in a gated community and Oscar Grant was murdered in a public transportation station.

She writes, there are violences that occur in alternative universities, like the slave ship, the hood, the prison, at the hands of the state. What happens when you're unable to articulate the violence of and from your subject position. Because you possess an unintelligible identity as is possessed by black people hence the need to constantly perform the dehumanising mental gymnastics of appealing to an innocence that we can never obtain. What happens when the violence is simply a logical extension of the politics you either knowingly or unknowingly perpetuate?

When white liberals favour order over justice, they by extension support segregatory policy and ghetto policing as that's what order is. Perhaps part of our silence about the murders of black trans women both by black and not Black cis communities, is because the violence and abuse they experience is the logical extension of the cishnormativity that materialises our very identities as cisgender people experience.

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Because as with cis Black people killed by the state we name and exceptionalise and count and deadname the murdered transfeminine Women but we fail to interrogate the way that cisnormativity and gender regulation are central to white supremacist are central to white supremacist state-making.

You need only look at the way that CeeCee and Chelsea Manning and nearly every other transwoman is placed into male facilities or in administrative segregation for their own protection which is tantamount to torture. So we've got to reject this innocence in favour of a politic of Black Womens deservingness of safety in a world where Black womanhood is inviolable and unrapeable. Even in childhood, we're still hypersexual baby jezebel fast tail Girls, and innocence is impossible for us to obtain.

That's all I have, because I want us to have a conversation.

Interviewing Warren McGregor, ZACF, South Africa Warren McGregor & Leroy Maisiri (2018)

Warren McGregor is an activist born in the Coloured townships of the Cape Flats, now resident in Johannesburg, where he is involved in working class and union education.

Leroy Maisiri (LM): First of all thank you so much for your time, and making room for me in your busy schedule. Please kindly begin stating your name and any political affiliations you have with organisations or movements within the left.

Warren McGregor (WM): It's a pleasure, but please call me "Warren." I am a member of the Zabalaza Anarchist Communist Front (ZACF), as well as of the Tokologo African Anarchist Collective (TAAC), and I identify myself politically as an anarchist.

LM: It appears there is a new interest in forming a "worker's party" in South Africa at present. Some people think the National Union of Metalworkers of South Africa (NUMSA) will be the heart of that party, given its recent separation from the Tripartite Alliance of the African National Congress (ANC), the Congress of South African Trade Unions (COSATU), and the South African Communist Party (SACP). Others place their hopes in formations like the new Workers and Socialist Party (WASP), or even in Julius Malema's Economic Freedom Fighters (EFF). And many people have great hopes that the ANC can be ousted by such parties in upcoming elections. Do you think that there is a need for a worker's party in South Africa?

WM: Do I think there is a need for it? No. Ultimately you have to look at what the purpose of the workers' party would be: obviously it would be the same as all other parties, to, in whatever way, access state power. Historically, ideas of a workers' party as a means for the working class to take power and change society come from the Marxist tradition and from social democracy, the desire being to access state power through revolutionary or (usually, these days) electoral means.

What we anarchists would say is that there is no need for a worker's party. And, in fact, that it would be very detrimental, not only here in South Africa but worldwide, to the workers' struggle.

Fundamentally for us, as anarchists, state power is part of the problem of why we have an unequal society. The real, the hegemonic, power that is already dominant in society is the power of the ruling class. By “ruling class,” we anarchists mean those dominating in the economic sphere as well as in the state sphere. And we include into the ruling class the bosses of big business, but also the bosses of the state: your top politicians, and those who run things like the military part of the state, your police and judiciary (all unelected by the way), as well as your top bureaucrats in the governing arm (all unelected).

So we would include them in the ruling class. Our analysis of the state includes the people who run the state, as part of the ruling class. Elites run corporations, elites run the state.

Because of our analysis of the state, we do not consider the state to be an instrument that can be used to reconstruct society, or to construct an equal society, and thus we do not believe that socialism can be created through the state. And by “socialism” here, we mean a classless society and the equal redistribution of wealth and power in society, which means a stateless society, because the state centralises power.

I always say: if we want to create a stateless and equal society, how can we use the state? It’s like saying: “In a year from now, I want to exist on a chocolate-less diet, so I do not want to eat chocolate – and to do that I will eat lots of chocolate! And then maybe the chocolate will start withering away!”

LM: Since you have said “no” to a worker’s party, what is the alternative, according to you?

WM: It is to continue to work to build working class power in the country, but what we as anarchists, with the program of anarchism, would specifically build is “counter power.” This is power that is counter the hegemonic power, essentially a power against, and outside and counter to, the power of the ruling class – and its states and corporations.

For us this means very specific things. It’s about building the power of the working class to challenge the ruling class, and its capacity to reconstruct society from below at some point in the future. And the organs of counter power would include revolutionary (syndicalist) trade unions and community groups and other formations. By “working class” we do not include here just blue-collar workers. All people who work for others for wages and lack power are workers, no matter their jobs, and besides workers the working class includes workers’ families, as well as the unemployed and, generally, the poor.

At the same time, the working class organisations of counter power must not only be fighting organisations, but must also be organisations of education as well. We need a radical education including the ability to critically analyse that which is around you, not just society but also yourself, and your organisation as well.

This is about building a revolutionary popular “counter culture” that also deals with ideas, and with issues like what we mean by “revolution” or “democracy,” and the ideals we want for the future society, helping set in practice, now, in the development of our organisations, these ideals. So counter power and counter culture are linked fundamentally.

By “democracy” as an aim, we speak of a radical democracy, a direct democracy, where the people that form part of a particular project, community, factory, are involved in key decisions and are aware of the decisions, and share in the benefits that accrue from putting the decisions into action.

To get to a directly democratic society in all spheres, we need a revolutionary transformation in all spheres. But to get to a revolutionary transformation, we need to develop direct democracy right now in the organisations of counter power. And we also need to develop a revolutionary attitude, a revolutionary understanding and consciousness. At the end of the day, the ability of organs of counter power to develop towards revolutionary transformation is determined by the development of a revolutionary counter culture, of revolutionary consciousness.

LM: Thank you, very comprehensive. You say “revolutionary transformation,” but are we just smashing the state here? How do reforms and immediate struggles fit? And what, specifically, is meant by “revolutionary transformation”?

WM: Anarchism aims at a revolutionary transformation of society, and by this, we mean a complete overhaul of the way that society is governed and organised, to “revolutionise” the economic, social and political arrangements. Anarchism is not about chaos, or a lack of rules: it asks for a different set of rules, a different order. We do not mean changing the people at the top of society, or the nationalisation of industry by the state: this still means a ruling class controlling an unequal system.

We mean a society where the means of production are commonly owned, a society that is self-managed and democratised, with no hierarchies, no oppression, and no ruling class. It means a self-managed, socialist society, egalitarian and democratic, with collective ownership and individual freedom.

This is what we mean by revolution.

But to get there you need to build working class revolutionary counter power to the point where it can take over society, replace the state and capital. This means building a mass base.

So in the process of developing counter power, you need to attract people to your organisations. That means being able to win reforms in the day-to-day, using day-to-day struggles, based on direct action, not elections and lobbying, so as to improve people's lives: to battle for higher wages, better housing conditions, and access to better conditions from capital and the state.

Being anti-statist does not necessarily mean that you do not use the battle for reforms within the revolutionary struggle. The idea is that the reforms are not the be-all and end-all of the struggle, and that the counter power remains autonomous, outside and against the state, and that fights for reforms are won through direct action by autonomous movements, and linked to the struggle to build revolutionary counter-power and counter-culture.

Reform struggles help to develop revolutionary capabilities, and lead to a sense of encouragement, and the victories and defeats in day-to-day struggles are educational tools not just for the popular organisations as a whole, but for the individuals within the organisations.

Victories help develop a sense of confidence in oneself as a militant in the organisation, as an organiser, and in the organisation itself. Defeats can be educational if we decide to study them as sites of critical analysis. Revolution is the goal, the end, and reforms are necessary, not decisive or ultimate, but steps on the road to revolutionary transformation.

LM: I want to get your general opinion of the state of the left and of anarchism, right now.

WM: Globally the left, for the last thirty years, has been on the back foot, the advent of neo-liberal globalisation and the restructuring of control in societies shifting the balance in favour of the ruling class all around the world, accompanied by attacks on working class formations. The collapse of the Soviet Union, which was basically the collapse of classical Marxism, has had a massive impact: you see it in a massive decline of authoritarian socialism.

But we have also seen, despite Francis Fukuyama calling the period "the end of history," various struggles, in particular, social movement struggles, struggles of the unemployed, and the rural population and peasants. All around the world we have seen upsurges, and these new movements have to a certain extent taken over where

the trade unions used to be. Although the unions are far from dead.

We also see a resurrection of more libertarian socialism, in particular, anarchism. Now anarchism globally is still in a process of not necessarily defining itself, but of redefinition and rediscovery, of linking back to its historical roots, and recapturing parts of anarchist theory and history that have been lost or distorted. For example, from after the Second World War, writing about anarchist history has been focused on Northern Europe and America, relying on perspectives that discount the majority of anarchism that existed and exists globally and historically.

And we see that many of the struggles today, for example, the Occupy movements, also reflect the influence of more libertarian ideas and anarchist ideas without necessarily being purely anarchist. Many of those ideas are starting to find more space in the world.

However, there is a long way to go to reclaim the space that working class movements used to have a few decades ago, when they used to influence society, and also reclaiming the space for revolutionary left ideas, especially anarchism, which can radically change society.

The fact of the matter is that it is the radical right – in religious, fascist, populist and anti- foreigner variants – that is capturing the space opened by massive popular dissatisfaction with ruling elites.

LM: South Africa also has long tradition of left-wing and working class politics: where does anarchism fit here?

WM: Anarchism globally had its golden age in terms of influence from around 1870 to into the 1930s, and remained important after that, but less so than statist movements like anti- colonial nationalism and classical Marxism. But before that anarchism was certainly the most dominant socialist idea in the world, and its trade unionism, also known as “syndicalism,” had a very big influence. It played a key role in the colonial and postcolonial world, including in anti-colonial and anti-imperialist struggles.

This included an important influence on South African black and white worker formations in the early part of the 1900s. But it's only in the latter part of the 1990s that we have a rekindling of an anarchist presence in South Africa, and an organised attempt to get re-involved in working class struggles. This all means that anarchism here is still quite a small force, first of all in the left, and secondly, even smaller in terms of influence among the working class and poor.

But on the other hand we are growing not only as an organisation and organised force, but, more importantly, the ideas of anarchism, when engaged with in a proper and honest way, find favour with black working class people here. More important than sitting on committees in coalitions like the new United Front, promoted by NUMSA, or chasing political party dreams, is systematic back-to-basics work with grassroots working class people, to win influence and to develop a black working class cadre of anarchists who are involved in everyday struggles, community struggles, union struggles etc.

LM: And the left in South Africa?

WM: I have tons of respect, despite any ideological disagreements and differences in tactical and strategic choices, for others in the left and in the progressive movement.

There are real differences in terms of strategy and tactics. But we are not sectarians: our history shows this. I have been involved in the anarchist movement for about six-and-a-half years, and its clear anarchists have a long tradition of involvement in struggle with working class organisations, and this has included working with a variety of socialist and non-socialist groups.

We absolutely do not reject working with other political organisations, but we draw the line when it comes to what we are working for: if something goes against our principles or goes against the working class, we draw the line and do not cooperate.

We promote structured, democratic, mandate-based approaches to organising and reject the South African “populist” style. This is closely linked to the ANC and its offshoots, and centres on unelected and unaccountable leaders and self-appointed demagogues directing the actions of crowds who have no real say.

Fundamentally, there is no way we would consider a political party, whether left or right, to be of any use to revolutionary transformation or even reforms. This does not preclude the possibility that we will work, where needed, with political party people – and not just with independent or revolutionary socialists, because we would work with ordinary SACP and ANC members in struggles. These organisations have a big rank-and-file working class membership and those members can be engaged.

But as vehicles for a radical change? The SACP and ANC and indeed, all the other parties, including the EFF, cannot be these vehicles. Elections won't and don't help.

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To get anywhere in elections, the left would need to pour resources, resources that could have been used in building working class organisation and education, into getting people to vote, and even if seats are won, the representatives just become part of the problem, part of the state apparatus and ruling class. If militancy is funnelled into elections or a workers' party, it eventually means the subjugation of working class militancy to elections.

We will support any initiative that mobilises people and has a potential to become counter power or a space to win people to our ideas, and to build counter culture. But a workers' party and electioneering are a dead end, a grave yard for left, democratic and working class politics.

What is going to change society is a groundswell of working class organisation, structured, democratic and able to develop in the direction of counter culture and counter culture, not a unity of the left, which is not really possible. And this groundswell requires not just organising people but also changing the ideas that they have.

We, anarchists, are not messiahs who are going to bring about change the actual change, the revolutionary transformation. It is the working class that will, through a long, hard struggle with both victory and defeat, by building organisation and consciousness, despite suffering many losses, that will change the world. It's not a quick-fix, it's not a politics of election promises or freedom from above. State power and elections have never worked for the working class: that is the quick fix that fixes nothing.

Take the EFF: in power it has gone back on its promises and it reproduces many features of ANC populism.

LM: Thank you once again, for your input and your time

Haiti In Revolt - An Overview and Analysis of Six Months of Revolt Salish Sea Black Autonomists (2018)

As we write the French Republic is burning and the North American anarchist movement has its eyes fixed on the fires, yet in our own backyard the former French colony of Haiti has been ablaze for months. Since the slave insurrections and struggle for decolonization (a struggle unfinished, we might add) the Haitian people have been in a near constant state of revolt against slavery and colonialism, dictatorships, neocolonialism, occupation, and a crumbling state. The most recent incarnation of this social revolt started in July against corruption and has spread into a nation wide insurrectionary situation calling for the removal of the U.S backed ruling Haitian Tèt Kale Party (PHTK) and its leader, President Jovenel Moïse. The state has responded with beatings, torture, shootings, massacres, and what many fear to be the return of dictatorship era death squads. Rather than crushing revolt, it has only intensified.

This recent anti-government wave of revolt comes from the revolt against corruption and a gas price hike from early July, though we can see its precursor in the resistance to the 2015/2016 elections and the post election wave of strikes and riots. The Haitian elections were marred by fraud and voter suppression, as well as the general rejection by the Haitian people who have long since lost faith in electoralism giving way to the lowest voter turnout in the western hemisphere. The first round of elections were held on October 25, 2015 and of the nearly 6 million registered to vote there was a turnout of only 28.8% and Jovenel Moïse, a protégé of former President Michel Martelly and owner of a banana exporting operation, of the right-wing PHTK took the election with 32.81% of the vote, a mere 500,000 people compared to the size of the Haitian electorate (or compared to Haiti's almost 11 million total population in 2015). Coming in second was Jude Célestin of Alternative League for Haitian Progress and Emancipation (LAPEH) with 25.27% of the vote. Since there was no one who held a clear majority a runoff election, initially scheduled for December 27th, 2015, was to decide the President

The election results were rejected by both the Haitian people as well as opposition parties which kicked off protests decrying the fraud and corruption and demanding an annulment. Protests spread across the country and quickly escalated with

election offices burned, streets blockaded with burning barricades, and clashes with Haitian National Police and UN "Peacekeepers".

On December 22nd the Provisional Electoral Council (CEP) indefinitely postponed the runoff election due to the popular rejection of the initial election results. On January 1st then President Martelly declared the runoff elections would be held on the 17th, he later would change the runoff date to the 24th which would then be canceled due to intense riots and blockades as a part of the call for a week of rebellion against the scheduled elections.

The back drop to all of this was the United States urging the elections to take place as quickly as possible, urging the state to ignore the Haitian people and have the January 24th runoff election. A verification commission was set up to audit the results of the August 2015 election, a move the United States was displeased with as U.S. State Department Haiti Special Coordinator Kenneth Merten states, "We hope it is very, very quick and does not change the results of the election." The Secretary of State John Kerry even chimed in saying, "The Haitian players, the so-called leaders, need to understand there's a clear limit to the patience, the willingness of the international community to condone this process of delay."

However, against the wishes of much of the so-called "international community", a lovely name for the United States and the U.N., on May 30th the verification commission recommended throwing out the results of the August 2015 election. The new election was to be held in early October but was delayed as the country, which was still trying to recover from the 2010 earthquake, was hit by Hurricane Matthew. The new election was finally held on November 20th with people from the social democratic Fanmi Lavalas party and the PHTK filling the streets after polling stations closed, claiming they have won.

Between the devastation of the hurricane and the Haitian peoples exhaustion from the year long election process, voter turnout for this election was even lower than last time at just 18%. Of that 18% that voted, Jovenel Moise took 55% of the vote and with an 'absolute majority' won the election as a whole. Unwilling to accept more years of PHTK rule, again the Haitian people overwhelmingly rejected the results and protests and conflicts broke out, with reports of demonstrations, burning barricades, and gunshots, especially in the La Saline slum which is a major stronghold of social democratic Fanmi Lavalas which called the election an "electoral coup".

On February 7th, 2017, Jovenel Moise was sworn in as Haiti's 58th President. Already in the peoples bad graces and coming into office with suspicions of money

laundering, he declared, “we will invest in and cultivate available lands, build roads, bridges, and electricity networks... build schools, dispensaries, and hospitals, facilitate great tourist projects, take all the advantage we can from the HELP and HOPE acts [of the U.S. Congress] by promoting investment in the assembly sector.”, promises that have gone unheeded.

His first year in office was marked blatant corruption as well as by continuous protests, strikes, riots, and blockades for minimum wage increases and against the government that have taken an increasing revolutionary stance with protesters chanting “Down with the government, down with the bourgeoisie!” The Haitian State has responded with a wide range of repression through strike breaking and firing on with live ammo. This cycle of revolt and repression has been ongoing and it’s a pattern that will repeat itself with greater intensity in the next year.

An intensely unpopular right wing government riddled with abuse and corruption and wave after wave of protest and revolt in the winter set the stage for a hot summer. In July, using the cover of the World Cup hoping everyone would be too distracted to notice, the government implemented an IMF imposed reform raising the price of gasoline, diesel, and kerosene by 38%-51%, with a liter of diesel costing around 4\$ USD and a liter of gasoline costing about 5\$ USD. This price hike also meant that costs for public transportation would rise and for a country who’s minimum wage is between 215 Gourdes (about 3 USD) to 500 Gourdes (about 7 USD) a day depending on industry any price raise is a large chunk out of a days wages.

This all out assault on the poor (that the IMF claimed is actually helping the poor) didn’t go unnoticed and the state’s hope for people being distracted by the World Cup fell apart when Haitians took to the street as it ended. Protests, mostly centered in Haiti’s capital Port-au-Prince, quickly escalated to rioting and looting and not even 24 hours later the state reversed the price hike, but that didn’t get people off the streets and days of intense revolt followed in which multiple people were killed and ended up with the resignation of Prime Minister Jack Guy Lafontant and members of his cabinet.

Resumen Latinoamericano describes the revolt saying,

Hundreds of thousands of protesters are in the streets, building barricades, setting fire to service stations, car dealerships, premises, homes and so on and there are calls to occupy the centre of the capital, where the palace of government is located.

They follow up with,

It is important to note that for the moment, no political force is commanding the actions, but rather that they are developing in an uncoordinated way. The organizations are trying to articulate to give this uprising a clearer political direction and avoid the situation ending in generalized uncontrolled violence.”

This bears mentioning because much of the revolts that have happened, like the resistance to the elections, are called for by opposition parties and while they always have the possibility of getting totally out of control and can to a degree go beyond the parties threshold for acceptable conflict they are still able to be reigned back in. This, of course, isn't to say that the Haitian people are being led around by the opposition parties but that the opposition parties are apt in using and diverting the long burning rage of the Haitian people from asserting their power to directly meet their needs into being tools to get more leverage in the state, as any political body vying for state power aims to do.

The fires were still smoldering when in August an anti-corruption social movement under the banner of the #PetroCaribeChallenge began to emerge. What started as just an airing of grievances around government corruption based on a Senate committee report from last year quickly kicked off another wave of protest and intense revolt. The report details the misuse and disappearance of at least 1.7 billion USD from the PetroCaribe Fund, a fund established through the Venezuelan “economic solidarity” program PetroCaribe which for Haiti was filled by the 40% of revenues from cheap Venezuelan oil. A program that the United States was not a fan of.

The PetroCaribe fund was supposed to be used for social and economic projects as well as reconstruction from the 2010 earthquake. The outrage of this scandal was built upon not just the past months of revolt but years of corruption. Toward the end of August protestors began to hit the street and trying to save face and assert the legitimacy of the state both current and former Presidents pack an investigation into the misuse of the funds. Yet protests continued and would continue to escalate into October, which would prove to be a bloody month.

A protest was called for Dessalines Day, a day commemorating the death of ex-slave and revolutionary leader in the Haitian Revolution Jean-Jacques Dessalines. The lead up to the protest was filled with intimidation by the state and the Haitian ruling class, with a police memo fearing attacks on that day and some opposition party lawyers get questioned by a state prosecutor about the protests. Tensions

begin to rise higher as highschool students begin to join the protests and videos of wealthy Haitians begin to circulate showing weapons as a threat against the upcoming protest and in the days leading up banks and businesses begin to take steps to prepare.

The day before there were burning barricades erected and in the night there were ceremonies to invoke the ancestors. As the day began a government event is disrupted and police have to fire into the air to disperse the crowd. All over the country there are protests and clashes. In the end multiple buildings and vehicles were destroyed, 11 cops were injured, many police vehicles torched, and at least 2 people were killed. Days later video spreads of police beating people who were suspected of taking part in the protest and the bodies of 3 protestors who were arrested are found on the outskirts of Port-au-Prince.

Nightly protests begin to take to the street and at the end of the month a funeral for those killed by police at the Dessalines Day demo is held. Police attack and open fire on the funeral which kicks off intense rioting in the capital city. Rebels put up flaming barricades all over the city and clash with the police.

In November more protests erupt calling for the removal of the president, and at this point police responding with live ammo is the norm as the state militarizes more to intimidate rebels. On the 13th a massacre takes place in the La Saline slum, a Lavalas stronghold, and while the state is saying that it was a gang turf war the account of survivors tells a different story,

What was reported by residents — with shared photos on social media — the assassins appeared in BOID (Brigade d'opération et d'intervention départementale) uniforms and new vehicles. In addition, some of the known members of the Base Nan Chabon gang led by Serge Alectis — widely known as Ti Junior — were in the same mercenary soup wearing the uniforms. What is now becoming even more shared amongst Haitians is that the new amorphous mercenary group is fronted by former MINUSTAH (UN) officer Mohammad Nusari from Yemen. It is this “Security Consultant” that also brings with him the perceived involvement of the US Embassy, the CIA and the UN.

A 3 day general strike is called shutting down most of Haiti as barricades go up. People hit the streets en-mass after the strike and police respond with teargas and gunfire. Protests continue, in one town police kill Beaumont resident Camecio Simon and people respond by burning down the police station. The 28th anniversary of the election of Haiti's first freely elected president, Jean-Bertrand Aristide, is marked by protests.

As the situation currently stands demonstrations calling for the removal of President Moïse are still happening and the newly elected Prime Minister Jean-Henry Céant has tried to appeal to “patriotism” to call a “truce” for Christmas, but it doesn’t look like there are any signs of slowing down

For us as insurrectionary anarchists in North America the inevitable revolts to come as the crumbling Haitian state tries to save itself offers us a chance to on one hand chip away at our movements eurocentrism and on the other elaborate a practice of internationalism.

We do not find it surprising that the places and movements we tend to give our attention, material solidarity, and rage to are generally European, almost never anywhere with a black majority. We understand that, as A. G. Schwarz words it in the text *The Spirit of December Spread ‘Round the World*, “...solidarity is based on affective bonds.” Following this, it makes sense that an overwhelmingly white anarchist movement would find its inspiration and give most of its attention to explicitly anarchist forces (which is good) or other movements that look more like them. To illustrate the point further we pull this quote from the same text,

“And we may even be overestimating the limits of our own solidarity. When immigrants in Omonia rioted in June 2009 after a cop ripped up a Koran in a racist police raid, shockingly few anarchists took part. The tearing of a Koran was interpreted by many immigrants as an attack on their identity, their difference, and thus their very survival. Greek anarchists seemed to interpret it as a religious squabble, much the same way that Italian high school students might fail to understand what the killing of a Greek kid had to do with them.”

However, if our anarchism is to be internationalist, if we want to generalize insurrection across borders and across identities, we must actively be looking for and taking part in revolt outside of the usual places and identifying ourselves not just with anarchists but with anarchistic and ungovernable forces, of course with a critical eye to the content of their politics lest we relive the anarchist fascination with the 2014 Ukraine revolts that has anarchists unknowingly cheer-leading for neo-nazis because they fought police.

When we talk of elaborating a practice of internationalism, and particularly in the context of Haiti, we are talking about everything from intervening in workers struggles and forming state-side support campaigns to counter-information campaigns about and attacks against the means and logistics through which the United States intervenes in Haiti – through the State Department, the CIA, USAID, the U.S. Military, and through the United Nations.

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This can also take the form of putting in the effort to learn Kreyol, like many anarchists took the time and effort to learn Kurdish to support struggles in Rojava, to translate texts and analysis to and from to boost the voices of autonomous Haitian rebels and facilitate conversations between movements. We can also look to supporting groups like the autonomous workers organization Batay Ouvriye or the Haiti Info Project, one of the few on the ground grassroots groups putting out news and analysis of revolt in Haiti.

The continuous and increasingly escalating waves of revolt are looking like they might force out the President by early next year, however with the reformation of the Haitian Military and a violent history of US and UN intervention, not to mention the compounding effects of mass deforestation and climate change, the future looks as grim as it does promising.

As has been noted in many other instances the left path of electoralism runs up against the dictatorship of capital and the need of the state to first and foremost secure the existence of the state even at the expense of those it governs. In Haiti, with the direct and constant meddling of the US and UN, the military, and bourgeois leftovers of the Duvalier era, left electoralism is only a set up for worse to come. If there is hope for real peace and stability for the Haitian people it will come through abandoning political parties and state machinery in favor of building the autonomous power to take care of and defend each other. We can see the seeds of this in the autonomous revolts initiated by the Haitian people rather than called for by opposition parties and in groups like the autonomous workers organization Batay Ouvriye.

All struggles for liberation are connected, those directly happening in the backyard of the United States directly effect our struggles, and ours theirs. We will be continually keeping an eye on unfolding social conflict looking for ways to support struggle stateside, and we hope others do as well.

The Anarchism of Blackness
Zoé Samudzi and William C. Anderson
(2018)

Present incarnations of an unfazed and empowered far right increasingly demand the presence of a real, radical left. In the coming months and years, the left and left-leaning constituencies of the United States will need to make clear distinctions between potentially counterproductive symbolic progress, and actual material progress. Liberalism and party politics have failed a public attempting to bring about real change — but there are solutions.

The Black liberation struggle, in particular, has long provided a blueprint for transformative social change within the boundaries of this empire, and it has done so due to its positioning as an inherently radical social formation — a product of the virulent and foundational nature of anti-Blackness in American society. Understanding the significance of this struggle, we can proceed through examinations of the past, present and future to build new movements, a strong and radical left, and political power that generates and inspires rather than disappoints.

The Failings of American Liberalism

The United States' self-ascribed democratic traits have long been filtered through oppressive forms that the state insists are necessary. Life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness are measured by the success of a capitalist system that only truly benefits a few. Meanwhile, everyone else is told to believe that our supposedly meritocratic chance at being one of those few beneficiaries is what makes us “free.” True, unfiltered freedom and deep democracy are far too revolutionary for this state, so radical and revolutionary critiques of systemic limitations are often dismissed as overly idealistic or a utopian fantasy. But it is in the midst of the real-life nightmare that is the Trump administration that we should now — more than ever — be dreaming and striving to achieve something better.

For many years now, American liberalism has been a bitter disappointment to many of those who somehow maintained faith in the democratic integrity of the two-party system. The Democratic Party has seemingly been the only choice for those who consider themselves progressives working for a better society, but the notion that social inequities will be solved through the electoral process was always

naïve at best. The entrails of this system are lined with the far-right fascism that is currently rising and has been bubbling under the façade of liberal democracy at the expense of non-whites in a white supremacist society. A system predicated on the over-emphasis of “order” and “security” is primed for authoritarianism.

Genocide, enslavement and other forms of violence the empire inflicts have grown more tepid in their bluntness since this nation’s birth. Over time, the violence has been displaced and restructured by more insidious and invisible modalities of community destruction. The reservation, the prison system and austerity policies are just some of the negotiable forms of violence that liberalism has facilitated over time.

Over the past few decades, the United States has seen a shift in liberal politics leaving the Democratic Party in a completely compromised position. The emergence of the Tea Party, a populist surge in the Republican Party, alienated the more “moderate” establishment Republicans in favor of a more explicitly articulated bigoted takeover. The lack of a real response to this moment further enabled the rightward shift as a shaken liberal establishment only sought and attempted bipartisan negotiations with the more extreme elements commandeering the party. Instead of moving left, the Democratic Party pandered to the alienated “moderate” right as it had been for years, and facilitated this conservative shift with nearly every waking opportunity.

Bipartisan Delusions

Liberal support for the Iraq War, post-9/11 domestic policy and the foreign policy extensions of the War on Terror made clear the position of the Democratic Party. For “millennials” in particular, our generation has come of political age watching perpetual disappointments to this end. There has been no true left in the United States because the positioning of the Democratic Party is not one of stark opposition to the right. The messaging that suggests we should meet conservatives halfway and work on “both sides of the aisle” has comfortably consolidated a giant right-wing apparatus.

It seems fitting that at the end of the Obama era we would see a white supremacist Trump presidency, and that immediately following a Black president whose cabinet was outspoken about diversity and inclusion we would see a spike in right-wing hate group enrollment. And through the transition of administrations and the first wave of antagonistic legislation, there was neither sustained nor sustainable protection being planned by the party purporting to defend progress. That quiet has now manifested itself in a Trump administration filled to the brim with the worst of the worst: the absence of a real left has left so many vulnerable populations exposed and at the mercy of a plutocratic tyrant hell-bent on destruction.

After a spate of extrajudicial police killings, hate crimes and domestic terror incidents, the country is reeling. Black America has been reminded again and again that we are seen as a monolithic group of feeble-minded children to be chastised by the state for our own disenfranchisement and community disadvantage. If there is nothing to be offered that addresses the reparations Black America is owed on several fronts, then we should seek to secure these things ourselves through action.

Liberalism and Democratic Party politics are simply not working for Black people. The agenda of the liberal establishment is frequently not one that is in line with the everyday material needs of Black America. Despite the optics of change and the promises of a new day and the moral victories of “going high,” an old sun is rising on a white horizon. At this point Black people and all people of color across the United States will have to decide between securing real change and bargaining with bigotry for compromise.

Blackness and the Zone of Non-Citizenship

Societal fascism describes the process and political logics of state formation wherein entire populations are either excluded or ejected from the social contract. They are excluded pre-contractually because they have never been a part of a given social contract and never will be; or they are ejected from a contract they were previously a part of and are only able to enjoy a conditional inclusion at best.

Black Americans are the former: they are residents in a settler colony predicated upon the genocide of indigenous people and the enslavement of the Africans from whom they are descendants. Residents in the United States, as opposed to citizens of. Despite a Constitution laden with European Enlightenment values, and a document of independence declaring egalitarianism and inalienable rights as the law of the land, Black existence was that of private property. The Black American condition is perpetual relegation to the afterlife of slavery, and as long as the United States continues to exist as an ongoing settler project, in this afterlife Black people will remain.

As Hortense Spillers makes clear in her seminal work, “Mama’s Baby, Papa’s Maybe: An American Grammar Story,” Blackness was indelibly marked and transformed through the Transatlantic chattel trade. European colonialism and the subsequent process of African enslavement — both as a profit-maximizing economic institution and an un-humaning institution — can be regarded as “high crimes against the flesh, as the person of African females and males registered the wounding.”

Crimes against the flesh are not simply crimes against the corporeal self: the wounded flesh, rather, was the personhood and social positionality of the African. The wounding is the process of blackening and necessarily of subjugation, a wound from which Black people and “Blackness” writ large have yet to recover. Black exclusion from the social contract is existence within a heavily surveilled and heavily regulated state of subjection. We are carriers of the coveted blue passport still trapped in the zone of citizen non-being. We are simultaneously subjugated and teased with promises of liberation via individualized neoliberal self-betterment and swallowing of a long-soured American Dream whilst choking back dissonances and forcibly reconciling irreconcilable double consciousnesses.

Whiteness has long sought to grapple with the existential threat posed by Black freedom. Black repatriation to Africa, or “colonization,” has long been floated as one potential solution. Founded in 1816 and driven by a variety of ultimately complementary motivations, the American Colonization Society helped to found the colony of Liberia in 1822. The abolitionist contingents within the society believed that because of the insurmountable discriminations free-born Black people and freedmen and their families experienced, Black people would fare far better organizing themselves in their African “homelands.”

Slaveholders within American society were concerned that the presence of free Blacks would inspire enslaved Blacks to revolt and thus compromise the stability (both economic stability and the stability of the anti-Black racial order) of the southern slaveocracy, and other openly racist members outright refused Black people the opportunity to integrate into American society. Others still were concerned that Black families would burden state welfare systems and that interracial labor competition would ultimately compromise wages for white workers.

A lesser known proponent of colonization was the “Great Emancipator” himself, Abraham Lincoln, who entertained a far lesser known and quickly abandoned plan for Black colonization in Panama — one decried by Frederick Douglass as “ridiculous” — which would also play a role in the expansion of American trade influence in the Caribbean. The “Back to Africa” project was subsequently taken up by Black thinkers like Marcus Garvey in the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries following the failures of Reconstruction in the South, the first attempt to meaningfully extend citizenship to newly emancipated Blacks, to protect them from white supremacist violence and also the social and political disillusionment of Blacks who had migrated to northern states. It is no coincidence that interest in repatriation peaked during the period.

The major problem with both historical and contemporary repatriation-colonization programs is the means by which they fail to both provide reparation for historic violence and answer the perennial question of Black citizenship in the United States. Many or most Black people, including many descendants of enslaved Africans trafficked from the continent centuries ago, have no desire to return to an Africa that has never been their home in any material sense. Given plans to remain, Black people have organized in myriad ways to affect change and actualize varying conceptions of liberation in the United States. But as history has demonstrated, some vehicles for change and political advancement are more fickle than others.

The Anarchism of Blackness

Make no mistake: progress has been secured by Black people's mobilization as opposed to a single political party. We are the ones who have achieved much of the progress that changed the nation for the better for everyone. Those gains were not a product of any illusion of American exceptionalism or melting pots, but rather through blood, sweat and community self-defense. Our organization can be as effective now as it has been in the past, serving every locality and community based on their needs and determinations. This much can be achieved through disassociating ourselves from party politics that fail to serve us as Black freedoms cannot truly be secured in any given election. Our political energy is valuable and should not all be drained by political cycles that feed into one another as well as our own detriment.

While bound to the laws of the land, Black America can be understood as an extra-state entity because of Black exclusion from the liberal social contract. Due to this extra-state location, Blackness is, in so many ways, anarchistic. African-Americans, as an ethno-social identity comprised of descendants from enslaved Africans, have innovated new cultures and social organizations much like anarchism would require us to do outside of state structures. Black radical formations are themselves fundamentally anti-fascist despite functioning outside of "conventional" Antifa spaces, and Black people have engaged in anarchistic resistances since our very arrival in the Americas.

From slave ship and plantation rebellions during enslavement to post-Emancipation labor and prison camps, to Harriet Tubman's removal of enslaved peoples from the custody of their owners, to the creation of maroon societies in the American South, to combatting the historic (and present) collusion between state law enforcement and the Ku Klux Klan — assertions of Black personhood, humanity and liberation have necessarily called into question both the foundations and legitimacy of the American state.

So given this history, why do we understand Black political formations as squarely entrenched within liberalism or as almost synonymous with supporting for the Democratic Party? The reality of the afterlife of slavery shows that the updated terms of Black citizenship are still inextricably linked to the original sins levied against us from the moment of this nation's inception. We are not able to escape a cage that has never been fully removed, though liberal fantasy would have you think we will have a dream or dignifiedly protest out of harm's way.

The simple and increasingly realized reality is that mass protests, petitions and the over-exhausted respectable methods liberals tout as sole solutions have a purpose, but do not stop bullets — that is why Dr. King and many of their favorite sanitized “non-violent” protesters of yesteryear carried weapons to defend themselves.

Responding to this Neo-Fascist Moment

Liberalism cannot defeat fascism, it can only engage it through symbolic political rigmarole. The triteness of electoral politics that has been superimposed onto Black life in the United States positions Black people as an indelible mule for much of this nation's social progression. Our hyper-visible struggle is a fight for all people's freedom and we die only to realize that everything gained can be reversed with the quick flick of a pen. While liberalism takes up the burden of protecting “free speech” and the rights of those who would annihilate all non-whites, Black people and other people of color assume all of the risks and harms

The symbolic battles the Democratic Party and its liberal constituents engage in pose direct existential threats to Black people because they protect esteemed ideals of a constitution that has never guaranteed Black people safety or security. The idealistic gestures with which liberalism defines itself are made at the expense of Black people who are not protected by such ideals in the ways institutional whiteness and even articulations of white supremacy are protected.

Constitutional amendments are contorted based on the state's historical disregard for sustaining an active antagonism towards Black life. The First Amendment has been repeatedly trampled by militarized police trotting through Black neighborhoods. The Second Amendment has been shot down by countless state enforcers who have extra-judicially murdered Black people based merely on the suspicion they might have a weapon. The Thirteenth Amendment legitimized enslavement through mass incarceration and extended the practice into a new form of white supremacist rationalization and an old capitalist labor politic that still tortures us to this day. This fascist moment is neither ideologically new nor temporally surprising. It is an inevitability.

Anti-fascist organizing must be bold. The mechanisms working against us do not entertain our humanity: they are hyper-violent. They deal death and destruction in countless numbers across the non-Western world while turning domestic Black and Brown neighborhoods into proxies for how to treat sub-citizen “others.” The militarization of police, border regimes, stop-and-frisk and ICE are clear examples of how the state regards the communities it targets and brutalizes. At the very least, a conversation on self-defense that does not mistreat our survival as a form of violence is deeply needed. And it would be even better if such a conversation normalized anti-fascist organizing that prepared people for the possibility of a fight, instead of simply hoping that that day never comes and respectably clutching proverbial pearls at those currently fighting in the streets.

Everyone has a stake in the fight against fascism. It cannot be defeated with bargaining, petitioning, pleading, “civilized” dialogue, or any other mode of response we were taught was best. Fascists have no respect for “othered” humanities. Regardless of age, gender, race, sexuality, religion, physical ability or nationality, there is a place for all of us in this struggle. We are always fighting against the odds because there is no respite in a perpetually abusive state. It can only function through this abuse, so we can only prevail through organizing grounded in radical love and solidarity.

Our solidarity must prioritize accountability, and it must be authentic. Strategic organizing of this sort, organizing where we understand the inextricable linkedness of our respective struggles, is our means of bolstering the makings of a cohesive left in the United States. The time wasted on dogma and sectarianism, prejudice and incoherence among leftists is over.

The sooner Black America in particular begins to understand our position as an inherently anarchistic element of the United States, the more realistically we will be able to organize. Moving beyond the misnomer of chaos, the elements that make us such are the very tools we should utilize to achieve our liberation. This burning house cannot be reformed to appropriately include us, nor should we want to share a painful death perishing in the flames. A better society has to be written through our inalienable self-determinations, and that will only happen when we realize we are holding the pen.

Why I Am An Anarchist **Benjamin Zephaniah** *(2019)*

I got political after I suffered my first racist attack at the age of seven. I didn't understand any political theory, I just knew that I had been wronged, and I knew there was another way. A few years later, when I was fifteen a marked police car pulled up to me as I walked in Birmingham in the early hours of the morning, three cops got out of the car, they pushed me into a shop doorway, then they beat me up. They got back into their car, and drove off as if nothing had happened. I had read nothing about policing policy, or anything on so-called law and order, I just knew I had been wronged. When I got my first job as a painter, I had read nothing on the theory of working class struggles or how the rich exploited the poor, but when my boss turned up every other day in a different supercar, and we were risking our lives up ladders and breathing in toxic fumes, I just knew I had been wronged.

I grew up (like most people around me) believing Anarchism meant everyone just going crazy, and the end of everything. I am very dyslexic so I often have to use a spellchecker or a dictionary to make sure I've written words correctly. I was hearing words like Socialism and Communism all the time, but even the Socialists and Communists that I came across tended to dismiss Anarchists as either a fringe group, who they always blamed if there was trouble on demonstrations, or dreamers. Even now, I just checked a spellchecker and it describes Anarchism as chaos, lawlessness, mayhem, and disorder. I like the disorder thing, but for the 'average' person, disorder does mean chaos, lawlessness, and mayhem. The very things they're told to fear the most.

The greatest thing I've ever done for myself is to learn how to think for myself. I began to do that at an early age, but it's really difficult to do that when there are things around you all the time telling you how to think. Capitalism is seductive. It limits your imagination, and then tells you that you should feel free because you have choices, but your choices are limited to the products they put before you, or the limits of your now limited imagination. I remember visiting São Paulo many years ago when it introduced its Clean City Law. The mayor didn't suddenly become an Anarchist, but he did realise that the continuous and ubiquitous marketing people

were subjected to was not just ugly, but distracting people from themselves. So more than 15,000 marketing billboards were taken down. Buses, taxis, neon and paper poster advertisements were all banned. At first it looked a little odd, but instead of either looking at, or trying not to look at advertising boards, I walked, and as I walked I looked around me. I found that I only purchased what I really needed, not what I was told I needed, and what was most noticeable was that I met and talked to new people every day. These conversations tended to be relevant, political, and meaningful. Capitalism keeps us in competition with each other, and the people who run Capitalism don't really want us to talk to each other, not in a meaningful way.

I'm not going to go on about Capitalism, Socialism, or Communism, but it is clear that one thing they all have in common is their need for power. Then to back up their drive for power they all have theories, theories about taking power and what they want to do with power, but therein lies the problem. Theories and power. I became an Anarchist when I decided to drop the theories and stop seeking power. When I stopped concerning myself with those things I realised that true Anarchy is my nature. It is our nature. It is what we were doing before the theories arrived, it is what we were doing before we were encouraged to be in competition with each other. There have been some great things written about Anarchism, and I guess that's Anarchist theory, but when I try to get my friends to read these things (I'm talking about big books with big words), they get headaches and turn away. So, then I turn off the advertising (the TV etc.) and sit with them, and remind them of what they can do for themselves. I give them examples of people who live without governments, people who organise themselves, people who have taken back their own spiritual identity – and then it all makes sense.

If we keep talking about theories then we can only talk to people who are aware of those theories, or have theories of their own, and if we keep talking in the round about theories we exclude a lot of people. The very people we need to reach, the very people who need to rid themselves of the shackles of modern, Capitalistic slavery. The story of Carne Ross is inspiring, not because he wrote something, but because he lived it. I love the work of Noam Chomsky and I love the way that Stuart Christie's granny made him an Anarchist, but I'm here because I understand that the racist police who beat me have the state behind them, and the state itself is racist. I'm here because I now understand that the boss-man who exploited me to make himself rich didn't care about me. I'm here because I know how the Marrons in Jamaica freed themselves and took to the hills and proved to all enslaved people that they (the Marrons), could manage themselves. Don't get me wrong, I love books (I'm a writer, by the way), and I know we need people who think deeply – we should all think deeply. But my biggest inspirations come from everyday people

who stop seeking power for themselves, or seeking the powerful to rescue them, and they do life for themselves. I have met people who live Anarchism in India, Kenya, Jamaica, Ethiopia, and in Papua New Guinea, but when I tell them they are Anarchists most will tell me they have not heard of such a word, and what they are doing is natural and uncomplicated. I'm an Anarchist because I've been wronged, and I've seen everything else fail.

I spent the late seventies and the eighties living in London with many exiled ANC activists – after a long struggle Nelson Mandela was freed and the exiles returned home. I remember looking at a photo of the first democratically elected government in South Africa and realising that I knew two thirds of them. I also remember seeing a photo of the newly elected Blair (New Labour) government and realising that I knew a quarter of them, and on both occasions I remember how I was filled with hope. But in both cases it didn't take long to see how power corrupted so many members of those governments. These were people I would call and say, "Hey, what are you doing?", and the reply was always something along the lines of, "Benjamin, you don't understand how having power works". Well I do. Fuck power, and lets just take care of each other.

Most people know that politics is failing. That's not a theory or my point of view. They can see it, they can feel it. The problem is they just can't imagine an alternative. They lack confidence. I simply blanked out all the advertising, I turned off the 'tell-lie-vision', and I started to think for myself. Then I really started to meet people – and, trust me, there is nothing as great as meeting people who are getting on with their lives, running farms, schools, shops, and even economies, in communities where no one has power.

That's why I'm an Anarchist.

You don't riot if you have a nice job and a home to come to at night.

You don't riot if you're well fed and unemployment doesn't pressure your head.

You don't riot if you live in the city but have a country cottage with a view so pretty.

You don't riot. Riot happen too late. And that's South Africa, Britain is great.

Benjamin Zephaniah

Pan African Social Ecology
Dr. Modibo Kadale & The Final Straw Radio
(2020)

This conversation was recorded before the killing of George Floyd and but after the increased awareness of the killing of Ahmaud Arbery nearby to Dr. Kadale in Glynn County, GA, which reflects in the discussion. Modibo shares some criticisms of official Black Lives Matter, liberal cooptation and the veneration of representative leadership.

TFSR: Thank you so much for taking the time to chat, Dr. Kadale.

Dr. Modibo Kadale: It's very good, thank you very much. I've seen this collection. It's a very good, very easy read, deciding for ourselves, it's got quite a few different perspectives. What makes it so good is that everybody talks about where does this ideal society exist, where can you find it, and what we got to do is show how it's emerging all over the world. The collection is a really good read. I recommend it highly.

TFSR: Awesome, we just received a copy from AK Press which we are excited to dig into. I'd like to say first off that I really appreciate the wide focus lens that you use when discussing the history and popular movements and popular participation in discourse. When you have Q&As and discussions. It seems like a lot of your public presentations are focused on the idea of de-centering the individual as the focus, and you engage other participants in lively discourse, rather than a monologue. I feel that says a lot about your politics.

MK: Don't you find monologues boring? I think their peculiar emergence in a liberal individualistic society. The lecture shows you that somebody's got the answers, and you've got to listen. It is very boring and authoritarian.

TFSR: Absolutely. One thing that I noticed from some pieces that are in your collection from OOOA! was you talked a lot about the impacts of, among other people, C.L.R. James on your thinking. We've never had anyone talk about his writings and what he brought to the Marxist tradition and the postcolonial struggle tradition. Can you talk a little bit about, maybe like some of his thoughts that influenced you and interactions that you had with him?

MK: The most dramatic thing was he was a critic of the nation-state. Of course, I was disappointed because he never went as far as I wanted him to go. He was a critic of the nation-state, yet he venerated certain pan-African statesmen. I don't think he ever made a distinction between classical Pan-Africanism, which is statist in its nature, and neo-Pan-Africanism, which is what I am. I'm a neo-Pan-Africanist, I believe that Pan-Africanism as any kind of humanism has to emerge from my people sitting down, talking, and discussing things to decide how they will go in their society, consistent with their natural ecosystems there that they depend upon for their survival. And these ecosystems are mutually dependent on human beings, symbiotically, relating in a natural world. And I believe we've got a real serious problem because capitalism has taken human beings into a very bad dark place. It's a real detour that people have degenerated, and the technology, it is not very impressive when you look at it from a social-ecological perspective, all the patterns and human knowledge and all that stuff. Beginning with the industrial revolution, it was really inhuman what they did. It's a very vicious and horrible period we live in. And they've been successful in making us believe it is the golden age of human thought and existence. To me, it is just the opposite. You get weapons of mass destruction, human beings fighting all the time with other human beings. Capitalism is driven by the private ownership of property and wealth accumulation. The writers of history look at human society as something which is not only great but the modern technology is wonderful, but the tragedy of it all is that they cannot see the inhumanity. We are on the verge of completely destroying the planet. Nobody seems to understand that human beings who try to own everything and try to rule everybody, there is a danger. The danger for the survival of the species and human society and human advancement not in the materialistic sense but in a humanistic sense.

TFSR: I think what you are saying plays with the definition of social ecology that you give in some of your pieces. Can you break that down a little? Because people may not be familiar with the term?

MK: The term 'social ecology' was coined by Murray Bookchin. His contribution was that he saw that human society was natural as opposed to the people who thought human society was unnatural. The rest of the natural world was natural and humans were pitted against the rest of nature. Bookchin saw that human beings and human society were a natural outburst of nature, and what we have to do is reintegrate human society with the rest of the natural world as a natural symbiotic relationship, a mutual affirmation.

TFSR: Where do social ecologists feel like it went wrong? You pointed out the industrial revolution- and I think some people might point to the application of Cartesian Logic, but some people might go back to primitive accumulation.

MK: Well, I have a serious break with Bookchin at the point when you start venerating the Age of Reason, venerating the American democracy. I really don't think American democracy ever existed. I think that in the American state, there is a particular bastardization of democracy, of direct democracy, for sure. Now, there's gonna be a debate about that. Because there are people who believe that the American and the European experiments with the rise of the nation-states in the Age of Reasoning and, of course, what they call modern science... I believe that science has existed, as long as human beings have tried to live collectively on the planet. So I'm a little different there, and I'm gonna write more about that later. But I believe that American democracy is no contribution to human social history. And we can see it's not any kind of contribution to ecology at all. Look at America today, look at what's happening in the North American continent, this is probably the most unnatural of the continents, because, by the way, you have to put this element in it, this idea of individual ownership of property, the unbridled right to own people, including other people, as it began. And this private property is against human collectivity. Human beings have existed socially and as a species for documented over 200,000 years. And if the greed and avariciousness and competitiveness that we know now, that defines individual relationships with one another, the kind of exploitation and the kind of brutality that human beings exact upon each other and nations, exact upon one another.

And as you know, nation-states in their legal systems have a right to kill people. They call it capital punishment, and war. They venerate people who kill people, those who kill the most other people are the people who are the heroes. So I mean, capitalism and individual private property really must be looked at seriously, because that's just where human beings, and that's where the detour began to take place. Now, there was some hierarchy before, old against young, against women and men, but it never reached the point that it exists now. The point it exists now is almost unimaginable. Can you imagine, some nations can wipe out every living thing on the planet with their weapons? And they got all kinds of technologies circling the planet, most of its purpose, of course, they tell you, the purpose is to facilitate communication, but most of its purpose is to seek some advantage over one another. So that they can develop this diplomatic concept that they call Mutual Assured Destruction. What an inhuman concept! I'm laughing because I'm hurt so bad by it.

Bookchin and C.L.R. took me up to a point. But they were people of their time, just like I am a person of this time. So hopefully, we can write this stuff down so other people can take a look at it and critique it and see where they don't take it.

TFSR: So if we decenter the individual, just in terms of decision-making or deciding what's best for the communities in which we live and the repercussions that we have to live with as individuals, I can see people who have been raised in places like the United States, we've been taught what democracy is to be this representational constitutional republic, whatever it is, that people would reject the term Democrat outright, because that's what has been fed to them. Are there any visions of democracy that you can talk about that you've been personally influenced by that have had a different, more decentralized and human-level version?

MK: Even you can look at the most popular movements of our time, which have started off as direct democracy. And even the native people that were culturally and socially destroyed with the North American genocide, (when I say 'we', I don't mean 'me') the American government wiped out all these democratic forms which they could have learned from. Anytime you see a picket line, when a local group, when a local society is under great pressure and in crisis, like in a storm or flood, people do what they have to do. People get sandbags, they don't get paid for that, they line on the riverbanks with sandbags, they feed themselves, they feed other people that are in this pandemic. But let me give you a good example of how we don't even know because we've been so brainwashed, don't even know what's happening for us.

For instance, Black Lives Matter. When Black Lives Matter started off, it was completely democratic. People were marching in the streets and raising their slogans and saying what they needed to say. But by the time the social workers and various people came in from the outside, as people came in, it became the Black Lives Matter. Next thing we've been raising individual people who were running for office, who were credited with founding the Black Lives Matter movement. First thing, it became the Black Lives Matter movement, because the media did that, the media named it that. And so it became. So they had to interview somebody, to interview these people who claim to be articulators of the program of the Black Lives Matter movement, but the Black Lives Matter movement was spontaneous of people from the suburbs of St. Louis. And basically, when we look at it, we're looking at what I call a state creep. The state is taking it back over. And now people are running for office and using the Black Lives Matter environment as credentials. So they become members of the bureaucracy. But what you're looking at is the shadow of the Black Lives movement, the aftermath, what the state has crept up and done. Like the civil rights movement. The civil rights movement started in Montgomery. These people spontaneously began to organize themselves. Martin Luther King didn't really know what was going on. And they organized an alternative transportation system on their own, boycotted the bus. They boycotted the buses. But that wasn't an important thing. The important thing is a lot of those

people were getting to work on time. Taxicab drivers were organizing, people who had cars organized themselves. And so they maintained a transportation system because the city continued to function despite what they call the boycott. Martin King came in, they got somebody who can speak, they always get the best speakers to articulate what the masses want. But they usually are not clear on what's going on anyway. And even now, I don't know if you know about a young black man who was killed in the streets of Brunswick, Georgia.

TFSR: Yes.

MK: Okay, let me tell you something about it because you have to look at it. When the history is written, if we don't say anything, it is going to be the NAACP leaders, the ones who call the rally on the steps of the courthouse, and then, of course, they interview his mother. And that's the story we get on TV. But what happened was that Ahmad was a very popular young man. And his friends went over to that suburban, almost all-white community after he was killed. After they got the story straight, because they had to go through the story to get the story straight, the officials. The official story was that he was trying to rob, there was a burglary in progress. And the police came in with these other guys helping to stop this burglar. And so after the story got out, people didn't believe that, they were his friends. So these young people went over to the community where he was killed and started walking up and down the street and saying, "We run with Ahmad, all of us, we run with him". And so they started running down the street. But there were no preachers there with no Bibles, no black leaders with no suits and ties telling them how to conduct themselves. And then when the guy who took the video saw that these kids were getting some publicity like that, he then released the video. And then when the video was released, then everybody knew them. But these kids are not gonna get any credit for any of that.

TFSR: Because they don't have a non-profit or a pulpit.

MK: Yeah, because people don't look for direct democratic, spontaneous people as being significant in human history. But that's where the new society is born, and that's why we have to write it like that. And once they see it, and once you look at it, everybody knows, yeah, that's what happens. Because you can verify it, like in the case of Montgomery, the Montgomery Improvement Association was having regular meetings, but the black bus boycott, it already jumped off. And I saw it in Detroit, in New Orleans, when these people were trying to keep their community running. And next thing all the drug stores are flooded. So you are going to the drug store and ask the cashier to get you some Pampers, but there is no cashier in there. And the kids need Pampers, people need medicine. So they

go in and get it and give it to people. But then when the media gets it — they're looting the drug store.

So we just have to begin to look at history from a real directly democratic eye. Because that's how it's been happening the whole time. And you can see it even in the dark ages. If you look at European history, that gives you a good example.

Before all these philosophers, like Locke, and Hume, and Berkeley, even Rousseau started writing. That was the Dark Ages. And that was between the period of the fall of the Roman Empire, the disintegration of the Roman Empire, and the rise of these kingdoms in northern Europe and the periphery of the Roman Empire.

These are the Dark Ages because the church was not strong. There were no strong kings, these are the Dark Ages. But the people were organizing guilds, the artisans were organized, they were directly democratic forms. So when they say the Dark Ages existed, then what we got to do is shed some light on the Dark Ages. And when they say that African people were not capable of civilizing, that's why they have classical colonialism, we have to show that these people were civilized, self-organized, but they don't look at directly democratic organizations as being any form of civilization. And that's why European capitalists in these states who now rule the world, or some form of their organization all over the world, this is a very dark period of civilization in human history. And I don't know if we can survive it or not. What do you think?

TFSR: I hope so.

MK: I think we will.

TFSR: You pointed to how these directly democratic forms are coming up when people are feeling under pressure, you pointed to Katrina, you pointed to more recently during the pandemic, these examples of mutual aid and goods redistribution. I think there's a lot of hope in there. I think the scale is lacking, and not that things have to be centralized, but if things can integrate together, if these things are happening in a bunch of different places, there are forms of communication between them, but it seems like networking and sharing resources.

MK: All the time now I've been zooming my ass off. I've been on a Zoom in Europe, people from Belgium and France, and I've been all over the screen and read my screen right in front of me. Young people understand it. But the point is, as long as you measure human beings by some material wealth and some private accumulation of property and federate these corporations because that's all they

are, they are just people organized to amass enormous material, wealth, and control. These things have to be dismantled along with the state. They put up these big centralized states, people have to become unmediated human beings. You can't represent me, I can't represent you, we have to get together and talk about what we want to do and figure out what we want to be. And we can figure it out. Human beings have always done that. Human beings wouldn't exist for 200,000 years in some kind of without any kind of mutual aid or some kind of cooperation. And if they were selfish and individualistic, there would have been no more human species, human society. That's why we got to this point by people understanding that despite all that... Sometimes people do it without even knowing it. If you went to Montgomery, Alabama, and asked anybody black, even a month or two before the bus boycott broke up. If you asked them, "Do you think that black people in Montgomery, Alabama can organize an alternative transportation system that can get people to work on time for a year?" "No, can't do that? Who is going to teach us how to do that?" Well, you teach yourself, you work yourself, you work yourself through. I feel very strongly about it, I guess you can tell that.

TFSR: And you've done a lot of thinking and observing of that, too.

MK: Oh yeah, it's a marvelous thing to behold. It's like anything else, beautiful. If you know what to look at, it becomes greatly beautiful, if you don't know what you're looking at, you won't be able to appreciate it. We are all learning, of course. Do you have any examples that you marvel about in your life time?

TFSR: Well, it's hard to not have like the tinted glasses of retrospect and be like, "Well, that was weak for this reason, that reason, but definitely like the mutual aid stuff..."

MK: Where are you now?

TFSR: North Carolina, Asheville.

MK: Asheville, North Carolina? And where did that bookstore come from?

TFSR: That came from people getting together and saying, "We want this in our community." And that's how it gets supported, it definitely doesn't make money.

MK: Y'all trying to make money in a massive fortune?

TFSR: It would not work. That's probably the joke at the beginning of every presentation.

MK: You want to have a whole book chain of all these books, so you can get on your computer and count your money?

TFSR: Here, we have a couple of mutual aid projects that are distributing goods that are donated from people and doing deliveries of groceries or handing out sandwiches and coffee to houseless folks or folks who just need a little up in the morning.

MK: Who taught you to do that?

TFSR: Our program's named after the Black Panther Party Survival Program, and they learned from someone, too.

MK: Does it make you feel good?

TFSR: Yeah, absolutely.

MK: And you know who's not going to be there and who's going to be there when you get ready to do it. That's how it works.

TFSR: Yeah.

So we've talked a little bit about the decision-making and the organizing aspects of what some of the things that we've experienced that humans are capable of in our societies. Shifting a little bit, you mentioned militarism and mutually assured destruction. Trump just dropped out of the Open Skies Treaty. And before that, he removed the US from the INF Treaty and the Iran nuclear deal. And there's talk of sparking an arms race with Russia and there's been saber-rattling with China. A lot of the people that are listening to this show have grown up under the war on terror, and haven't known a time when the US hasn't been actively engaged in a war abroad. Besides the police interventions that were going on in the 70s, 80s, and 90s, or whatever you want to call it.

MK: I grew up during the Cold War. I thought the Russians would come. We used to duck and cover under the seats in the school expecting a nuclear attack. But the only country that used nuclear weapons against the civilian, nuclear weapon against anybody is the United States government.

TFSR: And you resisted the draft, right?

MK: Yeah. That didn't make sense. As dumb as I was, that didn't make sense. For

whatever reason, I wouldn't go into that one. That's the whole history of the last century. Nation-states fighting armies. Only ones that have armies are Nation States. Nation-states got armies, and they got legitimate armies. You can be a nice guy from Northern California and get drafted into the military. You can't get drafted now into the military. And you can go into a place that you have never been before. And because you're an American military person, you can kick down somebody's door and shoot him in the head and get away with it. And then come back a hero. Cowardly, what you can do is just become technologically savvy and send drones over there to do it.

TFSR: And then afterwards, you carry the trauma of having done that sort of thing as a human being in a lot of cases, right?

MK: Yeah. And you do it because other people tell you to do it, you don't even have a chance to think about it, you follow orders. I don't mind following something that I've agreed with other people that we are going to do. I don't follow somebody telling me what to do, that I never had anything to say about. And I think that's a human, not so much an instinct, but I think human beings are wired to work in common with other human beings and to not destroy other human beings, except over something material. And we are taught that I think.

TFSR: Yeah, because we've been taught that, I wonder how – especially for those folks that have been living under this war on terror thing or those of us who grew up during the Cold War – how do we move away from being influenced by these leaders who... it's obvious that Trump and the administration feel that not only have we lost the prestige of our imperial halcyon days of the Cold War, but the economy also could do for a boost, and all these other associated things with militarism, like patriarchy and white supremacy. And these things are waning in some ways, because of the threat of social justice movements, or just people being good to each other.

MK: It's the way they mobilize everybody behind the banner of patriotism and stuff. So it's not just a war on communism, or war on terrorism, it is the war on poverty, the war on the virus. The American policymakers know one thing, they know that to get everybody behind a policy, you got to declare war.

There is a war on everything, on drugs, etc. And so what we have to do, is get out of our mindset, this jingoism when we get involved in a debate about policy. Anytime it says a war on something, what that means is that they're trying to rally people and appeal to their nationalist fervor. You have a war on virus – what the fuck is that? So what you have to do is criticize, there is no war on viruses and we're not

all in this together either. Some people ain't even in it, but they'll send you to be in it. The fact is that there are people who are unevenly affected by this kind of thing.

So, what you have to do is you have to explain it to people that these are viruses, these are naturally occurring viruses that are part of the evolution or the failure of the evolution of the human body to adjust to the environment, to their immediate environment. And then you have to explain it scientifically that there is a cancer pandemic. People understand that very well. Because cancer is the human body trying to adjust or accelerate evolution in an uneven way. So, all these tumors and everything come as a result of the human body trying to adjust. And these viruses are like that. These viruses come in for several reasons, they turn down the natural support system of other life forms on the planet. They are trying to survive, their bodies have viruses, too, and what we need to do is understand how we have to live within the scope of our own context. And we have to put scientific knowledge in the service, not of developing a vaccine, and showing that a vaccine is gonna make a lot of people a lot of money, a lot of people will get famous. So that's why over a hundred different corporations are putting money into vaccines as an investment. And explain the system to them, and how the policy arguments are not fruitful. The argument that we have to look at is how do we take control of our own local communities and help other people do that. And we have an opportunity here too, because the virus attacks community, locality. And that's why you have outbreaks here and there, and you have to work it from that angle. But the rhetoric gets to be really emotional.

We have to have a war on this and a war on that, and then, of course, everybody's thinking that Biden is going to save us. And Trump has betrayed us. That's what the liberals think, and the more conservative think that Trump is trying to save us, and all you other dummies are trying to stop them from saving us. But the point is, people will have to have an enlightened discussion about the relationship between human society and the rest of the natural world. And we will have to understand that the nation-state and the corporations and individual ownership of property stands in the way of human beings realizing the scientific and ecological future. A lot of people are going to say "What the hell are you saying?" But over time, and we have to sacrifice ourselves, your children will understand, that generation will understand. But if we have nothing written down, no kind of discussions like this on tape, then they will have to reinvent the wheel, because these things will be suppressed. So we have to keep these things alive, so they won't be suppressed. So I don't see my role too much, I just trying to write something down so that people have something to think about in the next generation when the real pandemics come. What we have right here is nothing compared to the real pandemics, the real wars and stuff and real confusion.

Young people understand climate change, but the really important thing, all of the major real issues have nothing to do with state policy in the sense. Climate change is across borders. Borders don't mean anything to climate change or the pandemic. And it doesn't mean anything to these immigrants. People gonna go where they go and people gonna fight where they need to fight. And then they go organize themselves to make the fight. And we have to put a mirror in front of them. So they'll see who they are, what they must do, and support them in doing it and not try to interpret what they're doing in some capitalistic bourgeois bullshit way. I get tired of reading these people, you read them, and they reach, they get to the point where all the shit is wrong, obviously, they're wrong. But you know what they end up doing? But we got to develop, we got to change the state so it can really save us, we got to make sure the corporations are accountable. That's where they fuck up right there. We got to get beyond that point.

TFSR: They haven't rejected the state structure or capitalism fully, but they recognize the climate crisis is real. And they recognized the patterns of disease and how capitalism facilitates its spread. I just keep thinking back to all the money that's been poured into the airlines, and how much of an effect on the ecology there's been since fewer flights have been going, and how cheap the planes are right now, and how it's just trying to stay alive. But it's literally the vector for not only massive amounts of pollution for people to make pleasure trips in a lot of cases or business trips or whatever. But it's also the vector for so much of the disease spreading. So many of these huge places where it's become pandemic are not that far from an international airport and then it's complicated by racialized and class-based impacts of capitalism.

MK: I just enjoy looking at the sky and not seeing vapor trails. I don't know whether you noticed it, but in the morning, the sun is much brighter and the grass is much greener. And seeing like nonhuman nature seems to be responding, releasing itself in a very good way. I've seen animals come out of the woods. I have a comrade in China, he texts me and he says, he's from Beijing. He says the sky is blue in Beijing. I thought it was great. You got to see the sky. That has an impact. And I understand that the fish coming up into the Grand Canal in Venice now. You don't have those big luxury liners going up in there. So you can catch a fish off the Grand Canal. People don't see that. The earth is telling us something.

TFSR: Yeah, and we need to heed that and we need to stop this shit from coming back.

MK: It's gonna come back, but it's not gonna come back without being seriously challenged next time. It goes like that way. I have another little difference with my

friends. They think that I'm some kind of a historical generator of spontaneous upheavals. Because they think that what we should be doing is agitating and telling the masses, they must fight and engage blah, blah. No, no, no, this isn't the period of propagandizing, this is the period when we conceptualize stuff, and when they erupt, that's when we should be agitating. And they say, "Spontaneity, what is that?" "That's the New Society trying to emerge?" "How come they never take over?" Because they aren't trying to take over, they just try to understand who they are, what the world can look like. And over time, it'll become clear to everybody. Let me just draw a line right here, I have drawn a line with my mentor C.L.R. James, when he venerated certain black heads of state, he says, the states are evil and we must go beyond them. But then he turns that around and venerates the guy like Lenin, a guy like Kwame Nkruma. If you're gonna be against the state, you gotta be against all of them, whoever they were, whoever they are. He's circumscribed by us all the time. He can only act in a certain way. And Bookchin, he's gonna raise the Age of Reasoning and the American Revolution. I broke with him there.

I just want you to know that I'm thankful for these guys. But we got to go further than that. If we stay where they stood... And I'm sorry that there are people who are venerating these people now without understanding what they represented in the development of certain ideas and certain political trends and stuff. You should never venerate anybody, no individual person should be... When you put out a work, or you engage in the discussion, like you and I, it's supposed to be for critical purposes. So you can understand one another better. The axe doesn't get sharp on his own must be sharpened by file. That's a metaphor.

TFSR: It's a good metaphor. I was talking to a friend the other day about having this conversation and she was asking, "What are you reading?" And I mentioned your book and she asked about social ecology. And she also asked "What's the definition of Pan-Africanism?" and I gave like the Wikipedia definition. I wonder if you could break down what that phrase means to you and what it means to be a neo-Pan-Africanist.

MK: Pan-Africanism is a concept that arose to counteract the colonization of Africans on the continent of Africa and the segregation of African people in the new world along with some other colonies in the Caribbean and Central America, which were black. The original Pan-Africanists saw that the empowerment – that's why I call them classical Pan-Africanists – that the empowerment of African people requires that they create state bonds, state formations, and unite them like the United States in North America so that they can be on the world stage as representatives of the will of the black masses, both in the United

States, the Caribbean, and in the continent of Africa. That's what classical Pan-Africanism is. Now, most people don't make this distinction. My distinction is neo Pan-Africanism is for the empowerment of all African people, wherever they might be, without the state, the empowerment of African communities all over the world in unity with the rest of the people all over the world. So that's what I call neo-Pan-Africanism. Now, most people don't make that distinction. So if you talk to somebody, you tell them that that's the distinction that I'm making. So they won't think that you haven't thought about it as well. To be clear, classical Pan-Africanism is associated with a response to classical colonialism. Classical colonialism is the period in human history where European nation-states sent their direct administrative apparatus to administer their colonies. They lived there. Neocolonialism is the period in human history where indigenous groups of people emerge to take over control of these states and administer them like they're doing now. The period of classical Pan-Africanism is a response to classical colonialism, the idea of neo-colonialism, neo-Pan-Africanism is a response to that.

TFSR: And is the need within the neo-Pan-Africanist push, or as you experienced it, or that delineation that you make, you said that the nation state format is an unnatural, or at least a detrimental form...

MK: Yes, it is unnatural, and it needs to be swept aside, along with these various confederations of states, like the Organization of African Unity. People see them as that. People just say, "Why don't they act right? Why don't they be what they're supposed to do that?" The Organization of African Unity and various governments, they call socialist governments in Africa, like in Tanzania, sometimes, Ghana sometimes, and even Nelson Mandela. Nelson Mandela never was anything but really a classical Pan-Africanist and, actually, he was a more broad-based classical Pan-Africanist, because he united with the Cubans as well, and the Chinese as well. But he never was a socialist, even of the old classical socialist ilk, but he's like Martin Luther King. You can say nothing against Martin Luther King because that's being racist, and he's denying black people and he was turning against your race and all that, but you got to criticize him. Even Malcolm X. These people understood liberation in the context of nationalism, black people, white people have got nation-states. And what we need to do is have nation-states of our own, and that's how you liberate yourself. To me, that was bullshit from the beginning.

TFSR: But you do feel that it's important that people of African descent have been able to organize together, right?

MK: Yeah. Being organized together in places where they have a commonality with other people organized with them too. I don't see it as a separation thing, it's

like right here, down here in Midway. There's Black people and white people. Black people can organize and then white people want to come and we can organize together on how we want to live. And as time goes on, you will see more and more of that.

TFSR: Can you talk a bit about the community that you live in and some of the history of resistance there? Your interactions with the authors of *Dixie Be Damned* and other essays that you talk about are really impressive.

MK: Well, I live on the coast of Georgia. And during the reconstruction, during the Civil War, this was a rice plantation area. And you had rice plantations up and down the coast of Georgia and up and down the coast of South Carolina. But even before the Civil War, there was a shift in the south, where big money was invested in cotton, cotton don't grow well down here. If you look at the Black Belt, that is a demographic area where there were large black populations before the migration to the north, you don't find the coastal areas included except in various places. But you'll find the use of those plantations in central Georgia, central Alabama, up and down the Mississippi on both sides and up into Western Tennessee and Eastern Arkansas. That's where, in North Carolina, South Carolina. But when the Civil War broke out, the market and rice were already gone. So the rice plantations don't look like the cotton plantations, the rice plantations were left alone and they worked down here. The owners only came as traders who actually traded that it didn't last so long during the Reconstruction. People just claimed the land for themselves. And then they didn't give any kind of acknowledgment to white ownership. And they just claimed that, that's why when Sherman came down, he issued Field Order #15, and he said that all of the land, from the ocean to 31 to 32 miles inland couldn't be claimed by the emancipated slave as their own. So they did.

So as the country grew and developed, there was an erosion of that ownership of land, but people held on for a while. I was born down here. When my parents came from central Georgia... And by the way, these people voted. They couldn't run for office in the South, because the state government didn't allow that. But they could vote for white people.

So I had all kinds of Gullah Geechee communities and all kinds of African retentions. And all kinds of independent, autonomous institutions. So that's who they were. The Geechee had a reputation of being a rice-eating, fish-eating, mean, recalcitrant, disagreeable person, short, black. And those are the people I grew up around. So it has a collective history.

And even the people who ran the county government really didn't bother the black people too much. When the paper companies took over some of the lands, they just want to make sure that the people brought the wood to the sawmill like in many other places. But that tradition was a part of who I am. So I never believed that black people were not resourceful and could not govern and decide for themselves what they want to do. I never believed that. Other people believed that, I think in central Georgia, there was less of this kind of self-organizing activity. But in coastal Georgia and coastal South Carolina, there were a lot of legendary leaders who guided the people to some kind of autonomous existence. And their history is written. There's a place called Harris Neck, Andrew went over there, he was amazed because they still live over there, even though there's a great push from Northern, New York people primarily from Long Island to settle down here after they retire, instead of going all the way to Florida. So it's always changing. But that's the context. You want to come down here sometime.

TFSR: I'd love to.

MK: When this is over, you come down and take a look around.

TFSR: You also have a Social Ecology center down there, right?

MK: Yeah. We just found that about three years ago, after I retired from my teaching career. We set up, primarily myself, Andrew, one of my students, and another friend of mine, a guy who found a Geechee Cultural Center in Riceboro, which is about four miles down the road. But he passed on. So we became the conveners of the Autonomous Research Institute for Direct Democracy and Social Ecology. Now, that's a complicated name. But we wanted to have a name that was not confusing to what we were doing. If we called it the C.L.R. James Center, that would be an amorphous veneration of some individual person and that wasn't serious. We wanted people to know that it was autonomous, which means we have a different kind of fuels, historical development. And we want to let them know that it was an institute for direct democracy, we're not interested in people writing about their heroes and famous baseball players or anything like that. And it is for social ecology. But we believe that direct democracy, social ecology cannot be achieved without having a direct democratic social organization. And a group of people who could see that. History shows that, the Native American people show us that. I'm writing about some Native American people, it will probably be released next fall. So I'm here working now and talking to you of course.

TFSR: That's awesome. Are the Gullah and Ogeechee communities what one might consider to be Maroon communities?

MK: Yeah, you can consider it, but Maroonage has taken on all kinds of forms. It's not just people running away and setting up their own... Some of those communities right on the ridge in the front of plantations and interacting with some of the people. And some of the people went far distances and set up very complicated societies and stuff. So the type of Maroonage is dependent upon demography, history, the type of plantation and was the type of monocrop that was being raised, and how people fed themselves, what kind of transportation was available.

TFSR: It's kind of attesting to the adaptability of people.

MK: Oh, yeah, they adapted. They were all over if you study Maroonage, they were in Mexico, and across the islands, the big islands, they have substantial populations in the hinterlands, like in Haiti and the Dominican Republic, and, of course, in Cuba, and Jamaica. In Haiti, that was Hispanola, and after slavery was over, a lot of those people just simply took over the land in the Caribbean and grew crops to feed their families. And that's why in places like Trinidad and Guyana, they had to import plantation labor. So the black people who were slaves developed their own autonomous communities. They grew crops on their own, no monocrops. So if you wanted a monocrop labor force, they had to go to inland and get that. That's why he has an in the population in Guyana and Trinidad, coming out of that type of relationship with labor with capitalist mercantile agricultural laborers.

TFSR: Is the nature of the writing that you're doing right now on indigenous populations about what might be understood as social ecology of... to put that term onto what communities were experiencing and living? What's the topic?

MK: Well, the two examples that I'm using to do some detailed writing, the Forte Mose experience and Spanish experience in northeastern Florida. How the Seminoles evolved from this interaction. And how the Creek Seminoles where the creeks came from autonomous, complicated, hierarchical society. Do you know anything about anthropology and archaeology in St. Louis, upper Mississippi, and middle Mississippi areas? Have you heard of Cahokia?

TFSR: Yes, Kevin Tucker writes about Cahokia. He lives right outside of it. So I've heard it referenced.

MK: In that connection, I've talked about how Cahokia, which was a hierarchical kind of society, and people look at the big leaders in Cahokia, but I was trying to explain how Cahokia... People left Cahokia, people didn't like it. That's why the Creeks were fleeing Cahokia and that's why they migrated down the Mississippi

and all the way up to Northern Florida. And they went along creeks that's why they were called Creek Indians, but I hook them in and then the African populations which fought with the Yemassee in early Charlestown, the early Charlestown settlement, and they went south to St Augustine and then to Cuba. That's what that's all about. Then I've got another section, which is a more naturalistic section, it's got to do with the Great Dismal Swamp and the history of that geographic area. I'm looking at that one as a part of the lore, the place and why it became known as the Great Dismal Swamp, but it really wasn't dismal. Depending on who you were, if you were running away, it was a paradise. But I think it's coming in the right size. I remember the first book I wrote, that thing was way too big.

TFSR: I still use it as a reference, though.

MK: It had all the documents in the back. I think that's just saving grace, the rest is shit. I lose to self-organization every once in a while. But that was where I was in the 1970s, a young man trying to put it together.

TFSR: And at least he referred to the book very clearly on the cover as the raw notebooks.

MK: It's raw, really. Because my students, one student, in particular, he came by the house and I was rummaging through some stuff and he said "What's over here?" It was one of those manuscripts. He put this together. He grabbed the thing, and took it back to the office, and started hunting and pecking, I said, "What are you doing?", and he said, "I want to put all this together". They organized it and put it in a book. It's very raw. It offers no real solution. But it shows certain attempts: it shows the 6th Pan-African Congress, the League of Revolutionary Black Workers, and its lack of democracy. And it shows the African Liberation Support Committee. So it came from the minutes and stuff that I was keeping at the time. So it has an empirical side to it, I think

TFSR: It's interesting to hold that up to your shorter book *The Pan-African Social Ecology*, because a lot of those events that are in a lot of cases you and Andrew talking about or that you referenced during speeches, to be able to dig back into this book and say, like, "Well, here's the notes from that time, here's a little deeper context of what was going on with the League of Revolutionary Black Workers or the 6th Congress".

MK: I guess it has that value, but it doesn't speak to any kind of ecology. When I started exploring questions of ecology, I was really out of the anti-nuclear movement, I just thought the nuclear shit was dangerous to the planet. But I didn't

have a real conceptual context you put it in. And I was just trying to deal with some Marxism and critique the limitations of Marxism, especially the vanguard party in need for the revolutionary people to lead the ignorant masses to victory.

TFSR: It's so patronizing.

MK: It's preposterous. But I think we got a nice size for people to actually read this. There are pictures in it, too. A guy from Nova Scotia was in my last zoom session. And he saw a picture of me on hillside. That was me. I owe a lot of that to Andrew [Zonevald]. Andrew edited and put this book into great context, and the introduction is of great detail. And when I mentioned something he says "Oh, man, we should have put that in there"...

TFSR: I like your working relationship. It's really awesome. I like Andrew a lot, too.

MK: Yeah. And Andrew brings it out. He knows when I get contradictory, he says, "What does this mean in relation to what you just said?"

TFSR: That's the beauty of conversation.

MK: When there's an election, I do vote in the local election, and I vote for sheriffs, representatives on the county commission, but the rest of the stuff, I don't vote for. But I know these people. And that guy who's running for the county commission chair thing, I sat down with him, and he says that he's gonna make sure and he made it part of... He's been on social media and essentially, his thing is to get people involved in the decision-making of their local government, and he said that he will have some town-hall meetings where he don't say nothing unless they call along. And he'll organize in such a way that everybody gets their say. And he's committed to what he calls participatory democracy, which I don't know what that means for him. But participatory democracy is not the same as direct democracy. But if we really get it kind of close like that. And if he wins, which he stands a good chance of winning, more people understand that we'll be able to set up a couple of forums, regular forums, where people can actually decide something about their local government.

TFSR: It seems like that critique of the stuff that was going on in Jackson for a while.

MK: You can't just stop at participatory. You can't have people come in and they talk and talk and they listen to you, and then they go do what they want you to,

you can't do that. Not only do people have to decide, but they also have to actually implement, that's what direct democracy means.

TFSR: Because there has to be, some sort of accountability and recallability. Right?

MK: Yeah. There has to be a direct recall. And no hell of a lot of money involved beyond the task, if you enlist somebody to do something, you paying for that and that's it. No lifetime appointment, no president-for-life shit. So I'm involved in that. But if the guy doesn't win, he'll at least raise the credit, but he got a good chance.

TFSR: That's better than a lot of us have right now. We just got to not stop at participatory.

MK: In terms of the state legislature and state governments, I don't vote in that kind of stuff. But people are really upstanding Trump, it is primarily a black community still in East Liberty County.

TFSR: Again, some meandering. Here Modibo shares some criticism on decision-making in vestiges of Leninism, and projects like Cooperation Jackson, and the Zapatistas.

MK: That's all that they were doing. They were trying to push the gathering over and think it was supposed to be an anarchist gathering in Detroit or somewhere, and they were pushing, the people in Jackson have been in the vanguard of what they call this concept they introduced as organizing dual power, which means that they were kind of stuck with the Leninism. And I really think that they need to examine that. I don't want to get associated with that. Because dual power, to me, is a statist concept in itself. When I started writing about the origin of dual power, and how it's a statist concept, and how we got to break with Leninism. And I couldn't explain that in an article and stuff. So I just want to hit on a road. That turned out to be about 12 or 14 pages. Andrew said, "Why don't you put that with your critique of direct democracy and republicanism?" So I put it there. And then it turned into a chapter and like the explanation of what representative democracy is and the difference between participatory democracy and all these sham democracies? So I never did. Because if I got associated with that, and somebody was gonna write a book and reference that book, and reference somebody else in that book, and then I'd be associated with people trying to organize the democratic institutions. The point I'm making is that getting organized is shit, people don't do that. All you have to do is shepherd the process. Frankly, I found it kind of vanguardist because

I know what's going on in Jackson, Mississippi is not a direct democracy. I know that so I'm not gonna even go there.

TFSR: I feel like in the book, at least, that's one of the goals they point to and say they get a lot of influence from Rojava and the Zapatistas. I know that there's a history of Leninism in the backgrounds of both of those.

MK: Well, the Zapatistas, I got into a tiff with Andrew on that. Andrew was sympathetic to the Zapatistas, which is a Leninist, Marxist organization stuff, plus their stated goal was to take power in Mexico, they see themselves as operating in the kinds of... And then when the Cheran people emerged, that's what you need to be looking at, the Cheran people.

TFSR: I don't think I know that. How do you spell that?

MK: Cheran. It's in the book. The women who stoned the logging trucks that were taking logs from the forest.

TFSR: Oh, that's right, near the end of the book.

The Second Step: Organizing After the Protests

Anon
(2020)

“Rioting is the Language of the Unheard.”
Martin Luther King Jr.

Where We Are.

We march, we shout, we cry out, we anguish, and yet justice has not come for our Black brothers and sisters who had been murdered.

As of September 2020 we as a people dedicated to a political struggle are at a standstill, lost of any political momentum. Rather, more people keep being murdered with no arrival of justice in sight. More families and communities are destroyed by the police and the government daily, yet we march on. To what avail? Let's think about the routine of the average protestor in 2020 since, and even before, the George Floyd protests. Many folks hear about upcoming protests in or nearby their areas and travel an hour or so, meet up with a crowd, listen to a few speakers, march for a few more hours and then go right back home with no real action having been made or conclusion being reached. The routine is not always the same, sometimes people riot, get arrested, brutalized, maimed, or even all three. But outside of waiting for the next facebook or twitter update telling them where the next protest will be, nothing else is done. Protest in, and protest out, people will march, riot, and chant with unwavering energy and fervor. The events in Portland and the rest of the country since George Floyd's death demonstrate the lengths people will go to fight and work together. Yet it always stops at the protest; there is no organizing past this. It's as if our solidarity, our spirit and our love to fight vanish once we get in our cars and leave for home.

This is not to say the organizing efforts of BLM and other solidarity movements are not commendable to the highest degree. The struggle of People of Color in their communities, and fighting in their communities, is the core of liberation struggle which builds societies. However people cannot but ask the question of why even after so many months of protests nothing has happened. There is this privileged and entitled view of protestors regarding change, that their efforts alone

should have brought us “The Revolution”. There is an ever apparent atmosphere of stagnation and standstill in our political landscape. In order to understand why we must examine our symptoms in order to find the root of this issue.

At almost any protest in 2020 one will find there is an anti-social behaviour which hampers or more often eliminates outright the ability of these protests to move past protesting, to blossom into genuine movements, for people to organize with their communities and friends. People will bring themselves or a set of associates and, like middle school children, stick to their cliques seemingly afraid of any contact with their fellow peers (other protestors). Not unlike middle schoolers, the average protestor, if not simply just going home, will only talk to their “teacher,” or in this case the protest organizer, only to know when to head to the next protest. To put it simply, people are hesitant and unwilling to intermingle with their fellow protestors. While participating in collective action to create a message with their voices, strength in numbers but only as far as the protest will walk. The sociability stops at the message uttered out of a megaphone, no one is willing to socialize out of fear of talking to their fellow protestors. These people who are already connected don’t seize the opportunity to make further connections or even communicate with others. This lack of sociability is the main symptom which persists throughout the current moment we find ourselves in and never allows us to properly form a movement with teeth. It is why there is no change, and it is why we can go 100 days of constant protest and still find ourselves as oppressed as the day George Floyd died.

Protests and riots have their place, as MLK said ‘rioting is the language of the unheard’; in America today the message of BLM has surpassed its exposure since the protests for Micheal Brown. But that is all, they are a message, they don’t build communities, stop police brutality, inhibit the destruction of the Planet, nor liberate the third world countries which suffer from wars our Countries wage. We must do more. We need real foundations for a movement not just social media posts. Look at CHAZ/CHOP in Seattle; spontaneous yet short, nothing came of it after the fact, and, while certainly being a place of platforming, it failed to move past the protest.

Why CHOP Isn’t The Goal.

Nearer to the start of the George Floyd Protests, word came out that a section of Seattle declared themselves an autonomous zone, denouncing the local department and their actions, and declaring the area a no-cops zone. The goal of the founders was to make a platform where Black and other oppressed voices could be spotlighted, and a place where cops could not simply roam around, defining a safespace.

CHOP was an attempt to extend activism beyond protesting that fell apart due to its inability to move past protest culture and the inability to communicate and collaborate between the various existing movements in the CHOP. A lack of structure -- not due to lack of a centralized body but rather, again, due to a lack of communication. Local black communities were not reached out to, and neither were the people who lived there. This lack of basic sociability between people who are supposed to be “comrades” is again a lacking feature at the core of these events.

The goal of CHOP was, among many contradictory sentiments, to platform a message of anti police brutality and to keep out the police. Two Black people were killed by so-called security groups, and multiple people were shot and brutalized after it's fall. And for what exactly? Most voices that needed to be heard weren't and were instead replaced by appointed and elected officials. Cops still got in. While there were still nice individual speeches the community was not heard, and while they had a barricade it did not hold anything back. In a sense CHOP was the perfect test of protest culture in its inability to combat and deal with the current problems we face, and in the end, the CHOP failed, not because it didn't achieve a goal, but because it failed to be anything of substance.

The Dilemma of Non-Violence.

You march non-violently, the police will declare your march is illegal, and if even one of you tries to put your hands up to defend yourselves, the Media will declare your march is a violent riot. You have a violent riot in response to the people in your community being systematically culled, the Media will declare your city as lawless and your movement as violent. No matter which way you go, if you fight for your own life against your own oppressive government, it's media will declare you violent and unruly.

So why is it that we see such a strong force within our own protesting body disavowing and cursing our furious siblings who have taken up both the picket sign and the molotov? Why is it that we see the most privileged of us belting out great speeches undermining the actions of those fighting for their lives on the frontlines simply because they destroy the property of our oppressors? Why is it that these bellyachers have such sway upon so many, when they themselves have not felt the pain of having their homes, their families, their children, their lives ripped away from them? And why do so many, though they are fewer in number than the majority that have felt this pain, agree with these pearl-clutchers?

Perhaps it is due to these pearl-clutchers having a vested interest in their own property, and understand that, in the recent past and present, their own businesses have undermined the integrity and lives of the many who march in our streets today.

Perhaps it is because of the great and powerful propaganda machines that are our social sphere, educational systems, and media, who uphold a picture of the late Dr. King washed clean of his Communism and his appreciation and understanding of violent protest, always in conflict with a monstrous defamation of the late Malcolm X, complete with the claws and fangs of his earlier, more hateful years, and his more powerful and important later years erased from the image, just like King. Regardless of these reasons, it is folly to think that somehow, our movement refusing to defend oneself and destroy the oppressing power of a government who only cares for said profit and property somehow get said government to lay down its arms against a single group of people, nevermind the whole population under its governance.

Perhaps those at the frontlines who ask for peace overall demand it because they have been alone for so long at the hands of a government that has raped and pillaged them for generations, and so they simply want to be left alone for the first time in centuries. Perhaps it is because there are those of us with the fear that our violent actions will undermine a movement against the violent oppression of Africana and by association and inclusion all peoples which are under the scrutiny of any police force, settling a false equivalence between the defensive, freedom-seeking actions of the Brutalized and the offensive, liberty-destroying actions of the Oppressor. These are not pearl clutchers, like those addressed above -- they have been in combat without being able to fight, they have been taking all of the worst oppressions and malevolence of our Oppressors this entire time. Before the protests, they had been sucked dry of their wealth, their life, and their very existence -- we would be utterly disrespectful to their struggle to ask them to fight any longer. Instead, we must use our bodies to shield them, to heal them, and to rebuild their communities. Instead of quitting because they have suffered, we must work so that they never suffer at the hands of an oppressor ever again.

The Corporate Media And Our Image.

The Corporations that own most of the nation's media are very invested in keeping up the image of the institution of the Police. As such, no matter what we do, they will always put us in a bad light. The same treatment was given to MLK and Malcom. If we are against the Police, we are also against these corporations, and therefore they will report that we are unruly, violent mobs that only want to burn shit down, or that it's only white people who are marching in order to raid and steal, or that it's some boogiemens that wants to upend our society rather than the reality of the situation. The idea of property over people is and will always be propagated by those with most property. All our goals go against their interests of profit so it is not only a matter of Racism on their part but also interests of capital, money, profit, etc.

It would be silly to see the great corporate giants of MSNBC, the New York Times, CNN, Fox, the Economist, and so on as entities that are separate or at the very least have separate influences and desires from that of those who govern us. Their pockets are linked, or rather, they feed into each other constantly, through direct funding, lobbying, campaign donations, federal subsidy, subsidy programs, legal scheming, and otherwise. It is a mutual partnership between folks from the same cloth, painting themselves in two different colors and bantering across the stage that is the nation in a spirited attempt to make you believe they are enemies. Most people understand the myth of the two party system and it's fake presentation of choice. Truly, through this great acting, they have succeeded in creating the illusion of opposition, as well as the illusion of choice between these supposed two groups. But offstage, they're all pals, cranking out deals and cash at our expense. MSNBC, CNN, and the Democrats could wholly disavow Fox and the Republican Party, and absolutely offer an undying opposition to every action that party does regardless of the fact that they do not hold the Presidency or Senate, but they do not because they would make more money and achieve more power by instead offering up the aesthetic of opposition and meeting with the Republicans after the cameras are off.

Both parties serve the same interests and so they are naturally friends. This illusion of choice sedates the public with a dictatorship of the rich cause it doesn't look like a dictatorship.

What that leads to is a situation where Liberal news outlets denounce protests for being **uncivilized, destructive to property, and damaging to progressivism**, Conservative news outlets declare war upon them for being **un-american, communistic, and destructive to businesses**, and by both parties for not shutting up and using the ballot that indeed legitimizes their extravagant acting and backroom dealings, as well as their great wars on who they call their constituents and the foreign poor. What are we, as individuals and as a collective who wish to free ourselves from tyranny, to do about these de facto government mandated media campaigns which run narratives that seem to forever ruin our image?

If it were as easily solved as simply creating our own media company, or not appearing violent, we wouldn't be in such a spat. There is no real way to compete marketwise to the corporate grip, which simply means we must simply refute them outright. Organize communications within ourselves, completely off the market, and refute the narrative these companies spin: Undermine our Oppressor's narrative abilities, both economically and aesthetically. Control the narrative.

The Military Industrial Complex And Defunding the Police.

Military contractors and businesses are directly invested in the Police, funding and supplying the equipment, weaponry, and ammunition of departments across the country. As such, we are not only fighting to defund and abolish the Police, but we are fighting to disempower the Military Industrial Complex of the entire country and its affiliates, including but not limited to the NRA, several representatives, senators, and officials all across the country, and their wallets.

Surely we all know how exactly these police departments have gotten hold of so much tear gas, weaponry, armor, and vehicles, but in case you do not know, not only are these departments getting millions in federal and state funding from our tax dollars, but are also partnered with several weapons companies with whom they spend those millions buying tools of warfare to indeed go to war with the people they supposedly defend. Why do the companies sell to the cops? The demand for a higher ability to suppress the oppressed population higher than ever, especially since the American people have apparently recently found their revolutionary spirit. Just as important, these companies, just like any high facet in the great American economic hierarchy, benefit from the suppression and subservience of the Working American.

It is not enough to “*reform Policing as an institution.*” It is not enough to abolish the institution alone. It is not even enough to throw out our current legal and justice system entirely and create a new one. No, we must attack, defeat, and destroy the Military-Industrial Complex and the rest of the imperial economy itself if we are truly going to free ourselves.

But in this sense, we understand the police and our goals to defund or replace them as symptoms of a larger problem, as demonstrated. To defund the military would, in effect, destroy America as we know it. The Military Industrial Complex is not called so for no reason -- it is an industry. Recall 2008 Housing Market crash: now imagine the impact of removing the US arms industry which currently sells to the largest 5 militaries in the world. We in an economic sense need to be at war. In the same sense as large banks, the M.I.C. is “too big to fail”. These systems of profit lay on the backs of not only dead americans but also dead foreigners, a symptom of a larger problem. We as activists indict the whole system and so it is natural we must not change it but create an alternative. It doesn't start with guns and pitchforks, but rather the initiative the American People have been lacking.

What Is To Be Done.

So you arrived at a protest with your signs, or perhaps your “crew,” or nothing but you and whatever you brought in your pockets. Understand that this is not a

playground to show off how woke you are, or how much you care for minorities or whatever. There is work to be done here; this the first step, making your, and by association other people's, voices heard, and to bring attention to a given problem or set of problems. Around you, you will find that there are many others who have come here to represent themselves and others that share your ideals and your drive. As said previously, we have seen that many refuse to associate with those at these protests even as they march elbow to elbow towards a police line. We must remedy this behavior; we must communicate to each other, get to know each other, and become a well organized group(s), a movement. Find those who come from your area -- you're bound to find two or more folks from your spot -- and from there, trade contact information, or if you're hesitant to do so, plan a follow-up meet somewhere at home or nearby. Once you have attempted that, attempt to connect with other protestors regardless of where they come from.

The oppression we face is systematic, and built off of our collective backs; we destroy it by determining for ourselves collectively that it must be dealt with, and so physically destroy it as a community. Our power is our numbers, as we have seen in Portland, Minneapolis, and Kenosha. These people, your fellow protestors, do you not see them as your allies? You may feel anxious or nervous but understand that if what is said, that they are your friends and allies bi-proxi, is true; then you should make an attempt to connect and communicate. To get over your anti-social behaviour is to break the binds of your oppressive upbringing, in a system that sees you as a number. Our tasks are great and we have a responsibility to work towards a better future; communication is the smallest challenge in the road ahead.

We all must take risks, and it is understood by these authors that there are people amongst us who aren't here with the best intentions. Whether it be undercover police, creeps, or people with problematic behavior, we all should exercise caution when meeting new people, but don't use this as an excuse to isolate yourself. In all senses of the word, we are fighting on borrowed time, we understood this when we walked out into the streets to protest. We understand that we either *come together and free ourselves*, or we *die*; in that understanding, I think we all know that we must not fear an uncomfortable conversation and a few shared numbers. But even for the protestor with no companions it is possible -- Simply talking to the person marching next to you can be the start of a blossoming community and organization. Basic communication skills found on self-help websites are not resources exclusive to the lonely guy at work. The commonality already exists between you and the person next to you, you just have to use it. Starting a social media page, an encrypted platform, or even just a collection of phone numbers is enough to grow something positive. Community Projects, mutual aid groups, etc are started by groups of friends and acquaintances who want to make a difference.

But even so, resources exist for those with social anxiety. Organizations which already exist attend and advertise at protests. It is easier to approach local organizers and representatives than someone non-affiliated for the first time. But beware organizations which do not seek your interests in mind. PSL, DSA, Socialist Alternative, CPUSA, Official Black Lives Matter Organizations, which are separate from the global BLM Movement, any so called leftist political parties. Party-Oriented or Bureaucratic Groups which seek membership over substance should be avoided as these groups, while good intentioned, are stuck in 20th century activism, which we seek to avoid. You may try your luck but be prepared to be disappointed during your 38th meeting on when the next social event is. We want to inspire direct action and association in its most liberating form, to communicate with your fellow protesters, allies, and friends; autonomously putting events into action is the most radical activism of the era.

Don't think the work is over when the protest ends; the work has only just begun. You didn't just connect with tens or hundreds just to have a few more twitter followers, and you didn't just risk being beaten to death by police death squads for woke points, right? Organizing is more simply arranging yourself with people who have similar ideals to you, it's the creation and development of whole communities and liberating social structures. We implore you to form a collection of your friends, your close peers, and your neighbors into a group you can depend upon, and refounding your community from there. The building blocks of movements, and our idealized revolution, are these tight-knit communities. We can get nowhere without them.

Notes From The Rockford Rebellion

Anon
(2020)

*Just put a rag on ya face when you ride
you don't want them sattelites to take ya picture*

*Dead Prez
D.O.W.N.
(2004)*

*They building up the East Side and investin' too,
While the entire West Side is left destitute*

*Judah The Lyrical Rev
Rockford Files
(2006)*

*They try to tell us to believe in the government,
But even when Barack is president, niggas had to sell rocks*

*Vic Mensa
No More Tear Drops
(2020)*

Intro

This is a revolutionary anarchist perspective from Rockford, Illinois and the conditions here. Smaller cities are often not focused upon enough when it comes to revolutionary analysis. There is a real lack of radical memory and analysis in this area. However, many of the dynamics described in this piece are evident in other cities. It may be helpful for people in other cities. The hope is that this document is turned into a zine and distributed among the participants in the movement here. This reflection is meant to be document of some thoughts on the rebellion and what will be required to advance the revolutionary struggle against racial capitalism in Rockford further.

The black revolt here is justified and understandable. Rockford's black population is probably about 22 percent of the entire population of the city. Rockford is a declining industrial center. In a report released in June of 2020, Rockford was

rated the 8th worst city in America to be black. The black poverty rate in Rockford is 37 percent. In the past ten years, there have been a number of police shootings by the RPD and Metro Enforcement. There have also been a number of deaths inside of the Winnebago County Jail. There is much to be angry about in this city.

Black organizations acting as mouthpieces for the pigs and the city have claimed that the rioters were white and from "out of town." Despite this, the most militant forces against the police were predominantly black youth and black folks who had come up from the Fairgrounds projects as the march approached the precinct.

The perspective of this piece comes from a New Afrikan anarchist perspective. The description of New Afrikan is to honor the legacy of revolutionary anarchist Kuwasi Balagoon and to set the anarchist politics described apart from white anarchism. There is a lot of demonization of anarchism by the State right now and many black misleaders are attempting to act as if anarchism is only for white people. It is not. New Afrikan comes from the Republic of New Afrika, a black revolutionary nationalist formation that continues to fight for black self-determination. The author situates New Afrikan anarchism within the Black radical tradition similar to black anarchists such as Kuwasi Balagoon, Ashanti Alston, Lorenzo Komboa Ervin, and the Anarkatas. The State is anti-black so we as New Afrikan anarchists must oppose and destroy the State.

The goal of the document is to spread light on the movement in Rockford and what it will require moving forwards. However, the author is just one participant and does not hold any or all of the answers. These thoughts are the product of a variety of conversations among black anarchists and revolutionaries from the area.

The Uprising

On May 30th, there was a march in solidarity with uprising that was taking place in Minneapolis and across the country at that moment. It was one of the largest marches in Rockford history. Thousands took to the streets unpermitted. Due to the pandemic, many were masked up in addition to organizers telling folks to utilize tactics of masking up. The chants and banners were very militant. A lot of "fuck the police" and abolitionist messaging through chants and banners was present. This initial mood set the tone for the rest of the march. The group marched to District 1 Station on West State. Whatever the organizers had planned, black autonomous action took the forefront. Anti-police graffiti was thrown up on the police signs, fireworks were shot off, people began to destroy the RPD district 1 sign, and eventually throwing rocks and bottles at the pigs. The attacks on Capital and the police are revolutionary action. The clashes with the police began shortly after these actions were taken near District 1. The clashes lasted late into the night.

Looting began all over the city soon after. There were attempts by young rebels to burn down buildings on the East Side. The looting lasted for two days.

These organizations are opportunistically taking advantage of the rebellion to advance their own agendas, as black middle organizations tend to do.

Dozens of people have been arrested and are facing charges for their participation in uprising on May 30th. This moment must be understood as the revolutionary surge within the city. The protests are continuing although they range in militancy and class character. They have never reached the height of May 30th. Many within the Rockford community have condemned the actions of black youth and others, as “outside agitators” even though most of the arrests were people from the city of Rockford. It is clear they are frightened of revolt and revolution. Black organizations acting as mouthpieces for the pigs and the city have claimed that the rioters were white and from “out of town.” Despite this, the most militant forces against the police were predominantly black youth and black folks who had come up from the Fairgrounds projects as the march approached the precinct. Black people do not need white people to take revolutionary action. Furthermore, if the march had not ended in an uprising, it is unlikely the subsequent demonstrations and teach-ins, which have been ongoing from over two months, would be happening.

On Counter-Revolution

The counter-revolutionary tendencies within the black community are strong. Many of these so-called organizations for black empowerment or anti-racism are clearly linked to the racist city government. Groups like 100Strong, the NAACP and others came out the next day with white city leaders to “condemn the looting.” Some of these groups even helped to clean and fix up the police station the day after the rebellion. These groups do not represent black power, they represent deference to the white power structure. They utilize language and aesthetics of black power such as the clenched fist but they are clearly very much tied to a politics of respectability. They must be opposed at every moment. Revolutionaries must not have any respect for organizations or individuals who sell Black Lives Matters t-shirts or Black Panther hats while in the same moment host cookouts and take photos with the pigs.

Black people do not need white people to take revolutionary action.

The United Way has been particularly opportunistic in how it has used “Black Lives Matter” in its youth programming while also working explicitly with the police. These organizations are opportunistically taking advantage of the rebellion to advance their own agendas, as black middle-class organizations tend to do. This

follows along a longer history of co-optation and social movement repression in Rockford. This is partially why there was never a sustained Black Lives Matter moment in this city between the years of 2014 to 2016 other than a few so-called peaceful protests that worked with the police. The co-optation in the current moment is clear as the city creates “Listening Sessions” with the intent of co-opting the revolutionary actions of black youth during the uprising on May 30th and distracting from the revolutionary demands of the local black radical organizers. Groups like the NAACP and other black liberal organizations (such as the local preachers) have allied themselves with the white establishment and the police. This is unsurprising as revolutionaries understand that the class struggle cannot be separated from the struggle for black liberation and vice versa.

The opportunist black leadership and local “activists” seek to improve their own conditions while forsaking the black lead multiracial rebellion that occurred on May 30th. The white establishment and the black mis-leadership class have rejected even the reformist demands such as the resignation of the police chief or firing officers responsible for brutality on May 30th while the District Attorney Marilyn Hite-Ross charges black youth with felonies for holding water bottles in their hands. Counter-revolutionary cop-collaborationist organizations such as Rockford Youth Action and Empowerment have set up to distract from the abolitionist demands.

The white establishment and the black mis-leadership class have rejected even the reformist demands such as the resignation of the police chief or firing officers responsible for brutality on May 30th while the District Attorney Marilyn Hite-Ross charges black youth with felonies for holding water bottles in their hands.

To combat this, radicals must actively name these groups as counter-revolutionaries and eject them from our spaces. There must be political education showing how liberal opportunism destroyed black movements in the 1960s. The demonstrators have done a good job at not cooperating with these organizations. Clearly there is a lack of knowledge here as well; anti-police rebellions exist in the long tradition of black struggle against slavery and racism. Condemning the looting when the United States and white society was built upon the looting of indigenous land, Africa and African people shows the ignorance and class allegiances of these so-called black leaders. Looting is reparations! Without the rebellion, these so-called black leaders wouldn't even be talking about police brutality in the community. Condemn the police, not the looting. There are no good cops and there are no bad protestors. Of course, the experiences of New Afrikan militants or anarchists who took part in the rebellion in a variety of ways were erased. To loot and revolt is a politic. Political education is deeply important right now in order to combat the lies of the black mis-leadership class in Rockford.

On Tactics

Tactically, it is very clear from this action that it is possible to have sustained militancy in this area. People just need to be better organized and prepared. Most of the radicals who turned up on May 30th did not anticipate actual revolt. Thus, radicals lagged behind many of the black and brown youth who pulled up with plans of action. The marches subsequent to May 30th have not been full-on revolt. There was only a day or two of true rebellion here in Rockford.

Despite this, there are some tactics that revolutionaries pushed that have had an affect on the character of demonstrations in the following two months. The normalization of full masks and black bloc has been very essential. This has become normalized at demonstrations making it very hard for the city or liberals to decry individuals as “agitators” or “anarchists.” However, black bloc should not be the only tactic people utilize when it comes to concealing one’s identity. People should experiment with other types of disguises in situations where black bloc may draw more attention from the police than needed. Black bloc has a tendency, especially within white anarchist circles to be fetishized. There must be an emphasis on black bloc as a tactic rather than an identity or signifier of radical politics. The punk bloc or partial bloc has been an issue in Rockford. People do not seem to understand that the goal of bloc is too completely mask any identifying characteristics.

There needs to be better development of street tactics and deepening of the existing ones. For instance, banners were used to conceal people’s actions from cameras at the first demo. This particular tactic could be used more especially for folks who need to do a clothing change out of black bloc. The use of bike crews to block traffic, accompany the marches, and scouting. The bikes were even used to block fascists who tried to ram the marches. The street medic collective which formed is deeply important. Hopefully, these autonomous crews will continue to function even after the uprising. There is a good amount of support based infrastructure at these protests.

However, for things to grow there must be more autonomous collectives especially to build capacity for action, de-arrest people, and to defend ourselves against police attacks. The aversion to addressing these concerns is a big problem in regards to keeping the momentum going. Anarchists have failed for the most part to even take low level actions such as doing street art or pulling temporary barricades into the street. The black and brown youth at the action on May 30th were far more militant than the revolutionaries on the street. This is partially due to a lot of peace policing rhetoric as well as inexperience with street tactics locally. The most escalation we do see is typically with militants yelling at police. If things on the streets are going to grow past simply protest, energy must be redirected. The

militant de-arrests and night marches are encouraging developments. In short, militant resistance needs to grow to keep people safe.

Anarchists and radicals in Rockford need to also become more adverse to cameras and media. Recently, participants have made the media more uncomfortable after a protestor was targeted by the police, which is an important development. Many of the photographers are actively aligned with the city and represent a threat to protesters if they are allowed to remain embedded within demonstrations. On a similar note, revolutionaries and anarchists should be taking decentralized action that is not traceable on social media. There needs to be more under the radar actions that are not announced over social media so they cannot be repressed.

There has been some fear locally about the levels of repression especially since Rockford is not a city with good radical legal infrastructure that has made people reluctant to escalate against the State and Capital. Militants need to be building more support for groups like the Winnebago Community Bond Fund, which helped bail protestors out on the first night.

Furthermore, it would be really excellent if radicals could find a few lawyers in this area willing to do pro-bono work on criminal cases. Legal support is going to be deeply important in the coming years. Revolutionaries cannot sustain a movement without deep amounts of infrastructure. There is a deep need for serious armed security as well. In marches subsequent to May 30th, there were guns pulled on demonstrators. Those demonstrations were on the white side of town on the East Side. There may be a need for armed self-defense as a precaution if demonstrators return to Forest City Plaza. Generally though, there is a large fascist presence in the white suburban and rural areas. In other cities, white supremacists are very willing to murder demonstrators. It is only a matter of time before they try that here so those of us who can be armed, should be. However, this will be difficult, because there is no open carry in Illinois.

New Afrikan anarchists want the end of this anti-black world. No mayor or politician will ever grant that to us. It can only be granted through the actions taken with our own hands.

Subsequent from May 30th, there has been a failure by the organizers and participants to build and grow, which has led to diminished turnout. However, the sit-in outside of the jail and the noise demonstration on July 4th which both took place at night have taken the most revolutionary character with militants taking autonomous action to throw up street art and burn flags. Night marches may be tactically more advantageous when it comes to escalating things as the

most militant actions have taken place at night. Protestors recently did a noise demonstration late at night outside of the Mayor's house on July 25th in solidarity with Portland and to push the demand of dropping charges of people arrested on May 30th. This was a particularly effective tactic. Although the West Side and Downtown has many sites of State power (City Hall, District 1, and Winnebago County Jail), the East side is where all of the Capital in the city is.

The decentralization of the protests has also aided in the city being unable to pinpoint a leader in order to stop the protests from continuing. The police in this city do not have experience handling protest so anarchists and rebels must seize on this opportunity to employ decentralized and varied tactics. People should continue to form affinity groups and autonomous collectives rather than listening to protest leaders. Many of the militants involved in organizing protests have been averse to meeting with politicians. This should continue. There is no point in meeting with bourgeois politicians at all regardless of whether or not they will meet demands. In a revolutionary view, there is no demand that the city can grant that should drive people out of the streets. New Afrikan anarchists want the end of this anti-black world. No mayor or politician will ever grant that to us. It can only be granted through the actions taken with our own hands.

Due to how car-oriented and spread out this city is, integration of cars into demonstrations and subsequent uprisings will be essential for keeping people safe. There was some integration of cars with autonomous individuals driving around and looting. Some of the marches were very long and there were rightly many concerns about accessibility for folks who could not walk for miles. We need to integrate cars into longer marches or develop routes that are more accessible. Part of this is developing more concrete plans of action that extend beyond simply disruption. These tactics have been effective with the targeting of the mayor and the jail in night marches called for by Rockford Youth Abolitionists as mentioned previously.

On Revolutionary Organization, Ideology and Strategy

The major challenge that Rockford as a city is facing is the lack of black revolutionary organization. There are no organizations in this city with an analysis similar to the Black Panther Party or the Black Autonomy Federation. However, there are groups and individuals which front as if they are coming from that tradition. Building organizations engaged in political education and mutual aid is the most important thing to do coming out of this moment. Organization is not synonymous with hierarchical, Statist, authoritarian, or oppressive forms of organization. Revolutionaries must be willing to build decentralized organization that can take on the State in every capacity. The few collectives and

informal networks that exist in Rockford have provided an essential base to keep the protest movement going.

One group, the May 30th Alliance has done demonstrations outside of Rockford City Market, which has led to it closing. This tactic has been particularly effective. The crowds at these demonstrations have been smaller but the vibes have still been very disruptive and abolitionist. The City Market is an event that began in 2010. It has been a part of the effort by city leaders to gentrify downtown to make it more attractive to businesses, white professionals and white people from out of town. The choice to target City Market in a sustained fashion is very effective. It is clearly upsetting the white power structure. On July 31st and August 1st, there were more arrests albeit these arrests occurred due to protestors blocking East State Street and due to clashes between “Blue Lives Matter” demonstrators on August 1st aided by the police. The “non-violent” nature of these arrests has led to more supportive from mostly white professionals to provide legal and financial support.

Revolutionaries in Rockford need to be engaging in political education and deepening our own mutual aid/community defense networks as the economic crisis continues to deepen.

There is no reason for demonstrators to put themselves on a platter for State repression as some protest leaders have indicated. It is not the 1960s in a small Alabama town. The non-violence of the 1960s did not exist in a vacuum. They can fill these jails up and they have been charging demonstrators with felonies. Demonstrators should try to avoid arrest at all costs. There will be more revolt in the next few months as a result of anger around elections and continued economic insecurity, we do not want our people to be tied up in charges when that happens.

Revolutionaries in Rockford need to be engaging in political education and deepening our own mutual aid/community defense networks as the economic crisis continues to deepen. There were a few teach-ins in early June which were very successful in building relationships and bonds. In terms of political education, focusing upon deepening a local analysis of racial capitalism as it relates to the police and the prisons is going to be very essential in our city. The protests here although they are very abolitionist in their rhetoric and character do not seem to have fully developed class-consciousness. There has been no explicit critique of capitalism by these organizations. There needs to be deep development of political education around the tactics utilized by radicals and security culture. Both of these elements seem to be deeply lacking in the current moment which has made repression of the State more effective as participants are not doing enough to guard themselves and one another from repression.

Revolutionaries and anarchists must form our own affinity groups so protest leaders or organizations with large Facebook followings do not dictate our actions or tactics. Decentralize our action. There are a lot of people here calling for defunding and abolition of the police however it does not seem that abolition has translated into the day to day practice of many protestors. Recently, the zine *If You See Something, Do Something: 12 Things to Do Instead of Calling the Police*, has been distributed locally at events. This is good. There must be more education developed locally on creating our own abolitionist networks to deal with harm without the police. Much of the rhetoric online is still very carceral and Statist such as the calls to report and work with the police to track down racists. Too many protestors have been talking to the police at demonstrations despite claiming to be abolitionist. Talking to pigs does not keep us safe. Rockford must build cultures of non-cooperation.

The May 30th Alliance organization despite some of the more disruptive actions does not seem to be truly invested in a revolutionary strategy. Some of the members actively talk or negotiate with the police at actions for “safety” purposes. This is really discouraging behavior from a group that claims an abolitionist perspective. The organization is not actively counter-revolutionary but rather many of the people involved seem to be still going through political transformation. If the group is truly invested in tactical non-violence, they should be creating workshops to train folks in NVDA tactics. There is a real lack of training in that regard locally. Much of the rhetoric of that group and their supporters is similar to the Black Lives Matter movement back in 2014 to 2016. It is frustrating because the issue is that Rockford never experienced a Black Lives Matter moment, so many of the proposals and actions taken in this city feel 4 or 5 years behind. The use of “die ins,” the “we are not our ancestors,” and so-called “revolutionary” non-violence are all in play here. The issue is that we must move past the Black Lives Matter moment. Voting some candidates out next year is not the same as insurrection or true revolution. Despite this, the broad acceptance of abolitionist frameworks to some degree is encouraging.

On the Class and Racial Character

Racially, the demonstrations have been black lead but multi-racial in their composition. Black abolitionist organization has been key to advancing the movement. There has been an attempt to cast the protests as white-lead. This is very wrong. A revolutionary movement must center black people and black struggle. Specifically, the most marginalized black people must be centered. Black trans people and black women must be at the center of our movements. That has been a struggle here with the lack of black queer radical formations. There has not been enough emphasis on the particular oppression of black

women and black queer people in the educational sessions or rallies. The cis-hetero black male leadership whether radical or liberal has been more averse to escalation against the State and Capital than the participants who were not from that background.

This struggle has clearly defined the lines of the class and political struggle in Rockford. Fundamentally in this moment, the black working class revolted for a day against the black mis-leadership class or black middle class aided by a group of multi-racial radicals with black leadership. The sustained protests afterwards have continued to shake up the city although it is unclear whether or not the leaders of these protests are “rebels for reform” or revolutionaries as Robert L Allen describes in his book *Black Awakening in Capitalist America*. As mentioned previously, the calls for reform may be important to further radicalize but revolutionaries must oppose reform as the end goal.

There has also been a large amount of participation from white working class people and youth. The first demonstration had a lot of involvement from the Latino community in Rockford, however the failure of organizers to link the anti-black violence of the police to the violence of ICE against the Latino community has depressed turnout a bit. There needs to be more alliance building. Generally though, there have been a good number of Latino militants involved. Perhaps a black and brown unity march through the south east side would be a good way to build relationships in the future.

There is not a political base for the abolitionists yet. It must be built.

In terms of class character, the first day many black folks from the hood came out. The protests continued to have some mass character but at this point, the marches consist of predominantly the same group of traditionally political or activist types (this group ranges from radical to liberal in orientation). This was definitely because of the pivot towards non-violence after the first demonstration. It is clear that this move alienated many working class people as well as some anarchist militants. The cross section of support of the demonstrations is truly interesting. At this point in the struggle, the demonstrations have become predominantly white in racial makeup. This isn't necessarily a bad thing but it points to the lack of connection between the black protest leadership and the black working class. There is not a political base for the abolitionists yet. It must be built.

Conclusion

A revolutionary movement in Rockford must emerge through mutual aid and political education alongside revolt, which is the work that some of the groups

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in the city have been undertaking. Revolutionaries must be cynical about the possibilities for any type of reform. However, the failures to achieve actual reform in this area will only push the revolutionary consciousness further so perhaps making demands such as “defund the police” and then have those things fail to materialize will force people to understand the need for revolution and complete social transformation. Reactionary politicians and reactionary police who are supported by an armed base of reactionary supporters control the County. The only way forward in my view towards actual abolition will demand revolutionary action. That necessitates that we build structures and affinity to revolt against the State in the next moment. Finally, as abolitionists, we need to start deepening our resistance to Winnebago County Jail through building and strengthening systems of support for people locked up. Prisoners make up one of the most revolutionary segments of our society and the lack of attention to the conditions in Winnebago County Jail in the midst protests has been a problem.

There is no one way forward. Resistance will look different from region to region. That is an idea that many radicals do not understand yet. At the same moment, revolutionaries have to remain principled to our values as anarchists committed to black liberation and decolonization.

Call For Community Defence Revolutionary Abolitionist Movement (RAM) (2020)

In the wake of the murder of George Floyd we have seen a tectonic shift in the terrain here in the US. The brutal murder of Floyd at the hands of the police seemed to be the final straw for people. In response, rebellion erupted and spread like fire across the American plantation. The magnitude of this rebellion is unlike anything we have seen here on US soil and marks a new front in the struggle for liberation. The rebellion of Minneapolis ushered in a new stage in the people's war against the State.

While the rebellion marks a new stage in the struggle for emancipation, the state has also heightened its repression of the rebellion from propaganda about conspiracies of anarchists and anti-fascists to unleashing federal gestapo on protesters in Portland as well as in other cities across the nation, all in the name of law and order.

Despite the rage and fury of the oppressed facing off with the state's sanctioned violence, pigs continue to murder black and brown people in cold blood as we have seen with the attempted execution of Jacob Blake by a Kenosha pig unloading 7 shots into his back in front of his children. This in turn has sparked a new wave to the rebellion.

Aside from direct repression from the state we are seeing an armed white militia response to the rebellion similar to what has happened in the past when slave revolts erupted against the status quo. We can look back to the Nat Turner Rebellion in Southhampton that shook the planter class to their core. Fear of slave insurrections spread from plantation to plantation leading to the brutal massacre of over 100 slaves at the hands of militia.

In Kenosha we have already seen the deadly outcome of a white militia response to the rebellion with the 17-year-old Kyle Rittenhouse murdering two protesters and injuring another as well as violence from Proud Boys and other fascists in other cities such as Portland. All with the stamp of approval from the police and the state.

This response from the far right demonstrates that there is an urgent need for us to start building up our defense capacity in order to defend the rebellions as well as the communities in general from right wing militia and state violence. There is a critical need to take seriously the situation at hand and develop strategies for defense in the face of state and state sanctioned repression from militia and vigilantes.

We as revolutionaries and abolitionists should be developing decentralized networks of local neighborhood defense units to defend against this repression and to advance our stronghold in the struggle for liberation.

Defense is the central pillar of our resistance. The State tries to consolidate its monopoly on violence by claiming to have the unique ability to protect its “citizens,” but it has become clear, there is no such thing as protection that one does not provide oneself. Defense is not only the barricade against an oppressive force, but also the means for the collective development that is an integral part of revolutionary change.

There are many historical as well as present examples we can learn from, adapt and apply to the immediate situation at hand. For example, the neighborhood defense committees in Barcelona from 1933 to 1938 during the Spanish Civil War which were the clandestine militant groups of the CNT. These defense committees were reorganized based on a more serious methodical “revolutionary preparedness” in opposition to the tactical spontaneity of what was called “revolutionary gymnastics” of the action groups previous to 1934 in order to meet what was said by the National Committee of Defense Committees (CNCD) “a State that has experience, heavy weaponry, and a greater capacity for offensive and defensive combat”.

This demonstrates the importance of being prepared to match and defend against the repression of either the state or militia/vigilante terror unleashed at protests or in the communities most vulnerable to this violence. Being unprepared in such a serious situation can lead to major consequences as well as far right forces gaining a stronger foot hold and digging their roots into communities that can be future obstacles to the movement for liberation.

Other lessons can be drawn from other formations such as the HPC (Civilian Defense Forces) in Rojava. The HPC are directly responsible for the protection of their own communities and deal with issues and disputes within those communities. Building neighborhood defense units can work and contribute to the abolitionist movement by making police obsolete in our communities as we learn to deal with conflicts and become more advanced in our training in defense bringing more community members into the fold to participate in our own protection against threats like police terror.

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At a time of rebellion against the state and its repression there is an urgency to maneuver appropriately against the force of the state and successfully repel any attempts to suppress our movement for emancipation. Building up our decentralized forces for defense on the local levels that can be the “barricades against an oppressive force” and “an integral part of revolutionary change” is vital to our success. To quote Raul Zibechi in his book *Dispersing Power*:

The insurgency is a moment of rupture in which subjects display their capacities, their power as a capacity to do, and, deploy them, revealing aspects hidden in moments of repose, when there is little collective activity.

In this moment of insurgency are we going to display our capacity necessary to defend and advance our movement for abolition and liberation against the state and other forces seeking to crush the rebellion and maintain the status quo?

On the Black Leadership and Other White Myths We Still Outside Collective (2020)

A communiqué sent to Ill Will by some black friends in New York.

What they call, “the black leadership,” does not exist. Let’s be serious: what they are talking about is nothing more than a figment of the white liberal imagination. That is, if these so-called black leaders even exist at all, then they can only be found shucking and jiving a “woke” white person’s head.

Isn’t it interesting how progressive whites seem to have a direct line of communication with black leaders, while everyone else in the street fails to suffer from the same delusional schizophrenia? What’s all the more odd is that the voices that they hear from these magical negroes always manage say the same things: “Everyone should peacefully protest on the sidewalk, because unmediated black rage makes others uncomfortable.” “Don’t strike back at that cop even if he wants to kill you and everyone you love.” “I know the manager follows black kids from aisle to aisle, but still, his store shouldn’t be looted.” In other words, the message relayed from the sounds on repeat in a white liberal’s head is to end the black revolt and conduct civil disobedience in a manner that is appropriate for Karen and Ethan, not Jamal and Keisha.

It is worthwhile to note that black people, themselves, never refer to any mythical black leadership. This is because we know, full and well, that all of our leaders, since Martin and Malcolm, have been killed. Even our potential leaders, like Trayvon and Tamir, are gunned down before they can share with us their vision. What’s more, if they are not brutally murdered, then they are locked away forever with Sundiata, Mutulu, and Mumia. That is, we know that if you speak with truth and move against oppression, then the only way to avoid the pig’s bullet or penitentiary, the modern-day cracker’s whip or plantation, is to go on the run like Assata Olugbala Shakur! In fact, any black person that says otherwise should be exposed for what he or she is: a poverty-pimp!

After half of century without a figurehead in the front, the black youth has shown the whole country that they are more than capable of setting their own path and

directing their own initiatives. They have demonstrated to us a dynamism that can never be reduced to a homogeneous mass following any one authoritative voice. Paradoxically, it is the entire spectrum of the black revolt in the streets that can be identified as leaderless “leaders,” since they have shown everyone else what it means to free yourself.

To paraphrase James Baldwin’s still apt observation, we black people are more aware of the inner workings of our pale-face antagonists than they are of themselves. Consequently, the diagnosis of woke whiteness’s psychological condition is quite simple: this James Earl Jones, Carl Winslow, or Rafiki from the *Lion King* voice, which bellows off the walls of their skull, is a defense mechanism against their inability to completely repress their own white superiority complex. What’s also abundantly clear is that the only way to fully work through this hang up is to gain even a small percent of the courage of a black adolescent and overcome their white guilt with a fist, a stone, and a Molotov cocktail.

A View On The Capitol Hill Autonomous Zone D & The Final Straw Radio (2023)

In the past few weeks since the uprising in response to police killings of Black and Brown folks around Turtle Island, amazing chances have presented themselves and folks have seized opportunities. One great and unfolding circumstance is known as the CHAZ or CHOP, an autonomous zone and occupational protest surrounding a police precinct in Seattle's Capitol Hill neighborhood. The area was opened to community redesign after nights of intense battles with the police leading to the department evacuating the East Precinct to crowds of people chanting "Every Day", meaning they would continue surrounding the police building. In many ways, the ability of the community, including anarchists and other radicals, to be able to respond to the situation was possible because of the mutual aid work that had been being developed during the covid-19 pandemic and years of building relationships.

In this podcast special, you'll hear a fresh conversation with D. D is a Black Anarchist who grew up in and around Capitol Hill district in Seattle. He talks for this chat about that neighborhood and adjacent Central District's rebelliousness and conflictual history with the Eastern Precinct that the Seattle Police abandoned, about his knowledge of the protests of past weeks and the retreat of cops from their pen. D talks about the foundation of what has been called the Capitol Hill Autonomous Zone, aka CHAZ, aka Capitol Hill Occupation Protest (or CHOP), or as D calls it the Chopped City CHAZ. You'll also hear a tiny bit about the history of occupations during protests in the city, engagement with the zone and indigenous communities in the area, the idea of monolithic Black Leadership, self-defense against the far right, the reproduce-ability of the autonomous zone model and other topics. We're going to try to bring you more stories from this place soon and are super thankful to D for sharing his perspectives.

note: I was informed by my cohost William that in fact the retaining wall in front of the fourth precinct in Minneapolis that I was referring to was actually constructed by the Minneapolis PD, hence why it looks janky as shit.

TFSR: Would you be able to identify yourself, maybe what political tendency you identify with, your relationship with Seattle's Capitol Hill neighborhood, maybe whatever name and pronouns you prefer?

D: Sure. My Name is D, I use he/him pronouns. I'm a Black anarchist born and raised in Seattle, I grew up at the bottom on the east side of the Capitol Hill so I'm really familiar with the history of the area.

TFSR: Thanks for taking the time to chat, I really appreciate it.

D: Yeah, no problem.

TFSR: So there's this occupation, this autonomous zone that was formed in the Capitol Hill district. Can you talk a little bit about what the protests were like in Seattle following the police murder of George Floyd and other Black folks, and what it looked like in Capitol Hill?

D: It started off with the Friday night protest, the Friday following the burning of the third precinct. I had actually just got back into town and went in not knowing what to expect. It was kind of directionless, some targets were hit that made sense for people, like an Amazon Go store was hit which reflected the sheer hatred of Jeff Bezos. Then it was a very confrontational atmosphere in the crowd but also [it was] kind of not knowing what to do or where to go and nightfall happened the demographics of the crowd got very younger and much more Black and there was a newfound energy.

People were going around downtown Seattle and made their way up the hill until like 2am in the morning. The following Saturday were more organized protests that were in the heart of the shopping district in downtown, and before the organized event could really get underway the confrontation with the police occurred and things got really wild throughout the evening. That's where you see the burning cops cars and the Nordstrom's getting hit and the different looting occurring downtown. That Sunday, the next day, there were hundreds and hundreds of people out on Capitol Hill marching around and the cops wouldn't let people downtown. Groups would break off in like groups of 100 and try to find a different way downtown while another group would stay behind at each police line that would be formed.

Over the course of maybe like seven hours people finally made their way downtown in different, smaller groups. Simultaneously with that happening, on the east side of Lake Washington in Bellevue, Bellevue Square Mall got hit and looted with seemingly a coordinated group of people there where the police didn't know how to respond. All they could do was watch a they got hit and looted. I wasn't there for any of that, I have no idea how that even happened or came about. It was cool to hear about.

Then, on the following Monday, somehow the line, the gathering point for the protest and the goal was the East Precinct on Capitol Hill. That's kind of where the siege began and it kind of just stayed there.

TFSR: Can you talk a bit about Capitol Hill: the dynamics in that neighborhood, who all lives there, and what standing conflicts are like with the police? Just to name a reference that I have, I was in Seattle for the protests in '99 and I remember some rad shit happening in that neighborhood. I think that's where there was a RCP bookstore or whatever. There were a lot of marches, a lot of burning dumpsters in the street and I remember the difficulty of transiting between downtown and neighborhoods like that because those roads that go over the highway are really easy choke points to block off for the police.

D: Yeah, I can give you a quick rundown. I want to say it was like in the '50s they got all this funding to build I-5 and they basically cut the side of the hill and built the freeway. In doing so they built these overpasses to get to downtown that you were just talking about, which creates these choke points. I think there's four main ones on Capitol Hill, popular ways, then there's maybe two more a little bit north in what people call the hospital district or Pill Hill. It's a pain because you could go from like one overpass to another and if you have a crowd to take the streets it's kind of hard for the cops to navigate around to get to the choke point. But I feel like they've got really good at spreading out their force and being ready for it and not getting stuck.

The population on Capitol Hill, for me in like the '90s and the late '80s up to the 2000's was a very counterculture scene. Capitol Hill is also on the edge of the historically Black neighborhood so there was always this counter-culture/Black-culture mingling that's existed on Capitol Hill. Grunge came out of there, a lot of punk kids, D.I.Y. people, and the hipsters were a really big thing. Especially post '99 the hipsters moved into Capitol Hill a lot, and at that point I think Capitol Hill had cemented it's neighborhood legacy as being like the queer neighborhood. So the hipsters started coming in and started changing a lot of the demographics, it became more hip, more expensive to live on the hill.

TFSR: More white?

D: Yeah, more white, for sure. And even the whiteness changed, it wasn't like counterculture white anymore, it was conformist but like indie. It's kind of hard to describe. I always use this reference of being in New York and going to a talk learning about how the hipster culture was bad and that was the first time I realized what a hipster was. I realized they were the ones destroying Capitol Hill, it was

weird to go all the way across the country to get a name for what was happening to my town. Now it's a really interesting demographic because there's definitely a lot of tech money and a lot of single, or young couples. They're very liberal and progressive and from those ranks you get a lot of 'allies,' a lot of people who want to be down, but you also get those who aren't at all. The contest-ability of the neighborhood is lost, or i thought I was lost up until recently.

But it was always known for protests. Occupy was camped out there, a lot of the more confrontational protests post-Ferguson were up there and the East Precinct in particular was the police precinct which oversaw the Central District, which is the historically Black neighborhood so there's a very deep-seated relationship, bad relationship, with the Black community in Seattle and that particular precinct. Like gang unit used to operate out of there, one of the more powerful Black churches is like three blocks away from there. So it's very dynamic but it's a very controlled neighborhood.

TFSR: Can you talk a little bit more about your understanding of who the cops are and where they come from? Like are they folks out of Tacoma, are they out of like Bellevue or other suburbs, or are they people – if you want to call them people – who lived and grew up in Seattle?

D: I don't think any of them grew up in Seattle. I'm probably wrong, there might be a few. A lot of them are from surrounding areas. The cops that I know of what area they live in, most of them are from like Sammamish, which is east of Bellevue, and Bellevue is east of Seattle across the lake, so like up almost into the mountains and passes there are little towns up there and bougie enclaves up there. I wouldn't be surprised that some of them live as far south as Tacoma or as far north as Everett or even further north, in some of the areas you could get some land, rural areas or whatever. I doubt very few come from Seattle, if any at all. I feel like some of the higher-ups maybe will have their kids in some of the more bougie private high school around, but that's about it.

TFSR: That's a pretty common trajectory in a lot of cities police departments. Particularly if there's concentrations of people of color or communities of color and then you've got a mostly white police force that comes in from the suburbs and has absolutely no connection to their lives that their work has.

D: Yeah, Seattle's interesting. I don't know about other locations regarding this, but I think the cops of color are probably the ones who are most rooted in Seattle or have the most history and relations to Seattle. Where I doubt any of the white officers have any roots in Seattle. And Seattle, they're like cutting edge on shit like

community policing and community engagement. So like when Trayvon Martin died there was a Black officer, her name is officer Cookie, she had just taken over a community started chess program. Basically by like getting the library where it was held to not hold it anymore, and then took city funding to start her own chess club in the same place and talked to all the parents and had the kids come to her chess club.

So that had been going on for a few months and then when Trayvon Martin died she took photo ops holding a bag of skittles and an iced tea can and stuff like that. And this is a Black woman. And this is a few years back, and even now it's Carmen Best who's Chief of Police in Seattle, a Black woman who can hit the talking points like "my grandchildren are out in the protest" and "my son/daughter in law is out in the protest" and that type of stuff. But it's there's always been like, even in the neighborhood I grew up with, there was the Black officer who responded to every single call that was every made in the neighborhood. He was the first one there because he was the community liaison and so Seattle's good for that – their community policing's cutting edge.

TFSR: Some people in the listening audience may have heard the term 'community policing' in a positive way as like it's a way to de-escalate situations and to decrease the likelihood of use of force through that way by officers, and cement conversations in neighborhoods or whatever, the smiling face of cops. When in fact it's notably a counterinsurgency method.

D: Yeah, in Seattle it came directly out of Weed & Seed funding. Weed & Seed was a Department of Defense project [transcriber's note – I checked, it's Department of Justice] and it was literally like weed out the bad and seed the good. I experienced that growing up in the '90s, basically it was like they would send these community police officers or whatever into neighborhoods to build relationships with community councils, which were often grassroots organized, and would build these relationships and convince neighbors to snitch on each other. In doing so people, families, lost their homes. They literally get their homes taken away from them because their kids or families members were breaking the law, and they'd be turned in by neighbors.

It was a very insidious program. And community policing was not the like...you know, I never once played basketball with a cop. But the cop would be sitting there staring at all the kids who were playing basketball at the park nearby and would know whose parents were who so it would make rounding up people easier for them, if anything. It created more divisions in our community if anything. It was insidious but it was also that happy, like shake hands, I'm here for you, here's my

direct line, give me a call if you see anything sketchy. Then as new neighbors came in and the gentrification picked up it was the white neighbors who were calling the cops on kids for doing what kids do.

TFSR: Well, to sort of switch gears back to the narrative of what happened in the runup to the police retreat from the east precinct, can you talk about that siege that you mentioned, what that looked like and how that panned out?

D: The police precinct's on an intersection, so it's a corner building. Basically a block down from the precinct the cops set up barricades, basically in every direction and the western barricade is where people gathered first, and they kind of kept gathering. It was pretty amazing, one chant that really stuck out to me was "Every Day" and people chanted it all the time, they would just chant "Every Day." At first it made me chuckle, like, okay, we're not gonna be out here every day. But people just kept coming and kept staying and they'd be at that barricade which wasn't a super hard barricade, it was like a metal bike rack. People would be there for hours and hours and then the cops would find some excuse or just get worn out or find some excuse and throw like a flash bang or pepper spray people, people would retreat maybe twenty to 100 feet, then you would hear the chant "Every Day" and people would go right back to the front line again. It was that over and over for a few days.

One of the things, the anarchistic intervention in that, there was a call to build a vigil for all the people who had been killed since the uprising started and we built one and it gave the crowd a place to be emotional and process everything. It was about halfway down the block from where that main front was against the police barricade. I would see people leave the crowd, go and kneel in front of these candles and flowers or light a candle and process everything, and then go right back into the crowd. The crowd size would fluctuate, be small in the morning and late at night and then throughout the day it would get bigger and then into the evening it would get really big and more confrontational. It just got to a point where people were sick of the barricade so they removed it. That led to a pitched street battle and the cops pushed the crowd back three blocks but every time they'd try to make a new line you'd hear the can't "Every Day" and people would re-form. It was different for me 'cause I'd never been in a situation like that, it wasn't a march where you were playing cat-and-mouse with the cops. It was like, they'd throw their flash-bangs, people would try and throw them back or try and retreat, and then if you got shrapnel or stuff in your eyes you'd go to the side and you'd get the care that you'd need and then you'd go right back into it.

So they pushed us back like three blocks, then something really strange happened:

they started conceding territory, it was like maybe forty-five minutes where they slowly backpedaled all the three blocks they had pushed us. After they had re-established the barricades and got on the other side of the barricades, then it was like we were right back in the same position we had been in for days. Maybe I missed something but over the course of those days people started setting up mutual aid tents because we had a consistent place. So there was a ton of medics everywhere, as soon as someone would be hurt you'd turn around and scream for the medic and they're there instantly, probably already taking care of the person who wounded. There was snacks, there was water, there was people consoling – like a mental health tent that was set up early on. People were willing to take care of those places and man those places. The medics had a whole area set up and were rotating shifts and were everywhere. So that helped sustain the siege.

The day after we got pushed back those few blocks, the next day when the crowd got pretty substantial and it got to be kind of late but not quite sunset yet, maybe like 7:30, people completely removed the barricades and passed them through the crowd that time, and inched closer and closer to the police. Every time the police would yell a warning over the blowhard it would either be “Fuck the Police,” a loud “Boo,” or the “Every Day” chant again.

TFSR: [laughter] It's so ominous.

D: Yeah, it was great. A lot of chants I feel like are used to help us rejuvenate our own spirits and keep our own morale up whereas I feel like this “Every Day” thing was like we're going to ruin the morale of the cops. It was a siege. I think it was effective.

Yeah, so that day they get really close to the cops – they're now like a foot away from the cops, the frontline of the crowd. Like directly under the spotlight, directly next to the sound system. There's basically no more room for the cops to give up, no more space that they could relinquish to us. Then they came, and the day before the day before the mayor banned tear gas. I think the police were a little more on edge and trying to be a little more restrained in their tactics. At that point all restraint went out the window, they started using flash-bangs and tear gas. This time the National Guard was actively with them, not just being behind them but actively in their lines and their ranks and they pushed us back down the street and in doing so split the crowd on two sides. Immediately when that happened all the old police barricades got repurposed to protect our flanks and the backside, and I heard that there were other people at the other police barricades that were set up at different areas. We regrouped under the chant of “Every Day,” people took care of themselves and were able to maintain the siege even though we were divided a

little bit. And that went on I think until two or three in the morning, and then the next day there was all these reports of the cops preparing to abandon and the news was publishing photos of moving trucks, and then the cops ceded the precinct, they boarded it up and left. I don't think a lot of people realized on the ground was that those barricades we had created in order to protect our flanks and our sides became the boundary of the zone immediately after. It kind of just happened.

I don't many of the anarchists in town were ready for it, or prepared. I don't think many of the activists or the radicals that had been on the street for years were ready or anticipating that by any means. I think it caught a lot of us off guard in the best possible way.

TFSR: Yeah, I don't think we have many examples of something that feels like a success or a win when confronting the police. They basically are out there usually out there to distract us and tire us out or injure us. I have a friend who spent a lot of time in Chile during the uprising there and they were talking about how a lot of people on Turtle Island don't realize this but this is something they saw in so-called Chile, there are bodies in those uniforms and that will tire out and they will give up. They put up this visage of being never ending sources of power and determination and whatever else but ultimately they will tire out and there's more of us than there are of them. It must have been a crazy thing to see like suddenly the footprint of your self-defense became the outline of this little space.

D: Yeah, and the composition of the crowd was like – it's weird because everyone's in masks, so it's even hard to find friends. I think it was also because the crowd had seen what had happened that Saturday when things were on fire and being looted and they saw the precinct burn in Minneapolis and they saw looting occur other places, that there was a level of militancy that didn't necessarily line up with people's political ideology. Like Bernie Bros with gas masks. It was just absurd to see what was going on, how people came, you had like sorority girls in training with like White Claw at the front-line screaming at cops, for the good and the bad that that makes. It was a completely heterogeneous crowd and that might be an understatement. It was so different.

TFSR: I want to ask about what you think about where folks who were there were coming from, and the impacts of cohesion being formed in the neighborhood a little bit later. Since the police actually pulled out their stuff there's a lot of discussion in media like "Are they going to burn it?" The socialist City Council member was talking about turning it into a community center, there's been a lot of discussion about what would happen and it's been a while now since the space has been there. Can you talk about immediately after the cops had left and the cops

realized what had happened how the space transformed? There have been gardens built, right, for instance?

D: Yeah.

Yeah, so initially I wasn't on the ground that morning, I showed up later in the afternoon. But it seemed like people were a little bit unsure what to do and a few people who had been kind of like chosen by the city as "leaders" didn't want it to burn down and other people were unsure if it should burn down or if we should even there the premises. So just like nothing happened. Which the next day kind of made a weird split, the first split between the Chief of Police and the Mayor because the next morning the Chief of Police went out and made a video directly to the rank and file saying that it wasn't her decision to withdraw from the precinct and kind of throwing the Mayor under the bus when talking to her rank and file cops. It seems like they were expecting it to burn down and they were preparing for that because all the press conferences and talking points the next day said that, that they had got word from the FBI that there were plans to burn it down. Weirdly it might have been a strategic advantage to not do it, we're really gonna know the answer to that later, like after this all unfolds.

In terms of the area it was cool to see because there were already mutual aid tents set up, the vigil was set up, the medic tents were set up, people immediately started to use this cop free zone to do what they wanted, and started taking care of each other. The zone is attached to a pretty big park on Capitol Hill, Cal Anderson park, so people immediately started setting up tents on the soccer field that's there. Just past the soccer field there's a small grass hill and people immediately started building a garden that grows every day. Around the garden now a tent city kind of popped up around it, and just past that area is an even bigger grass field and people started working on that field, growing mushrooms I believe. Then some people planted nut trees along the sides, the full length of the park. Every surface became a canvas, basically. I think on that first day when the zone was established someone came in with white paint and wrote "Black Lives Matter" really big across the length of the whole block. The next day local artists came and each one got a letter and they did their own art in the letter. It was all local artists who did it for free as far as I know. It's a beautiful sight, you see art everywhere, people helping each other. It continued to grow in that manner to the point where last time I was there, they call themselves the 'No-Cop Co-Op' or something. There were people doing shopping, get toiletries, fresh produce, snacks and water, Gatorade and juice. They were handing out tote bags so people could do their shopping, it was unbelievable. Then directly in front of the precinct was a stage area, sometime there would be a literal stage there and bands performing. It became a place for speak outs and

other organized events that continually tried to ground the space in the Black struggle, to make it so that identity was trying to staying there. I think it's yet to be determined if that was a success or not. It definitely became like a tourist attraction on weekends. There's a nightly rotation at the barricades and crews that are doing that, who maintain that.

TFSR: In terms of like the barricades and defense of the space, I've heard about community patrols to stop white supremacists attacks. Can you talk briefly about this fear and say what you can about what security's looked like? Do you have an honest impression of – like, the right wing has all these talking points (and probably a lot of centrists and liberals) about 'lawlessness' and 'violence being created in the space' and I have no sense from out here if that's an on the ground reality or if I just have my ideological perspective that people tend to take care of each other if they have the ability to.

D: One thing I can't stress enough is that the on-the-ground-reality is constantly in flux there, but in terms of your question, the barricades themselves were a response initially to street battle with the cops and then became more fortified, but they're very modular so people can open them up for cars that need to come in for whatever reason. There's no checkpoint, anyone could just walk in. I think the difficulty with that is that the heterogeneous nature of the crowd, there were a lot of liberals and a lot of progressive types who were still very adamant about free speech and so as the right-wingers and the alt-right and the white supremacists have been trickling in to see what's there, confronting them has often leads to a couple of people from the crowd trying to defend their right to be there and their right to free speech, often because they don't understand who these people are or the history or the violence these people enact. So that's very difficult. I think once you get enough people who know that or are with it they can get them out of the zone, but I've also witnessed some conservatives, maybe not alt-right or people who flirt with that, come to the space and are kind of like disappointed. One person vocalized that they felt lied to by the conservative media and they don't know what to think anymore. Which was very interesting.

It's hard, security, there's different formations that I think if we knew ahead of time what was gonna happen we would have been more organized and maybe politicized those barricades a little bit more. I think again it was like, woah, we were just given this zone, we didn't expect it. But I think because of the history of Seattle and the radical organizing over the last 15 years in that town people kind of fell into natural roles that they knew needed to be done, maybe natural is the wrong word but it just fell into place.

What safety means in that that space is very different in that space than the rest of the city, for sure. I've had multiple like femme bodied people who have mentioned that for them it's harder to actually confront people who are being inappropriate or touching them in that space because they're surrounded by liberals, whereas if they were just on the street they could actually do something.

They would actually feel a little bit safer defending themselves, which is interesting. Not having police is a very big thing and I don't think a lot of people who go to that zone are ready to deal with that reality. And it became especially difficult during the weekends when it was such a tourist zone, you'd get a lot of well-off drunk people, or well-off liberals who are coming to see what it's about and don't understand a lot of the politics of the alt-right and the white supremacists factions. There's the video of the armed Black man with his crew running around on the night when we thought some Proud Boys were coming to town. They were kind of behaving like police, they never like physically kicked anyone out but you do have a machismo or a macho culture that's associated with that crew that's problematic. It's hard to describe.

TFSR: It seems like a conversation. I think the way that people keep themselves and their communities safe is imperfect and shifting, and like you said stuff on the ground is shifting. If you've got like a peace police instance, not saying the crew with guns are peace police, where people are experiencing getting inappropriately touched or getting attention they don't want or they can't just defend themselves and be like "Get out of my space, get out of my business, leave me alone," because you've got liberals who are like "Woah, woah, woah, peace peace!" That's weird.

D: Yeah, everything's strange. I wish there were more conversations about the difference between peace policing and self-defense, and more time and avenues to have those conversations with people. I think most of the people who were really invested in the space were having those conversations but I think the overall appeal as a tourist attraction made it hard to really figure out solutions to these problems.

TFSR: Yeah, it sounds kind of like some sort of Exarchia situation where they have to deal with a bunch of drunk western tourists wandering in and being like, "I hear this is a cop free zone."

D: Yeah, exactly.

TFSR: So at different point's there's been talk of there being demands from the commune or from the autonomous zone. Are you aware of any decision making

forum in the neighborhood and if so can you talk a little bit about the process and the makeup of it?

D: There was an attempt, they tried to do a general assembly to help facilitate some kind of way to make decisions and breakout groups so smaller groups could figure out what they wanted to do. It seemed like it was going somewhere after a couple of days, but again just the flux of people all the time made that model really hard to implement and people who were on the ground were making autonomous decisions, the people who were really invested in the space. In terms of the demands it seems like three demands came out of the city of Seattle as a whole, or the communities of Seattle as whole which were: defund the police, fund the communities, and then basically amnesty for all protesters or rioters, so, free 'em all and drop all charges. It seems like 'Defund the Police' is a national call, so it seems that that was really popular, and the idea of funding community police was also really popular. I think a lot of people were down the third demand of amnesty for all but maybe when they talked wouldn't push that line or that would be the one that kind of got left out sometimes. There was one speak out early on in particular where someone was really attentively listening and compiled a list of I think 19 demands out of the while speak out that's like pretty exhaustive, everything from like free college to like closing the juvenile detention center, no kids in jail anymore, increased diversion plans, defunding the police, I think releasing nonviolent offenders, decriminalizing sex work and all drugs, it's like pretty exhaustive. That's really the only demands I've seen that come out of the zone.

Right now we're in an interesting spot because there are certain people who are working with the city and small businesses and they're working with I think like the Department of Transportation, the Fire Chief and like some of these small businesses nearby and one person from one of these mutual aid tents. They've opened up the zone basically, that's currently underway right now. It seems like they're trying to make it like a pedestrian zone area. They are allowing the garden to still exist, I think the tent city still exists as of now. But these leaders have been picked out of people who have been on the ground. I think they're often picked out in the morning when there are very little people around but I'm not 100% sure about that.

To me it's interesting because the city didn't roll in the mayor or the city council or the police, it was like the fire department and the transportation or department of utilities or something, the aspects of the city that people don't have a hostility to naturally, they were the ones that came in and made these negotiations to open it up for emergency vehicles, which is I think for the most part and for the average

person a really hard thing to fight against. It's hard to tell the fire department, "No you can't have the street to put out fires," or you don't think of the department of transportation as being, um..

TFSR: ..nefarious.

D: Yeah. Or doing the work of the mayor or the police. So that's happened but it's also increased some people's antagonism again which is great. There are certain barricades that people are trying to keep erected and some people are feeling duped, honestly. They're feeling like they got played by these department heads.

TFSR: Are people staying in conversation about that? It sounds like it, if you're hearing it, people aren't just throwing up their hands and walking away.

D: Yeah, it's interesting. I feel like the anarchists and other radicals have maybe been a little burnt out and are exhausted to a degree. I've felt this way a bunch, where I'm kind of like "okay, that's the end of that" and then something happens and brings the energy back. So I'm hoping for something like that. The precinct is still there, there's an underground tunnel to the precinct so every once in a while you'll see a cop in the building doing stuff. But figuring out what to do with that building beforehand or making sure it doesn't get back into the hands of the police is a big priority for a lot of the people. The zone is one of these areas where some people are really, really invested with it and are going to hold it down til the last dying breath. Where other people might just be like, so much energy is going to this and our demands aren't really being discussed with the city or leveraged.

TFSR: Well someone could always just like liberate a cement truck or whatever and fill in that tunnel pretty easy. [laughter] I saw pictures of a precinct in Minneapolis that just got a bunch of cinder blocks sealed up in front of the entrance in front of it.

D: That's hilarious.

What's been nice is that here people are like 'how moveable are these things?' Anything in the zone people are like 'we could do with it what we want' which is really cool, that mentality is still there, it's just how the energy turns. I'm personally waiting for the "Every Day" chants again.

TFSR: Weird question but is it CHAZ or CHOP? What's the difference?

D: Uh...man, I'm the wrong person to ask. I'm up for either really, I also just don't really care. The CHAZ thing I think was like a media branding more than

anything. I want to say it came out of the Stranger because it sounds like something that they would do. The Stranger is the local, weird independent press that goes in-between being friendly with anarchists to despising anarchists. It seems like a very corporate brands so CHOP was the response to that. I think there's a lot of misconceptions about the CHAZ, the name. So the argument for the CHOP was that it's like Capitol Hill Occupied Protest is somehow less offensive to the Duwamish people. Which from what I've heard the Duwamish people didn't really care what this area was called. The Duwamish people are one of the indigenous people who were the original caretakers of what is now Seattle. There's another argument I heard where someone tried to say that 'occupied protest' is more part of the Black radical tradition than autonomous zone, but I couldn't follow the logic or history they were presenting. I think part of it was that some people felt like the name CHAZ came from the outside and they just wanted to re-brand it for that reason. Some people talked about CHAZ sounding super white and wanting to re-brand it for that reason. I've been referring to it as Chopped City CHAZ just to kind of like laugh at the name. But yeah, it's interesting. I feel like the name being contested is reflective of the on the ground scene where there's this contact flux and people are having identity problems, I don't want to go as far as to call it a crisis but the space is still trying to figure out what it is.

TFSR: And the people that you – Suquamish, is that what you were saying?

D: Duwamish.

TFSR: That's the S-U-Q-U-A-M-I-S-H?

D: That's Suquamish. Duwamish, so yeah, the area of Seattle from the history I know, totally could be wrong, was a shared space from a lot of tribes: Mukilteo, Suquamish, Duwamish, Snohomish, I'm forgetting a bunch probably, maybe the Puyallup. The treaty as far as I know was signed with the Mukilteo people but I could be wrong*. I'm just gonna stop talking about it because I don't want to mess up anything.

The Duwamish people are, the government considers them a part of the Mukilteo tribe but they've been fighting for federal recognition for a long time and they have a longhouse in west Seattle that was actually where the original settlers landed. Oftentimes the opening of an event you would recognize the Duwamish and Suquamish people as the original caretakers of the land. So those are the two that are often recognized as the original caretakers.

**transcriber's note – the treaty was signed in Mukilteo by a number of tribes*

TFSR: We had someone come on the show and present an interview that they did with someone from up there who was talking about this community center that I think had an art collective – it was like Rising Star, I think was the name of the indigenous community space.

D: Was it Daybreak Star?

TFSR: Daybreak Star – yeah, I think so.

D: Yeah, that came out of the occupation of a military base. Seattle has a real strong history of occupations and getting those spaces. So Daybreak Star was one, I forget the name of the organization that runs it now.

TFSR: Daybreak Star Indian Cultural Center...

D: Oh, okay. Then there's El Centro De La Raza which is a Latinx community space that was occupied by Roberto Maestas and his crew back in the day, I dunno the full history very well but they have like a huge building, they have low-income apartments now, the area where it is is kind of a cultural hub for the Beacon Hill neighborhood in South Seattle. And then the Northwest African American Museum (NAAM), it came out of an elementary school building occupation that lasted for years, I think it's still considered the longest occupation in US history minus the government US itself occupying all the territory of whatever. But it was a couple Black people who held down the school building for years and it was weirdly taken away from them and given to another Black group to then create the African American Museum and it has apartments above it. The people who were holding that down in the original occupation have occupied three other buildings in recent history and have been violently removed from them all. But there's a radical history of people occupying stuff, I believe in '99 that was a thing too, there were two or three apartment buildings that got taken over during the WTO thing

TFSR: I didn't hear about that, that's awesome. I'll make sure in the show notes to link to some of these projects and spaces that you're mentioning. I was wondering about the Suquamish folks because the political prisoner Oso Blanco put out a public statement saying there should be coordination and communication with Suquamish folks since it's on occupied territory so it's cool to hear that there is some dialogue and back and forth going on.

D: Yeah, there's a lot of networks in Seattle that have been established over the years and I feel like a lot of those networks have moderate to pretty deep intimate connections with the CHAZ. I think figuring out how to turn that intimacy

into a level of accountability is very, very difficult and takes a lot of energy that I think because people are doing so much stuff in this time they're not, I dunno, the capacity isn't all the way there. But I think on the second day of the occupation being established I overheard a phone call with the Duwamish tribe just getting clarification and I haven't checked, they might have already put out their official statement. For the first week at the CHAZ there was drum circles, indigenous people were leading prayer and ceremony throughout the day at different times. It was indigenous people from tribes all around the region. I think there definitely could have been more connection and it could have been done much better but I think, again, people just not expecting this to happen. I think we were a little underprepared for that.

TFSR: Kinda ad hoc.

D: Exactly

TFSR: Well, also, this is all a process, and accountability requires like you said, intimacy and so hopefully if nothing else this is sparking people to deep their relationships with each other and such.

D: Yeah, I really hope so.

TFSR: Well I just have a couple more questions. Rates of infection and death from the COVID-19 pandemic are rising nationally as states "reopen their economies." I know Washington was one of the places hit really hard and really early. People aren't getting public assistance or the public assistance they were offered was pretty paltry and ran out, so people are feeling forced to go back to jobs and maybe are in danger of losing their unemployment if they don't. These protests nationwide have been expressing rage and challenging disproportionate rates of death at the hands of police of BIPOC but also have presented a dangerous vector for infection, is a fear that I have. Are people in the sustained spaced of Chopped City CHAZ keeping up harm reductive measures around the pandemic, is that a conversation folks are having? Cause I know it's easy to be like 'we need to stop Black death in this way' that's a demand that's 400 years old.

D: I think, in terms of conversations I haven't participated in too many besides like a couple of my friends who thought they maybe got exposed and they went and got tested and they found out it was negative so they came out. But there's hand sanitizer everywhere, everyone's wearing masks for the most part, it's hard to maintain social distance but I feel like if you want to step away, people will let you step away if you want to practice it. I was trying to find the numbers particularly

for Seattle and it looks like 1% of everyone who's gotten tested who's been at the protest has been infected, so weirdly enough the numbers haven't risen yet, I dunno if that's because of the incubation time, I don't really understand biochemistry very well. I don't really know why.

I think people are taking the measures that they can take. It's been interesting for me to see that now racism is being talked about as public health crisis. So I've been seeing a lot of talking heads from the medical field who are saying like, this COVID thing's a thing but we also have to talk about this as being a public health crisis. I'm curious how that conversation continues to grow.

TFSR: Yeah, absolutely. For me too. I'd heard inklings among activist communities and occasionally public health officials about – I mean, are you referring to rates of infection being higher because of disproportionate access to resources and stressors throughout lifetimes among communities and individuals that are affected by immediate racism?

D: Yeah, and I think also it's like how the medical field itself is governed by white supremacy, so like Black women given birth have a much higher rate of death than white women, or any other category of women. How white supremacy affects the health of Black people and non-white people. I saw someone on I think it was CBS News, a corporate news channel, push back against – I dunno what they're called, the talking heads, journalists – the guy from the medical field was pushing back saying yeah the COVID thing is a crisis, too, but racism as a health crisis has been affecting people for hundreds of years and we should now acknowledge it and talk about it. I think part of it is related to COVID and the disproportionate infection rates among different communities of color, but it's also pushing this conversation to a point where we are talking about white supremacy as a public health crisis beyond just COVID, or Corona.

TFSR: I'm really glad people are digging into the roots of this and bringing it up. So I guess the last thing I was gonna ask was folks have been talking about trying to create autonomous zones following the model of Seattle, and it seems like if I understand the situation was kind of ripe in a lot of really material senses for the CHAZ with a lot of neighborhood unity around hatred of the police, police stepping back, momentum from the protests, talk about police abolition, and amidst collective traumas of grieving the murder of Mr Floyd and countless others and on the back of months of the pressures of quarantining in this slow strangulation of capitalism, to create autonomous zones it seems like the means to live, like access to water, food, shelter and a wide shared sentiment of solidarity kind of need there for it to sustain itself. I know Asheville had a very, very short

lived attempt a few nights ago at an autonomous zone on auto-zone or whatever. It did not stick, it did not plant roots.

D: Yeah, the solidarity point I think is crucial. The goal was never to build an autonomous zone as much it's its ever a goal to build an autonomous zone. It was a siege, and that's what we got out of it. It definitely wasn't the intention of most people that I know, to manifest an autonomous zone. It was just kind of a siege and I think that's the interesting point, it was a siege and it exhausted that precinct. I haven't got to the point where I can image we have the capability to force a tactical retreat, I just think it was a siege. I think they were just exhausted and I think the chief of police and the mayor were playing a media game, and not really making their decisions based on what was happening on the ground. I could be wrong. I dunno, I'm not in those halls of power. But the "Every Day" thing – that was huge, just people saying they were gonna be here every day and then living up to that.

I was just watching about, I forget where it was in the country, they were setting up tents and camping outside of a precinct. I think that might lead to something. I think the siege tactic was what got us the zone, not any intention to go out and build the zone, if that makes sense.

TFSR: Yeah, . think so. Were there any things I didn't ask about that you have a burning desire to talk about or any other pointers that you think people should take with, or good sources for keeping up on this?

D: Sources for keeping up on it? There's a media outlet called Converge Media, they've been on the front-line live-streaming everything. When we were in to confrontation with the cops they were literally on the front-line filming everything. They're they're whenever the Proud Boys – when a crowd forms around someone, they tend to get really good video and the guy doing the filming asks pretty good questions for the most part. But there's even a couple videos on their YouTube where they find someone new to the zone. It's a Black media outlet, too, but a Black person would come into the zone, really curious and they would meet this person who's filming, his name's like Amari. He would give them a nice tour of the zone, there's like two or three videos where he would do that at different times so you can see how the zone progresses over time.

But just, yeah, keep at it. And the "Every Day" thing, I can't stress how powerful that was. I think just getting people to say they'll be there and then just keep coming back, and keep coming back, and keep coming back. I think for anarchists and other radicals just being smart with their interventions and thoughtful and maybe creative, being prepared for the unexpected and hopefully being able to

communicate and move together pretty rapidly. And just recognize face-to-face communication is so much better than any kind of text thread or email chain or signal group, and meeting people where they're at and realizing the people are a little bit more open than they've been in the past to typical anarchist talking points.

TFSR: Actually I did think of another question that I didn't script out, and if you don't want to tackle it it's totally fine. One of the things people had passed for me to bring up, was I had written down 'liberal co-optation' and that kind of felt covered by the talk of the bureaucracies coming in the mornings and looking for representatives to talk about the demands of the community, or sort of chipping away at the edges of it. I don't know if you have any views you want to share about the call for taking Black leadership. I know there's this conflict around this idea of monolithic Black leadership or any kind of community representation and people, like well meaning white folks wanting to be allies or accomplices or whatever word they want to put on it, showing up for things and then in some instances the loudest voice or the voice that has the most amplification from power as it exists, as in institutional power, gaining the mic and directing folks. Do you want to say anything about this?

D: Yes, man, that's a heavy question. I think it's important as a Black anarchists who are up in the city and who has been pretty active mostly for like the last 12 years. I've seen people who I grew up with who regularly sit down and are in a negotiation with the city and other projects like that, specifically Black capitalist milieus and the Black church and a lot of those people who I know intimately, who I grew up with, who are typically positioned to suck the energy from any Black radical uprising or divert the energy into what they're doing. When they abandoned the precinct they came up to me and were very congratulatory, like "Good job, keep it up," things I would never expect to hear from these people. We're all for Black liberation but our understandings of how to get there are in opposition to each other and we both know it, are now saying "Good job." They've been pushed a little more radical or at least is an opening for them to be amenable to these more radical things happening. I think there's examples of that of some of the discourse between the civil rights movement and the Black Power movement, but I've never experienced that in my lifetime. I think that's something that's important to understand now, that the terrain's different, especially with the recuperative measures from the Black bourgeoisie class or the Black Popular class or whatever you want to call it, and I think for specifically white radicals and white anarchists it's important to understand that these so-called allies are coming out because they saw a precinct burn. In their mind they're saying it's for Floyd, which it may be partly, it may be in their heart. But they're also responding to a precinct burning it's not just the death of black bodies that's bringing people out,

it's the action taken by those brave souls in Minneapolis. The discourse is a little different, that's not to say these people have been pushed all the way radical but the conversations in Seattle – early on, it was oh this is kinda like Occupy except all the conversations are good.

TFSR: [laughter]

D: You know, you're not banging your head against some person stuck in their liberal politics or whatever.

TFSR: Or jet fuel burned down the third precinct or whatever.

D: Yeah. I think it's worth nothing that, and it's understanding that the Black community is definitely not monolithic. Nuance is very important, but people have changed, this has changed people to some degree and it's worth acknowledging that. So even though you might have a past history with a certain group, the dynamics have changed so the conversations are going to be different than they might have been in the past, at least in the context of Seattle. I think in terms of following Black leadership I think you're always going to hit that contradiction like you were saying of the person whose voice is most amplified is probably going to resonate with the same logic of the people who govern over us. So it's going to be difficult to navigate that, but I think there was initially at least, hopefully it's still there, an underlying hostility that's bubbling to the surface. I think things are different, people are different. I think it's important that formations like John Brown Gun club or any anti-fascist formation or any anti white supremacy formation need to be clear about their politics and what they're doing, especially when confronting people who are white supremacists or known fascist. And willing to share simple ideas with people they find around them, like: bring an extra t-shirt and if you do something wearing that shirt get rid of it, no souvenirs.

That kind of stuff. I think people are really open to hearing it if you just tell them. I think one thing we could have done better is help the people we've seen on the ground organize themselves in non-hierarchical ways and faster. I think that would have been very useful. It sucks because it happens but it's an anti-police uprising and it sucks because there are still some liberals who say we need to dialogue with the police. Or will try to become the peace police, but in Seattle there are a lot less than there used to be. I don't know in other places how they're dealing with or facing that. I know personally for me every time I met a Black person who was like, "we need to be peaceful," it was really easy to be like, "You want to abolish the police, right?" and they're like "Well, yeah." To get them to acknowledge that policing is bad in some way, and then to be like "Well, look at Minneapolis. This

is what they're doing and their city council is already trying to figure out how to disband the police. So the simple fact is burning a precinct works."

I kept going back to that a lot, in my conversations with Black people. I'm also Black so I don't know how that would work with white people engaging with liberal Black people. I would say maybe don't do, maybe find people whose ideas are resonating with you and figure out how to move together and be effective and safe.

TFSR: I really, really appreciate that. When you said "Burning a precinct works" makes me think of this artist in the Bay Area who, I was still living out there when the Oscar Grant riots were happening. They put out a poster, just black and white stark, this was their style, with a picture of that cop that killed Oscar Grant behind bars. It just said "Riots Work" in big letters on it. This Overton window, shit is shifting like you say, and without people pushing on it it wouldn't shift. Sorry to speak over you.

D: Oh, no, no, you're fine. I was just gonna reiterate what you were saying, like, "Hey, this tactic works" whatever it is. That it's rioting, burning a police precinct, whatever. It's something the state does, the state knows that. I once went to a talk during Occupy times. It was shortly after that May Day that the courthouse got hit, that Niketown and some other businesses got hit, and banks got hit.

TFSR: It was 2012.

D: Yeah, I think it was 2012. I went to a talk and there was this person called Connie Rice who's actually first cousins with Condoleezza Rice, and her job is to basically go to different towns and help them, I dunno if she still does this, but at the time her job was to go to different towns and basically sit in a room with the cops, the fire department, city officials and Uncle Toms and Aunt Sallies and other Black recuperative forces, and explain to them what their job is and how they need to move to recuperate the energy. One of her big lines was "A million dollars of damage," like once a million dollars of damage is hit you have to concede certain efforts and once that point is made it's the job of the Uncle Toms to get involved instantly, to immediately be there with the politicians who are making the concessions. That was her thing, they do that, they know that. They know that at a certain level of damage they have to give concessions, and that if the Uncle Toms and Aunt Sallies are there the concessions can be very minimal, and that's all they need to do to quench the fire, or at least that's all they used to do to quench the fire. But now it's a little different, I think. We could use that on our side, at least, explaining to especially Black and Brown folks, "Hey, look, this tactic works, we get what we need, we could live a better life if this happens." I think specifically

anarchists are positions in a way where we can also talk about the repression that comes later and add that to the conversation. I dunno if any of that makes sense.

TFSR: Yeah, absolutely. Well D, thank you very much for taking this time to chat. I really appreciate the candor and you sharing your perspectives. I know you're super busy, I think people will get a lot out of this.

D: Shit, thanks for having me. Also I dunno if you want to cut this or not, I think it's worth maybe trying to reach out to one or two other people because I feel like there are so many perspectives to how this all unfolded.

Kickbacks, Ancestors, and Wildcats - The Anarkata Turn Nsambu Za Suekama (2020)

The pigs say, 'Well, the Breakfast For Children program is a socialistic program. Its a communistic program.'

And the women said, 'Well, I tell you what, boy... I don't know if I like communism and I don't know if I like socialism. But I know that that Breakfast For Children program feeds my kids... And if you put your hands on that Breakfast For Children program, I'm gonna come off this can and I'm gonna beat your...'

*Fred Hampton
Power Anywhere There's People*

*What did the untested militants,
and smug ideologues,
know of Truth
and Tubman?*

*Unlike Unruly Colored Women,
they failed to recognize that experience
was capable of opening up new ways,
yielding a thousand new forms
and improvisations.*

*Saidiya Hartman
The Anarchy of Black Girls Assembled in a Riotous Manner*

In September 2019 a group of Anarkatas set up a free store in a park, and asked the kids there to help us out and tell their friends and family about it. Not surprising to us, several young Black children, mostly little Black girls, began working out and asking around on their own accord about who needed what and how much they needed. They also started struggling with each other about whether or if there was anyone who was taking more than they needed and should put some stuff back or to give to someone else, and ultimately kept trying to make sure anyone in the area who lacked got something they needed. The kids, with these girls in the lead, were not self-professed anarchists. There was no pamphlet they read from and a lot of their deliberations did ironically involve some poor shaming as they

weren't necessarily a politically conscious bunch. *Yet, by their hands alone*, magic happened, and with no authority to manage their activities *but their own* these children themselves helped our Back to School Kickback become a success.

We did not approach them with a speech or much theory at all or pushing any ideology, although we had our canon and thought with us. We simply *acted in our principles*, **with the material aid present**, and it made room for the anarchy of Blackness to shoot forth. By the end of the Kickback, bookbags full of loose leaf, folders, pens, markers, pencils, index cards, as well as comic books, food, water, toys, VHS tapes, CDs — all things that local folk needed, had been autonomously distributed, and equitably so, without any outside interference. And all from beyond the reaches of State management, NPIC trappings, and philanthropic paternalistic/profitierism.

In short: a group of kids in the hood did something anarchic without being proselytized to about revolutionary theory. A group of kids in the hood did something anarchic without identifying as revolutionaries. A group of kids in the hood did something anarchic without even knowing who or what “the left” or “Kuwasi Balagoon” is. A group of kids ultimately led themselves in meeting a community need, and did it in a dedicated and thoughtful way, outside formal/mainstream channels (government, business, church, school, nonprofit), even amidst mistakes — and all because we were there facilitating an opportunity for them to fill a gap all Black working class people in our region feel when September rolls around. As Anarkatas, we were just there as **radical extensions of what is an organic Black tendency toward communal self-empowerment**. Taking care of our own is not just a cultural necessity under colonialism and capitalism, but an ancestral rite that still energizes through our spirits on the daily.

This is how the Anarkata Turn situates itself. We're not here to convert anyone; we just want people to rock wit, people to collab wit, so we can build our communities by ourselves for ourselves. We are revolutionaries, so we struggle tirelessly to ensure that this mutual aid work can happen in an **encompassing and intersectional** way, in a way that frees the most marginal from those trying to hoard resources and power and clamber their way to the top of the ladder, who push the rest of us into a barrel to fight desperately like crabs. We want to destroy the barrel, and to destroy the ladder too, so that our people will not be caged by colonialism, capitalism, cisheteropatriarchy. We violently oppose the authoritarians and the colonizers and cishets and disablists invested in domination. We believe this ultimately requires eradicating the government/State too, as well as any other form of hierarchy that exists. Like the Anarkata Statement declares, liberation comes from “the ways we ride for each other, and not from top down hierarchical authority...”

Now, for clarity's sake, what hierarchy means is that someone is imposing their will on another. But there's more to it. A parent telling their kid not to walk in front of a bus isn't hierarchy, for example; that is guidance and protection. Just like an elder advising a spiritual devotee on the necessary duties of their ancestral tradition isn't necessarily hierarchy either, but rather is assisting them in their personal contribution to the cosmic order. Guidance, protection, assistance, advice — these can be understood as leadership. That's the role my comrades and I played in the park with those kids and how Anarkatas try to operate. **Leadership is more like nurturance** and requires a lot of **accountability** to the success or survival or growth and **self-empowerment of the so-called "led"** — a great deal of which means transferring skills and resources so that people can guide themselves.

Leadership can become hierarchy when it fails to meet an affirming end, and when it is manifested through abuse and through exploitation, when it serves control and self-interest, and when its mode of relation is rooted in methods of domination and born in oppressive ideologies. When a parent's "authority" is rooted in self-righteousness and personal catharsis, as is often the case under colonial ideology, when parents cannot be questioned and treat and beat their kids like slavemasters did to our ancestors or like cops do to us all on the street today, when parents threaten the growth of their children keep them from properly learning to assess and express their emotions and make decisions for themselves and form healthy relationships and advocate for their needs — this is hierarchical relation. When the religious leadership robs the people and keeps them poor and ignorant, as is often the case unfortunately, and when it prevents the faithful from affirming and nurturing their full persons and their environments and one another, when it polices and violates and justifies oppression and brainwashes them into xenophobia — this is a hierarchical relation. And even when the revolutionaries come around but they prevent the people from being able to organize to meet their needs because they dominate all potential avenues for organizing, when they make everything about their own particular ideology or their own methods or venues or circles or affinity groups in ways that people seeking liberation cannot access materials or take power for themselves outside these myopic channels, and when these channels fail to resolve the contradictions of our suffering and even work to uphold or benefit from them and stifle the expression of liberating energies in alternative ways — this is all hierarchical. Hierarchy means that there is a certain "will" being imposed upon the masses, one that subjects us to certain interests, despotic interests — interests that contradict the people's journeys towards autonomy and safety.

When anarchic movements began to develop into explicitly politicized forms, all the hierarchies they have sought to destroy — disablism, transmisia, the State,

racism, colonialism — each involved a particular material interest (a capitalist one) being forced onto the planet and the people. It was the “will” of class and colonial rulers imposed upon us, creating a rift between us and our communion with mother earth, and which enacts a system of “organized, protected robbery” as Fanon called it. **Land, labor, and more is stolen to produce and maintain wealth for the powerful captor-colonizers** while everyone else and our lands is sucked dry resources and forced to live under premature and actual death, disease, destitution and deterioration. So first and foremost, destruction of all hierarchies — which is Anarchy — thus requires actually and unapologetically disrupting the imposed material interests of Capital, disrupting settler and imperial colonial rule, disrupting cisheteropatriarchal control, ending the ableist disposal of whole populations written off as useless because of our disabilities.

This is what makes mutual aid networks/initiatives — like the free store my comrades and I put together — important. The poverty that makes the back to school season an issue for many Black communities is a direct consequence of capitalism, of a system built on greed and enslavement and land theft and exploitation and brutality. So when we work with people to address the consequences of oppression concretely, we make it easier for the vulnerable to survive and we open up potential for us to prove to ourselves and the people that we can resolve the structural causes of oppression concretely as well — not just in theory, **but in practice**. We can demonstrate that anarchy is not something far off, but that it can begin now. This helps to both radicalize and conscientize, which basically mean that people become more confident and understanding of skills we have or can learn to use in meeting our needs and freeing ourselves, and it means we become more aware of why autonomy from the Man and white power is necessary, why it’s valid, and to become more conscientious about the reasons why revolutionary movements that fight for liberation are happening in this particular historical moment and this geographical region among this group of people.

A revolutionary has to be devoted to helping this process of radicalization and conscientization happen, tirelessly assuring it comes to fruition, fighting to affirm and defend and hold ourselves accountable to the growth of our revolutionary activity. It is the concrete work, actual mutual aid, like our Back to School Kickbacks, which set the stage for any of this to occur, because when it comes to Black people the seeds for anarchy are already in our culture and spirit because **we are a communalistic people**. So all people need is just the opportunity to enact it more fully outside the trappings of capitalist, colonial, cisheteropatriarchal binds. This isn’t to say all Black people are anarchists or even that all Black people are here for Black people (cuz all skin aint kin); or that communalist social life is inherently anarchic or free of oppressions. What I am saying tho is that Anarkata is simply

a process or phenomenon or method or paradigm for stretching the potentials of natural/organic Black anarchy whenever and wherever they manifest. We call it an “Anarkata Turn,” because it is like with Sankofa; the movement progresses because it is rooted in us going back to fetch what’s before us, going back to fetch what we have already been carrying with and in us. Those children at the park that day proved this thesis, because again they led themselves, outside the State, in a dedicated and contextually devised, systematic manner, to meet a community need — due to the interaction of both revolutionary commitments on our part, and due to their own ancestrally-inherited, culturally-reinforced Black conscience.

Now there are revolutionaries who reject the Anarkata Turn. There are revolutionaries who would overlook those young girls as not anarchists for lacking a political tract, or who would even say we Anarkatas are not revolutionary for failing to preach to those kids the gospel of whoever’s ideology. They also would never even hold such an action as a back to school “Kickback,” and even if they did they would quietly insist that the people they share resources with and provide mutual aid for to be other anarchists who share their ideology. They spurn comprehensive survival-program-style mutual aid praxis because it fosters “dependency,” in their minds, from undeserving populations who aren’t radical enough to qualify for their graces. Even where this isn’t the case, the only people these types of “revolutionaries” talk to are those who share their radical “lifestyle” and aesthetic. And often times, because what they do materially is so conditional on ideology, the people they end up sharing resources with and for are other bourgeois/white folk who claim their particular brand of radicalism. So what we have is people who got much to give by virtue of their class position, but who circulate it all among themselves, and when they “organize” they create opportunities not for building the community (because how can you when you isolated to your ideological social club?) but for indulging only themselves mentally and materially. The material consequence of this type of “anarchism” is to never truly challenge oppression or its effects. And, to be honest, these people aren’t real radicals and are just as much partaking in hierarchy and robbery as the enemy. They are, after all, powerful and privileged folk hoarding resources at the end of the day, cloaking themselves in radical talk. They have **their own interests**, whether it’s in a certain political clique (or cult) or moral high ground over competing ideologies. Though they claim to “lead,” they don’t nurture or guide or affirm the oppressed’s organic activity. Instead, they impose their self-interest onto the oppressed’s activities, subjecting or hindering them in a way that doesn’t challenge their class participation in larger contexts of displacement and carceral endangerment of the locals.

Anarkatas have witnessed this hierarchical charade known as (white) anarchism time and time again, and that is why collectives like mine decide to do Kritikal

Kickbacks like the Back to School one I mentioned before. What we prioritize is **engaging the community without requiring anything of them**. You don't have to declare yourself Anarkata to work with us, or to be Anarkata for us to collab with you on what serves the community's betterment and community's defense. And when you rock wit us, it aint all theory or baseless, performative subversions. No, issa vibe and it's fun as hell, wit music and food and we strive to make it that because we tryna resonate wit yo Soul and do this revolution stuff for the culture too. And we are dedicated, we are principled, and we are serious about revolution. We are adamant about mutual aid, about trans liberation and disability justice, about community defense and political education, about abolition and true accountability, about food sovereignty, about freeing the most marginal and knocking the people clambering to the top right on down, about spreading leadership capacity and nurturing that which already is at work — even such that bears no “politic” (like with the kids at the park). It is central that we be out here as radicals funneling resources to those who need it and facilitating their capacity to meet their needs and help one another and themselves — and that we do so in a genuine, principled (not flaky), and unselfish way.

This, quite strangely, makes the Anarkata Turn unique, perhaps even “incorrect” to many anarchists. That's why I declare that **perhaps Anarkata is to anarchism what a shadow is to a glass**. Both are not something you can clearly see or grasp with the eye, but that is the only real connection between the two. Glass can go invisible and shadows fade and don't have form, but they are distinct phenomena and only one has hidden Black people running from slavecatchers in the woods (cuz if we did rebellious stuff under a glass we'd be visible enough to be caught or burned by the light of a thousand suns like ants!) Anarchy and Black life have much in common, yes, and Anarkata is just about extending that to its most revolutionary form.

It is akin to Kwame Turé's reminders that the “unconscious” already seek freedom, will quickly mobilize for it, and that revolutionaries need really to just be helping a “conscious” understanding of unconsciously rebellious behavior develop — through radical organizing. But (orthodox) anarchism looks past this, often instead requires that niggas trade their Blackness for some dead white man's philosophy, as if we need something from them in order to transcend our fallen ways, and give the impression that this simple formula is the Way and the Truth and the Life, that if we simply meditate on and convene around and try to individualistically apply the insights of some European man's book, we'll all rise to the liberation hilltop. Anarkata and traditional anarchism are therefore not the same. Perhaps anarchism and Black struggle aren't incommensurable, but what my comrades and other Black Anarchic Radicals (BARs) do know is that until the “genre” of

anarchy we strive for is rooted in Afrikan-centeredness/Pan-Africanism, rooted in concrete Black histories and concrete practices and concrete material struggles, it will not resonate and it will not change anything.

It was disabled, mentally ill Black queer and trans women and nonmen who really felt this most viscerally during the last decade. Our communities were forced to choose between “identity” or “anarchy” as if there was ever really a way to have one without the other while living at the “bottom of the lowerarchy” as Assata once called it. As radicals, these communities on the margins and front lines of violence already had to fight for each other independent of dominant channels, autonomously. So we spent the 2010s re-observing as much revolutionary theory as possible and studying Black history and culture and spirituality and struggle and kept being reminded that anarchy was oozing all through it and that we needed to just carefully, in a dedicated, organized fashion, go out and concretely nurture those fires until the plantation was set ablaze. Anarchy, the death of hierarchy, is at hand, we were sure. Black History Month of 2019 came; 2019, the year some faiths prophesied we’d get free; 2019, the year of global uprisings, “the Year of Revolt,” as the Ready for Revolution crew called it — and Anarkata announced itself like a cat that had already been prowling, deciding to make its presence known. Quite simply, Anarkata meant we would just work to synthesize the things about Black liberation that already tend toward anarchy, while struggling to remove impediments (the forces of domination) by building our power and fighting to undermine and overthrow the structures in our way.

We’d have hurdles to face, and the tide of reaction from our adversaries to deal with and suppress at all costs, including our own internalized oppressive b.s. But we would also have the will of the masses and our ancestors helping us push back and unleash what has been stirring here upon the world. It is this whirlwind of Black life that got us to make an Anarkata Turn and that would keep us turning and spinning in the circle and cypher of revolution: the ballrooms and other alternative homeplaces that Black trans and queer folk create; the grandparents’ living rooms in which every family member across generations has lived in or slept in while on hard times; the “two dollar ride, two dollar ride” finesse in the subway as fares go up and kiosks fail us, and the various informal group/cooperative economic practices by which we done taken care our hair, watched our kids, schooled each other, protected each other, cleaned up for each other, raised rent and medical expenses for each other; the “five finger discount” and underground railroads and other illegal means to which we’ve sought our basic needs and our freedom; the “text me when you get home” check-ins because you know it’s real on these streets and some man or pig or fascist could kill or disappear one of our siblings for no reason at all; the “say hi to the elders you know when you see them” unctions from

our parents because we know we should be a community and social organism and have kinship; the casual declarations of “f**k the police” on a daily and in every song because we deep down recognize that them and 911 alike are a joke and aint here for us; the “save this” reminders from our parents when it comes to plastic bags and plastic containers and cooking oil because even if we aint on some green politic we know that wastefulness is not okay and we should use every part of what we got instead of throwing it away; the spirit and power of Marsha P Johnson and Assata Shakur and Sojourner Truth and Harriet Tubman and Kimpa Vita and Malcolm X and Martin and Frances Beal and Frantz Fanon and Amilcar Cabral and Queen Nanny and other maroons and palenques and quilombos and each of the various units that took on the name Combahee and many others; the words and work of Moya Bailey and Kimberlé Crenshaw and Miss Major and Angela Davis and Cece McDonald and Sylvia Wynter and Mariame Kaba and Ruth Wilson Gilmore and countless other even unnamed or not-well-known Black sheroes, theyroes, and heroes, whether ancestors or the everyday this-world niggas who got us hip to all this with just a look, a touch, or their care; and its the plants we grow and tend to and it’s the creatures we pet and feed and take care of and its the waters we commune with that hold our dead and its the mountains where our ghosts and guerrillas are hiding in and carrying out struggle from and its the skies our folklorists used to say we could fly upon like angels on Jacob’s Ladder and the stars above that guided niggas off the plantation over a century ago; and it’s the Divinity we call upon, and the inSpirited religious experiences that free us up from rigid colonial and gendered limitations on how we inhabit our bodies and express our emotions; and it’s also the very expanding and black-colored universe itself. It’s all these wild and wayward Things and more that inspire us before it’s ever Kropotkin, or Malatesta, or Bookchin or Marx or Mao (if they ever even come into the picture). Not discounting the left’s insights, because some of it is useful, but we just saying that first and foremost we are BLACK before we are anarchic, not the other way around, the latter proceeding from and never taking us out of the former. Revolution for us is a consolidation, not a conversion.

As such, it will come as we studiously and reverently integrate a range of Black radical contributions and praxis with our cultures of resistance and rebellion. It will come as we wholeheartedly operate under guidance of Black revolutionary (trans)feminist principles and true intersectional analytics that provide a “roadmap to areas of need” and center the most marginal. It will come as we tirelessly build via principled and even ecumenical dedication to radical community organizing. It will come as we ground ourselves in establishing and defending and being accountable to viable and comprehensive networks of autonomous community support + mutual aid. And it will come because our people are daily struggling to make Black liberation more possible by their own means. It will come because

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our people work to make genuinely radical conscience more widespread for our communities on our own terms. Leaders and formal or mainstream or dominant positions and channels need not dictate; we simply require nurturers and reminders and defenders for everyone and ourselves that we have the capacity to alter conditions, and that only we — not anyone's authority or institutions or superiority — got us. It is by our collective strength we will get free.

To educate the masses politically does not mean, cannot mean, making a political speech. What it means is to try, relentlessly and passionately, to teach the masses that everything depends on them; that if we stagnate it is their responsibility, and that if we go forward it is due to them too, that there is no such thing as a demiurge, that there is no famous man who will take the responsibility for everything, but that the demiurge is the people themselves and the magic hands are finally only the hands of the people.

*Frantz Fanon
The Wretched of the Earth*

In My Own Words

Ojore Lutalo & Bonnie Kerness

(2023)

Josephine Graf: Let's start at the beginning. How did the two of you meet? Ojore, what led you to reach out to Bonnie?

Ojore Lutalo: On February 4, 1986, I was placed in a pre-hearing MCU [Management Control Unit] with 10 other prisoners. Most of us had been in the control unit for several days, and they tell me we don't have disciplinary infractions—we were there for being Muslims or revolutionaries, or jailhouse lawyers. I realized that I needed some outside assistance, so I wrote a letter to the national office of the American Friends Service Committee. They forwarded my letter to Bonnie, who sent someone from the Office of the Ombudsman to the prison to interview me. They told her that they couldn't find me! I was one of the most closely watched prisoners in the system, but the prison officials "couldn't find me." So from there, Bonnie, myself, and others in the control unit began the NJ Control Unit Monitoring Project.

Bonnie Kerness: I got a letter in February of 1986 from Ojore Lutalo, from New Jersey State Prison, saying, "I have just been placed in a Control Unit. What's a Control Unit? Why am I here? And how long will I have to stay here?" It was 22 years before we had any answers. The Management Control Unit in New Jersey was opened in the 1970s, for Sundiata Acoli, who was a member of the Black Panther Party and the Black Liberation Army, and Assata Shakur's co-defendant. The very birth of this form of isolated confinement was for political purposes. By the '90s, the Clinton administration began flooding states with money so that they could build not just prisons, but solitary confinement units and entire solitary confinement prisons. It was Ojore and 96 people living in concrete boxes without ever having been charged with any infractions. Prisons have always had punishment units, which were bad enough. But this was even more egregious because people were placed in the Control Unit feeling as if it were a personal dungeon. Everybody there was known to be political. And there they sat, for many years, until we were able to form the New Jersey Control Unit Monitoring Project, which led to the National Campaign to Stop Control Unit Prisons.

JG: This history challenges the idea that we don't have "political prisoners" in the US, and yet there are people that are treated differently because of what they think, who they are—not any infraction, but what they believe.

OL: As long as you don't become political, you don't pose a threat. I went to prison as a revolutionary, and at the time, in 1975, we had a high-profile case. I'm a New Afrikan anarchist. So, they thought my presence in the population was a threat, and they moved to isolate me.

JG: Ironically, it is a recognition of your power. In a collage on view at MoMA PS1 you include a letter from the prison denying your release from the MCU in 2008, just a year before your eventual release from prison, specifically because you might influence other prisoners. I found it interesting that they so blatantly admit the fact that they're holding you because of your beliefs, but also that you might be so persuasive as to sway the rest of the population.

BK: And it took us 22 years for them to say that. That, for me, was an aha moment. My outrage, my grief, had to do with being very attached to my generation. It was a generation that was killed in Vietnam, murdered on the campuses of Jackson and Kent State. I saw young people being murdered by law enforcement in the South. To see people and groups I admired—the Panthers, the Puerto Rican Independence Movement, American Indian Movement, women radicals—thrown away in the solitary confinement units, I was profoundly moved to work on this and expose it. There are many extraordinary groups working on the issue right now, and I think you're looking at ground zero. Prison Watch started working on the issue of solitary confinement in 1986, and it has international implications because isolation in prison violates the United Nations Covenants on Torture that the US has ratified and signed.

JG: Ojore, can describe what it felt like to be held in the MCU? What was a day like for you there? And what were your survival tactics? How did you make it through 22 years?

OL: As a revolutionary I came to terms with the prospects of death and captivity. So, I was prepared for it psychologically. I would get up in the morning, wash up, read, write, listen to the news, and exercise. Maybe I'd be able to make a telephone call. I'd be on lockdown 22 hours one day and 24 hours the next. Then once I met Bonnie, she was my bridge over troubled waters. And she gave us a voice, she gave us a human face. She was listened to because she was a middle-class white woman. And the state didn't like that, telling her that these people were "the worst of the worst." Bonnie would challenge them, noting that they haven't violated any of the

prison rules. Once the press began investigating, they contacted the Department of Corrections, who confirmed that what she was saying was factual. The inside/outside advocacy began from there, and once the attention came, the repression came. They put Bonnie on the FBI watch list. The harassment was endless.

BK: I was so impressed with how Ojore and the others survived and stayed mentally healthy. Because I deal nationally with people in solitary confinement, I know that many of them become quite ill. We began to collect testimonies to compile into a “Survivor’s Manual,” written by and for people living in solitary confinement. To this day, we send out about a thousand a year, and I’ve been told it’s a life saver. People in prisons are teaching one another, and everything comes from the inside—teaching one another Tai chi, mediation, how to write, how to journal, how to stay street oriented.

You’ve got reactionary propaganda and you’ve got revolutionary propaganda. Mine is revolutionary propaganda. What’s there isn’t criminal at all, all you’ve got to do is fact check it.

JG: So much of your fight together has been one waged via communication and exposure. Ojore’s collages form another facet of this struggle for communication. Ojore, when did you first start making them? What sparked the desire?

OL: It was in 1994, 1995. I used to do a lot of corresponding, answering a lot of questions. People asking: “What does your cell look like? What do you do every day?” So as opposed to repeating everything, I thought, I’m going to start making collages, because the visuals are more effective than the verbal. I would make the collages and send them out to Bonnie, who would take them to Staples to photocopy and circulate. I call that political propaganda. You’ve got reactionary propaganda and you’ve got revolutionary propaganda. Mine is revolutionary propaganda. What’s there isn’t criminal at all, all you’ve got to do is fact check it.

JG: I love this idea of reclaiming the word propaganda, which oftentimes has a negative connotation. What your works suggest is that propaganda can be positive—it just means art that’s effective, that actually gets a message across, and is made to be disseminated, to live in public space and discourse.

OL: Emory Douglas taught me a lot because his stuff was powerful. I realized I could do the same thing and be just as effective. And it was. All I had was newspapers, glue, and magazines. At the time, it didn’t pose a threat to the administration, because it was just magazines and newspapers. But once I started putting them together, they started reading the content. Then that became a

problem. They would come in my cell, take my collages and throw them away, even though I wasn't violating any of the rules.

JG: In some of your collages you talk about very specific experiences you went through. I imagine that it was a way of both bringing attention to these experiences, but also processing what was happening to you.

OL: At one point they put me in a bloody cell. A prisoner had attempted suicide, so he took his blood and painted the cell red. Then they took him out and they put me in there. When I approached the cell, I see streaks of blood on the door, and once I stepped into the cell, I saw it was covered with blood. There was blood crunching underneath my boots. And that's called "no-touch torture." At another point, they put me in a mental health unit to see if I could cope for six days. I couldn't have visits, showers, nothing. I was in a freezing cold cell, lights on for 24 hours a day. And another time they put me on a non-contact status, which meant I could do nothing with the group, only individually. That's another form of no-touch torture. See, their goal was to break me psychologically. So they could reach into the general population and say, "If you become a revolutionary this will happen to you." And I understood that. Because I studied psychological warfare. The controlling program is a psychological program, it's designed to break a person psychologically.

BK: And all of this is really a political experiment in the United States. Prior to the mid-'70s there were no control units. The use of solitary started in California in the 1970s for radicals in prison. Then they locked down Marion federal prison in Illinois, and created a control unit experiment. If you look at the country now, this experiment has gone nationwide—and worldwide in some places.

JG: Let's talk more about the connection between the way that prisoners are treated in domestic prisons and the kind of extrajudicial punishment that is used by the US internationally, as part of the so-called "War on Terror," for example. One collage in *Marking Time* is about Guantanamo. It incorporates an account by someone held there about the importance of being able to see a glimmer of the sea from their cell, and the way that glimpse was policed, taken away. How do you see your experience fitting into a larger global struggle?

OL: In the control unit, you never knew what day or week it was. You wake up, somebody calls out, "What day is it? What time is it?" So, I immediately related to the oppression described in that piece. It's going on all around the world. I did a collage around Iraq, how they train their prison guards in the US and send them to Iraq and implement the same torture. People don't see the US as being an

aggressor, going overseas and bombing other people's homeland. They don't want to consider that.

JG: And what's so interesting about your collages is how you're actually using media outlets that are mouthpieces for a certain kind of mainstream narrative, taking their words, and then making them yours. You repeat this phrase in your collages: "in my own words." You would send them out to Bonnie, who would use them in lectures and as educational materials, bringing your words to a wider audience.

BK: I would make copies of them on good old copy machines. Sometimes I would take them and have them blown up to 2 × 3' on vinyl so they could be hung on a wall. Once we were speaking at a school in Connecticut, which has a school of architecture. I asked him if he could do one of a blueprint of Eastern State Penitentiary, which was built in 1829, next to a blueprint of the supermax Control Unit prison in Florence, Colorado, which was built in the '90s. It's the same blueprint. It's the same design, like the spokes of a wheel, and it's on purpose. There's no sense of where you are in the world. No sounds, No life.

JG: That correlation between Florence and Eastern State gets back to the origins of solitary. Solitary was initially a Quaker idea first introduced in prisons like Eastern State.

BK: It was seen as penitence. It was seen as self-reflection, but then became punitive. A coworker and I uncovered material that showed that when 19-century Apache leader Geronimo was removed from his tribe he was placed in solitary confinement in a fort in Florida. Captors have been playing with solitary for a very long time.

OL: That was political isolation. Not punitive, political. Trenton State Prison control unit is clean, it's moderate. You walk in and the silence is eerie, I mean you can feel the oppression. You can smell it. Just stand back and look at the cells, how its structured. It's real oppressive. My collages, I'd put them in a box, push them underneath the bed. The cells were painted white. That was by design. When I came home I started making collages in color, because of the effect that colorlessness has on the psyche.

Our house: Why protecting the right to squat is a defence of radical Black history

Lisa Insansa

(2021)

Squatting has been a means to live, resist and organise for generations. The unused buildings that spill over a city's landscape and latent land that grounds our surroundings become used and repurposed by homeless people, activists and those seeking – or who are forced – into an alternative lifestyle. Squatting has also played a key part in radical Black British history, a history that is continually under threat. The recent proposed Police, Crime, Sentencing and Courts bill (PCSC) only furthers this threat, dragging the squatting movement and Black radical history in the maelstrom of authoritarian state violence.

Over the years, squatters' rights have been slowly eroded as successive governments have allied with property developers and private landlords. For a long time, it was legal to squat (the act of occupying an empty building or piece of land) a residential building. However, in 2012, a change in legislation criminalised this type of squatting and made it only possible to occupy commercial properties. Today, if the new PCSC bill gets passed, it would become a criminal offence to trespass on private property (currently it's a civil matter) where a vehicle is present, directly affecting GRT communities who could instantly lose their way of life, as well as squats that rely on vehicles, and ultimately providing a stepping stone to the eradication of squatting altogether. This is a worrying reality for those who have nowhere else to go and for those who use squats as a political tool.

While the squatting community can often appear as just another white-dominated space, it is important to recognise the legacy of Black squatters and how they weaved their cultures and strategies of resistance into the movement. After the Empire Windrush docked on British shores in 1948, helping to kick off a wave of Caribbean migration, thousands of Black people moved into cities that had been chewed up by six years of war. This flow of migrants found themselves locked into a crisis where the supply of decent and affordable housing was diminished, and the roots of institutional racism were firmly planted.

“It is important to recognise the legacy of Black squatters and how they weaved their cultures and strategies of resistance into the movement”

By the 1970s, the Black Caribbean community were tired of waiting at the end of council housing lists and being squeezed into one-room accommodation. Squatting became a necessity for some, as well as a political action against housing discrimination, meagre dwellings, gentrification and the ubiquitous racism of the state. A 1974 essay from *Race Today* on the topic of squatting explained that initially there were few Black people in the squatting movement of the late 1960s, due to a “cautious approach” bred as a result of being a minority immigrant population. However, as Black radical movements took root in Britain, the causes became intertwined and through the 1970s and 1980s, squatting – reclaiming and repurposing buildings – became a vital part of radical Black organising, especially in London.

Brixton in particular was the hub of political squats, not just for the Black radical tradition, but for white anarchist movements, LGBTQI+ communities and those who were rebelling against the authoritarian state. For example, the legendary 121 Railton Road squat in Brixton, which was opened in 1973 by Black British Panther and key Black squatters’ rights activist Olive Morris and her friend Liz Obi, ended up being re-squatted by these different movements until the end of the century.

While Black and white squatters would live on the same street and share information amongst each other, the experience of the two groups were not the same: “That the young blacks have been informed by the white squatting movement is true, but their squatting activities are qualitatively different from it,” continued the 1974 *Race Today* feature.

The black squatting movement in Brixton has broken new ground. It is local council policy that the single person does not qualify for public housing and therefore the black youth seemed destined for a life of homelessness or hostel existence [...] They will not tolerate the one-roomed existence offered them nor continue to sleep rough and be objects of liberal pity.

Through the squatting scene, Black Caribbean communities were able to set up radical bookshops, reggae and blues clubs – or shebeens – social centres and meeting spaces for activists. Groups such as the British Black Panthers and Brixton Black Women’s Group resisted the thieving nature of landlords and the grasping hand of the state by occupying these buildings and centring them in the community. This history is especially profound considering that London’s most “attractive” buildings were paid for with money drenched in the blood of enslaved and colonised Black people; in this way, their squatting can be viewed as reparatory justice.

Through the squatting scene, Black Caribbean communities were able to set up radical bookshops, shebeens, social centres and meeting spaces for activists

Squatting also opened and continues to open doors that would have otherwise put pressure on movements: having a rent-free physical space to live and organise means that the weight of working a full-time job is lifted, freeing up time, money and energy to put into activism and bringing the community together. On top of this, the act of living in a communal setting can provide ground for the constant exchange of ideas, skills, trust and understanding between people in the movement, as well as breathing an air of autonomy and freedom necessary for revolutionary struggle. It should not be a privilege to be able to do these things, but a human right. In the free society to come, a society without money and property ownership, we will essentially all be ‘squatters’. Residing and interacting with the land on our own terms will afford us the time and energy to connect to those around us without the normalisation of exploitation that gives rise to white supremacy, patriarchy, ableism and queerphobia.

Today, the memory of Black squatters has been wiped from much of our consciousnesses. Certain Black squats met a tragic fate through arson attacks, police raids and evictions, amped up by the 1981 Brixton riots which increased policing and targeting of Black movements and Black culture. The general squatting movement also suffered massively from Thatcherite policies like “right-to-buy” – a scheme that reduced social housing values in order to encourage tenants to purchase their rented dwellings. This liberal policy drew a sharp line between respectable and illegitimate ways of living, economic productivity and laziness, citizens and outlaws, subsequently condemning squatters to the realm of parasites.

More stringent measures in place to clamp down on squatting and an expanse of neoliberal ideologies has pushed oppressive hands into peak capitalist initiatives such as property guardianship. This is where property owners rent out rundown buildings – or would-be-squats – at the almost usual market price of ordinary rented accommodation. This not only short-changes the people who have no option but to rent such dire accommodation but acts to rid squatters of their homes and spaces while commodifying the tenets of squatting itself.

Despite this, squatters still fight for their right to occupy buildings. The recent occupation of a disused police station in Clapham Common, 200m from where Sarah Everard disappeared and in reaction to the insidious PCSC Bill, highlights the political power of squatting. This occupation saw a coalition of squatters, feminists, anti-fascists and Black liberation groups enter the building, which spread anxiety through the establishment and resulted in a brutal eviction, where bailiffs violently attempted to take protesters off the roof of the building and off a crane. One instance saw a young Black woman who was defending the building being

dropped down a roof hatch in aggravated intent; other occupants were detained in handcuffs and faced injuries.

“This occupation saw a coalition of squatters, feminists, anti-fascists and Black liberation groups enter the building, which spread anxiety through the establishment and resulted in a brutal eviction”

We can also see the continuation of the Black radical squat legacy through groups such as House of Shango in Brixton, which operates as a home for Black activists and community action, providing free food, clothes, herbal medicine and political information. This act of resistance comes in the wake of closing youth centres and social spaces which have uprooted diaspora culture and communities.

If we let squatting die at the hands of authoritarian state power, we will lose a base for positive change. Britain currently has more than 600,000 empty buildings that will continue to rot in front of the eyes of those with nowhere else to go.

Squatters live amongst the discarded, in the rubble of a state that turns its back on the undesirable. A state that paints over the engravings of our culture on those so-called decrepit walls, and swallows whole the spirit of community in favour of a loveless enterprise.

In the famous words of Olive Morris: “I won’t come down until you let us have the building” and the people will not tire until they have their freedom.

The Meaning Of Anti-Work Andrew “Andrewism” Sage (2022)

I have worked in a number of different fields throughout my life. From data entry to manual labour, from paper pushing to restaurant work, from customer service to work from home. I've worked for myself and I've worked for others. But every single one of those jobs, no matter what they were, seized and drained my time, my energy, my mind, and my body. Despite the breadth of my employment experiences, I know I haven't faced the worst of what work imposes on people, but I can still recognise that we cannot simply resign ourselves to merely reforming work. Such an approach misses the forest for the trees. The mental, physical, psychological, social, and environmental consequences of work necessitate its end and the fundamental transformation of our society. But in order to understand the concept of antiwork, we first need to understand the concept of work.

What is Work?

The dictionary defines work as an activity involving mental or physical effort done in order to achieve a purpose or result. But antiwork advocates would more readily use that definition for the concept of labour. Work as understood by work abolitionists is grounded in an understanding of work's role in a broader socioeconomic sense. Work is forced labour, that is, compulsory production, enforced by economic and political means, by the carrot and the stick. Work is (usually) wage labour, as workers must sell themselves, mind and body, for the purpose of production. Thus, work has an inherent dynamic of domination, one that we see elaborated in all industrial societies today, even the ones that claim to be socialist.

We are employed to work at things called “jobs”, where we must perform tasks which, no matter how intrinsically interesting they may initially be, eventually become dull and monotonous when performed for upwards of forty hours a week, with no say over when you show up or leave, what you do, how long you do it for, how much you do, how you do it, who you do it with, and for whom it is done, all for the profit of those who control the means of production.

The world of work is a degrading experience of suffocating bureaucracy, surveillance, rotework, high pace, quotas, time charts, persistent harassment, paternalistic

management, exploitation, subordination, and totalitarian control for the sake of it. Your washroom breaks are often timed and regulated. Your clothing and hair are strictly managed, which often has an anti-Black component to it. You are spied on and supervised, and you can be expelled at any time. Work is therefore the antithesis of freedom. The prison, the school, the factory, the office, and the store are all stamped with the discipline of modern despots, and all share techniques of control in common.

The lineage of domination from childhood in schools and at home to adulthood in the workplace is clear. Its purpose is to habituate us to hierarchy and psychological enslavement. Our aptitude for autonomy is atrophied and our vitality is suppressed so that we are reconciled with regimentation and can replicate and reproduce it throughout our interpersonal lives, politics, and cultures. That is *Why Revolution Needs Therapy*.

The clergy of work fail or don't care to recognise that we don't work, we don't sell our time and energy to a boss, because we want to. We work because we have no other way to get money to buy things to survive, because the commons were stolen and enclosed, and we have been deprived of any other choice. We get our tasks, repeat them over and over again, every day, every week, every month, every year, and yet our time at work is never ours, never really part of our lives. That time is for our bosses, who take the things we produce, whether it be objects like pizzas or housing units; services like cashiering or cooking; or qualities like clean floors or healthy patients, and sell them for profit, paying us only a portion of the value we produce and using the rest to reinvest in capital and enlarge their own wealth.

Our own lives are centred around this work. The money we get from work sustains us just enough to keep us coming back to work. Our time away from work is spent travelling to or from work, or getting ready for work. Leisure itself is just nonwork for the sake of work. It's the limited time we spend recovering from work and trying to distract ourselves from work.

Because of work, we're constantly under the tyranny of the clock. It's like what Bob Black claims Socrates once said: Manual labourers make bad friends and bad citizens because they have no time to fulfil the responsibilities of friendship and citizenship. He's right. Our "free" time is not even ours. It still belongs to our bosses in some capacity, so really the only thing free about it is that our bosses don't have to pay us for it. And when we don't have work, we spend our time looking for work, because the threat presented by unemployment is graver than the consistent pains of employment.

WORKS

“All the labour-saving machinery that has hitherto been invented has not lessened the toil of a single human being.”

John Stuart Mill

One of the things that really troubles me about work is not so much the work itself, but the culture that surrounds it. Our society, our politics, our world is built upon the veneration and glorification of work. It's more intense in some places, especially those influenced by the Protestant work ethic, but it can be found all over the place. Conservatives may want right-to-work laws and liberals may want an end to employment discrimination, but the centrality of work, the unspoken idea that employment is a virtue, goes virtually unchallenged. This intense worship of work is even reflected in children's television.

Even many self-described socialists, who may more accurately be described as state capitalists, venerate work and the worker. In the Soviet Union, the Stakhanovite movement was supported and led by the so-called Communist Party to uplift the efforts of coal miner Alexey Stakhanov, and others like him, who continually raised the standards of productivity, and therefore the physical toil of other workers, through the country. Workerism, that is the ideology that encourages the acceptance of, and propaganda for wage labour, is endemic among so-called revolutionaries, who uphold the “virtues” of exploitation and alienation as a necessary and honourable sacrifice for the building of the state, the economy, and Capital. Workerism specifically often worships the idol of masculine manual labourers, who are said to be most productive, while denigrating service, office, and domestic workers, the latter of which are usually female.

This brings us to the work that isn't even seen as work. The unpaid and invisible care work relegated to the realm of women. Housework is just as feminist authors describe it: monotonous, repetitive, and fragmented, consisting of long hours at a pressurised pace, inescapable and in isolation from all others. Or consider those who, due to physical or mental disabilities, are unable to work, unable to access basic necessities, and are left to fall by the wayside. What kind of society discards those most in need of support?

State control is not the solution, nor is deregulation. Because either way, work is sapping us of our life force, it is stealing our time, and it is literally killing us. In fact, work kills most people, directly or indirectly. Millions of people are killed on the job around the world every year, millions of people are injured or disabled on the job every year, and millions of people are killed by occupational diseases they acquired on the job every year. Millions of people are killed by vehicles going to work, coming from work, or looking for work. Millions are killed by work-induced

cancer, heart disease, or addiction. Millions are killed by the environmental pollution caused by work.

Work is nothing to die for.

The Mythology of Work

But the mythology of work persists. The mythology of work insists that work is necessary. But after centuries of false promises and technological leaps and bounds, we work far more than our ancestors, who had the added benefit of enjoying natural commons and shared knowledges, ever did. The class that destroyed that way of life tells us we should be grateful. They feed us narratives of glorious progress. Yet despite all this so-called progress, which could have liberated us from the need to work if founded on humanity and not capitalism, here we are, still working to death. We generate abundance, but only a select few get to benefit from it.

The mythology of work insists that work is productive, but at what cost and for whose sake? Work generates mass waste worldwide. The Earth is now filled with disposable items, obsolete technologies, abandoned factories, and wasted food. Communities and ecosystems, which should be treasured in common, are pillaged and exploited, all for the sake of profit for a wealthy few. The pains and stresses we experience at the end of a workday are a microcosm of the pains and stresses experienced by our home planet. The mythology of work insists that work creates wealth. But work creates poverty, in direct proportion to profit, because work enriches some at the expense of others. In sharing societies, even when there's scarcity, no one is forced to go without while others hoard more than they need. Work also creates poverty in a nonfinancial sense, as our physical, social, and mental health are all impoverished by work.

The mythology of work insists that you must work to make a living, but the cost of working is higher than the cost of living. It costs us the only thing we can't get back: time. It costs us our relationships. It costs us our human potential. And the only reason we have to do it, and so much of it, is because of the violence that instituted and maintains these systems and suppresses all alternatives. Capitalism exists because our daily activities reproduce it, but I don't think we would reproduce it if we truly had a choice in the matter. Believe it or not, people weren't exactly ecstatic about the violent arrival of colonisers and pillagers.

The mythology of work insists that work incentivises initiative, but true initiative, the full unfolding of our creative potential, often contradicts the profit motive. Work, instead, often erodes initiative. You don't get to leave work early for developing a more efficient and less time-consuming way of doing things. Most

times, you're just paid the same and expected to produce more. Despite all the innovations of the past century, the average work week has not decreased. Not to mention that your initiative outside of work gets eroded too. We're so burnt out by work that we can hardly pursue the interests and activities we actually enjoy doing. As a result, some can't even imagine a world without work, where people are able to invest their energy in projects they actually want to do.

The mythology of work insists that work teaches responsibility, but workers check their own consciences at the workplace door. The Nuremberg defence of "just following orders" has been employed to avoid accountability for mass pollution, mass animal cruelty, mass wastage, mass destruction, mass surveillance, mass imprisonment, mass enslavement, and mass violence. Lastly, the mythology of work insists that work provides security, despite the hazards and instability that practically define work. But true security would be found in a community built on mutual aid, where people support and look out for each other. Work is really the thing that keeps us from building and sustaining such communities.

Abolishing Work?

People are sick of work and yearning for more. Some turn to individualistic entrepreneurship, UBI, or reformist unions; there's still a widespread acceptance of the inevitability of work. Sadly, it's still hard for many people to consider, let alone imagine, the ambitious aim and effort to abolish work and advance freedom and fulfilled potentials for all.

Contemporary hunter-gatherers, according to anthropologist Marshall Sahlins, enjoy what he terms "the original affluent society." They "work" for about four hours per day in total, but based on my earlier definition, what they do can hardly be defined as work. It is not forced labour. Their quests for food are intermittent, leisure abundant, and varied. What they do is more akin to "play": free activity stimulated by a superabundance of life and the liberty of thought and feeling.

Play has been reduced to "mere child's play," but play is a far greater and more expansive activity than we might initially recognise. Play is energising and enjoyable. It is the exuberant expression of human creativity. I hinted at it briefly in my video on *The Importance of Imagination*, but we seriously need to undertake the task of creating a new way of life, based on play instead of work. The enormous task of transforming work into play will require a lot of effort. But work abolitionists recognise that, unlike the vast majority of work today, such an effort would actually be worthwhile.

Work abolition is twofold: quantitative and qualitative.

First of all, quantitatively speaking, we need to cut down on the amount of work being done, by a significant margin. David Graeber identifies the problem in the provocatively titled *Bullshit Jobs*: most work today is simply useless, if not actively damaging, serving the purpose of commerce or social control as opposed to actual human needs. We don't need to salvage the tedious white-collar work that now dominates post-industrial societies. We can get rid of all the real estate, insurance, banking, marketing, finance, advertising, lawyering, and other jobs, including all those who work under them, that exist simply to maintain capitalism and the state. We can get rid of a lot of the more "productive" work too, particularly the work that exists to supply the appetite of mass consumerism and the shrine of car centrism. We can also automate much of the productive work that needs doing too, and though I don't believe we need total automation in order to pursue the goals of anti-work, we can use labour-saving technologies within reason to actually save us our time and labour.

And by abolishing wage labour, we can also dismantle the whole sexual division of labour, liberating women from the burden of housework and approaching the vital task of abolishing the patriarchy. See my video on *Rethinking The Family*. Also see my videos on *Education*. Schools exist to create workers, and thus the abolition of work will also involve the abolition of schools as we know them.

If we wish to reorganise our society from one built on work to one built on play, children must absolutely be involved, as teachers and students in the ludic revolution. This revolution will require a transformation of whatever useful labour remains into games, crafts, and creative pastimes. This is the qualitative aspect of work abolition. No more "jobs." Fun activities usually lose their fun when they become jobs anyway. That's why farming is a job and gardening is a hobby. Instead of jobs, there are things to do and people who do them.

We can take the useful activities we enjoy and do them just as much as we enjoy them and in the ways we enjoy them. We can actually have a say in what we do. We can rest when we need to. There are some things I can do for hours nonstop and other things I can only do in short bursts every once in a while. What these specific activities are will vary from person to person. Many people enjoy spending time with kids, but it becomes draining and tedious when, for example, you're a single parent with no support network or you have to teach them all day every day with no say in the what/when/where/why/how. Many people enjoy cooking for others, just not in the hostile and frantic environment of a restaurant or in the isolated and unappreciated setting of domesticity. And as for the things we don't like doing but need to be done? They can be rotated, gamified, or transformed in

some way to make the drudge less drudgerous. Our different interests, tolerances, and temperaments are what make a life of free play possible. Most people have a variety of interests and an interest in variety, and they should have the freedom to pursue them.

Work abolition is a destructive and creative project. It will require the efforts of millions of people around the world working together to transform their conditions. Typically, workers have turned to workers' unions as forces for change. Unions are capable of organising strikes, boycotts, sabotage campaigns, protests, and more on a massive scale. But we cannot limit our efforts to unions, as they are also often stagnant, bureaucratic, and ultimately reformist and capitulatory. At the end of the day, workers' unions need workers and jobs, but we don't, and we cannot afford to keep making the mistake of half-measures. We can't just take over our workplaces and leave everything else jussu. To quote Abolish Restaurants by Prole.Info,

Every time we attack this system but don't destroy it, it changes, and in turn changes us and the terrain of the next fight. Gains are turned against us, and we are stuck back in the same situation—at work. The bosses try to keep us looking for individual solutions, or solutions within an individual workplace or an individual trade. The only way we can free ourselves is to broaden and deepen our fight. We involve workers from other workplaces, industries, and regions. We attack more and more fundamental things. The desire to destroy restaurants becomes the desire to destroy the conditions that create restaurants.

This struggle, for a world of free association and play, has been placed under the banner of antiwork and anarchy. Personally, I'm fond of post-work, because I think it better encapsulates my desire to both oppose and propose, to move against and beyond this detour, this phase of destruction called work, but the term antiwork does what it needs to do too. There have been attempts to co-opt and defang this liberatory project, but despite the recent online drama, this struggle is older than the Internet, and it will continue unabated, because I believe the impulse to be free is one of the defining attributes of the human experience, and this system is fundamentally unfree. Once liberated from the shackles of employment, people will be free to sloth and to slack, but also to do and to act. Humans are verbing creatures. We should fight for a world where we can verb to fulfil our needs and express ourselves instead of line pockets and destroy the Earth. All power to all the people.

Peace.

A Love Letter From the End of the World

Saint

(2022)

The Apocalypse in Greek; simply means an unveiling. An unveiling of what was unseen and is now seen. Oftentimes apocalyptic writings come from religious and philosophical writers. Something that comes to my mind is in the Christian tradition in the book of Revelations where the writer tells of a vision he has that results in the end of the world. This idea of the Apocalypse in Christianity is tied to Jesus's preachings of bringing God's kingdom to Earth. This is something we see in Christian Cults all the time. Christian cults believe that the End of the World is here and they are the only ones that know how to survive it. The idea that everything is political is not a new one. Every aspect of our lives, even our crises, and ultimately the end of the World is political. I want to show how the Politics of the Apocalypse rules our lives; how anti-blackness, the state, and colonialism put us in a state of a constant Apocalypse, and one of the ways we can counteract this.

In some traditions such as the African concept of *Zamani*, *Zamani* frames time in such a way that the past can be accessed in the present just as much as the future can be actualized now. Similarly, a cyclical model of time is better suited to adapt to the ways our struggles are non-linear. This is of course in contrast to how we view time now which makes us believe there is a simple formula or sacred tradition that must be followed in exact sequence to make revolution. We must honor those that came before us not by idolizing them but by growing from their lessons and adding our own. There are no beginnings or nor are there endings.

"Those who have ears let them hear." Apocalyptic Anarchism is a political framework or, rather, a lens to look at the world. If we look at the crisis that America is built upon and needs to function, then we can finally understand that neither asking for "our rights" nor demanding will get us what we want. We must take our liberation. Abolition is more than just creating a new world, it is tearing down the old one. This lens for looking at the world helps us make sense of the events that are happening around us. The apocalypse is continual as there is no perfect destination or some ultimate revolutionary point that we reach. I often notice this almost religious fervor reminds me of a lot of evangelicals in the so-called Leftist Movements and Scenes.

They want abolition without the mess. They want us to reach a final goal where we can throw up our hands and say we are done!

The Left often reminds me of Christian cults that so often pop up and declare that they are the second coming of Christ or that it was revealed to them how to lead Earth into a new era. The issue is that no one is coming to save us. There is no Superman, there is no Vanguard and, most importantly, there is no State that will save us from the havoc Capital wreaks among our lives. I don't want us to think that we have to wait for our Salvation. Much of the Left will have you believe that if we were to form Parties big enough that we might Seize the State, or that if we just get everyone to Follow the Party then everything will be perfect. Passivity will have us waiting for the perfect moment, leader, or clique to tell us what our survival instinct has been screaming all along: that we are in a crisis, an apocalypse of epic proportions. This type of leftist thinking is the same as the Evangelical doctrine of a Messiah coming to take up all the saints to a better far off place. With the Climate crisis, Pandemic(s), and multiple other disasters that are all happening at once, it is clear that there is no savior. Often evangelicals think that afterlife on this earth, we will go to a place called Heaven where there is no poverty, no class, no hunger, and so on. Too often I see communists with this same idea about revolution and abolition as if these are perfect ideas and not something that is continual. These ideas are not new and they will not act as complete or accurate roadmaps for world events we have yet to experience. They will have to be continually updated by new language that we uncover to more effectively describe our liberatory objectives. This continual process of uncovering new language will have to engage our embodied reality as well as our collective imagination as what we understand as Liberation evolves we realize that what this means to us is continually evolving in an eternal process for liberation. Words like revolution and abolition are not supposed to pencil you in but are an incomplete sketch of a map to show us where we are going because as of right now we can only dream of what liberation looks like. I believe that it is beyond any of our wildest imaginations. To me, the only way out of the predicament we find ourselves in is not prayers, leftist leaders, or good thoughts but the Continual Abolition of the World.

Abolition at its core is about how you participate in the community. Despite this, the term community has become this far away thing, a term we use to blanket sometimes real questions so that we can avoid hard conversations. What is the value of community when it is presented as justification for absolving abusers of any responsibility to change their harmful behavior or face consequences that make room for more safety and healing. How does it serve us to have legitimate questions about the forms of harm we encounter from people we are expected to identify with as "our" community? Community should not be an abstract ideal we hope to achieve one day or even something we put over our own immediate needs in an ongoing

apocalypse. Participating in the community is all about having hard conversations and having questions that you sometimes don't know the answer to. Abolitionists have missed this mark when it comes to survivors. What will we do with my abuser is a legitimate question, and although building networks of care is important we have to recognize that sometimes the community hides the abuser. We attach a label to these uncomfortable and painful experiences and that is often mistaken as an appropriate response for the actual material impacts these harms have on us. The failure to address the forms of violence that affect the intricacies of our lives is the very foundation upon which such crises are built. It might be easy to say let love and community guide us and I believe this to a certain extent. But the word community is not a magical word that makes everything okay. Oftentimes we find harm in communities, even ones that say they will protect us. I often think of the folks in Black Hammer who either were coerced or led to believe in a community that would protect them and found nothing but harm and trauma. This same dynamic/process has happened in PSL, DSA, and many other big left orgs where patriarchy, racism, and white supremacy still rule. We must acknowledge this hurt and pain as what it is. Apocalyptic anarchism calls for imagination as there are traumas and hurts we do not yet have words for. Love and community are nice and this by no means is a call to forsake community and networks of care. What I am calling for is not a utopian concept but a look into what we really want right here and now. We have to build communities where we are truly safe and this is a call to soberly look at reality and what we are facing.

Apocalyptic Anarchism is in the spirit of Korryn Gaines which is to say Shooting Back. Korryn Gaines was a mother in 2016 who was pulled over for an earlier traffic violation the officers tried to get her to go back to the station with them in but she refused to be kidnapped as she also had her son with her at the time. Upon seeing her gun after she told the officers of her refusal to go with them she was shot and killed, her 5-year-old was also shot although he survived which is saying nothing as he had to witness the murder of his own mother at the hands of the State. Apocalyptic Anarchism realizes the situation at hand and recognizes it for what it is: a crisis. In Ferguson, amidst the tear gas and flames, someone Tagged a Quote from "The Hunger Games". The quote was "If we burn you burn with us" and while this might seem trivial to some I understand the sentiment. Growing up I was taught that if I got into a fight and I lost I better make sure that at least I took something of theirs. Meaning to say in a world with no justice sometimes the best option is revenge. Ferguson has shaped me and my politics meaning when in the face of those Oppressing me no matter what I am going to get mine even if I "burn". We must strike at the heart of America as many times as we can because rest assured it wants to kill us and we must defend ourselves **BY ANY MEANS NECESSARY** and if we can't have justice I say let's have revenge.

Oftentimes I see people asking if this is the end of America. The thing with this empire is that capital expands and absorbs crisis because it is in fact built on crisis. Naomi Klein's book *Shock Doctrine* goes over this in detail about Hurricane Katrina and the effect it had on Louisiana. There is no passive crumbling of empires and there never has been. An apocalypse requires active participation; it's active destruction, not a reformation but total annihilation of what was before to lay the ground for what is now. The biggest example right now is the Pandemic, which can very obviously be described as an apocalypse of sorts. What was the end of the world to many was, for the rich, something to build on. There were many people who were saying, "now see? the empire is crumbling!" While this is true, we can never underestimate the way that whiteness is cannibalistic meaning that it will consume itself as capital expands when it has nothing else to consume. The Empire that we live in wants to extract our labor by any means necessary. Work and die is the state of Capital with people losing COVID pay and despite this, being required to Work even while testing positive for COVID. The State thrives on this as it would have you Dead but at least Working healthy. During the Winter storm in Texas in 2021 the stocks of companies that profit off of electricity went up. The world was ending but yet people were getting richer. We can not lose sight that Apocalypses are active and they force us to see something that we either did not want to or up till a certain point had the power to avoid; an unveiling happens. This is why I am drawn to the apocalypse; it forces me to see and confront myself and those around me. I, too, am forced to have my eyes opened. I'm confronted with the fact that this does not begin in some far place but that I too must pick up the Brick. I must End the World.

Apocalyptic Anarchism is active destruction and a call for immediate action. There is no time to wait. We can testify with the Pandemic that not even a deadly airborne virus could get America to crumble and Ecological Collapse definitely won't imperil empire. They will simply have us Work through it. We must understand that there will never be a perfect time to end this world. We do not have the luxury of passively waiting for a preordained opportunity. We must create our own opportunities to mortally wound the empire.

When people talk about decolonizing and dismantling white supremacy, what they are really asking for is the Abolition of the world. To destroy the world would mean a world without white supremacy and colonialism, the very things it was founded on. To me, Abolition and the apocalypse almost go hand in hand. We cannot fear the Apocalypse. We must move forward because Apocalypses are continual. We know not what the world is like without white supremacy, colonialism, and capitalism but we do know what it's like to have our world continually ended. We have to ask ourselves do we just stop at asking for the Abolition of Prisons, the State, Capitalism. No, we have to End the World on our terms.

**Black Is Crime: Notes on Blaqillegality
Afrofuturist Abolitionists Of the Americas
(2022)**

As long as I'm alive I'ma live illegal, and once I get on I'ma put on all my people

Prodigy

The fugitive nature of Blackness, the inherent outlawing of our bodies by the state and our positionality as being already outside of the law, gives rise to a Black illegalism where extralegal activities to further our survival are foregrounded.

Anarkata: A Statement

What a crime it is to be Black. To have the police be called on you for sitting in a restaurant, for grilling at a cookout, selling water, going to the pool, taking a nap, standing on the corner; to be Black and to have the presence of one's very own body break the law and to know at any given moment a police officer can slam you to the ground and cuff you for resisting arrest, which is to say, arrest you for absolutely no reason at all. Blackness carries this implication that a law is or has been broken and is about to be broken in the future. It is the color and sign of criminal activity under white supremacist capitalism used to justify the mass incarceration and extra-judicial murder of Black people by and large.

But what are the origins of this strenuous relationship between Blackness and the law? In what ways is Black criminalization constituted under the state? And if Blackness is already criminalized in the eyes of the law, what are the features of already existing Black illegal forms and what might the theoretical contours of Black illegalism (Blaqillegality) that is principled and above all revolutionary look like?

Blaqillegality is of course not to be confused with illegalism, the mostly white anarchist movement originating in Europe. Influenced by thinkers such as Max Stirner, illegalist base their view on an individualist egoism that embraces illegal activity solely for the benefit of the individual person. The individual through illegal acts seeks personal restoration, be it the financial gain one gets from stealing from the capitalist ruling class, or the catharsis involved in criminal activity. Although

later formulations used illegal activity as a “propaganda of the deed” meant to incite revolt among the masses, for illegalist criminal activity is still very much a personal, individualistic rejection of the status quo that is not necessarily moralistic or even principled.

In fact, for illegalist the mere presence of the law is understood as an affront to personal freedom and may be rejected to assert the spirit of the individual. The law here is opposed for the sake of being opposed. It is seen as a barrier, an impediment that prevents the individual from exercising their personal will. The individual, in this case, is, of course, the white citizen who resents their passions being held in check by their state’s legal system. White illegalists contest the law’s authority to place limits on their personal freedom, and if the concept of personal freedom in the West has always roughly translated into white freedom, the illegalist pursuit of individual liberties is an exercise in pushing white privilege to its limits.

But where white illegalism understands the law as an unjust restraint on the white citizen’s personal liberties and uses it as an excuse to engage in reckless and selfish pursuits of adventurism and catharsis, Black relationship to the law (and by consequence, Black illegal forms) rest on an entirely different register. The difference is where the white citizen might experience the law as a mere nuisance keeping them from doing what they want to do, the Black person experiences the law as an absolute violence on their very being, is fully impaled by the legal system and is always already marked as the criminal element that enables the law’s possibility. This is because Black life itself is constituted by illegality and we can attribute this to transatlantic slavery.

In the colonial Americas, Black people first appear within the law not as subjects or citizens, but as objects managed through the legal codes of slavery. Slave codes became necessary in a context where civil law failed to stick to or be applicable to chattel. It required new kinds of legislation in order to manage those beings who were considered property and essentially substituted civil law with a form of property law. The slave codes were the collection of regulations each colonial power put forward to rule enslaved Africans in their respective colonies. There were slave codes in the British Caribbean, including Barbados and Jamaica. The infamous Code de Noir was a collection of slave codes established in the French West Indies, San Domingue (modern-day Haiti), French Guiana, and Louisiana. The Spanish had their own set of slave codes established in Central and South America. Later the United States kept and modified existing slave codes while enacting new ones. Every place where enslaved Africans were brought had its own laws regarding slavery.

Generally, these laws all had the same function: to restrict the movement and assembly of the enslaved, to restrict access to education (particularly reading), to prevent intermixing, to legally permit the torture and killing of the enslaved, and to legislate the trade and commerce involving enslaved people. Slavery was not only the law but was the legal precedent for dealing with Blackness. And this legal precedent as Calvin Warren notes provided the foundations for modern-day law and the means by which Blackness appears within the law today:

Contract law (law of chattel) is perhaps the hallmark of modern legal development, given the need to regulate commerce and specify the rights and entitlement of property holders. But this corpus of law emerges because one needs to integrate the slave into the world. In other words, contract law conceals an ontological project

Under these conditions, the law deprived the enslaved not only of the personal freedom so coveted by the white illegalist, but the very modes of personhood that enable freedom's possibility. The aims of this ontological project, concealed by legal discourse, was to provide the legal ground for slavery's continuation through regulating Blackness to the status of property under the law and dividing civil society into property and property holders. Blackness is disciplined by this dividing line and it is the law's goal is to contain Blackness and keep it from breaching this line. To maintain slavery's coherence the law became a means to make the distinction between human and Black concrete and tangible. In this way, the law became the first site in which slavery, racism, and white supremacy were institutionalized.

Trapped within the confines of a structural and ontological position of unfreedom, (a position which is regulated and codified by the law), the Black enslaved were forced to occupy the cramped positionality of what Fred Moten calls 'the hold'. Here, Blackness twists and turns uncomfortably stretches out against the walls meant to contain and regulate it, and in the most natural of impulses attempts to escape. The regulations meant to restrict every aspect of Black life could not do so fully, and if containerization was the law's basic function for Blackness, then Blackness could not help but break the law. Be it by accident, circumstance, resistance, or necessity, Blackness defied the boundaries of the law every day precisely as this twist and turning struggle intrinsic to a people kept in bondage.

The U.S. Fugitive Slave Laws enacted in 1793 and 1850 made escape from slavery a federal offense and expanded the legal measures to retrieve fugitives. Yet any free Black could be accused of being a fugitive, even if their freedom had been legitimate. In effect, Fugitive Slave Law made freedom illegal for Black people

and rendered all emancipated Blacks as possible fugitives of the law regardless of whether they had proper documentation or not. To borrow a Tina Campt quote from *Another Life is Possible: Black Fugitivity and Enclosed Places* by Damien M. Sojoyner: “the concept of fugitivity highlights the tension between the acts or flights of escape and creative practices of refusal, nimble and strategic practices that undermine the category of the dominant.” Fugitivity is the tendency or quality of Blackness to flee, subvert, or evade the reaches of capture and breach the thresholds of state containment.

Fugitivity, this defining struggle of Blackness to perpetually escape and refuse the terms of enclosure and domination imposed by colonialism and white supremacist capitalism, finds in the law its most concrete analogy. To be a fugitive in the most basic sense was to engage in an act of flight from the law. But these acts of flight were not just singular moments of resistance but also features inherent to Blackness. Fugitivity is useful for our analysis here because it provides a theoretical framework for examining both the ways in which Black illegal forms emerge (as acts of flight) and the means by which Blackness is, in turn, is perpetually criminalized by the state (illegality as an ontological feature of Blackness).

Black criminalization under the state is the enduring legacy of slave law and its afterlives (to channel Saidya Hartman). Sometime during the history of enslavement, this refusal that marked the fugitivity of Black life and survival in the hold became collapsed into the racialization of Black people and was read by the state as a disposition toward criminality. This was in line with earlier antiblack formulations that justified slavery by utilizing biblical references to argue the morally corrupt nature of African people. The formation of slave patrols and use of the white citizenry to police the boundaries of Black containment were crystallized around the emerging notion of Black criminality in the white imagination and anchored by the emerging technologies of the state. The fact that the very origins of law enforcement in the Americas came from the slave patrols drives home the point that the law only ever needed to be enforced when it came to the question of Black people. Blackness becomes criminal precisely at this point, where its refusal is read as an ontological malady, and where the securance of white property interests compel the use of organized law enforcement. Containment again becomes the principal occupation of the state, the law codifies this containment, and the police carry out its enforcement.

Where Fugitive Slave Law regulated emancipated Black life as perpetually outside of the law and subject to recapture, Jim Crow and later mass incarceration repackaged the same legal precedent while revising its application. Of course, the most relevant of these developments in the U.S. is the constitutionality of slavery

under the 13th amendment's "punishment for a crime" clause. For if the legality of slavery rest on being punishment for a crime, Blackness itself is a crime, has already been constituted as a crime, and is the symbolic indication of future crime, making it perpetually eligible for enslavement under the law. Emancipation could not change the precedent at its core, which understands the emancipated Black person as runaway merchandise, assumes Black deviancy, and requires Black discipline and containment. Today the law underwrites all instances of police brutality, mass incarceration, and the extrajudicial killing of Black people. "Law and order" is a synonym for waging state violence against Black people.

Likewise, the positionality of Blackness makes it almost impossible to appeal to the law as a form of justice or legal restitution. Countless examples of failed attempts at justice through legal channels confirm that Black injury cannot be seen by the justice system, and does not register as injury in the eyes of the law. In fact, to deliver justice to Black people is actually counterintuitive to the project of the law, which is always, the containment of Blackness. As Calvin Warren explains:

The Law recognizes the black only in its destruction, and this destruction is required for legal intelligibility. Thus, something like black redress is outside of the law's jurisdiction to the extent that the aim of redress is restorative, and restoring black being is not only impossible but antithetical to the law's aim

Two Black revolutionary formations become important to analyze here for their markedly different approaches to the law and its relevance to Black struggle. The early years of the Black Panther Party saw the law as a tool that could be used to push Black revolution forward. The first armed demonstrations organized by the Party constantly reference the Second Amendment right to bear arms. New members of the Party were encouraged to read Mao's Red Book and the United States Constitution. Huey P Newton personally studied the law fervently and for all of the loud and bombastic declarations made at the armed demonstrations, a great effort was made to keep them squarely within the bounds of the law.

What the Party did not foresee is that when the law could not perform its function to contain and regulate Blackness, the law could be changed. Months after the 1967 Panther demonstration at the California Capitol, the Mulford Act was passed effectively banning the open carry of loaded weapons. As police repression increased, amounting later to shootouts, raids, and assassinations of key BPP leaders, it became clear that legality did not matter when Black revolutionaries pose a threat to the white power structure. The systematic attack on the Black Panther Party forced Newton and many others to dial back on armed demonstrations.

The law remained unavailable for use as a form of redress in the pursuit of Black liberation, for Black liberation is against the law and antithetical to the laws aim. Huey himself briefly turned towards criminal activities later in his life in an attempt to organize gangs but was killed in the process.

The Black Liberation Army emerged largely out of the fallout of the Black Panther Party and took an extralegal approach to Black liberation. It engaged in armed attacks, robberies, prison breaks, and other activities while rejecting the legitimacy of the law itself. Taking the lessons learned from the Black Panther Party seriously, the BLA understood that breaking the law would be required for Black liberation but refused to see what they were doing as truly criminal. They made distinctions between illegal activities that were explicitly political and those that were criminal. They argued that because their actions were political they should be tried not as criminals but as prisoners of war. When Black Liberation Army members were tried in court for crimes such as 'domestic terrorism' they famously rejected the legitimacy of U.S. courts maintaining that the court lacked the moral authority to do so. Kuwasi Balagoon in his trial statement said boldly:

I am a prisoner of war and I reject the crap about me being a defendant, and I do not recognize the legitimacy of this court. The term defendant applies to someone involved in a criminal matter, in an internal search for guilt or innocence.

The BLA's refusal both recognized the court as an illegitimate colonizing institution and rejected the terms in which Black radical activity is marked as criminal. Instead, BLA members reframed their activity as existing outside of the jurisdiction of the law and requiring different legal machinery. The BLA members appealed not to U.S. law but international law pertaining to the treatment of prisoners of war. In his essay *The Vengeance of Vertigo*, Frank Wilderson had this to say about Balagoon's statement:

Its deepest insight is the conclusion that it reaches that the law is White, coupled with the inference that Balagoon was guilty prior to the Brinks expropriation. His innocence cannot be vouchsafed until all semblance of the law has been eradicated.

The way in which the BLA positioned themselves in relation to the law, both as the wholehearted embrace of Black illegal forms coupled with the refusal to recognize the legitimacy of the law, has been an inspiration for this paper. I disagree with Wilderson's complaint that the fault of the approach was the inability to empathetically account for Black suffering within the courtroom. Rather, the only

fault was the assumption that an appeal toward 'prisoner of war' as a viable legal standing for BLA members could or would be heard at all by the court. Their non-cooperation with the law still relied on the law to see BLA members as subjects eligible to be tried as prisoners of war (when as Calvin Warren reminds us, the law 'recognizes the black only in its destruction'). It represents an inability for the law to extend legal status to Black people that would absolve them of criminality. Further, it reveals the inability of the law to recognize Black people as Humans or anything other than runaway merchandise. The BLA was correct in claiming their activities were outside of the law's jurisdiction, for Blackness itself is outside of the law and in perpetual contempt of the court. It ruptures the very coherence of the law since laws apply to those considered humans, yet the legal precedent is invested in recognizing the black only in its destruction.

Given this context, where the law codifies Black containment, engenders Black criminalization, underwrites antiblack state violence, and denies Black appeal to the law as a form of redress, we can finally begin to make the case for a Black illegality (Blaqillegality). Blaqillegality takes the fugitivity of Blackness, that is, the perpetual refusal of and flight from enclosure inherent in Blackness, as its basic starting place. It argues that Blackness breaks the law by its very nature; it is a fissure within the law.

This fissure is read by the state as perpetual criminality and is the source of the systematic criminalization of Blackness under the state. Furthermore, Blackness is made into the perpetual criminal element that enables the law and its enforcement. Blaqillegality maintains that the law remains necessarily unavailable to Blackness for making appeals of redress, that the law 'recognizes the black only in its destruction'. Finally, Blaqillegality understands Black life, Black survival, Black restitution, and above all Black freedom to be outlawed and in so many words illegal.

The Blaqillegality postulates that breaking the law is not only good praxis but becomes necessary for Black survival and even further, for the pursuit of Black liberation. If the law's main function is to discipline and codify the state containment of Blackness, then breaking the law becomes an act of flight from the enclosure that the law engenders, and is thus a fugitive act. Due to the everyday conditions of Black oppression, which emerge as a consequence of white supremacist capitalism and state repression, Black people again cannot help but break the law be it by accident, circumstance, resistance, or necessity.

Fugitive acts occur always in response to these conditions and are compounded by the criminalization that already marks Blackness. For these reasons, the

Blaqillegalist says that under white supremacy the Black person already breaks the law as a consequence of their very being, and as a refusal to die under white capitalist oppression. This renders all efforts to remain lawful pointless and undoes any moral obligation Black people might have had in abiding by the law. Since we are ‘damned if we do, damned if we don’t’, the Black person might as well engage in illegal activity if it is responsible and for the survival of themselves and their communities.

Of course, on the ground, Black people have already arrived at this conclusion. There are a great variety of illegal activities that are already employed by Black people every day. Of these, only some constitute a Blaqillegalist praxis, while others don’t. A Blaqillegalist position generally embraces both small and large-scale illegal activity pointed in the direction of Black collective survival and Black liberation and is critical of illegal forms that are ultimately detrimental to that project. Here we will examine and reclaim the Black illegal forms that would fall under a Blaqillegalist praxis.

Disorderly Conduct

Definitions for what actually constitutes disorderly conduct remain arbitrary, and on the ground, disorderly conduct could refer to any normal activity Black people do that break some arbitrary law imposed by the state. This could be anything from “being too loud” in a public place, playing loud music, selling goods without a permit, soliciting, loitering, trespassing, squatting, protesting without a permit, to even resisting arrest. These laws are almost always meant to target Black people specifically and are a residue of the slave codes that regulated Black movement and assembly in public spaces. Black people always break these laws, usually unbeknownst to them, because what is being regulated here is Black everyday life. Blaqillegalist praxis asserts that we should break as many of these arbitrary laws as possible while evading the police.

Theft

Under white supremacist capitalism, all theft by Black people that targets white individuals, institutions, and businesses are reparations. This includes shoplifting, petty theft, burglary, looting, expropriation, grand larceny, scamming, embezzlement, piracy, and fraud. Colloquially called swiping in the Black community, these acts have always been practiced and for some have been a viable means of survival. Black theft emerges as a direct refusal of capitalist oppression and resistance against a system that has stolen from Black people for centuries. A Blaqillegalist praxis would encourage continued decentralized theft of white institutions as the best means to obtain reparations for slavery and colonialism. Furthermore, the stealing and redistribution of food, medication, toiletries, clothing and other necessities

serve the collective survival of Black communities. As long as the targets of such activities are white, this is Blaquillegalist praxis.

Sex Work

Sex work continues to be criminalized in general which pushes many people especially Black sex workers into dangerous situations with both police and clients. Many Black femmes, especially Black trans femmes involved in sex work do so for survival. When anti-prostitution laws are enforced, they are more aggressively targeted at Black sex workers. Although the criminalization of sex work is not ideal, Black sex workers have and will continue to break the law regardless. Black sex work defies the jurisdiction of the state and refuses to be subsumed by the law. On the ground, money generated from sex work is often shared by a community of sex workers to ensure the collective survival and well-being of that community. When police officers refuse to protect sex workers from violence, this fugitive community is often the first line of defense in keeping sex workers safe. Sex work is a fugitive act for Black people and is a reclamation of bodily autonomy in a world where Black people's bodies are rendered as property not belonging to them. It is an act of flight from the bodily directives that are the secretion of patriarchy.

Vandalism

Activities that destroy, deface, or beautify public and private property generally fall under the category of vandalism. Tagging up buildings, train cars, and other surfaces continue to be a strong Black artistic tradition and is one of the five elements of hip hop culture. The New York City crackdown on graffiti artists in the 80s and 90s notoriously imprisoned many Black artists and reinforced the illegality of tagging. Although graffiti is slightly more accepted (and gentrified) today, it is still generally outlawed especially when the artists are Black. Other activities that also fall under vandalism include sabotage, arson, and general property damage. Vandalism continues to be used strategically by Black people to forestall the encroachment of gentrification in the Black community. Furthermore, property damage that targets white businesses, institutions, and personal holdings is in direct resistance to white supremacist capitalism and is a strong Blaquillegalist praxis. Vandalism is also a key component of revolutionary activities and employs the use of sabotage and arson in particular to further the project of Black liberation.

Inciting to Riot

Any unauthorized public gathering could generally be interpreted as a riot under the law. Historically however Black unauthorized gatherings have always been more likely to be read as riots since the age of the slave codes. Anti-riot laws are another legal residue of slave law, which outlawed Black public assembly of any kind and saw it as a threat to white safety. Over the course of racial history

and as consistent Black revolts ensued, legal precedents adopted from slave law became codified in the language surrounding rioting and inciting to riot. Black people have been breaking this law since we have arrived in the Americas as both a feature of Black social life, and as moments of Black uprising. From the countless uprisings during and after slavery, the race riots of 1919, the 1943 Detroit riots, the 1965 Watts riots, 1968 race riots, the 1969 Stonewall uprising, the 1992 LA riots, to the contemporary uprisings in Ferguson and Baltimore, rioting fits squarely within the Black radical tradition and is a part of Blaquilllegalist praxis.

Treason

Treason is legally defined as any activity that is an act of war against the state, seeks to destroy the state, overthrow the state, or collude with its enemies. These include espionage, sabotage, and some forms of terrorism. Black revolutionary activities that seek the elimination of the white supremacist state as a requirement for Black liberation are marked as acts of treason by the law. If the state is the principal instrument of anti-Black oppression, which props up white supremacy and facilitates colonialism and imperialism, then it is the state who has already waged war on Black people. Similar to the BLA, a Blaquilllegalist praxis rejects the legitimacy of the white court of law in its entirety and recognizes it as an extension of the state's undeclared war on Blackness. Black people tend to fight for their liberation and fighting for liberation means fighting to destroy the state that oppresses us and subjects us to super-exploitation. Black revolutionary activity breaks the law by definition.

Those criminal activities that do not lend themselves to Black liberation or survival would not constitute a Blaquilllegalist praxis and would be considered counterrevolutionary. Although these still might be understood as fugitive in so far as they are still acts of flight from the law and possess a quality of refusal that is innate to Blackness, the refusal does not present itself as a gesture towards freedom. Criminal activity that steals from poor and working-class Black people, murders indiscriminately, peddles self-destructive drugs into the community, engages in domestic violence, assault, rape, and other violence especially against femmes and LBGQTQIA people, do direct harm to Black people and could not be said to be Blaquilllegalist. Much of this activity invites increased police repression in Black communities, foster unsafe environments for Black people, and is generally never for the collective wellbeing of Black people on the ground. A Blaquilllegalist position must remain critical of counterrevolutionary Black illegal forms which very often are encouraged by the state because they destroy the social fabric of Black communities and make them easier to police and contain.

WORKS

This is a distinct turn away from the individualist line of white illegalism which makes no distinctions between revolutionary and counterrevolutionary illegal acts and puts emphasis on personal freedom. Where the centrality of the individual drives the actions of the white illegalist, the Blaquillegalist is driven by the pursuit of collective freedom for Black people everywhere and locates individual illegal activity as grounded within the collective struggle for Black liberation. It understands and situates individual Black illegal acts as operating within the matrix of countless moments of refusal and flight taking place all over the African diaspora and across past, present, and future temporalities. For the Blaquillegalist, no illegal activity we engage in occurs in isolation and is intimately connected with our local and global contexts as well as our history, immediate present, and afro future.

Dreams of Black Revolt

Anon
(2022)

Note: A lot of people seem to be writing about the rebellion. However, there aren't enough black anarchist voices (or black revolutionaries in general) publicly reflecting on it. Our input matters the most right now in my opinion. Shoutout to the Anarkatas, Lorenzo, Saint from Haters, the comrades who wrote BAJ, and all my homies who I talk to about this stuff.

I hope this gives yall a taste about what's been on my mind the past two years. I've been involved in a variety of writing projects but this one is really just a mostly personal reflection on how I've been feeling. One day I'll be back on twitter but I hope this one essay helps shape the discourse a bit more, haha. It isn't meant to be a full critique of anything. It's just a few ideas that been bouncing around in my head.

It has been a little over two years since my brother and I watched the livestream where the Black rebellion burned the 3rd precinct in Minneapolis. We had discussed going to Minneapolis in the days prior because we understood how important it was. Luckily, the rebellion came to our city next despite our incredulity. The gravity of the moment was clear to us, but fundamentally we were still so unprepared for the moment. This lack of preparation brings me deep shame and regret. It's been two years and I still feel that the moment for many of us was missed.

In all honesty, I didn't believe widespread rebellion, let alone revolution in the United States was possible prior to 2020. I had resigned myself to the fact that the peripheries of the American Empire were the only places where revolution was possible, believing our only goal as revolutionaries here was to build to support oppressed people in the Third World. The Black revolution had been defeated in the 1970s. Our warriors were killed or locked away from our communities. The black neo-colonial class was ascendant. The white proletarian counter-revolutionary impulses were too strong to overcome. There was no future for the Black movement in the United States. And then, the rebellion of 2020 happened. This was a revelation for me. It shifted everything in terms of my belief in social transformation. Revolutionary moments should be revelations for us all. I fundamentally believe now that we have a chance to see revolution in our lifetime.

Over the past two years, I have realized that my commitment to struggle could not be contained to activism as a hobby. I have always tried to not be contained within anarchist or activist subcultures, socially. I feel these anarchist subcultural scenes are often toxic and strange (also white), so I do not spend time in them. Thus, many of my friends and lovers do not share my beliefs. Long time relationships were filled with tension leading to their end as a result of the rebellion and its fallout. Many people in my life did not grasp the importance of the uprising, and, to me, those are the moments that test who we are as human beings. We must allow these moments to change us and adjust who we are and how we exist in the world. We must not resist it and act as if the revolt was a blip in history. For many of us who have lived shorter lives, it was the closest thing to freedom, liberation, a revolution or anything along those lines that we have experienced. Even if you did not participate directly, those of us who seek liberation must grapple with the importance of the rebellion in our own lives and the broader world.

I have been a self described pro-Black activist since I was young before eventually calling myself an anarchist. I have always understood myself as linked to the Black liberation struggle. I read Malcolm, listened to Dead Prez, and watched the Baltimore Riots live in high school. I was inspired by the Black teenagers fighting back on their own terms against the police. I remember post-Trump, I saw some people in black bloc fuck up a car that tried to ram a Black Lives Matter march, and I decided those were the type of politics I wanted to have. However, I found myself brought into a bunch of socialist and communist milieus that doubted the viability of Black self-activity as the central force for revolution. I found myself lost in a dual-power infrastructure/base-building milieu who resigned me to the fact that we were not ready to fight back and we just all needed to build community gardens and worker's cooperatives. I was really into learning about Cooperation Jackson, Black cooperative farming practices and Black histories of mutual aid. I think some mutual aid and cooperative economic projects are cool but most didn't seem to be relevant to the rebellion at all when it happened. They seemed to be mostly passion projects of middle class people masquerading as "revolutionary". While I think those things are well intentioned, they were largely disconnected from the fighting on the streets. I just think we gotta keep it real. Other articles like those written by the homies who wrote Black Armed Joy have explained the limitations of "mutual aid" a bit better than myself. Conversations with my Anarkata comrades have also shaped my opinions about care and militancy in meaningful important ways. I'm not against mutual aid, I just think we gotta explore the care and revolt dialectic a bit more but I can't do it justice here.

I got caught up in the idea that I needed to follow or defer to a certain type of Black leadership if their ideas were not correct. I no longer believe that revolutionaries

should reduce their own politics for the sake of deferring to people on the basis of identity when these politics are not revolutionary, despite how uncomfortable it may make us feel. I do feel that I had a sort of vanguardist attitude towards the Black masses with my emphasis on the need for revolutionary “infrastructure.” To be clear, I was never a self-identified authoritarian; I always considered my politics anarchist. Despite this, when the rebellion came, I initially lagged behind the masses in terms of ferocity, strategy, and power. I do not want that to happen again.

Prior to the rebellion, I spent my time connecting with other Black anarchists and trying to develop an analysis around the Progressive Plantation and the lack of a Black liberation tendency within the anarchist movement. I felt myself drawn to abolitionism in the tradition of the Revolutionary Abolitionist Movement which learned from Nat Turner and the BLA or the Militant care of the Anarkatas who learned from Marsha P. Johnson and Kuwasi Balagoon. I read DuBois, Cedric Robinson and the Combahee River Collective. I watched documentaries about the Black Panther Party. All of these ideas shape this essay and I’m grateful for all of those revolutionary contributions as they shape my outlook in this moment.

I never understood my abolition rooted in reform. However, we did not live in a revolutionary era as I understood it. So, prior to the rebellion, I felt that there were many ways forwards for abolition whether it was “non-reformist” reforms or through the insurrectional attacks. If you had asked me prior to the rebellion if I supported “Defund,” I would have said yes. I did not see the actions in the rebellion as opposed to “non-reformist reforms,” but the rebellion revealed to me that they were. In reality, those reforms were not achieved. Defund became nothing. It was easily co-opted. #DefundThePolice was used to distract from the power of the insurrection.

The activists and organizers and academics (abolitionist industrial complex as I call them) co-opted the George Floyd rebellion. Every day, there is a new abolitionist book published which repeats the same tired lines about how cops don’t keep us safe and all that. Despite claiming to be revolutionaries, these academics do not defend the actions of the black rebels; instead they focus upon the actions of activists. Robin Kelley’s new intro to Black Marxism is a good reference for what I mean. He focuses upon the #DefundThePolice activists as the continuation of the Black Radical Tradition in his intro instead of the black rebels who fought police and engaged in looting. It is tiring. The Black proletariat stands alone. The audiences for these abolitionist books are the mostly non-Black petit bourgeois activist class who consumes them with vigor. Most of these books want us to “imagine a world beyond prisons or police” and to push for socialist democracy or whatever in the United States. While I’m not against imagining a new world, real solidarity means supporting the masses in their revolutionary action against the

State. For years, the Left has mostly sat on the sidelines when the Black masses have decided to fight. In some cases, the Black Left has co-opted the Black struggle to build their activist clout, get book deals, and nonprofit money while the Black masses are killed and incarcerated for fighting in the rebellion. The reality is that as a revolutionary, I have more to learn from the Black youth who fought the police in my city or from prisoner who fought the COs in prison than I do from Black or non-Black leftists with PhDs. The reality is the real struggle against the police and racial capitalism emerges from the margins. The people with the least to lose are the ones most willing to fight. Unfortunately, most of the Black “abolitionists” and leftists do not care at all to build or interact with these young rebels. Despite this, The Dragon will be awakened, and that’s word to George Jackson. We all saw the precinct burn. Most Black academics and nonprofit types are incapable of comprehending what it meant. Most Black academics wrote it off or ignored it. The Black writers who guided my understanding in the moments right after the rebellion and engaged directly with the politics of the revolt were Marcus Sundjata Brown, Idris Robinson, the We Still Outside Collective, and Yannick Giovanni Marshall. I thank them for keeping my head on straight with their analysis.

It is the duty of Black anarchists and Black revolutionaries to build our own networks that train and prepare ourselves mentally for uprisings as it clear that the Black left (both the activist and academic forms) is uninterested in creating networks that could actually fight alongside the Black masses. I want to be clear that I do not believe Black anarchists should be doing a sort of Leftist soldier cosplay like we’ve seen with some of the black bloc anarchists, especially in Portland and elsewhere. I think that the specialization that some anarchists have engaged in is alienating, and it often doesn’t contribute anything tactically. Plus, I saw people in black bloc protect police stations, wave American flags, and act in roles for “deescalation.” Black youth with t-shirts over their faces seemed more capable and willing to fighting than many of the seemingly geared-up or well-prepared militants (who were mostly white) in my view. It is a tricky position that Black anarchists find themselves in, as we should be training to be ready for an uprising, but we also shouldn’t engage in some strange anarchist military shit that parts of Left seem into.

Even so, most of the Black left is just as opposed to the revolt of the Black masses as the Black liberals are. Most Black abolitionist or Black socialist groups just want to march around making “demands” about community control of the police, which has little appeal to the masses of Black people and therefore is not much better than the faux black bloc militants. I know Pan-Africanists who will call the police while quoting Kwame Ture in their facebook posts. The Black left has little to no presence in the Black community and instead they spend most of their time

in academia or around their white or nonblack leftist “allies.” Worse than that, Black leftist groups like Black Alliance for Peace, Hood Communist and AAPRP promoted/gave platforms to cult leaders like Gazi and Black Hammer who abused and hurt black youth. (Go Read Redvoice’s articles *The Devil Wears Dashikis* on this if you want to know more about the type of cults that the Black left has unfortunately spent so much time supporting and boosting) For this reason, I am uninterested generally in black leftist politics as they exist in the United States.

However, the true Black radical politics I am invested in is the politics of the Black revolt that were on full display during the George Floyd Rebellion. The never-ceasing, constant ability of our people to fight back against our oppressors under any circumstance. As CLR James says, “The only place where Negroes did not revolt is in the pages of capitalist historians.”

Many Black liberals propagated the idea that our people are timid and helpless. The idea that Black people could not simply act on our own in violent and meaningfully ways against our oppressors is the most evil and racist lie that has emerged in the past two years. It is unfortunate yet unsurprising that Black leaders now choose to relegate our people to the dustbins of histories instead blaming the revolt on cops or whites who lead our people into “danger.” The United States has always been dangerous for Black people but suddenly these Black liberals become concerned about safety when the Black masses fight the State. Through these lies of Black victimhood, we have been reduced back to electoral politics, the never-ending marches, and continual terror of this anti-Black world with no possibility of a future. I have no hope in the Black left, Black activists, or Black leaders anymore, but I do have hope in the exploited, oppressed and marginalized Black masses.

I come from a Black nationalist understanding of self help, so I do not think we can really rely on white radicals either for us to be trained and well equipped to fight. I think it’s sort of boring to critique the white left, though I understand the necessity of those criticisms. I just don’t really feel like that’s where my energy is focused anymore. There may be a few whites who have relationships with Black people but fundamentally most whites do not feel that they should be in struggle with Black people. They have their own reasons for revolt. Despite this, I saw poor white kids fight alongside poor Black kids against the police. I don’t have romantic notions about what that means, but I do think it is a development that Black revolutionaries in the United States must take into account. We can’t ignore it. However, we must build on our own and take from the white left when it seems necessary.

The only thing I remain committed to after years of struggle is the spontaneous self-organized revolt of the Black masses. The uprising in the streets or in the

prison remains the most advanced form of struggle. I hope that one day workplace struggles will take on a similar rebellious character that comes into conflict with the State, but that has not happened. Until then, I have left my dreams of Black community-run farms, a post-capitalist economy, cooperative housing, and all of that behind. I return to the dreams I had when I was teenager: dreams of Black revolt. I dream of Black uprisings all over the country in every town and every city. Modern day Maroons in Milwaukee. A resurrected BLA in Brooklyn. The forms will vary. But it will be a constellation of organized Black resistance, coordinating alongside one another but never leading the masses. I hope that I have enough strength, skill, and courage to fight alongside the Black masses with even more ferocity than last time. I hope that I find comrades who are ready to fight alongside me, even and especially when it becomes dangerous.

The fascist counter-revolution is on the rise with the attacks on our trans siblings, bodily autonomy, and “Critical race theory” in schools. It feels harder and harder to keep the memory of our Black revolt alive. I talk to my brother about it sometimes. He seems like he is preparing for the next moment of revolt as well. I talk to my friends, comrades, and lovers about all of this. Sometimes that summer feels like it was a dream. I’m not spiritual, but during those few days in May, I felt ancestors laughing at the revenge that Black people were getting on our oppressors, our jailers, and our exploiters. I only wish for that moment again.

How To Deal With Cost Of Living Hike Your Local Black Queers (2022)

Several copies of this 28 page A5 zine were packaged in bubble bags and dropped off anonymously at various social centres in London, England in the Summer of 2022, adorned with a Circle A graphic over the backdrop of defaced British Currency.

THE COST OF LIVING IS RISING THE GOVERNMENT IS FUCKING US OVER YET AGAIN NO SURPRISE

People are in outrage. Gas prices are soaring in British households. Councils are upping their tax bills. National Insurance [*Ed. An additional income tax, spun as being used to pay for Welfare for workers*] is increasing. Interest rates are doubling. Inflation is at its highest rate in 30 years. The price of consumer goods is experiencing a surge. Altogether are going to be spending much much much more on basic necessities. But don't worry, the chancellor (*now Prime Minister*) Rishi Sunak plans to alleviate it all with a "generous" £200 gift. Oh, did I say gift, I meant compulsory loan.

The government wants to dress up the Hike in prices as unavoidable due to the financial cost of the pandemic, when, in reality, it would rather squeeze every last bit of our already crumbled stability. Meanwhile, companies like Shell and BP continue to make disgustingly large profits without paying any tax on their North Sea operations.

We all live inside a stinking carcass, which swallows up all living things in order to power its phoney movement.

The state will never be on our side: it's just a board of gluttonous fools that seek delight in moving the dial further into the pit of austerity. We cannot rely on them. Not now, not ever. They are the ones that rely on us to power their oppressive machine. How do you stop the machine? You break its machinery through direct action. This is anything that attacks the vulnerability of a system, small or large scale.

Right now, with people already unable to pay rent, get basic food or afford travel, we thought it necessary to share some ideas on how to live a more frugal lifestyle. Whilst writing this, we do also want to acknowledge that certain things we have included can be more difficult for people such as those with an unstable immigration status, those that are differently-abled, those that have previous convictions or those that already have a “suspicious” skin-tone. Be confident, be careful, but also, take things at your own risk.

RENT’S TOO HIGH? SQUAT THE LOT

Squatting is the act of occupying empty buildings and land which removes the need to pay rent, meaning that you can have a home for absolutely no cost. Sounds like a dream, right?

The UK currently holds over 600,000 unused buildings, a testament to the waste that spills from this wicked system. These buildings can usually be accessed through open windows, easily penetrable roof hatches or by a simple crowbar to the door, among a multitude of other creative ways. Be Careful though as criminal damage is a punishable offence.

The law in the UK states that trespass is currently a civil matter, meaning that the property owner must take you to court to get you out which can be a long and expensive process, but only on commercial buildings. Squatting a residential building is a criminal matter. There are loopholes to this such as occupying a building for protest, but if you’re looking for a more stable building (although you still likely will have to move around a lot) then commercial properties such as pubs, warehouses, banks, shops etc. are a safer option.

If you’re interested in getting involved or learning more, get in contact with ASS (Advisory Service for Squatters), based in Freedom Bookshop in Whitechapel, London but who also have a phone number and email on their website; you can also pick up a copy of the Squatters Handbook from here.

Be aware that the squat community can be a very white space, but there is an all-black squat in London and BPOC squatters around so ask about them. Also, if you have certain accessibility needs, squatting can be difficult, but this all depends on how the building is set up.

There are so many great empty buildings out there, so fuck off your landlords, grab a crowbar and unsettle private property owners!

THE ART OF STEALING

You can steal most things. A lot of it is about confidence. I have a friend who walked out of a store once with a gigantic octopus plush toy that she didn't pay for, and no one said a thing. If you act like what you're doing is normal, then you can usually avoid getting caught. Whilst saying this, there are obviously systems in place which mean that certain people are already automatically suspicious i.e if you have dark skin, so it's important to be aware of this and take things at your own risk. However, as a Black person with many darker-skinned friends, it has been a very successful method for us.

So, what's the method? I'm personally a fan of the "stealing bag" approach. This means getting a large bag (bag for life type thing), putting something in it to fill it out a little - like a t-shirt - and then using that bag to put items in whilst you're in a shop. The more nonchalant you are, quickly sliding things in without breaking face, the less attention you draw, but to be honest, I am sometimes bait as fuck and it still works. After you've filled your shopping bag (maybe arrange the t-shirt so it sits on top of your items if you're feeling nervous), then you can exit the shop. Usually if I'm doing this, I'll pay for a couple cheap items like some bread and bananas which makes you look less suspicious.

You can also just use your pockets if you have large ones or, if you're feeling more confident, just walk straight out with items in hand (hidden in plain sight).

Stealing is great, it can allow you to get food, toiletries, wavey garms and much much more for virtually no cost. Although do be aware of items with security tags. They will often be quite obvious, however, stores like Decathlon are stocking up with RFID tags which are hidden in products and track the movement of the product around the store. This can make things trickier, but the main thing is to act like you should be there. One of my mates got stopped with an RFID tag in their bag and they managed to get away with it by saying that they had bought it ages ago. You can also try to rip tags out of things (carry some scissors with ya).

Finally, while cameras in the store can be daunting, a lot of the time security aren't looking at every single camera so don't let this deter you, they're just trying to do up a panopticon vibe.

BUNKING TRAVEL*

**We've just provided a small explanation of this, for more info check out @ftbefares on Telegram (t.me/ftbefares1312)*

This is usually more possible with automated travel such as taking the tube or bus in London, or national rail, but you can try it in other environments. If you're taking the tube, simply run behind someone who's tapping their card in or shove your way through the barriers (it's not as difficult as you may think). London has made it harder to bunk buses since a lot of buses stopped opening the doors at the back, but you can try and get in if there's a crowd of people.

Likely the worst thing that will happen is they won't let you on the bus. Bunking national rail can be successful a lot of the time as well, as long as there's no ticket inspectors on the train. Everything is a risk but a lot of the time it can pay off. Beware of the British Transport Police though, who can sometimes be hiding undercover. Check out "ftbefares" for more.

FUMBLING WITH ELECTRIC METERS

Word on the street is that if you put a magnet to an electric meter, it will reduce the amount of energy usage on your electric meter. I looked into it and found some very detailed instructions on a website. Find them below. However, do be careful as there is a risk of getting done for illegal abstraction.

"You can save money if you can slow down the spinning of digital electric meters (such as smart meters and old electromechanical ones) with a neodymium magnet. The faster the meter spins, the higher your energy usage will be displayed on your bill, so slowing it down for a few seconds here and there might reduce the total amount you pay. This is because the smart meter will adjust its speed to match your average daily usage.

Here's how to do it:

- 1) Locate the magnet which controls the switching of the meter from "read" mode to "standby" mode. It might be hidden behind a panel, so check all sides and the top of the meter. Also, remember that sometimes meters are insulated from the outside world by metal housings, so even if you located the right switch it might not work.
- 2) Attach the magnet to the outside of the meter, as close as possible to this switch (you can use tape or even sellotape if you like your gadgets to be permanent)

WORKS

3) Now every time you want to slow it down, just wave this magnet near the meter and wait till the 7-segments display starts blinking; now you know that the current speed is 0.0 and the meter is in “standby” mode.

4) Wave again after a few seconds to turn back into “read” mode because the power company might start detecting malfunctions. If you do it too often - the power company will detect speed changes and will send someone to investigate what’s on there. It happens more quickly with old electromechanical meters (which are also more reliable when attacked by EMP).

5) Wave again to slow it down, etc. Repeat this five times, and you will get 1W usage on your bill instead of 2-3 like in the example above. If you wave the magnet three more times (total of seven) before the power company gets suspicious, you’ll get 3 W instead of 7.

The bigger the magnet is - the better for slowing meter; in most cases, even a very big one won’t be visible from the inside of your home unless your electric meter is located near where people can see it from outside through the window or similar opening. Also note that if your meter spins too fast, users might get suspicious because nothing in their home uses so much energy.”

NOTES TO END

As has been said, be careful, but have fun!

Try and build up networks of solidarity with people that live close to you or who you feel comfortable with so that you can notify each other if you get in trouble or update each other when gas providers, landlords, bailiffs etc. are snooping around your local area.

Also, be mindful that this is not a complete list. Have further chats with people you trust or do your own searching to discover new ways of getting your basic needs met whilst breaking the system intent on upping our bills and emptying our pockets.

xxx

Black Armed Joy

Anon
(2022)

This essay is dedicated to the memory of our revolutionary elder, theorist, and warrior Russell Maroon Shoatz.

This essay was inspired partially by one of our comrades while we were discussing the failures of non-violence as a tactic and philosophy. She said something along the lines of “I was raised by radicals from the 1960s and 1970s. If you were a Panther and you got caught, you were doing something wrong.” The zine is a product of a variety of conversations among Black anarchists in the post-George Floyd rebellion although many of these strands of thought have existed prior to this moment. We have three questions we hope to address in this zine.

What would an insurrectionary anarchist position thoroughly rooted in black radicalism and black revolt mean? How does the current white insurrectionary anarchist milieu fail? How can Black revolutionaries extend the insurrection?

What is Insurrectionary Anarchy?

To those who are unfamiliar, “anarchism” does not mean “chaos” nor does “insurrection” mean “mindless destruction.” Anarchism is the concept of social self-rule etymologically translating from “anarkhos” in Greek meaning “no rulers.” Therefore, In the words of Elder Lorenzo Komboa Ervin, “Anarchists are social revolutionaries, who seek a stateless, classless, voluntary, cooperative federation of decentralized communes-based upon social ownership, individual liberty and autonomous self-management of social and economic life.” When we discuss insurrectionary anarchism, we are discussing a tendency within the anarchist movement that focuses on insurrection as the primary revolutionary practice. Insurrection meaning, the social phenomena of unmitigated rebellion; the forceful redistribution of private property, land, and justice by the unsettled masses. The concept of attack and constant conflictuality with hierarchical forces is central to insurrectionary anarchism. Insurrectionary anarchists do not believe that we can simply “dual power” or “vote” our way to freedom. The institutions which currently uphold racial capitalism and all other forces of domination must be smashed. There can be no revolution without revolutionaries who must be engaged

in taking militant actions against the State and Capital. Finally, insurrectionary anarchists value the self activity of the masses as important. While not neglecting organization, insurrectionary anarchists understand that insurrections as a revolutionary phenomenon are social, not military. The self activity of the exploited and the oppressed drives revolution, not the actions of Leninist parties or so-called revolutionary unions. Insurrectionists emphasize the informal nature of revolution and organization. The revolution to destroy this world happens from the bottom up and includes all or does not occur at all. We define the terms of insurrectionary anarchism here before we launch into our critique to clarify for readers who are unfamiliar and to avoid any confusion.

Towards a Black Insurrectionist Anarchy

It is our duty to fight for our freedom.

It is our duty to win.

We must love each other and support each other.

We have nothing to lose but our chains.

Assata Shakur

The Critical Moment

It is imperative that we develop a Black insurrectionary anarchist position. The history of Black struggle in this country is a history of revolt by any means necessary. It is a history of constant attack by the Black masses against the capitalist and colonial powers which enslaved Black people. 2020 reminded many of us of this history and legacy. Despite this, many Black liberals hope to erase the George Floyd rebellion from our memories. Many on the Black “Left” hope to do the same so they can suck us into the same 50 year old organizations that have failed to produce anything other than symbolic protests and useless conferences.

Our History

Going even further, many on the more reformist and authoritarian ends of the Black Left wish to reduce the history of Black people and Black radicals down to simply formal organization. Despite lifting up figures such as Assata, they label any sort of Black rebellious activity as “too fast” or “not ready” or complain about the ultra-left “ruining” their plans for revolution despite the rebellious actions of Black youth in the summer of 2020. They do not want black people to study the Black Liberation Army’s tactics. They wish to erase Kuwasi Balagoon and his rebellious ways. They wish to erase how Assata Shakur was liberated. They wish to erase the general strike of the Slaves. They wish to ignore the Maroons. They just want us to participate in their reformist campaigns to “Defund the Police” or “Community Control of the Police.” The Black insurrectionary must reject these positions.

The Coming Insurrection

We seek unmediated and uncompromising conflict with State and Capital. It is abundantly clear that last summer, the Black masses proved they were uninterested in “Defund” or “Community Control” instead opting to fight cops and loot businesses. We reject non-violence and compromise. In the words of Elder George Jackson, “We must accept the eventuality of bringing the U.S.A. to its knees; accept the closing off of critical sections of the city with barbed wire, armored pig carriers criss-crossing streets, soldiers everywhere, tommy guns pointed at stomach level, smoke curling black against the daylight sky, the smell of cordite, house-to-house searches, doors being kicked in, the commonness of death.” We all saw the Third Precinct in Minneapolis burnt to ashes. We reject “tactical” arrest. We reject symbolic protests and marches that continually lead to more violence from the police with nothing in return. We share a fundamental belief that the Black insurrectionist should seek to dismantle all oppressive systems even within the so-called “radical” organizations and scenes. Living anarchy means living by principle. Living by principle means we dismantle systems (as best we can) in this world at this moment.

The Importance of the Attack

Although there have been some formations such as Salish Sea Black Autonomists which have linked Black radicalism and insurrectionary anarchy, we feel that it is continually important to point to how attack and conflictuality are central to any serious Black anarchist politics concerned with revolutionary change. With the resurgence of interest in Black anarchic forms of radicalism with the works of William C Anderson, Zoe Samudzi, the Anarkatas, and Lorenzo Kom’boa Ervin, we think it is important that Black anarchists do not fall into the trap of believing that only prefiguration will be enough for revolution. We must physically attack the white power structure by any means necessary. Simply building Black owned co-ops is not enough. While we believe the work of the people in Cooperation Jackson is important, it is insufficient to simply build co-ops to “opt-out” of capitalism when the reality is that the State could easily repress these “communes” through laws or through just sheer force. There is no way out of this capital nightmare, but through relentless attack, struggle, experience, and introspection.

On so-called “Mutual Aid”

We find that the resurgence of “mutual aid” as practice is important for us to criticize. A lot of “mutual aid” work being done is in reality just redistributive work with a radical label. While we are not opposed to this type of work on principle as it helps build relationships between revolutionaries, the issue is that real mutual aid as a concept is more present in black queer communities doing GoFundMes for one another than in radical organizations doing what amounts to leftist branded

charity. We posit, if the act of mutual aid does not contribute to the development of a revolutionary subsistence economy, then it is not “mutual aid” that is inclusive of society and must be criticized. Unfortunately, most “mutual aid” that happens now is not mutual in nature. Further than that, it does not confront power. We believe the the mutuality of mutual aid is critical as well as an insurrectionary element. For instance, many on the Left have dismissed the mass looting that happened in 2020 as the actions of criminals or as “not political” while in fact, Black people liberating resources and commodities from corporations is far more revolutionary than much of the “organizing” done by leftist or abolitionist formations in this kountry. Expropriation from the capitalists will create the basis for our subsistence economy. We must think of the revolutionary bravery and solidarity these acts inspired as we look toward militant property, land reclamations, and capital expropriations in the future. We should look more toward these types of examples of mutual aid as opposed to a more charity-NGO driven model. Our critique of mutual aid is similar to our critique of “dual power” or the “solidarity economy.” Alone, mutual aid is not enough to confront and destroy capital. We cannot simply “opt-out” of capitalism. We must become ungovernable. The Black Communes must arise out of the Black insurrection as we learn from our elder Lorenzo Kom’boa Ervin.

Against White Insurrection

We dedicate this section to the memory of Antonio Mays Jr who was murdered by a white leftist at the so-called CHAZ. We also dedicate this section to Michael Reinhoel, Eric G. King, and David Gilbert. We encourage white revolutionaries in amerika to follow your revolutionary examples. If there is to be a revolution realized there must be less talk, more action.

From our vantage point, the insurrectionary anarchist milieus in the United States are mostly white in composition and analysis. Their racial analysis does not really recognize the insurrectionary capabilities of the Black masses, and their attempts to are often fetishizing. Most insurrectionary anarchist analysis and theory focuses upon Europe as the primary example of revolt. When the insurrectionary milieus such as the white boys at Ill Will do focus on Black revolt, they downplay the racial dynamics of the riots by labeling everything as “multi-racial.” Without a proper understanding of the experience of being Black, there can be no understanding of how to nurture the Black revolt beyond its infant stages. Needless to say, this experience and leadership must be led by those living between the margins of racial capitalism; women, trans-folk, lesbian, gay, and other sexually and racially oppressed groups. Beyond that, we understand the youthful character of the insurrection as those young-people living in our cities have the most to gain from the beginning stages of our revolution. While the character of the 2020 George Floyd rebellion was not limited to just Black people participating, the white

insurrectionists seeking to universalize the black revolt are the “All Lives Matter” types of the anarchist movement.

We risk being accused of perpetuating the “white outside agitator” myth by writing this essay but the reality is that whiteness and anti-Blackness continues even during a riot and after it. It is anti-materialist to ignore these realities by suggesting that once we all get into street, all of our actions are the same in the eyes of the State. These white insurrectionists fail to grasp how their own whiteness continues to exist within and beyond the riot, instead opting to believe that race is magically transcended when they smash a window. White insurrectionists fail to engage with the long histories of Black insurrectionary history in this kountry by trying to import strategies and tactics from other revolts here into the United States... please shut the fuck up about France. This is not to say there are not elements of struggle in places like Palestine and Rojava or Central & South amerikan struggles against the state and police. Our oppression is similar in form and structure and so, our methods of resistance will also be similar. Indeed, we believe white insurrectionists have very little to teach us about our struggle. For instance, the fear and critique around guns at demonstrations that emerged last summer from a number of “anarchist” publications and report-backs speaks to this. Armed struggle has always been a part of Black insurrectionary activity. Further, it makes absolutely no sense to struggle against state and fascist violence using lesser means of violence compared to their own.

Let us remember, amerika has the largest amount of civilian arms available to public citizens in the “developed” world. In fact, armed struggle is a core part of this kountry’s founding documents and cultural development. We plan on using every element of amerika’s creation to destroy it. Why is it not asked why George Washington, Lincoln, even Stalin, Mao, and white anarchists across the world utilize(d) armed struggle? There are no changes to power or domination, but with force. Intuitively, we are well aware of the existence and “doomsday preparation” of far-right militia and fascist cells that are intent on furthering our extinction. We are also aware of the infiltration of these accelerationist fascists into our so-called federal, state, and local law enforcement agencies and the national military. Therefore, we will wage war against white supremacy on all fronts. The white left may believe that either we have a death wish or that our lives are dispensable and we are intent on proving otherwise.

The white anarchists handwringing about “symmetrical warfare” or “horizontal violence” reflects a, perhaps willful, misunderstanding of history and power in this kountry. This kountry has already been in a civil war, the remnants of which form the foundations of the current cultural war. The 2020 rebellions resurfaced white

anarchists historic apprehension toward Black insurrectionary methods, namely guns at protests/direct actions. We recommend they take a moment to reflect on the reality that, in the United States, Black people have been and will continue to be forced to face down white people who continue to act as proxies of the State. We intend to do as our ancestors did and use any means available to fight these people regardless of some white anarchists' fear of guns. Idris Robinson speaks directly to this white fear in his open letter to Michal Reinoehl (shot and killed a fascist in Portland):

“What the double-standard with regards to your situation reveals is how violence in America will always necessarily have a profoundly racial dimension. And it is precisely this—the terrifying core of racialized violence—that they are trying to repress when they lie to both themselves and others when they say that their issue with what you did is a question of strategy or tactics. I mean, give me a break: in a country that is literally saturated in violence, from blind mass shooters to murderous police, no one can honestly claim that the few shots that you let off could in some way be misconstrued as an escalation. There is simply no way to avoid the spiral of violence that began at the very moment when the first wooden ships reached the shores of the Atlantic.”

The white left in the current era must become willing to not only come to terms with the fact that some of their own family members, so-called friends, and idols will have to be put down by revolutionary violence if they act as violent state proxies, fascists, or racists. Those that do not understand our struggle may see this position as “adventurism,” but it is only common sense to mitigate racialised violence with a united front of counter-violence that transcends the psychological and social racial boundaries of settler-colonialism at subsequent stages of the armed conflict. In other words, we seek to generalise the armed conflict amongst the people on the north american peoples united against the state, all states until the hegemonic machinery and points of production for ruling class consumerism are reduced to ashes.

Greg Jackson critiques the white left in his “Authoritarian Leftists: Kill the Cop in Your Head” in the world of anti-blackness, whiteness is law and order and white people are deputized (made into cops) by the state meaning their actions are a result of the “natural way of things.” White led communes and autonomous zones replicate the state's actions on a smaller scale. This is what Jackson alludes to in his essay real white “comrades” know the importance of Black autonomy is killing the cop in your head. Thus, We will fight against white led “autonomous zones” as they replicate the state and antiblackness as shown in 2020 in the aftermath of George Floyd rebellion, when in the autonomous zone named CHAZ two black boys

ended up shot and one ended up dead. This is not insurrection at all. Insurrections require deep networks of care and love or they will die out before they can develop into a revolutionary movement. These white led anti-black autonomous zones must be attacked with the same ferocity that we attack the cops and the white militias. It goes without saying that white leftists who kill black people and reimpose white supremacy onto supposedly liberated spaces are our enemies.

Supposed black anarchists or leftists who cover for the White left's violent and anti-black tendencies must be considered enemies as well. Tokenism exists within anarchist spaces. We are tired of yt people claiming that their groups are multi-racial and unproblematic because they have the one token black anarchist. It is strange that anarchists and the Left in a broader sense seem to understand tokenism less well than liberals though this speaks to the failure of any sort of yt anarchist political orientation towards race. It is clear that anarchism exists as a scene rather than a revolutionary movement when there are multiple majority white "anarchist" projects in majority black or POC cities. Furthermore, publishing a black anarchist book or having one black anarchist in a project does not mean your anarchist project is not colonial. If you are a black anarchist covering for white anarchist nonsense, you should stop. We don't care if these people are your "friends." If they reimpose white supremacy on black people even as "anarchists," they are enemies.

The white left, for the first time in human history, must collectively prioritize the rest of the world's wellbeing in mind over their own cultural racism and privilege. It is the job of all other oppressed affinity groups across the kountry to ensure that they have no choice but to act in our interests. We are not our elders. We do not have the time or patience to wait for the white left to garner the moral capacity to become true revolutionaries while we are slaughtered like dogs in the street. Either you will aid the revolution as comrades or we will attack you as enemies until you do.

So, What Should Be Done?

We must begin to realize that only the community will effectively deal with the matter. Not the racist capitalist system, with its repressive police, courts, and prisons. Only we have the psychology and understanding to deal with it; now we must develop the will. No one else cares. – Lorenzo Kom'boa Ervin

We believe in evolutionary and revolutionary change. Evolutionary change means prefiguring ourselves and immediate comrades towards organizational changes we can make on a daily basis towards our end goal of revolutionary abolition of the state. Our evolutionary changes opens the door to an insurrectional opening

once the catalyzing event occurs. Revolutionary change is the accumulation of actions by the whole of the people that result in a mass movement with the goal of aiming of all humanity's resources towards the abolition of the state, capitalism, authority, and domination, simultaneously. It involves the whole of humanity in constant conflictuality with forces of oppression on an interpersonal, community, national, and international level. The insurrection is a social event which means it has social implications that span international borders. Thus, as the shackles of empire and militarism are attacked and destroyed in this nation-state, it should be made it all the more clear in other nation-states how to attack and destroy the nation-state. If amerika falls, so too does the manager of international capitalism and colonial oppression.

The Black Insurrectionary position seeks to replicate the destruction of "3rd Precinct" everyday and the takeover of an "Attica" every hour, until the amerikan project is deceased and the land has been reclaimed from those who it was stolen from. In other words, it seeks endless rebellion and uncompromising counter-violence to deconstruct our violent world into the peaceful one from which it came. Since the state and fascists will not hesitate to use all weapons at their disposal to achieve its aims, so will we to achieve the complete abolition of amerika as a nation-state in the social, economic, political, and cultural sense.

In order to prevent the isolation of Black & Indigenous revolutionaries and subsequent concentration of repression by the repressive state and fascist populists on our communities, the movement will necessitate the courageous actions of revolutionaries of every color, creed, and age but especially, white revolutionaries. We say this because of your historic failure to act. We refer to the words of Black Liberation Army's "Open Letter To The White Left In The U.S.,"

"It should come as no surprise then, that the White-left in modern western nations is inhibited by their own urge for bourgeois legitimacy, by their own cultural racism, and by the very process of western, working class cooptation. The sum of these parts add up to the revolutionary bankruptcy of the traditional White left in the modern capitalist nations."

We believe that for any actions taken by white anarchists, socialists, communists, and whatever else you all call yourselves to be truly "revolutionary," not only must they attack the white power structure at the pressure points of capital in solidarity with other assisting forces, but they must attack the white power structure at home. This means creating the psychological break with whiteness and privilege required for establishing new relations amongst human beings and nature itself. In other words, to preserve the lives of countless of oppressed Black and Brown

folks across the world, you all will have to betray your white privilege to become a white infiltrator with intentions of eliminating your former family, friends, and compatriots who refuse change. Third World peoples do not have the time to wait for the “difficult conversations” you had during summer 2020 while now at the beginning of 2022 we have endured numerous show trials since the 2020 uprising illustrating the amerikkkan justice system’s desire to avoid further rebellions by the masses by convicting infamous murderers like Chauvin and Potter while the rest of the pigs get away with murder and assault everyday. This means white revolutionaries organizing their own anti-fascist teams to combat the state and fascist racism beyond just staging counter-demos. In the example of Michael Reinhoel, shoot to kill.

We do not believe in statist solutions. We do not support efforts to “seize” state power, either. Each of our methods is means towards an ends of abolishing the state. We prefer methods of decentralized organizations based on common affinities. Once they are formed we should grow these networks among local groups to national and international networks of aboveground and underground self-organized resistance. We prefer making decisions in a series of votes and consensus gaining meant to garner understanding and establishing solidarity among comrades in our network and in our communities. We encourage exchanging skills, arts, and trades and exploring new ones to eventually teach to others as we create new structures for employment and self-organization within our communities. We will have to develop our own autonomous trade unions and apprenticeships to challenge the state and white racism.

We currently observe what can be considered low-intensity warfare among the young people in our communities. We must initiate the creation of forums and safe spaces to discuss community-led interventions to deter, redirect, and reduce the violent and criminal activity in our community at which point the hatred, despair, and desolation that plagues our community will be converted into revolutionary armed joy against the state and capitalism.

We observe that we must cultivate a revolutionary culture to provide a counter-hegemony to the dominant themes of intracommunal violence and personal robbery offered by reactionary rappers Lil Durk, King Von, Pooh Shiesty, Dolph, Nudy, other celebrities in their music, and even the sports celebrities. These celebrities have been given amenities and been propped up by the white power structure for a reason. This does not mean we cannot mourn them or enjoy their arts and talents but that we should understand their purpose and function. There is a reason that rap went from an art form that was inherently conflictual, underground, and counter-cultural to one that has been coopted and mass-produced for profits and

for white people. A reactionary life of drugs, money, and fame may be appetizing to some but we must somehow invent ways to make the coming insurrection more appealing to black youth. We can build new futures based on our own dreams and communities. We must develop a new sense of care for one another and develop solutions to the violence by any means necessary. Let it be known, we can attack the state and white supremacy and build our community simultaneously. “Black-on-Black,” is a white invention as is “crime” itself. Abolish the kkkriminal justice system. Free all political prisoners. Free Larry Hoover. Free Tay-K. Free Palestine.

A failure to act is an implicit approval of state-sanctioned genocide. For example, as of December 2021, Black people comprise 29.6% of Chicago’s population but we account for over 80% of all homicides. So-called “Hispanics” comprise 28.8% of the city and just 13% of all homicides. Whites comprise 50.0% of the city and just 3.8% of all homicides. We observe that the vast amount of mental health and educational resources, healthy food options and after-school opportunities lie in the white communities. These resources must be seized and reproduced in all underserved communities over the course of the insurrection to benefit all. Otherwise, they must be destroyed to benefit none. Revolutionary violence must be spread to the affluent areas in the suburbs to create a new field of conflict for the state. It must be understood that the city, county, and state police, and by extension, the army are what holds this violent arrangement in place, by force and so, they must be destroyed by force. We must build networks of protection and movement from within our communities and without.

History tells us to be wary of the inactive white left. We believe that inaction is complicity with white supremacy. In fact, we believe it to be intentional, willful inaction due to the characterization of collective movements for liberation by white people since we were brought here as slaves. Throughout our time on this continent, a status quo with Black people as victims of racialised violence via slave owners and later police has been quite acceptable. We understand that we are still slaves in this system and you understand this as well. A failure by the white left to organize a counter-violence to white supremacy in coalition with us will result in the Black people left with no other choice but to move on the white community with force. If nothing, we will prove that we are all humans that can live and die by violence all the same and at the same rates. In the words of Elder George Jackson, “Our pledge is to arms, our enemies are institutions and anyone with vested interests in them, even if that interest is only a wage. If revolution means civil war — we accept, and the sooner begun the sooner done.” That is our pledge, in the event that a revolutionary movement against the ruling-class is made impossible by the white masses across the kountry.

Black youth matriculating through the amerikan university system must accept the university as a site of white supremacist machinery and work to bring its operations to a halt. We must take whatever information is useful from the universities back to our communities to educate, organize, and propagandize those both younger and older than us. The university, much like the state itself, only serves the further development of the neo-colonial class of Blacks and the cooptation of movements led from the bottom-up. The university in amerika whether “historically black” or otherwise is the pit of “crisis management” that will never find actual solutions for the problems it creates. It is a cesspool of student loan debt and worker exploitation. We must leave bourgeois affiliations and corporate opportunities behind at the universities in preparation for the coming insurrection.

The only alternative for the masses to revolution is death. The protracted genocide of the oppressed masses are reacting to COVID-19’s political, social, and economic crisis and the slow collapse of this system. The time for change is now.

The current insurrectionary tendencies in the United States tend to lack any sort of genuine politics which are anti-oppressive or move from the Margins as the Anarkatas say. They instead tend to be dominated by men who just want to fight. We do not believe there is revolt without care. This is completely erased by the “insurrectionary” tendencies who dismiss all collective care work and long term organizing which prioritizes building relationships as “liberalism.” We fail to understand how a serious insurrection will be sustained without deep networks of care and love let alone supplies and infrastructure.

We must begin to build dual-power. We want to be clear that dual power if it is built must be tied to the insurrection. Leftist cooperatives or projects that do not serve the spontaneous revolt of the black masses are simply vanity projects. We see this with how most “infrastructure” built by leftists was irrelevant to the George Floyd uprising. Dual Power, as defined in anarchic terms, is the strategies of building self-organized counter-institutions to combat the current decadent, capitalistic institutions. Emphasis on the combat part of that sentence. As we build our affinity groups we must come up with new alternatives to the current power structure to begin building. New systems of justice, fresh food gardens, community entertainment, community defense, etc. As institutions are destroyed, new consensus-based, horizontalized, self-managed structures will take their places. At the same time, we must begin armed squatting of our homes and community centers to defend ourselves from gentrification and forced displacements. It may end up being inevitable, but we will also need to find suitable places for communities in the event our homes are destroyed by the capitalists’ military bombs. If it happened to MOVE in 1985, it can and will

happen today. We must build solidarity networks and create anarchic solutions to the problems faced by those seeking refuge at the southern border. We must do this all at the same time and the revolutionary anarchist minority can start action in these areas immediately.

We should especially prepare for an escalation in repression and likewise in resistance should a general strike develop among the Black masses over the course of the next insurrection.

We must have support and love for our homies who are locked inside of the prison for making the ultimate sacrifices for the revolution. We must also devise clever ways of aiding in their liberation. The actions of building care networks (we don't use mutual aid as we feel that this term has mostly been co-opted) is an insurrectionary act if done in a way that does not mediate conflict with the State. Many of our comrades cannot risk arrest, injury or death because they are providers for others or they cannot participate on the streets because of disability. If insurrections are meant to be social and not military, why do most insurrectionist formations and theories seem to not include the most marginalized in our society? Everyone must take part in an insurrection, and that requires us to center the most marginal.

The Prospect of Revolutionary Violence

This section is dedicated to Sandra, Rekia, Breonna, Korryn, and many more we lost too soon. We love you. We fight in your memory.

I don't have any illusions. Words are or are not comprehensible according to their actual situation. We only give them space and credibility if they fall into our patterns and certainties. Defence mechanisms become automatic and prevent the very reception of the message. If that was not so the illuminists would have definitively changed the world two hundred years ago.

Alfredo Bonanno

Make no mistake — we intend to use every method at our disposal to create a new world. This means in a literal sense, changing ourselves, the world around us and the conditions of those changes by any means necessary. We understand the revolutionary potentiality of violence over the course of the insurrection and subsequent revolution and we also understand the reactionary propensity for violence in the current era of fascism, racial, sexual, and cultural oppression. We understand one of the tools historically at our disposal has been the utilization of arms in the struggle. It is important to note that this is not the only tool at our

disposal but an ongoing development and synthesis of current and past struggles. Indeed, both the life and blood of our current youth, elders, and ancestors has been spilled to provide the economic impetus for the current ruling-class corporatist arrangement and the sociological impetus for the pervasive racism, sexism, homophobia, and transphobia plaguing our current society. This system cares nothing about our lives, families, homies, or hopes and dreams which we intend to protect with arms as we attack each of capital's major productive points. These strategies will develop as future rebellions develop into longer insurrections, as society shifts into a condition favorable for the revolution that is fomenting amongst the masses of dispossessed peoples. We will unite, inspire, and protect our community and build bonds with autonomous armed revolutionary projects across the world. We desire the destruction of capital, policing, racial and sexual hierarchies, and all forms of sexual and cultural oppression. The insurrectionary movement of the near future will build upon the aforementioned networks of care developed through revolutionary reclamations of capital and property to create conditions favorable to the growth of a Black Commune. The only way to begin to protect these revolutionary projects while delivering blows to the state is by the understanding and proliferation of Armed Joy.

By "Armed Joy" we mean the self-organized armed struggle of the committed Black anarchist minority affecting and proliferating among the Black masses at-large to provide the gasoline fuel for the wildfire that will eminently burn the amerikan plantation in all its capitalistic splendor and initiate the long-awaited social revolution at the critical moment. By initiating this attack, we intend to give our children a fighting chance to survive on this planet regardless of the fears of white amerika in general and the almost non-existent white left in particular here in amerika. We understand from the fatalities in kenosha that the state will aid fascists that kill whites that stand against their occupation whether peaceful or otherwise. We encourage dedicated non-Black comrades to struggle against oppression in their own unique ways while genuinely learning from the struggle and leadership of Black comrades. We must find the best ways to resist together. However, we will not hesitate to use arms against those "allies" who willfully misinterpret our actions to justify state repression or whose reckless actions engender harm upon our communities. Due to the capitalists' greed and reckless oversight in placing copious amounts of drugs and guns in our community, our communities are already well armed and proficient in the use of arms as tools of destruction and self-hate. They will be made to see who the real enemies are. The weapons the capitalists created to destroy us will destroy them. The capitalists' international weapons manufacturers are also our enemies. There can be no peace until all the oppressive modes of production are destroyed. That is, our last gun will be stripped and destroyed when the last capitalist is dead and the methods of

reproduction for firearms are no longer necessary. Until then, no cop is innocent and no military officer will be spared our bullets. We urge the new klan-type militias to think twice before attacking our communities as well. We will not hesitate to defend ourselves. We argue that the violence that once made racial capitalism in general and amerikan fascism in particular the cultural and economic center of the world will destroy it and all it represents from the inside-out.

Conclusion

This document by no means speaks to the objective will of the black masses as a whole. It is simply a reflection by a few anarchist comrades in our an attempt to document insurrectionary anarchism and the path forward to insurrection as we see it. This document was a product of conversations and struggle. We welcome critique, study, and practice. The social revolution in the context of the United States will flow from the actions of the black masses. While anarchists and insurrectionaries must participate, we understand the black masses guide the course of history. We cannot emphasize enough that black anarchists and revolutionaries must take up the critical questions of revolutionary strategy in the coming years. We cannot allow white anarchists or Black vanguardists to dictate how we move. We hope to see this document generate discussion, organization, and further action within black anarchist circles. While many black anarchists are busy doing anarchy, we do feel that black anarchist thought needs more reflection and theorization in order to broaden the scope of what is possible. Forward ever towards black insurrection and the black commune!

Organising Under Military Dictatorship **Sudanese Anarchist Gathering & Perspektive Selbstverwaltung** *(2022)*

Tell us about Sudanese Anarchist Gathering (inso far this is possible without risking repression for you and others). What are your goals and what strategies do you use to achieve them? How are you organized? Do you have local groups in different cities or are you working together with other anarchist groups?

We are a group of a Sudanese youth which believes in the libertarian socialist anarchist idea. We formed our revolutionary group in the wave of the December revolution (2018), where we met during demonstrations and in universities. We came together in order to spread anarchist ideas and achieve anarchist progress on the ground throughout Sudan. This is done despite the danger the government authorities pose, as they will operate against any instigators or propagators of the anarchist idea. But despite this risk, we were determined to establish a group that would struggle against the government and its corrupt institutions, even if we face the risk of imprisonment for life or being killed by the fascist state. After the foundation of our group, we contacted individual anarchists in all states of Sudan and also communicated with a group of anarchists in northern Sudan. They are doing a great job spreading the idea of anarchism and organized the first anarchist student movement in Sudan at the University of Dongola which we, the Khartoum anarchists' group, support. Now we are working on the formation of a general and inclusive organizational body. Its' main purpose is to connect all groups and individuals who believe in anarchist ideas and who want to be a part of this movement.

What are your goals and what strategies do you follow to achieve these goals?

Our first and main goal is to bring down the fascist military regime, which poses a great danger to anyone who expresses their opinions freely, arrests anyone who appears to be affiliated with an anarchist group and which therefore is limiting our capacities to spread our ideas openly. Only the downfall of this fascist regime will open the door for us to pursue our other goals, because currently under this system we are classified as saboteurs, terrorists and as a danger to the entire country. Accordingly, our current main goal is the downfall of the fascist military regime.

We employ many strategies in this struggle that are based on existing tools of peaceful protest but we have also invented additional peaceful forms of action that have proven themselves to be effective.

How do you organize yourselves and your work? Do you have local groups in different cities and the countryside?

We organize ourselves and our decision-making mechanisms through forms of non-hierarchical direct democracy. For now, only two organized anarchist groups exist in Sudan: one group in the north of the country and our group, which is located in the capital city Khartoum.

It seems that you are focusing on universities. What is your future vision for working within the broader working classes in Sudan?

Yes, the universities are our hubs. But even in the capital city Khartoum it is tremendously difficult to organize anarchist student groups within the universities. This is because the state is using all its power to protect capital and to prevent the work of political student groups. Whenever such groups are discovered, all their activities are stopped and the university administration is asked to dismiss every student who is associated with the organization from the university. This is why we still operate underground as a hidden organization inside universities. Until we topple the regime, this will be necessary as we only can become a publicly known group, when the people themselves hold power.

Is there a strong division between the countryside and the big cities?

Yes, there is a great division between cities and the countryside, especially socio-economically. It is very clear that the accumulation of capital and labor in big cities like Khartoum happens at the expense of the countryside and rural areas. Communicating and interacting with the countryside is a challenge for us, but we are using the networks and connections of our comrades to reach a large scale of rural and non-urban areas.

We know women play an important role in the revolutionary movement in Sudan. How is this in your organization?

Yes, women are an integral and active part of our group. We pay attention to distribute roles and rights within the group as equally as possible, a practice that is part of our group's charter. We support the anarcho-feminist movement.

We have published the translation of a program for an anarchist student union. What was your response to the program?

We welcomed this step taken by the anarchists of north of Sudan, and we are working hard to reach all the universities of Sudan.

How do people react in conversations with you who do not share your anarchist ideas?

Discussing such issues with people of all walks, they are often in a state of great astonishment for our strength and determination to organize within universities. They consider it a brave position and many support the ideas as well as the efforts to spread them. Generally, it has been our experience that once you begin talking to people on the street, they are quite interested in anarchist ideas.

Are you as a group or as individuals working with the resistance committees? And what role do you play there and in the Sudanese revolution in general?

We are active within the resistance committees as individuals. We support strikes, rebellions and protests in the public discourse and on the ground as well.

What do you think are the biggest strengths and weaknesses of the resistance committees?

So far, we see no major defects, the resistance committees are very effective in organizing the collective struggle and resistance on a national scale. Additionally, they partially follow anarchist ideals by practicing non-hierarchical, direct-democracy and by organizing horizontally. In sum, this enables decision making on a grassroots level.

What is your opinion about the different charters of the Resistance Committees? Right now, there is a process of merging the charters to a common one. Do you participate in this process and what potential do you see in it?

We have reservations about some points in the charters, but they are being amended and the agreements are merged into a one final charter. We participate as individuals within the resistance committees and this merger process, which could have the potential to unite the different opinions within the committees.

We are following the Sudanese Revolution with great hope. Nonetheless, history shows a frightening number of possible counter-revolutionary dangers.

Are you afraid that, if the stakes get higher and the Sudanese uprising grows in international relevance, you will be subjects to counterrevolutionary interventions? Which forces form the greatest threat for the revolution at the moment?

Revolutions throughout human history have been crushed by those who are invested in totalitarian and military regimes. The Egyptian revolution (2011) is still fresh in our memory. Its trajectory had many mistakes and it bears important lessons we can learn from, just as from many other experiences globally. In our opinion, the Egyptian revolution failed because certain countries did not support the uprising. We seek to counteract such developments by organizing youth groups who, in various forms, are at the center of the revolution itself and will also be crucial in the continuation of its struggle, passing it on to more people and future generations. Ultimately, it's our mission to spread libertarian socialist ideas that pave the way for the desired radical change that uproots the current military regime.

Looking at Sudan, besides the Sudanese regime the governments of Russia, Saudi Arabia, Egypt, the Emirates, Turkey and Qatar all support the counter-revolution as they have vested interests in the previous and current regimes and support totalitarian military regimes generally.

And, for you're international allies, what is the best way to support you?

In regards to actions international comrades can take, we always welcome media pressure, protest rallies, and support for the revolutionary Sudanese communities that organize solidarity protests and criticize foreign interventions in Sudan's internal affairs by countries supporting the oppressive military rule.

We need international solidarity, pressure your governments! But also material support as well as knowledge transfer and media skills are much needed.

Black Anarchist Reflections, From Bash Back! and Beyond **Anon** **(2023)**

We are writing this document as black anarchist attendees of Bash Back! who are trying to grapple with some of the broader issues/organizational questions within the black anarchist milieu and how those convos came up during the weekend for us and our homies. While we come from a variety of political backgrounds, we share a committed desire to insurrection and revolt for black autonomy. It was great to meet one another and kick it over the weekend. We got to hash out the answers to some questions. There was a lot of necessary conflict at Bash Back!. While reportbacks are fun, though often misleading, our aim in this document is to talk in a broader, abstract way about some of the questions and dynamics that occurred for black participants.

In a more positive spirit, the self-organization of black anarchists was happening over the course of the weekend. Examples include but are not limited to the Blacktivities cookout Friday night, formal and less-than-formal self defense demonstrations (wink wink), long convos at house parties and spontaneous meetups and conversations in parks. It's clear we are building a tendency parallel (but not in reaction) to the white anarchist milieu.

BIPOC and the Politics of Resentment

It's important to contrast activities like the black anarchist cook out and other informal gatherings with what seemed to be more prevailing attitudes, namely the BIPOC caucus on Saturday.

The reason to contrast these dynamics is due to the fact that it seems that within Black anarchist circles, there is not a clear answer or consensus on how we orient towards nonblack POC and white radicals. It often feels that BIPOC spaces only exist as a place for people to vent about white anarchist racism even though these concerns and frustrations are valid.

We also feel that "BIPOC organizing" or even the idea of POC solidarity is a dead end for Black radicals. We don't think any POC group has more inherent solidarity with the black struggle and BIPOC organizing runs into the same issues that much of black-white organizing does.

An observation was made about the desire of black radicals to even purposefully remain in BIPOC and all-white spaces behind what might be a misguided craving for perceived uniqueness, inexperience with all-black spaces, and an assumption of power that they think accompanies being the only black person in a room.[1] These appetites, while not at all reducible to singular reasoning, can stem from a larger alienation that has yet to be exorcized. The baggage of the dominant social order is heavy. Having to not only analyze and dispel that baggage while bolstering a new sense of being aligned with a radical politic can venture into the traumatic. Complaining about white people is seen as a comforting political language but retreating into that comfort gets misconstrued as a significant, unifying political identity among black people. Hating white folks is not a meaningful politic. It's unsubstantial and very surface level, if not lazy.

One of the main weaknesses of such a politics of resentment can be located in an unfulfilled desire for a place within dominant power structures rather than a precise critique and push for its diffusion and ultimate destruction. What's often confused for liberation, especially within black radical politics culled from authoritarian inspirations, is no more than the age-old reform of power, hierarchy, and authority. Whether or not total freedom even enters the picture is up for debate.

A refreshing difference about the Black anarchist cookout was that no one even brought up white people. There's enough issues internal to Black anarchism and the broader Black liberation struggle that need to be grappled with. Limiting our ideas and actions to addressing white people is fruitless. It's not expansive and it centers the actions of a group that historically and currently oppresses us. For many of us who talked over the weekend, developing autonomous projects as Black people is far more interesting.

Abolitionists, Liberals, Authoritarians, and Black People Who Simply Aren't Anarchists

It's clear that autonomy and freedom mean different things to different people. To be frank, a lot of self-described Black anarchists just simply aren't anarchists. In fact, they tend to be liberals or even authoritarians who exist in the anarchist social spaces out of convenience or as tokens. It's also clear that as much as Black radicals in an anarchist spaces may share a critique of whiteness, we may not share anything other than that.

Luckily, on this front, there have been developments. A good example of this was the debate during the Maroon workshop that happened over the weekend. The two presenters (black and indigenous, respectively) were pushing a political position that many in the crowd found to be authoritarian and vanguardist and

numerous Black anarchists criticized their hierarchical approaches. Comrades remarked that in the past, they'd seen Black people circle up in radical spaces despite political differences almost out of a scarcity mentality. Or going even further, Black authoritarian or liberal perspectives would go unchallenged because the speaker is Black in a mostly non-Black space.

Simultaneously, there were Black participants in the Maroon workshop who were upset about the conflict and ridicule directed at the presentation. They made comments about how we're "all on the same side" and other liberal platitudes such as "it's problematic to laugh during a presentation" that diminishes very real political differences between black people. This is just dishonest. To suggest that Black anarchists should have common cause with Black liberals and authoritarians is real goofy. However, an important development nowadays is that Black liberals and authoritarians can get challenged by people that look like them and be forced to actually defend their ideas.

As an increasingly prevailing form of liberal politics, abolitionism has so much territory in black radicalism that people assert false similarities between abolition and anarchy, and are too generous with what it means to be an abolitionist without any coherent critiques of the state and capital, while also lacking any real self-developed principles and action. Abolitionism is a political language of comfort, is devoid of the visceral nature of attack contained within anarchism, and is the perfect home for radlibs. The language of abolition has become so dominant in radical lexicons that it has warped people's understanding of material reality, where "informed consent," "restorative justice," and "communities" obscure our understandings of the ranges of repair, which frequently includes confrontation, expulsion and violence.

Black Anarchist Projectuality

The anarchist subculture is mostly white. This has been true for decades. Though there's some argument that it has improved in the last 5 years due to Black anarchists building consistent long term projects, whiteness remains common and alienating for most Black folks involved in anarchist spaces. Though it's uncomfortable, as we mentioned earlier, there were a variety of conversations and vibes over the course of the weekend that indicated that many Black anarchists are happy, or at least content, to remain within the mostly white anarchist space. One of our comrades back home who didn't attend remarked that he felt anarchist convergences are often disappointing because very often the Black people who attend them don't really fuck with Black people. Anarchism, unfortunately, can exist as a subculture for Black people who are uncomfortable being around other Black folks, which opens up the space for tokenism.

The lack of imagination for something better than the current white anarchist subculture is uninspired at best and problematic at worst. While there's nothing inherently wrong with remaining in white spaces politically if Black anarchists feel that they are beneficial, to remain in these spaces while constantly complaining about the white supremacy of the spaces is a bit odd. You can just leave and do something else. Do something better. That's the principle of free association.

However, a lack of resources for black anarchists remains a persistent obstacle for the materialization and/or actualization of many important Black anarchist projects. Between the isolation of Black anarchists in Black authoritarian leftist spaces, the Black nonprofit world (full of opportunists), or in white anarchist spaces, we find ourselves at a constant crossroads. The only political solution to the lack of resources is to orient ourselves in a way where we build autonomously amongst each other while simultaneously criticizing, attacking, and seizing resources from our political enemies whether they are authoritarians, Black profiteers or (at times) white anarchists.

We also want to highlight what black anarchist projectuality can look like in light of the cookout and our overall desire to grow the tendency. A big part of the weekend, especially the informal conversations, was hashing out what the space can and should look like if we are truly organizing for revolt. Ultimately for us, conversations with other Black anarchists about tactics, strategy and the way we need to move are far more critical in developing black anarchism as a tendency with a real ability to refuse constraints, oppose authority and evade capture.

Suggestions

Black autonomy meet-ups in person in your city or online. We can't build a real tendency without knowing one another locally (make sure to tell people to leave their white partner or homie at home). Often times these meetups will start very small and that's okay. All projects gotta start somewhere. Building black affinity can be beautiful, is important, and shouldn't focus on scale. Prioritize building with other Black individuals with the same ideas and goals as you.

Black anarcho-caucuses at radical gatherings that focus on developing a set of Black anarchist politics that isn't just based on a resentment of white anarchists.

Confronting Black authoritarians and Black liberals about their stupid ideas at their events and conferences. We need to draw cleavages in the black liberation movement (works better when you got a crew).

Produce more Black anarchist works. If you disagree with us, write something in response to this.

Black Cataclysm: Anarchism and Ruination

Sam C. Tenorio
(2024)

Transcribed by CommieCon from an Anarchist Research Group essay uploaded to Youtube.

From the description;

In this essay, adapted from his recently published book, Sam C. Tenorio (he/they) reconsiders the Watts Rebellion of 1965 and its ruinous disruptions, like arson, theft, and vandalism, as a cataclysm that clears material and discursive ground and proffers its own questions of property.

In 2015, to commemorate the Watts Uprising, the Los Angeles Times published a series of op-eds and editorials reflecting on the watershed moment and its legacy.

From the standpoint of the half a century past, Watts 50 Years Later in large part attempted to distance itself from its 1965 coverage that was grossly unsympathetic and unquestionably hazardous to Black Angelinos.

At the same time, the retrospect's very titling was careful to rescind any necessity to name the fierce confrontation with local, state, and federal forces a riot or rebellion. In the wider discourse for popular protests of increasingly gratuitous anti-black police violence, there remains a controversy of terms and a necessary resistance to sensationalise representations of such events.

Robin DG Kelly's Times op-ed echoes this in his opening warning to expect, on this day, crude reductions to gruesome statistics and violence; something readers were all too familiar with a year to the day from the severe police suppression of the 2014 protests in Ferguson Missouri.

Still, Kelly's claim that what they burned is less important than what they built, couched in the assessment that a focus on violence and looting fails to engage residents actual confrontation with social and economic catastrophe begs the question what if the opposite is true.

In 1965, as six days of tempestuous confrontations with the state ensued, political officials and pundits decried random terror and lawlessness and they were not referring to the police. Like Kelly, many scholars have decisively troubled these accounts, explaining the inciting conditions and continued effects. This essay gestures toward these questions, but engages the indicia of rebellions and sensit rage of destruction, like arson, theft, and vandalism, as a fundamentally germane set of spatial subversions allowing us to understand the communicas of the conflagration differently.

Through this spatial refraction, rebellion's Black Anarchist force reveals cataclysmic critique; a disruptive leap from White society's urban ghetto, antagonistic to both state and Civil Society.

Pushing past the police perimeter of where politics takes place and how it is to be conducted, Watts residents confronted militarised forces and civilians cohered as a wide panic.

Further, despite characterizations running the gamut of desultery and reactionary to criminal and cathartic, these destructive practices about the state's own property analysis and solution by proposing questions of property itself and interrupting an ever growing nexus paying fealty to law and order. Listening at the sociospatial register allows us to hear the rebellion differently, where ruination counters the state fables of the common good and crime prevention told through environmental design that inalienably link property and the police.

A 1968 study on White reaction to the Watts Rebellion found that while some Whites were sympathetic to its reasons, linked to a history of injustice, the vast majority thought it hurt the negro's cause and that it would only increase the social distance between the races.

It is unclear what the cause was believed to be, although the paradigm of race relations that seems to rear its head as indicated by the reference to social distance does offer some clues.

Used in part as a barometer to determine political acceptability, this application of race relations is undergirded by two major assumptions, the first is the divine right of the state and Civil Society to decide the worthiness of black people to exist in proximity, the second is that the cause is undoubtedly a pursuit of assimilation, integration, and inclusion.

Almost a week after the uprising in Watts began, Representative Adam Powell, Chair of the House Education and Labor Committee, and first Black representative

to be elected to Congress from New York, issued into the Congressional Record an extension of remarks entitled *Anatomy of a Riot*.

In it, he argued that the recent series of events was caused by a deep set anger in the black community stemming from historical deprivations they have suffered at the hands of a largely callous and indifferent White society.

This explanation was given in tandem with a sharp disavowal of the riots and praise of President Johnson for condemning the inexcusable outbreak of violence. The underlying cause for Powell is not the racial structures of power per se, but the White leadership that has soundly and repeatedly rejected the efforts of Black people to participate fully in the running of the total community. So while he clocked Watts as a sociological detonation of unbelievable proportions, he also assailed it as an orgy of purposeless annihilation that vexed his American identity. In part, Powell was upset that Black residents in Los Angeles had given up the moral high ground that was earned in the early 1960s by the non-violence of the civil rights movement.

In the same move, he also invokes the state as the organ and channel of change where state reforms were meant to mobilise Black populations pursuing the Democratic promise of inclusion. As such, Powell too obfuscates the central antagonism of White sovereign will and Black liberation as he ushers the uprising through the narthex of race relations, often illustrated through a cycle of contact, conflict, accommodation, and assimilation. Powell is quite in step with the larger arguments and proposed solutions garnered in the various state and federal commissions from McCone to Kerner both commissions resolutely call for improving Black living conditions, access to education, and the relations between the police and the Black community, categories understood as the underlying causes for the urban unrest.

For the state the Black ghetto that houses the Black family was both the reason and the evidence for the spiral of failure.

State solutions, explicitly proposed through housing development and urban renewal or implicitly issued by the fiat of political derision, meant to adjudicate the alleged causes of the Watts Uprising as a matter of propriety and the proprietary. A variegated conglomerate of state actors, taking the order of society for granted, they are resolved in its maintenance as they propagate the paradigmatic language of race relations and its assumed logic of assimilatory objective. As Powell's ascriptions to the proper governmental channels prohibit the surfacing of alternative ways of doing that unsettle the fabled national promise of full citizenship, property

destruction extrapolates debates of this objective in the provocation of disorder. Powell's words calling out the participants for wasting precious energy and futility and citing misdirection, as it was aimed inwardly against ourselves, illustrate many of the problems that violent urban uprisings raised for our political imaginaries, structured by loyalty to state authority and lineal reformist transformation.

Its temporal and orientational grammar faithfully envisage state repair and ardently dismiss vandalism as no better than a pernicious exercise. Powell or any other reformist is not the obstacle, of course. Given the promise of violence and the closure of politics to the practice of the gratuitously disenfranchised, this spatial elaboration of urban uprising is not a romantic one and it does not portend obliteration of the state, or for that matter any easy reflection. What it is however is the query of the fire, a turn to the intellect of destructive disruption, or what Mable O. Wilson, Shaun Anderson, and the Black Reconstruction Collective term "unbuilding" as an aperture of the antagonism and interruption of state prescripts and prescriptions. In the act of property destruction, we are struck with the suggestion that ghettoization is neither a state aberration, nor an instantiated and established place, but a deliberative process.

Rather than a moment in which Black rights are simply being revoked or ignored, destruction as a method of taking apart in order to understand how the built fabric came to be reveals a non-habitation where any claim of ownership ruefully initiated by the state cannot also be suspended at its behest. While the popular admonishment of the urban revolt as riot deploys imagery of uncritical destruction that is pointlessly disruptive and generally ineffective, destruction asks what it means to absent absence to leave the ruins of failed reconstruction in utter ruination.

As I have discussed elsewhere, creation and destruction are coeval to Black Anarchist politics, not in a naive hope, but with an understanding that practice, destruction, and violence may provide constitutive thrusts summed by the belief that violence is necessary to the destruction of violence and the anticipation of alternatives.

This recognition of direct action is best conceptualised in the axiom "the propaganda of the deed." The deed of destruction is in this way communicative. In his elaboration of Black Anarchism, William C Anderson, conceptualises ruination as a revolutionary abolitionism, where the bold confrontation with the state requires the process of destruction. But if the Watts Rebellion as cataclysm is speaking, what is it saying?

Rather than provide declarations, destruction may be better understood as asking questions. It asks of the anti-Black conditions fundamentals to state solutions of

urban renewal packaged in housing plans and commission reports as repressions that occur in the practice and relations of property. If the societal valuation of property is based on shared understandings of who can do what with space and resources, then the destruction of property is a rejoinder disrupting the property foundations of social life. It is of no surprise that property destruction is vilified in the media as ineffectual and juvenile.

Pathologies issued as indictments, imputations of communities who turn inward to destroy their own communities. Yet such accusations fall on deaf ears that effectively issue their own scathing doubt, exploding in the fault lines of territoriality antagonism.

Whose property, whose destruction, and how to ruin ruins? In the Watts Rebellion, the physical buildings themselves acquired symbolic value as their destruction performs a deprivation of economic value and interrupts the space of capital, but also as physical markers of their impoverished non-belonging.

In this articulation, property destruction, and theft challenge the structural foundations of White society expressed through practices of Black ghettoization that not only house Black populations, but on whose capitalist structures of accumulation and desire it depends. In listening to what the upheaval is speaking, the question of whose property, expressed in the direct action of property destruction, is a multi-layered critique. A leap from the ghetto, a leap to destructive alterity, a leap against White sovereignty. If property is the right to exclude, then property destruction far from indicating a desire for societal inclusion, is instead a rejection of its system in some.

While White society admonishes Black communities for having laid waste to their home and their autonomy, ruination may emphasise a form of critique punctuating that neither home, nor autonomy was ever in hand. To use the words of George Jackson, “their line is ‘ain’t nobody but Black folks gonna die in a revolution.’ This argument completely overlooks the fact that we always have done most of the dying and still do.” As Jackson invokes death as the condition under which Black people in the ghetto are already forced to live, he does not intend for Black lives to be executed in vain, but argues that the fight toward any alternative future may indeed come at the cost of violence against those who oppress, to destroy violence with violence.

This assessment runs perpendicular to the lugubrious judgement offered by the McCone Commission, that violence and lawlessness leads to a dead end, meant to occlude the revolt as a failed mode of freedom. Jackson’s words are indeed jarring

and this dissonance is heard in the rebellion itself, much to the dismay of many who seek security rather than risk. This refuge is often disseminated in the search for demand, for clarity, and indeed for the propagandist intention where any legible answer to the search is subject to the safe vantage of state horizons the question of demands is meant to obfuscate. The cataclysmic vantage of the Watts Rebellion overflows on a narrative meant to misapprehend both the political subjectivity of Black people and their conditions of possibility.

The narrative that maintains the vote, electoral politics, or state sponsored tactics as something that can properly represent black interrogations. Demands, as Johan Casper argues, are simply screens to interface between worlds of rage and worlds of law which presume that interface is possible and are meant to pull us to the perspective of the law as a significant effector of change, rather than staged encounters of racial antagonism and the source of want and degradation. Powell's desire for the demand and disgust with what he calls a riot thus betrays his reliance on Western political proceduralism.

This common turn to the systematic progression through electoral representation may serve the questions at the level of civil rights, but can it make sense of those and for those who have been rendered socially dead? The disillusion with demand also reveals why the destructive refusals of Black Anarchism may not correspond to a politics of prefiguration as many across radical traditions adhere to prefiguration as a necessary tenant, where learning by doing generates the possibility to reveal alternative logics of life, such an orientation can overdetermine what is transformative.

The danger of fitting these practices into this normative frame is that what is prefigured exists by definition within the dimensions of the known and only provides contestations of the world that are compatible with the indefinite reproduction of this world. Similar to the inquiry for demand, prefiguration inhibits our understanding of the philosophical content of the revolt as it privileges questions of what is achieved by revolt, rather than the questions that are asked.

The physically destructive revolt, like the enslaved who jumps the slave ship, holds no guarantees of what may come and thankfully has the potential of embodying possibilities of which we have no understanding. This is indeed the anticipatory power of the cataclysm as refusal and as erasure. Neither we, nor those who generate revolt can know what those possibilities are. Indeed, the revolt does not remake the world, but in its interruptive questioning of our current world, it surely takes the first step in clearing ground for its anticipation.

On the Power and Necessity of Student Resistance

R. Anansi
(2024)

Let me tell you a story.

As I write these words, I am standing in solidarity with students protesting and occupying their campuses both at USC and UCLA. Having spent the last two days protesting alongside the students (as I highly encourage you to do as well) I feel the need to expedite the writing process of this particular project. Last year, I posted a video essay/documentary on the Ethiopian Revolution, particularly spending the bulk of the video discussing the student movement that precluded and lasted throughout the revolution. As I worked on the project I got the idea to take what I had learned and write something both arguing for increased organization and protest among students in America, and taking tactics, ideas, and lessons from the Ethiopian Student Movement. Providence and present events have beaten me to the punch.

My goal now is to briefly discuss the Ethiopian student movement, and the tactics and ideas they used that we can ourselves take inspiration from in order to gain greater levels of organization and solidarity as we continue to struggle.

Throughout modern history, student protests have become so common that the “angry socialist college student,” has become both a meme and a trope. But the ridicule of student organizers in popular culture misses and intentionally hides the power and influence student movements can have. That is what we will discuss here. The current wave of student protests in the U.S. has already begun to rival the Vietnam era protests, and bear the marks of 2020’s anti-police intifada. The shadow of Kent State’s massacre looms over all of us. As I write, snipers watch students from the rooftops of Indiana University. In Atlanta, volunteer medics are being tased and beaten while handcuffed in broad daylight, faculty daring to stand in solidarity are being brutalized and arrested in front of the students they teach. The very fingers with which I type these words ache from being smashed by police batons at USC. This violence cannot, will not, cause the movement to die down. Instead, it must cause the forging of a greater, stronger radicalism within all of us who witness such barbarism from the fascist arms of the state. It is our moral duty

as Americans to materially fight and disrupt the genocide of Palestinians, and to demand the absolute dissolution of the monstrous fascist machine we understand as the Zionist state of Israel.

It is the hope of the state, that by breaking up our encampments and shocking us with overwhelming and nakedly illegal violence, that we will be too consumed by our fear to continue protesting.

This was the mentality of one Haile Selassie, former emperor of Ethiopia, when his regime went head to head with students in running street battles in 1966. The cause of this uprising was the leaking of the Shola Concentration Camp to Ethiopian students. This was essentially a secret concentration camp where Ethiopia's unhoused population was forcibly detained in Addis Ababa, the capital city of Ethiopia. Students protested and demonstrated against this cruelty demanding freedom, better conditions, and the alleviation of poverty for the unhoused. The Emperor's regime responded by tear gassing and beating students, the battle culminating at Ras Mekkonen Bridge, where students successfully resisted the police's attempt to dissipate the protest. The police failed, and students refused to be cowed by fascist violence from bootlicking fools calling themselves "police." The camp was later closed, and those who found themselves detained at Shola concentration camp personally went to the campus to thank the students for fighting for them. In a sense, this event is mirrored quite tragically by LA's own struggle against the police, with the unsuccessful Echo Park uprising of 2021 being inspired by similar sentiments, and the incomprehensible and absurd dismantling of the DSA sub-organization Street Watch by its parent organization.

Digressions aside, Ethiopian students faced escalating methods of repression by the Ethiopian regime. In 1962, students who wrote poetry critical of the regime were berated and had their speech suppressed and subjected to checks by the regime before publication. It is vital to note how faculty who did not stand in solidarity with students acted as the first arm of state violence and repression against students, often going so far as to render students who lived on campus homeless in response to their participation in protests. Protesting students were frequently suspended, and the regime would often simply close the entire campus for all students in order to silence their resistance.

The night before I wrote this, I watched and was myself injured as police beat student protestors off USC campus and locked the whole of us out, and could not help but be reminded of these events. On my nightstand sits a 40mm foam "less lethal" round that the LAPD, a band of out-of-control thugs and rapists, shot at students, injuring one.

The suspensions and campus closures were not the extent of the regime's repression. The regime also took great legislative efforts to make student protests as toothless as possible, first, using the student union NUEUS as a peer-led site of control over the students, as well as the faculty, and second creating new laws and regulations in the wake of the Shola Camp Uprising to control when and where students could protest. This law was set to come into effect April 11, 1967, so naturally the students set their protest against the protest bill for April tenth, right before it went into effect.

The law required students to have a permit to protest seven days beforehand, required the names and addresses of organizers to be shared with authorities, all signs and slogans had to be approved, there could be no "dangerous articles" present, and a permit could be rejected on the basis of any of these violations. Violating this law could result in a 1,000 dollar fine and a year in prison. For the students, this made public demonstration against Haile Sleassie's regime basically impossible, and when they protested against it on April 10th, cops spent the day beating and tear gassing students into submission. There were over 120 arrests, and dozens of students reported injuries. At least fifty were hospitalized. Students responded by going on strike, refusing to go to class until their peers who remained in jail were freed.

But these fraught situations are where the unique tactics of the Ethiopian students shine. In 1964, the regime introduced the University Service Program. This was a mandatory public service program that students had to participate in to graduate. 72.1 percent of participants became high school teachers, which had the supreme benefit of allowing college students to communicate their radicalism directly to their younger high-school peers, and provide the younger student radicals with direct inroads to the student movement on college campuses once they graduated. This both grew the student movement, and meant that when college students were unable to protest due to school closures, suspensions, and mass imprisonment, the high school students could continue the struggle. It also made student rebellion that much harder to handle and suppress.

Here in the US there is not so clear a pathway between college students and high school students that I am aware of, but one of the goals of the current wave of student protest should absolutely be building and laying bare those existing inroads, so that we can propagate further radicalism and aid an already growing high school student movement that has seen walks outs in Florida, California, and across the U.S. Those students also must seek greater organizational capacity between each other. The existence of student organizations and student unions across age groups especially can aid in facilitating these inroads. That being said,

we must keep in mind how student unions (such as the one on campus at USC) can be co-opted by the universities as methods of preventing and quieting student radicalism and facilitating a business-as-usual appearance. A quick browse of the USC Student Union's Twitter account shows a prime example of this. Utter silence and rapid shitposts, even as the students it claims to represent fight tooth and nail to end a genocide and are beaten by campus police and LAPD gangsters in response.

In Ethiopia, high school students played a vital role in the student movement and revolution. They both produced theory, writing about their experiences and conditions, and participated in hardcore protests and direct actions. They did mutual aid feeding the unhoused and poor even as they were themselves among them, they seized buses, demanding free bus fair for all, battled the police in the street, and made the revolution possible as they brought their ideas of liberation home to their parents, who themselves protested and fought against the regime that beat their children night after night for demanding liberation.

In 2020 former LAPD chief Michael Moor made the observation that LAPD had no issue controlling a massive protest of thousands of people, but was easily overwhelmed, confused, and cowed by multiple, smaller scale protests happening in multiple locations in the same city. The students in Ethiopia weaponized similar observations, forcing the regime to play whack-a-mole as when one student uprising would be quelled, more would take their place. Student rebellion was impossible to crush as dispersed students could simply join another crowd somewhere else, would come back the next day angrier and with greater strategy and aggression, or both. The absolute solidarity between students was also invaluable. In 2020 we chanted "no good cops in a racist system, no bad protesters in a revolution," as a way of reminding ourselves not to police each other's resistance, to stay in solidarity with each other, and never trust the police. In Ethiopia, the student rebellions were at their weakest and most vulnerable when students allowed themselves to lose sight of their material goals and demands and argued instead among each other. This allowed the regime to exploit those political divides, fueled partly by the paranoia of traumatized students. This is why an insistence on respecting a diversity of tactics and radical ideas within reason is not only necessary, but required.

Another important piece of the student movement's success was the support and aid of the faculty. During a police attack on a permitted protest at Arat Kilo campus, faculty found themselves also falling to police batons and violence. The faculty's pressure against the government, especially via the EUTA, the teachers association, was an invaluable voice against the regime's suppression of student radicalism. They both participated in student protests at times, and also demanded

the release of their students from jail when arrested and brought to light the destruction of their campuses and teaching materials by police. In the modern day there is a severe marked difference between the success of student occupations that do and do not have faculty support. This relationship is symbiotic. Students support striking teachers and teachers must support protesting students. This kind of solidarity is what made protests 75,000 strong able to march through Addis Ababa to topple the regime. Nine schools had to close as students had both refused to come to class, and continued to disrupt ongoing classes. A police report of the time alleges 2,775 detained, 377 charged with crimes, 60 people charged for supporting the student movement, and two students dead.

The student movement was not without its martyrs. As things escalated, a number of students fell to the regime's violence. Shiferaw Kebede was the first. The high school student was killed during a protest demanding the waiving of school fees, improvement of conditions, and an end to arbitrary suspensions, when police suppressed the protest violently. Another martyr, Demeke Zewde was killed after falling from a police van, as students attempted to stop a police transport that had been kidnapping students off the street to take to police training centers to be detained. Another, Takkele Welde Hawaryat, died fighting cops that November. The most famous of the students killed was the prominent student organizer Tilahun Gizaw. Tilahun was among the first and only male students to advocate for and aid feminist student women in gaining prominence in the movement and organizing early on, and his death was an intentional assassination by the state because of his influence.

On Sunday, December 28th, 1969, while out on a date with his girlfriend at Afincho Bar in Addis Ababa, two men approached Tilahun Gizaw, and shot him three times. The shooter was later identified as police officer Berhanu Mecha. Tilahun himself was taken to Haile Selassie Hospital, where he died of his wounds before he could be operated on. Students took his body to the medical facility on the main campus to be autopsied there, and an upswell of student activity began brewing, as students gathered en masse at Sidist Kilo campus the next day. By 12pm Monday, over 1500 students had gathered, carrying signs condemning the murder of Tilahun Gizaw. When police later arrived at the campus to retrieve his body, in order to bring it to his half sister, another conflict ensued, as the students had their own plans to hold a procession and take the body to his father's house.

Around 2:45 PM, the Bodyguard unit filed into the campus, took a position behind the assembled students, and then charged with bayonets fixed. There was shooting, originating from students according to the police report, but the only dead and wounded were students. The final tally had

three students dead: Sibhatu Wubneh (a second year law student who was apparently chanting slogans over a megaphone at the time). Jemal Hassen (a second year arts student) and Abebe Berhe (a freshman in the physical science stream). Sixteen students were wounded. Also wounded on both legs was a polish political science professor, professor Szuldrynski, ironically very much a supporter of the regime.

The military force managed to snatch away the body and hand it over to the police, who were waiting outside the gate, and the body was carried in an ambulance to the outskirts of the city for immediate transport to Tilahun's birthplace in Maichew (southern Tigray), where it was buried on Tuesday 30 December in the presence of some five hundred people, including his half sister and the governor of the province Ras Mengesha Seyoum.

Babru Zewde

In the end, twenty seven student organizers were identified and arrested, and the students and faculty were left in chaos. The faculty were particularly frustrated with the situation as they had their own staff injured by police as well as students, and had not been aware the raid was going to happen. Not to mention the thousands in destroyed school property by cops. The student response was delayed by the fact that many were left unsure what to do. Student unions were banned as were publications, leaving few avenues for struggle. Some opted to leave Ethiopia in exodus, some refused to boycott classes and returned to normalcy hoping for an end to the violence, and others began seriously discussing the continuation of struggle in a more militant form. Such continuations are beyond the scope of this essay. Instead we will discuss a methodology of resistance.

I feel it almost need not be said, but if there are campuses near you being occupied and you are a student, I highly encourage you to participate, if you aren't a student check and see if students are asking for solidarity and participation from non students (some have done the opposite for safety reasons) and go participate as well. If you have the resources to bring food, water, tents, palettes for building barricades, do so.

If there is not yet an occupation on your campus or other form of protest, consider taking the steps to create it yourself. I understand that this is intimidating, but remember always; if you build it, they will come. There are like-minded students among you likely waiting for someone to give them a clear step toward resistance. Students at Columbia University were only able to confirm sixty students as participating in the occupation protest, far short of their goal of two-hundred, but that didn't stop them, and now their numbers swell beyond expectation.

WORKS

One of the first steps one should take is forming an affinity group of like-minded students whom you know you can trust, and building your occupation or protest from there. Delegate tasks among yourselves, each according to ability and need. Another vital step is ensuring that your occupation has a well-stocked medical tent, with experienced/trained street medics who can administer aid in the case of injury, or the deployment of chemical weapons such as tear gas and pepper spray. If there is a local collective that provides jail support to arrested protestors, get in contact with them. If there is not, work among your comrades to develop a strategy of jail support and delegate that aspect of organizing to a specific wing. It may also behoove you to develop some method of vetting students and participants who come to the encampment. At UCLA, student organizers mark each participant who enters the occupation zone with a marker on their arm to display when before entering. This is highly effective though I did have a brief humorous exchange when attempting to reenter the camp where I informed the organizers that their chosen color does not show up well on dark skin, and that should be accounted for.

We stand in the presence of a situation with near-limitless potential. What happens on these campuses now will define the rest of this year, and all signs point toward a hot summer. Unlike the summer of 2020, we are ready. We have spent the last four years developing our skills, strengths, political analysis, and connections as comrades, and now is the time to display the fruits of that labor. Occupy every campus and every building, spread our rebellion among our parents, our siblings, the high schools, colleges, and community centers. Our fight against American imperialism and Israeli Zionist fascism is not over, and when we fight, we win.

WORK IN P

PROGRESS

APPENDIX #1
Biographies

WORK IN P

PROGRESS

Lucy Parsons (1851/3-1942)

Biographical sketch taken from *Black Autonomy Vol.1 Issue 2*
(1994)

She Was Considered “more dangerous than a thousand rioters” by Chicago police. She was considered an eloquent and fiery orator by her comrades. But above all, besides being a founding member of the International Working People’s Association (IWPA) and the Industrial Workers of the World (IWW), as well as the wife of “Haymarket Martyr” Albert Parsons, Lucy Parsons was a firm believer in revolution by the people themselves. Not much is known about her early life except that she was born somewhere in Texas in 1853 to slave parents. She met her future husband, Albert, a former Confederate soldier and abolitionist around 1867 while doing actions to stop lynchings in around the Waco area. Actions including the advocating and practice of armed self-defence against the Ku Klux Klan and other racists. She was one of the staunchest advocates of armed direct actions against racist Southerners of the 19th century, often taking heat from other abolitionists because of her fully logical and revolutionary position as well as her gender. After several arrests of her and her husband, as well as threats made against them and their children, they moved to Chicago, Illinois in 1873.

It was in Chicago that she and her husband were introduced to anarchism by German and Italian immigrants who lived in the working class ghettos of the city. It was there that she and other anarchists founded the IWPA in 1881 as a response to the labour struggles going on in the area.

The struggle she is most noted for participating in was the general strike for an Eight-Hour Workday in 1886. It was a struggle which culminated in the famous Haymarket Riot on May 4, 1886 which began when an unknown person tossed a bomb into a large group of Chicago police officers that had come to break up the demonstration while Lucy’s husband, Albert, was addressing the crowd. Police responded by firing on the strikers, and hundreds more were arrested, including Lucy and her husband. In the trial that followed Albert Parsons and seven others were convicted of conspiracy, inciting to riot, and murder. They were hanged in 1887. Lucy served some jail time and was forced to pay a hefty fine. At the time of his execution, Albert had been working on a manuscript entitled, “Anarchism: Its Philosophy and Scientific Basis”. Lucy went on to finish it and had 300 copies

published, before Chicago police raided the IWPA headquarters and confiscated the rest of them. Lucy Parsons kept the memory of the Haymarket Massacre alive throughout her long life; authoring her husband's biography and staying on a regular schedule of speaking engagements; which more often than not landed her in a city jail.

She collaborated on various revolutionary projects with such names in American anarchism as Emma Goldman and Alexander Berkman, and had dialogues with European anarchists such as Italian-born Erico Malatesta and Russian theorist Peter Kropotkin (founder of "anarchist-communism"). She wrote for the anarchist newspapers "Freedom" (1891-92)) and "The Liberator" (1905-06), as well as writing articles for a host of anarchist, socialist and communist newspapers. She was a member of Social Democracy in 1897 and was a co-founder of the IWW in 1905. Even from ideological opponents she earned both respect and admiration for her uncompromising views and willingness to totally committing herself to the liberation of the poorest of the poor.

During a 1915 Hunger Strike in which she was arrested, several Christian and liberal activists came to her aid, offering bail money and legal defence.

Well into old age, Lucy Parsons continued her legacy of agitation and organising, claiming once that "Every jal on the Pacific coast knows me!" Her last speech was delivered on May 1, 1941 as she rode on the float built by the workers of the McCormick Reaper Works in Chicago. She denounced the brutality of the police and hired Mafia thugs brought in to break the strike. By that time she was legally blind and had to use a walker to get around.

On March 7, 1942 the wood stove used for cooking and heating in her home caught fire. She was unable to get out before the flames consumed her. Her close friend George Markstall, came home from grocery shopping to see the house fully engulfed in flames. Rushing in to save her, he was quickly overcome by smoke and died the next day at a local hospital. Prior to her death, she had willed all of her property to the Pioneer Aid and Support association, including a library of her late husband's rare and our of print books. Before the ashes of what had once been her home had cooled, FBI agents ran in and confiscated what was left of her belongings, including the remaining salvageable books.

Lucy Parsons spent 75 of her 98 years fighting for the rights of working class people of all races. She is yet one more example of an individual who dove in head first to struggle for what we all deserve as human beings... freedom and real justice; by any means necessary!

Domingos Passos (1890-1928 [Disappeared])
The Brazilian Bakunin - A biography by
Renato Ramos and Alexandre Samis
(1994)

A union militant, carpenter by trade, and renowned orator and agitator, Domingo Passos stands out as a figure of early 20th century anarchism in Brazil. While a more detailed profile of Passos, yet alone a contemporary and comprehensive account of Brazilian anarchism, has yet to be published in English we do recommend the 1973 “Anarchists and Communists in Brazil 1900–1935” by John W. F. Dulles. Read a short overview here and find more references in the Wikipedia entry on anarchism in Brazil. This piece on Domingo Passos was published as part of the 2018 Black Anarchism reader.

I woke at 5.00 am. Passos, who had been up and about for hours, was sitting on his bed reading *Determinism and Responsibility* by Hamon. I grabbed a towel and went downstairs to wash my face. When I came back from the yard, after drying off, I saw two individuals. It was a moment or two before I realized who they were. With revolvers drawn they spoke to me and asked me harshly:

“Where’s Domingos Passos?”

Anticipating another of the attacks that our comrade had been through so often before, I was keen to cover for him and said that he was not around. I told them:

“There’s no Domingos Passos living here!”

A Young Anarchist Militant

This brief extract from a 16 March 1923 declaration by the workman Orlando Simoneck, carried in the newspaper *A Patria*, clearly reflects a few features of the situation sampled by the Black youngster, carpenter by trade, anarchist and active member of the Civil Construction Workers’ Union (UOCC): by 1923 ‘Comrade Passos’ had become a special target for the Rio police as well as one of the best loved and respected worker militants in the (then) Federal District. Another feature of this comrade, rightly identified by Simoneck, was his relentless self-educational drive, his thirst for learning and culture, which found him spending his mornings poring over books in the little collection belonging to Florentino de

Carvalho who lived in the same house in the Rua Barão in São Félix, only a couple of paces from the union local.

We do not know the precise year of Passos's birth (it was probably towards the end of the 19th century), but, from the books of Edgar Rodrigues, we know that he was born in Rio de Janeiro state. We find his first appearance in social struggles of the time as a UOCC delegate at the 3rd Brazilian Workers' Congress (1920) at which he was elected as travel secretary for the Brazilian Workers' Confederation (COB). Passos had been selected for that post because he stood out in the ranks of the organised proletariat on account of his intellect and oratorical gifts which he had honed in the day to day struggles of his trade.

In 1920 Passos worked with the Rio de Janeiro Workers' Federation (FORJ) which had a daily newspaper in *A Voz do Povo*. Under the Epitácio Pessoa government, there was a severe crackdown with countless anarchist militants being jailed, tortured and murdered, trades unions shut down and labor newspapers pulped. In October 1920, the police dispersed a workers' parade down the Avenida Rio Branco with gunfire and, not content with that, stormed the UOCC headquarters, wounding 5 workers and rounding up a further 30.

High Hopes and Political Shifts

The labor movement was reeling from the onslaught and went into a decline from 1921 on. The 'yellow' unions expanded rapidly and came to contest hegemony in several trades with the revolutionary unions. Among anarchists, the high hopes vested in the Russian revolution were evaporating as news percolated through of the Bolsheviks' repressiveness.

On 16 March 1922, nine days ahead of the launching of the Communist Party of Brazil, the UOCC carried a document entitled 'Refuting the False Claims of the Communist Group' and declaring its repudiation of the state communists, the 'Bolshevists'. It was assuredly written by Domingos Passos. Throughout the 1920s Civil Construction workers were the steeliest and least compromising opponents of the Bolshevik doctrine. They were the very embodiment of critical awareness and in a number of regards took their toll of the communist cadres.

In July 1922, in the wake of the failure of the revolt by the lieutenants from the Copacabana Fort, the repression slapped a ban on the UOCC paper *O Trabalho*, to which Passos was a regular contributor. A new anarchist bastion in the press was under the charge of another UOCC militant, Marques da Costa, editor of the Labour Section with the newspaper *A Patria*.

A Driving Force

In 1923, with the police crackdown hot on his heels, Domingos Passos stepped down from the UOCC Executive Commission and turned his attention to propaganda and union organizing, travelling twice to Paraná to assist the local organisations. Like the intellectuals José Oiticica, Carlos Dias and Fabio Luz, Passos was frequently invited to give talks at union locals. He was also actively involved with workers' festivals, acting in plays, giving poetry-readings and talks on social themes. Such events certainly accounted for some of the few moments of pleasure that Passos enjoyed during his life as a laborer and political activist.

During the first half of 1923 he was one of the driving forces behind the relaunching of the Rio de Janeiro Workers' Federation (FORJ), the rival FTRJ organisation having been set up under communist control. When the FORJ resurfaced on 19 August 1923, Passos was elected on to its Federal Committee. Refloated by 6 unions (civil construction, the shoemakers, the coopers, the ships' carpenters, the 'gastronomics' and the Marechal Hermes General Trades Union) by mid-1924 the FORJ had recruited a further 5 significant trades: foundry-workers, brick-workers, ironworkers, steelworkers and stone-workers. In spite of state repression and underhanded communist tricks, revolutionary syndicalism grew in strength under the auspices of the FORJ which was at that time working on the organisation of an inter-union conference in Rio and planning the 4th Brazilian Workers' Congress. In July 1924, all of this organisation effort was wiped out by the crackdown following a junior officers' revolt, in São Paulo this time. Union locals were attacked and shut down, and hundreds of anarchists were jailed. Domingos Passos was one of the first to be arrested and after 20 days of suffering at Police Headquarters he was held in the prison ship 'Campos' in Guanabara Bay. The months that he served on board were characterised by severe privation and restrictions. With other anarchists and hundreds of 'outlaws', he was to be moved to the 'Green Hell' of Oiapoque, the 'Siberia of the Tropics,' where ill-treatment and disease claimed over a thousand lives. Passos managed to escape to Saint-Georges in French Guyana. Meanwhile, fever drove him to seek medical treatment in Cayenne where he received a warm welcome from a Creole who helped him regain his strength. From Guyana he moved on to Belém where he remained for a time as a guest of the organised proletariat in the city.

São Paulo and Imprisonment

Domingos Passos was one of those who returned to the Federal District after the state of siege enforced by the Artur Bernardes government for nearly four full years (1922–1926). On reaching Rio de Janeiro at the start of 1927, he returned to union activity, but he was dogged by the after-effects of malaria. That year he moved to São Paulo, where he helped reorganize the local Workers' Federation

(FOSP). He took part in the 4th Rio Grande do Sul Workers' Congress held in Porto Alegre. He was to the fore in the organizing of several pro-Sacco and Vanzetti meetings and rallies organised by the FOSP and its affiliates. In August he was jailed in the feared 'Cambuci Bastille' where he spent three months, subject to all manner of ill-treatment.

According to Pedro Catallo, his cell-mate, Passos left prison with his body covered in ulcers and half-naked and was sent to the jungles of Sengés in the still untamed interior of São Paulo state, to die. A short while later he managed to write to some comrades, asking for money, which he received through an go-between. So ended the career of a man who had been one of the most influential and respected of the anarchist and revolutionary syndicalist activists of his day. Nothing more was ever heard of him, aside from the occasional, unconfirmed rumor. Not for nothing was Domingos Passos known to his contemporaries as the 'Brazilian Bakunin.' Few were as committed as he was to his ideals and suffered so much as a result. He put his all into the fight to emancipate men and women. He spent nearly a decade in prison and in tropical jungle conditions. Passos became a great beacon for libertarian and social activists in his day and in our own!

Martin Sostre (1923-2015)
The unforgettable life of prison rebel Martin Sostre -
A biography by William C. Anderson
(2020)

Malcolm X once said, “We’ve only suffered from America’s hypocrisy ... If you go to jail, so what? If you’re black, you were born in jail.” For Black people in the United States today, this statement is still as true as it ever was. The state as prison has been the lived experience for countless Black people throughout generations, but sometimes a myriad of lives can be crystallized into a single account exposing the oppressive realities in intimate detail. The life of the great intellectual, imprisoned litigator and revolutionary organizer Martin Sostre was just that.

Not enough people know Sostre today, though his impact on the prison struggle is as large as Black radicals like George Jackson, Angela Davis and Mumia Abu Jamal. Sostre passed away on August 12, 2015 — five years ago today. His story is one that demands telling, because were it not for him, the world would not be what we know now.

Prison rebel to community educator

Martin Sostre was born in Harlem in 1923 and came of age during the Great Depression. He was inspired early on by Black speakers, thinkers and activists around the African National Memorial Bookstore on 125th street. But Sostre also received a different type of education, lessons on what he later described as “the methods of the streets,” which would foreshadow much of what was still to come. He initially joined the army, but after multiple run-ins with the law he was “dishonorably” discharged. In 1952 Sostre was arrested for drug possession and sentenced to 12 years in prison.

This was the start of a decades-long journey that would see him pass through terrible facilities like Sing Sing Prison, Clinton Prison and the infamous Attica Prison and eventually reshape the limited legal rights that are supposed to be guaranteed to incarcerated people.

In prison, Sostre initially embraced the Nation of Islam, attracted by its Black nationalist elements. When prison authorities tried to stifle his right to express his beliefs, placing Sostre in solitary confinement after accusing him of trying to

arouse dissent, he became a self-taught student of law and took part in a successful lawsuit challenging the authorities' suppression of his beliefs.

In one letter from prison he writes, "Although to some the struggle of a Black high school drop-out acting as his own attorney against the massive coercive power of this State may seem like a futile struggle, there is no doubt in my mind of the ultimate defeat of my oppressors." In many ways, the legal struggles he waged were setting a precedent, and Sostre was only just kicking off a series of strategic challenges that would make considerable and historic gains for people in prison.

After his release from prison in 1964, Sostre opened the Afro-Asian Bookstore in Buffalo, New York. Having undergone a political transformation in prison himself, Sostre likened his journey to Malcolm X. However, upon observing the Black power politics among the youth on the outside, Sostre parted ways with the Nation Of Islam. His bookstore would become a place where he cultivated resistance for an entire community. He sold radical books covering topics like Black nationalism and communism.

He grew to be recognized as an educator among community members who used his shop as a space for learning and fellowship. This was at odds with the Buffalo Police Department who threatened Sostre for his actions. He was politicizing Black youth at a time when the state was increasingly concerned and surveilling proponents of anti-capitalist, Black empowerment across the United States.

"Defy white authority!"

During the "long, hot summer" of 1967, Black uprisings took place around the nation. Rebellions flared in response to the many manifestations of institutional racism like unemployment, housing discrimination and police brutality. The unending police repression of Black America happening in the streets was a direct challenge to racist state violence. It was around this time that the infamous police threat, "When the looting starts, the shooting starts" was uttered by the Miami police chief as well.

When revolt hit Buffalo, Sostre was there doing the work he knew best: teaching, distributing radical literature to the Black community — especially young people — and providing context to the situation at hand. Sostre organized through education and supported the uprising using the methods he had learned from the orators, teachers and street-level militants during his youth in Harlem. His bookstore became safe haven where people could escape tear gas and police brutality. He would give out lessons and liberation literature to the people hiding in

his store, which the authorities perceived as a threat. It remained open and packed well into the night as people rebelled against police forces.

Eventually, authorities resolved to deal with the defiant Sostre by attacking and ransacking his store. He and Geraldine Robinson (his co-defendant) were imprisoned on narcotics and riot charges. He was convicted after the rebellion in Buffalo had died down and sentenced to 31 to 41 years in jail by an all-white jury. Sostre was gagged in court but was unfazed by what he described as a “foolish” attempt to silence him.

He later wrote that he was demonstrating “the weakness of this fascist beast” in the courtroom and encouraged Black people to look at what he was doing to the oppressor. Sostre promised to be consistently confrontational, and from prison, he encouraged Black people to “Defy white authority!,” setting an example through his actions.

He maintained his innocence, and in the 1974 documentary *Frame-Up!* he distinguishes “between a political prisoner in its classical sense and a politicized prisoner.” He categorizes himself as the latter, as someone “who has become politically aware while in prison, even though the original crime that he committed was not a political crime.”

Martin also won a case about the censorship of literature in prison. He recalled fighting so hard so there could be more political literature in prison than there ever had been before. While being imprisoned, he was still doing the political education work that he previously did in the community. He claimed several victories in court for the rights of those in prison, from political and religious freedoms to restricting the use of solitary confinement. He himself had been subjected to the torture of solitary confinement, had his mail tempered with and was subjected to intimidation — all because of his work. But Sostre remained true to his cause.

Introducing anarchism

Sostre was a fierce critic of leadership, authority and imperialism. He was fiercely opposed to empire and identified with the anti-imperialist efforts. In a 1967-letter from prison, Sostre writes, “I will never submit. The employment of the massive coercive power of the state is not enough to make me give up; I am like a Viet Cong — a Black Viet Cong.” He goes on to say the Vietnamese fight against imperialism was an example he was trying to live up to. He consistently connects the global struggle against US imperialism to the struggle for Black liberation.

He insists that “only by challenging and opposing their lies and acts in the streets, courtroom and battlefield will we defeat the fascist oppressors.” In another letter from the same year he says one of the first things he is going to do when he leaves prison is “establish a defense fund” because no one should have to be imprisoned “because bail couldn’t be met.” In another letter, dated 1968, he even criticizes “no-knock” police raids and stop-and-frisk as signals of a coming right-wing takeover. Sostre was ahead of his time in many ways.

In 1971 the primary “witness” against Sostre recanted his testimony and admitted he had helped frame Sostre so he himself could be released from jail. This happened in addition to a national campaign for Sostre’s freedom, who had since become a well-known imprisoned radical and was eventually ordered to be released from solitary confinement. It was done by order of the US District Court Judge Constance Baker Motley, who was the first Black woman appointed to the federal bench. She also awarded him damages and he was eventually granted clemency after gaining notoriety in a campaign for his freedom.

Sostre’s immeasurable contributions also had a big impact on the life and thought of Black anarchist Lorenzo Kom’boa Ervin. It was Sostre who introduced the former Black Panther Party member to anarchism after they met in federal detention. Lorenzo had been sentenced to life in prison after hijacking a plane to Cuba while fleeing weapons charges in the US. Ervin had become disillusioned after his time living in Cuba, Czechoslovakia and East Germany. He remembered his life under “Soviet socialism” as “elitist, authoritarian, and oppressive.” He argued, moreover, that Marxist-Leninist Maoism had “helped to destroy the 1960’s New Left, and the radical wing of the Black Power Movement, with cult of personality, middle class snobbery, manipulation, and opportunism.”

Lorenzo reflected on Sostre’s anarchist lessons:

“He bounced a new word on me: ‘Anarchist Socialism.’ I had no idea what he was talking about at the time ... He explained to me about ‘self-governing socialism,’ which he described as free of state bureaucracy, any kind of party or leader dictatorship. Almost every day he regaled me about ‘direct democracy,’ ‘communitarianism,’ ‘radical autonomy,’ ‘general assemblies,’ and other stuff I knew nothing about. So I just listened for hours as he schooled me.

Lorenzo based much of his efforts around Black Autonomy, his own jailhouse litigation and his “Free Lorenzo” campaign that resulted in his freedom on Sostre’s instructions. Through Lorenzo, Sostre indirectly inspired a new generation of Black anarchists (myself included).

Had it not been for Martin Sostre, much of the important work of political prisoners, politicized prisoners and prison movements that we know of today would not have been possible. Through his efforts, new rights were granted to people in prison that were not conceivable to many before.”

Sostre showed us the way

Martin’s life shows us that we should be working to abolish the prison whether that prison is a building or the state itself. Prisons are an instrument of violence that the state uses to oppress us, but the larger apparatus we know as governance is no more redeemable than the police, courts, or any parts of the processes that lead us to a cell. Though Martin Sostre was able to use the legal system against his captors, that does not make it any less deadly. They would have done him much more harm if they could, but it did not work out that way.

What does it mean to live the life Martin Sostre did and have your work remain largely unnoticed? It exposes the naked truth of a society that disappears both people and the problems we face. Happy endings are hard to come by in nightmarish conditions where indispensable history vanishes in the margins. The closest thing someone who lives their life like Martin Sostre will get to safety is a hopefully quiet, modest life.

However, decades of torture and suffering should not be the preface to any of our stories. We celebrate the hard won battles of Sostre while still in the trenches of an unwon war. He did not waver in his dedication at times when many would have chosen to do otherwise. He lived a life where he worked to take parts of the prison system down, even while in a cage himself.

We will all die some way or the other, but we should hope to take a piece of the state with us as we go until it is completely undone. Martin Sostre showed us the way.

Ojore Lutalo, 1946-
A Biographical Sketch by Andrewism
(2021)

Ojore Lutalo was never a member of the Black Liberation Army or the Panthers, but he was involved in the struggle, as early as 1970. He and BLA member Kojo Bomani Sababu were arrested after they attempted to rob a bank to fund revolutionary projects, which ended in a shootout with the police.

He was harassed, isolated, and faced false charges throughout his incarceration in order to keep him from being paroled. However, upon befriending Kuwasi Balagoon and being exposed to critiques of Marxist-Leninism, he became a New Afrikan Anarchist in 1975. He would spend time creating collages while in prison, but in 1986, unprovoked, the prison moved him into the MCU, the sensory depriving Maximum Control Unit, where prisoners move in shackles and guards carry clubs they call “nigger beaters”.

In 2005, still in prison, Lutalo was interviewed for a film entitled *In My Own Words* where he spoke on everything from his own political beliefs, to life in the MCU, to the difficulty of being a vegetarian prisoner. In the film, he said that,

I just believe in the consensus process, I believe in the autonomous process. I believe that people are intelligent enough to govern their own lives and make their own decisions without somebody collecting untold billions of dollars of taxes and telling you what should and shouldn't be. Most organizations of the Left and the Right they want to repress, they have power ambitions, they power hungry, money hungry. And they'll do anything to retain that particular power. They don't consult with the lower class people, they make decisions for them and I feel that's wrong. So that's why I became an anarchist.

More false charges were brought against him after that interview. Just a year before his release from prison in 2009, he was denied release from the MCU, specifically because the prison thought he might influence other prisoners ideologically. Eventually though, he was released. And in 2021, in an interview with MoMA PS1 curator Josephine Graf, Lutalo continued to advocate for revolution. Remember his story.

Lorenzo Kom'boa Ervin (1947-)
A Biographical Sketch by Andrewism
(2021)

Lorenzo Kom'boa Ervin joined the Panthers in 1967 after being involved with the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee. In 1969, while on the run for attempting to kill a Ku Klux Klan member, he hijacked a plane and fled to Cuba. But instead of lending support, the Cuban authorities jailed him, then deported him to Czechoslovakia.

He then escaped to East Germany before being captured, smuggled into Berlin, tortured for a week, and brought back to the States to be drugged through his trial and handed two life sentences by an all-white jury in a redneck town.

While in those so-called socialist countries, he became disillusioned with what was clearly a dictatorship, not some "dictatorship of the proletariat." And while in prison, although involved in prison struggles, he took time to reflect on his life and sought out an alternative method to Black revolution. Around 1973, he began receiving Anarchist literature, became inspired by Peter Kropotkin, and eventually became a Black Anarchist. His case was adopted by the Anarchist Black Cross and a Dutch Anarchist group called Help A Prisoner Oppose Torture Organizing Committee. They coordinated an international campaign petitioning for his release.

Of course, he took issue with middle class hyperindividualism of many white American anarchists at the time, but he still worked with anarchists around the world who continued to support him and write to him while in prison. He began writing *Anarchism and the Black Revolution* and published it in 1979. It remains one of the best and most widely read works on anarchism today. [Linked below](#). His prison writings garnered him a following in Europe, Africa, and among Australian Aboriginals. He was finally released nearly 15 years after his sentence, in 1983.

In *Anarchism And The Black Revolution*, Ervin emphasized that Anarchism is "the most democratic, effective, and radical way to obtain our freedom, but that we must be free to design our own movements, whether it is understood or "approved" by North American Anarchists or not. We must fight for our freedom, no one else can free us, but they can help us." He firmly believed that Black people, and other

people of colour, would constitute the backbone of the American Anarchist movement of the future. He also takes a principled stance against the world capitalist system, white supremacy, imperialism, colonial oppression, patriarchy, queerphobia, and the state, including state “communism”, recognizing that government is one of the worst forms of modern oppression. His emphasis on intersectionality would play a strong role in the shift away from class-exclusive analysis in the American Anarchist movement. He remains active today, and records a podcast called Black Autonomy with his wife and fellow former Panther JoNina. Remember his story.

JoNina Ervin (1958 -)
JoNina Speaks
(2022)

Transcribed by the editor from Episode 8 of the Black Autonomy Podcast

Lorenzo Kom'Boa Ervin: In this episode, we'll be talking to JoNina Ervin, co host of the Black Autonomy podcast and a former member of the Black Panther Party, about her life and experiences of nearly 50 years in the Black liberation struggle in america.

You were the last editor of the Black panther party newspaper, but before that, you were the southern preachers kid in Missouri here. Can you tell us, you know, a little bit about that trajectory and what radicalised you to the point that you joined the Black Panther Party?

JoNina Ervin: Well, I grew up in Jefferson City, Missouri, and during the time I was growing up, the civil rights movement, and a little bit later, the black Power movement was coming into four. I remember being a kid, and I watched on television some little elementary school kids being beaten up and having dogs sicked on them by cops in Birmingham, Alabama.

This would have been about 1963. I wasn't quite 15 years old, and I remember being astounded, seeing these little kids who were out there protesting. And some of them were the age of my youngest sister, who's ten years younger than me. And I was just so moved by that. And I said, well, if these little kids can get out here, I can do something, too. I mean, I'm 14-15 years old. And then not long after that, the three girls got killed in the church in Birmingham, Alabama. And there were different things that were happening. I was seeing things that involved young kids my age, and I wanted to get involved.

My own history also involves, in Jefferson City, Missouri, where I grew up, that I was among the first black kids to integrate the public schools in Jefferson City. The Supreme Court decision, Brown versus the board of education, came down in May of 54. And then in 1956, when I was eight years old and I was starting third grade, they integrated the public school in Jefferson City. And I was really young.

I didn't really know anything about Brown versus the board of education. But my parents did say to me, well, you're going to be going to school with only black kids. And my other friends, their parents were all kind of excited about it. So, you know, I grew up in that period with those experiences. So I think they all had an impact on me.

L: So it helped turn you into a revolutionary?

J: Yes, that helped.

L: Now, tell me more about the history of the Black Panther Party Intercommunal newspaper that you were involved with, the Black Panther newspaper actually got started in 1967. I joined in 1972.

The newspaper got started when a young black man was shot in the back and murdered by some cops in Richmond, California, which is in the Bay area, not too far from Oakland, where the Black Panther party got started. And his name was Denzil Dowell. And the people in the party, they were asked by Denzil Dowell's family to investigate because the cops had claimed that he was threatening them and they were justified in killing him.

But the party was able to find out that there were witnesses who saw Denzel Dowell. Well, the police claimed that he was running away from them. That's how he got shot. Well, Denzel Dowell's family said, well no, there's no way he could have been running away from you because he had an injury. And there were other witnesses who disputed the police department's account.

So that formed the basis of the first Black Panther newspaper published in April 1967. It was called "Who Killed Denzil Dowell? And the paper ran from 1967 until 1981.

L: You worked on a newspaper committee for almost ten years. Tell us about what you did on that committee.

J: So I joined the Black Panther Party in Detroit, but our chapter relocated to Oakland because the party wanted to really make Oakland their base of operation. And when I got to Oakland, I told them I had a background in journalism, so they put me on the newspaper, and what I did was write.

Sometimes it involved writing articles, maybe from scratch, as we would say. Maybe they would send me to a community event in Oakland, and I would write about

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that. We covered the world in our newspaper, not just oakland. So sometimes there might be an event that happened nationally that was of significance to black people, people of colour, poor people.

So I might be assigned to read an article in the New York Times and then talk about how it was applicable to black people everywhere in the United States or read something about the black liberation struggles that were going on in Africa at the time, the armed liberation struggle, and talk about how we were connected with those struggles.

So I was a writer. I wrote articles and as part of that sometimes the party would send me to meetings to represent the party. There were various coalitions the party belonged to, and in a lot of those cases, when I did that, I would write articles for the newspaper. But what about your period as an editor?

I was editor from March of 1978 until September of 1980, and that was the last time the newspaper was published. It was a weekly newspaper at its peak, and it had somewhere between 350,000 to 500,000 circulation at the time. Back in the late sixties, the circulation of the black panther newspaper, in terms of black newspapers, was second only to Mohammed Speaks. They're the only black newspaper that had a higher circulation than we did.

So the newspaper was a weekly for many years. But in time, the party began to have financial problems, and there got to be a time when it could not be published on a weekly basis because we did have to pay a printer to print it. So after a certain period of time, it became a bi weekly.

Then, as time went on, the party's financial situation just began to deteriorate. I became the editor of the newspaper at a period when it was maybe not declining in people's interest in it, but it was declining in terms of its frequency and how often it was able to come out.

L: Now, is it fair to say that the Black Panther Party newspaper was the primary source of political education for both party members and the black community or the community at large?

J: Yes, that was true. I know for myself personally a lot of the things that I was assigned to help write about in the Black Panther Party newspaper. If I hadn't been in that position as being part of the writing crew for the newspaper. I wouldn't have known about some of those things.

People in the black community in particular, not just in the black community, but people liked the newspaper because of the way that it was written, the famous cartoons by Emory Douglas and a lot of the other artwork and the articles, people could understand it. It was very plain.

Malcolm X always used to say himself that he wanted to make things plain. Well, the Black Panther newspaper did that for people. It made it plain through the articles, the headlines breaking down what had happened to different people in different parts of the country and how it was a sign or symptomatic of what was happening to black people, poor people, low income people everywhere. And so it was a primary source of education. I don't know whether we had a truly accurate handle on the circulation or not, because somebody would get the newspaper, and they'd pass it on to somebody else.

This is one of the things I will never forget. One day, I was out actually selling the newspaper in the community, and so this. This brother, he gave me a quarter for the newspaper. "I said, well, thank you, and here's your newspaper." He said, "oh, no, sister." he said "you keep the newspaper. You can give it to somebody. I don't know how to read, but I know that's an important paper", and, like, I was blown away. He spent his quarter so I could give the paper away to somebody else. He himself could not read, which was a statement on what was happening with the lack of education in the black community.

But even though he couldn't read, he knew that that newspaper was important.

L: What was the Black Panther party like for you as a Black Woman, and what what did you appreciate and what did you appreciate and what did you not appreciate?

J: Well, I came to Oakland in the early part of 1974 from Detroit, Michigan. I joined Black Panther party in 1972. So at the time I joined in Detroit, this was a reinstated chapter of the Black Panther Party, the original Detroit Chapter of the party, the party central committee, had shut it down. We didn't know it then, but we knew something funny was happening.

We later found out from COINTELPRO, counterintelligence documents from the FBI that there had been an undercover informant, a snitch, as we called it. Who had infiltrated the Detroit chapter and convinced some of the party members to.

What he said was, "we're going to rob this drug house and get rid of these drugs that are harming the community. But in the process of all that, one person was

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killed in that incident. And it wound up being that, I believe four members of the Black Panther Party were convicted in that case.

So that discredited the Detroit chapter of the party a great deal. So that chapter was shut down.

When I joined in 1972, the chapter had been reinstated. But at that point in time, a lot of the men in the party were locked up. There were not a lot of brothers. There were more sisters during the Detroit chapter at the time. So one of the things that I did when I first joined the Black Panther Party in Detroit was to be one of the people who drove a van, a car. We had the free busing to prisons program, and we didn't actually have a real bus. We used cars. And I was one of the few people in the Detroit chapter at that time who had a valid drivers licence.

So we would take people up to the. At that time, it was at the Michigan State prison in Jackson, Michigan. Back in the early seventies. Jackson State prison in Lansing, Michigan, was the largest prison in the United States at the time in terms of the number of people who were incarcerated. Now, that's not true anymore and that prison has since been broken down into several different prisons in Michigan.

So I would drive family members and friends up to the prison to visit their relatives. As I said before, I was a sheltered preacher's daughter. I had never in my life been inside a jail, let alone a prison, until I drove people up to the prison to visit their relatives. And so the first time I went into the prison, you know, I almost literally had the wind knocked out of me. I had never seen a situation like this before. This was a men's prison, and all these men were locked up, and there was all this kind of, like, noise, and all these human beings were locked up and behind bars.

I had never, ever seen anything like that in my life, although I had. I saw the news coverage of what happened at Attica, but I had never myself, personally, been in that situation to see it, so I had to get a hold of myself. Because you're a black panther. You're supposed to be tough. All I wanted to do was cry, but I couldn't cry. I said "You are a Black Panther. You will not cry now." So I kept it together. So you asked me what it was like.

That was one of the things it was like. It was like for me to walk into a prison for the first time and to see how black people were being locked up and mistreated and abused. That was an experience that I had had when I joined the Black Panther party after the Detroit chapter relocated to Oakland. There were many people on the central committee of the party.

There were men and there were women, and there were several women who, in fact, were in charge of some of the programs in the party and who were on the central committee. One of the things I did notice, though, was that if you had an idea about something, if you were in the party, your idea was more likely to be listened to if you were male as opposed to being female.

There was that degree of sexism. You know, I did notice that, even though I knew that there were women who had responsibilities. So I saw the different parts of it. I saw women who were leading different party programs, but I also saw a degree of male authoritarianism.

You know, you ask what it was like for me. You know, I worked on the newspaper committee, and the newspaper committee was actually protected from a lot of stuff because it was considered vital that the newspaper come out every week, and that meant the people who worked on the newspaper, they did not want us to be locked up in jail or anything like that. So some of the more maybe dangerous situations or situations of being possibly arrested or locked u, we, were, for the most part. Kept away from those situations so that we could, in fact, put out the newspaper.

L: Now, after the party had folded or had been destroyed, you were one of the founders of the 1986 Black Panther Party Reunion, which later became a movement in its own right. Tell us about that.

J: October 1986 was the 20th anniversary of the founding of the Black Panther Party. The party started in october of 1966. Myself and two former party members, Madalynn Rucker and the late Ralph Moore, we got together, and we thought, you know, we need to have a reunion. We need to celebrate the fact that 20 years ago, the Black Panther Party was Started.

So Madalynn and Ralph and I came up with this idea to have the reunion. And so we began to put the word out and find someplace to have it, you know. Now, what's interesting is, is that everyone was not excited about having a Black Panther Party Reunion.

I'll never forget one of the comrades when I was talking to him about it, he said "why are you all doing this? JoNina, you just need to let the party die. It's over. We don't need to bring all that stuff up again." and he wasn't the only one. There were some other people who thought it was a bad idea to have a Black Panther Party reunion.

But we pressed on, nevertheless spread the word about it happening, found a location for it. We actually had it at a hotel in downtown Oakland. We were able

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to raise money to pay for the hotel and we had that first reunion in October 1986, the 20th anniversary. And we had people who came from around the country who had been in different chapters of the party.

We had one of our biggest support groups from Norway, Denmark, and Sweden. They sent representatives all the way from over there to participate because they had been really strong supporters.

So, to make a long story short, since the first reunion was held in 1986, there have been reunions on a national level every five years since then.

The most recent one was held just this past October. And different cities around the country, they have their own local reunions so I would have to say that since 1986, the first one, I'm sure there have been at least 25. I need to sit down and actually count them up. So I'm glad we pressed ahead and did it, because it's become a very important thing for people who used to be in the Black Panther Party.

L: Why was there any negative feedback at first?

J: Well, you know, people had different opinions about their experience in the party. They had different ideas about Huey Newton, one of the co-founders of the party. Everyone was not necessarily positive. They felt like we didn't need to bring up all this stuff. Some of what they felt was negative stuff that had happened, actually, at the intensity that some people had about this. But like I said, Madeline and Ralph and I, we pressed ahead and we did it anyway. And it was successful. It was very successful.

L: Now, you co-founded the Black Autonomy Federation in Memphis, Tennessee. Now tell us about that group and it's work.

J: Well, the Black Autonomy Federation was actually part of a progression of groups that had come out of the first Black Autonomy, Black Anarchist Collective that you yourself, Lorenzo, you were one of the co-founders of that collective in Atlanta back in 1994. And from that period on, there have been different iterations of that collective. The Black Autonomy Federation, which you, brother Rasman Yiga Nokashir and myself started in June of 2012 in Memphis, Tennessee.

That's where you and I were living at the time. It was sort of the latest iteration of the original black autonomy collective back from 1994. And we had started with the intention of actually dealing with issues around poverty in the black community. We had a black power conference in Memphis, Tennessee, in June of 2012, which was very successful. I was skeptical about the conference because

I feel like we didn't really know that many people in Memphis. I didn't think anybody would come.

You know, I'll be honest about it. I was very, very sceptical about doing it. But you put the word out about it. And people came to it. We had over a two day weekend, we had over 150 people come to the conference.

At that time, Memphis was the poorest big city in the United States. That's where we started it. However, shortly after we started, what we realised was also happening in Memphis was all these black people who were being shot and killed by the Memphis police department.

We were almost at a situation where it was one a month. No one was speaking out against this so we quickly developed a campaign. We called it the "Memphis Black Autonomy Federation's Body Count"

And, that led us to where we are now.

L: What made you an anarchist?

J: Well, I was always very critical of anarchism. My first experience with them when I was living in Oakland, California, when I was in the Black Panther Party. And I would go to different events, and the only anarchists I would see at these events were white people. Now, I'm not saying that there were no anarchists of colour in the San Francisco Bay Area back then. I'm just telling you what I saw and they were mostly white people.

And my impression was that they were not really dealing with issues that affected poor people. And my impression was that they were not really dealing with issues that affected poor people. The Black Panther party was always concerned about poor people. I did not see this coming from anarchists. I also saw them as, like I said, they were white people, so I did not feel they had any relationship whatsoever to what I was concerned about.

Then of course later, they got off into lifestyle issues, which I thought were totally irrelevant. You know, it's important for people to have their lifestyle. But a lot of things that they were doing, lifestyles they wanted to have, were lifestyles that poor people, Black people couldn't have.

So along the way, I met you, Lorenzo. You were the first Black anarchist I ever met. I didn't even know there were any black anarchists. I assume there were but

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you were the first black person I met who was an anarchist. And so I began to understand that my impressions about anarchism that I had formed observing the white anarchists were not about what you and the other people who had started the original black anarchist collectives, that's not what it was about. You were talking about poor people, black people fighting for our survival.

So that's when I began to take a look at anarchism as something that maybe. Well, maybe, you know, this is something that I could believe in, because it's not dealing with what I had observed white anarchists dealing with.

So meeting you and realising that there were Black Anarchists and realising that anarchism was not what I thought it was. I began to get a broader understanding of it. That's when I became interested in it and involved in it.

L: When we first talked about you joining Black Autonomy you expressed your ideas as almost like a Libertarian Marxism, rather than just Anarchism, you know, because of that negative impression you'd gotten. And I understand why a lot of people don't understand that Libertarian Marxism, along with Anarchist Socialism or Anarchist Communism, forms the basis of Anarchist Communism. I should say Libertarian Socialism and Libertarian Marxism are two of the types of ideology that went into creating Libertarian Socialism.

So when I explained that to you, that's when I can remember you being more interested in making the step and actually joining a group.

J: Yeah, I didn't want to call myself an anarchist just because of my own perceptions about what I thought anarchism was. I didn't want my name to be associated with that. So as I developed a deeper understanding, yes I was able to get a better handle on it, appreciation of it, and realise this is something that I could belong to.

L: Ok, you've got one book out and another in the works. Give us a summary of those two projects.

J: Well, back in 2000, I guess it was late 2011, I published a book called *Driven by the Movement - Activists of the Black Power era*. In the book itself, I think it's about 20-25 people whose interviews actually appear in the book.

My inspiration for writing it was actually the beating of Rodney King in Los Angeles, the severe beating he received. And then, of course you had the Los Angeles Rebellion. I remember wondering, well, whatever happened to the movement against police brutality? The Black Panther Party was prominent in

that, there were other groups as well. I said, what had happened that could allow Rodney King to be beaten within an inch of his life?

I interviewed people from different parts of the country. Some were in the Black Panther Party, but the majority of them were not in the Black Panther Party, but the majority of them were not in the Black Panther Party. They would have been who had been in different black power groups or different black activists around the country

So I wrote that book back in 2011, right now I'm working on my Memoir, which is, you know, my life. From the beginning to recent times, including my experiences in the Black Panther Party.

L: What are you most proud about when you reflect on your life as a radical black activist who's crossed several movements and tendencies? I actually am most proud of the fact that I was in the Black Panther Party.

J: The Black Panther Party, of course remains a controversial organisation for a lot of people, but it was an organisation as imperfect as it was, and it was not perfect, and there were problems. But the Black Panther Party was the first organisation that I ever knew that stood up against state violence and said that black people have a right to defend ourselves against government attacks, against government repression.

I worked in the free breakfast program when I first joined the party in Detroit and I didn't understand until that point how many children were going to school every day in the black community, in the poor community, hungry, because our families didn't have money to feed them breakfast.

So I am proud of the fact that I was part of an organisation that stood up to state violence, an organisation that talked about fighting fascism. We are right now facing fascism in the united states. The Black Panther Party talked about fascism in the late 1960s and it helped me shape my worldview that I have today.

A lot of how I think, what I believe, what I know were lessons that I learned from being in the black panther party. I have that to thank for the work that I continue to do long after the black panther party was over.

L: Well, any last comments or things you'd like to share?

J: I think that after going on 50 years in the black liberation struggle in the United

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States, there are many things that I have learned. And one of the things I have learned is that;

There are battles that you win and there are battles that you lose. For the young activists today who are continuing to struggle, it's hard sometimes when you lose battles, and believe me, I've been part of them and sometimes you just want to give up.

Sometimes you just may need to step back for a while, take a break and reassess. Use those battles that you may have lost as ammunition to help you keep going and if you need to take take time, take a pause and look at what's happened and why it happened. That's fine, that's good! You have a right to do that, just remember that the battles you may have taken up and that you may have lost, they make you stronger and they will help you in the future to win more struggles.

**Ashanti Alston, 1954-
A Biographical Sketch by Andrewism
(2021)**

Ashanti Alston joined the Panthers and the Black Liberation Army in 1971, but before then, he'd been attending Nation of Islam meetings. He was imprisoned in 1974 for taking part in a robbery meant to raise funds for the BLA. While in prison, a fellow Panther named Frankie Ziths would first introduce Alston to anarchist texts. He was being sent a lot of letters and literature that he dismissed at first, because he thought anarchism was just about chaos. Eventually though, while in solitary, he finally dug into anarchism, and was surprised to find analyses of peoples' struggles, peoples' cultures, and peoples' organizational formations.

But he wasn't seeing anything that touched on the struggles of Black folks. There was a lot of emphasis on European struggles and European writings by European figures. It didn't fully speak to him. He had to seek out the anarchic practices of non-European societies, from the most ancient to the most contemporary. He realized that all of us can function in an anti-authoritarian society. He began to see that we should not allow anyone to set themselves up as our leader or make decisions for us. He began to realize that "I, as an individual, should be respected, and that no one was important enough to do my thinking for me."

He realized that the anti-colonial struggles of his time and of the past, whether in Angola, Guinea-Bissau, Mozambique, or Zimbabwe, still failed. The people lost popular power, and the foreign oppressor was replaced with a local oppressor. He became resistant to the influence and intervention of so-called leaders, wanting instead for "power to the people where it stays with the people."

He was released from prison in 1985 and became heavily involved in organizing as a Black Anarchist. He published critiques of top down organizing, explored the influence of childhood on our psychology, and, although he saw the shortcomings of Black nationalism, he still saw it as a force for unity and a direction for social change, with the potential to be anti-State.

As for why he calls himself a Black Anarchist, he says that, "I think of being Black not so much as an ethnic category but as an oppositional force or touchstone for

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looking at situations differently. Black culture has always been oppositional and is all about finding ways to creatively resist oppression here, in the most racist country in the world.”

To Alston, anarchy’s insistence that you should never be stuck in old, obsolete approaches and always try to find new ways of looking at things, feeling, and organizing is important and inspiring. He’s still out here, still organizing, still part of the struggle. Remember his story.

Benjamin Obadiah Iqbal Zephaniah, 1958 - 2023

Biographical Sketch by Ben Hall taken from Freedom News

(2023)

On Thursday, 7th December 2023, it was announced that Benjamin Zephaniah, aged sixty-five, had passed away in the early hours with his wife by his side; eight weeks prior, he had been diagnosed with a brain tumour. Born 15th April 1958, he leaves behind a vast legacy of poems, literature, music, television and radio. Benjamin lived an extraordinary life; he was a phenomenal person who created innovative art that positively impacted multiple generations. A poet, author, musician, performer and activist are just a few of the labels that capture the man, but if truth be told, he was a force of nature whose death leaves an enormous void on humanity that can only be partially quenched by the body of work he left behind for us.

When I was asked to write an obituary on Benjamin's passing, I was daunted by the task because how can any words truly convey the free-spirited nature of his outlook, art and life? While I will struggle to articulate every achievement across his adventurous time on Earth, I want to remember him framed through my personal experiences of being lucky enough to have known and worked with him. Benjamin was warm-spirited, insightful, and basically an all-around incredible human being.

The term 'man of the people' often gets bandied about, especially by the political class, to make themselves seem ordinary and not abhorrent to the wider population. It is a cliché I hesitate to use, but it describes how I feel about Benjamin Zephaniah. He was a real 'man of the people', championing the underclass and oppressed throughout his life while steadfastly remaining grounded to his roots. The outpouring of sentiments since his passing and numerous positive recollections and personal memories of people's interactions with Benjamin reaffirm the notion that he connected with and inspired so many.

Born in April 1958 in Birmingham, Benjamin began performing poetry as a teenager despite struggling at school with dyslexia; he was kicked out of education, unable to read and write, but would later go on in his life to achieve multiple honorary degrees and become a Professor of Creative Writing at Brunel University. He was sent to a borstal detention centre as a youth and was incarcerated in prison

for burglary as a teen. From humble beginnings with the odds of success stacked against him, he would become a 'titan of British literature' (The Black Writers Guild) who would entertain and provoke with his words. He moved to London in 1978, releasing his first poetry collection, *Pen Rhythm* and performing at political protests against racism, Police brutality, and Apartheid in South Africa.

His writing is included in the National Curriculum and has inspired multiple generations; I have had countless people tell me how they loved his poems growing up; his impact alone on inspiring children with poetry is extraordinary. It's difficult to summarise his vast output, but it is worth mentioning *Rasta Time In Palestine*, inspired by his visit to the occupied territories and *What Stephen Lawrence Has Taught Us*, as a response to the racist murder. His poetry has always been relevant to the times and situations around him, often outspoken and championing the oppressed. Even his children's poetry, like *Talking Turkeys*, encapsulates his passion for animal rights and Veganism. Benjamin was a righteous man, motivated to uplift the poor and marginalised; he was the perfect living embodiment of the Rasta archetype. Thoughtful, intelligent, engaging, entertaining, sharp and witty.

Alongside poetry, he also wrote several books, such as *Refugee Boy*, exploring the topic of political asylum as it follows a young man fleeing war in East Africa who comes to London. Benjamin's writing was hugely influenced by Jamaican culture, and he was considered a 'Dub Poet'. He had a prolific musical career producing several albums, and he was the first person to perform with *The Wailers* in a tribute to Nelson Mandela after the death of Bob Marley. He was also an actor; he appeared in fourteen episodes of *Peaky Blinders* set in his home town of Birmingham. He was a hugely proud Brummie. Benjamin took his food and health very seriously, kept himself in good shape, and was an expert in martial arts. He was a man of peace and love, but I'm sure he could have been a ninja if he wanted to.

I was lucky enough to meet and work with Benjamin; we became good friends, and I feel deeply honoured that I was able to share time with such an amazing person. I first met him in 2005; over that year, I was involved in directing/producing four music videos for his *Naked* album, plus we also shot some short poems around his house for a DVD project. Since his passing, many people have spoken about how approachable and open he was; I initially contacted his agent, trying to get him in my debut no-budget feature film, *The Plague*. I was surprised when Benjamin phoned me to say he was away, so he couldn't do the film but wished me well. I ended up posting him a copy of the final film, which resulted in him sending me his upcoming album, *Naked*. I was a nobody zero-budget filmmaker, but he wanted to work with me, so we began making our first video together at Rong Radio Station.

My memories of Benjamin are always based around visiting him in his house in Beckton when he still lived in London; from the outside, it just seemed like an ordinary terraced house, but inside was a treasure trove that reflected Benjamin's many interests and experiences. Every time I visited, there would commonly be knocks at the door from neighbours who wanted to chat with him; Benjamin was really a pillar of the community with whom anyone could talk. While his walls were adorned with framed pictures of countless famous musicians, politicians and celebrated people, it was clear he was still just at home talking with his working-class neighbours. His achievements were massive and global, but his nature and spirit were grounded and down to earth. We often spoke about class; I remember him telling me how he realised class was so entrenched in British society by the fact that when you go to send a letter, you have to decide if it is 'first class' or 'second class' stamp, he remarked on how division is sewn into the smallest details of everyday life.

Benjamin was a deeply thoughtful, considered, and open person. Sitting in his living room, sipping on green tea, he told me about how he committed domestic violence against a former partner in his past. He spoke eloquently about his feelings of regret, how he learned from this experience and how he changed. It was remarkable to hear someone own their flaws in such a reflective and positive way. It was clear from speaking with Benjamin that he was conscientious with his success, ensuring that his voice always spoke up for just causes and financially supporting countless organisations such as domestic violence women's refuges. He never wavered in his principles of always standing up, speaking out and supporting the oppressed and neglected in our global society.

We would have deep conversations on topics ranging from Rastafarianism, religion, capitalism, the state, fascism, and anarchism to films, literature and our mutual love of *Roots Manuva*. While making the *Rong Radio Station* video, I remember us looking over old *Reclaim The Streets* and *May Day* subversive propaganda for inspiration. His house reflected his spirit, humble from the outside while inside was deeply rich with experience. Shelves were filled with pictures, trinkets and books reflecting how Benjamin had countless tales of interesting people he'd met, situations he had been in and moments in his life that impacted the person he became. Stacks of soya milk showed how veganism and animal rights were ingrained within his life, his converted gym in the back garden was a testament to his belief in health and clean living, and the music studio he had built captured his love for music, rhythm and poetry. Hanging on the coat rack next to the front door proudly flew the Palestinian flag, a passionate cause held close to his heart.

While he achieved a remarkable number of positive accomplishments throughout his lifetime, one of the events often mentioned is when Benjamin rejected the Order of the British Empire (OBE) in 2003. His feelings are perfectly articulated in a recent viral clip: “I’ve been fighting against empire all my life; I’ve been fighting against slavery and colonialism all my life. I’ve been writing to connect with people, not to impress government or monarchy. So how could I then accept an honour that puts empire onto my name?”. The justified and principled rejection garnered many columns of moral outrage in the press. Benjamin would later joke about how often interviews would question him about it. They would ask him about something he didn’t do; he would compare it with orange juice; he doesn’t drink orange juice but keeps being asked about why he doesn’t drink orange juice. Rather than keep asking him about something he didn’t do, he would much rather talk about the things he does do.

I was incredibly lucky to get an insight into Benjamin’s real life; he was a fascinating and inspiring person, and I’ve probably only captured a small snapshot of who he truly was. One thing I know for certain is that although he was most known as a poet and writer, he didn’t just ‘talk the talk’; when it came to what he believed in and the causes he was passionate about, he really did ‘walk the walk’. He didn’t just champion radical causes and direct action; he took part in them. He was known for his veganism and animal rights, but he also put his money where his mouth was. He participated in animal liberation action, joking with me about the difficulty of hiding dreadlocks under a hoody. He was known for his anti-racism work but less known for taking part in direct-action militant antifascism, where his martial arts skills were put to good use. I was lucky enough to have heard some of his exciting tales, fond memories I will hold in my heart now that he has passed.

Benjamin Zephaniah called himself an anarchist; his principled and proactive life embodies the spirit of mutual aid and solidarity. He was a man of the people and believed in the power of the people; he came to anarchism not through an academic or historical perspective but through a common sense and fair vision of how an equal world should be. I will leave the final words of his philosophy on life with the master of language himself: “Fuck power – and let’s just take care of each other. Most people know that politics is failing. The problem is they can’t imagine an alternative. They lack confidence. I simply blanked out all the advertising, turned off the ‘tell-lie-vision’, and started thinking for myself. Then I really started to meet people – and trust me, there is nothing as great as meeting people who are getting on with their lives. Running farms, schools, shops and even economies in communities where no one has power. That’s why I’m an anarchist.”

Michael Kimble (1965 -)
Taken from a June 11th Collective's 2020 statement
(2020)

Michael Kimble is a passionate freedom fighter who has been held captive by the Alabama Department of Corrections for nearly 35 years. After defending himself during a homophobic attack by a known white supremacist in 1987, Michael was convicted and sentenced to life in prison. His trial was typical of what could be expected from a racist criminal justice system in Jefferson County, Alabama.

Speaking about his trial, Michael says,

"I was arrested and charged with the murder of a white, racist homophobe in November 1986 while walking with a friend late at night. I defended myself and my friend from attack after being called various racist and homophobic names...In 1987 I was found guilty of murder and sentenced to a life sentence after a farce of a trial. My court-appointed attorney neglected to put forth a vigorous defense, and my friend who was with me during the attack testified for the prosecution after being arrested for another crime and given leniency in return for testifying for the state."

Since his conviction, Michael has been fervently involved in efforts to free himself and others, assisting in legal defense for fellow inmates, organizing reading groups and Black History events, speaking up for queer folks behind bars, and helping to organize and agitate alongside the Free Alabama Movement for the historic national prison strike of September 2016.

Greg Jackson, 1970 -

Compiled from his interview 'No Way As A Way' and biographical sketch found in *Our Culture, Our Resistance* by Ernesto Aguilar (2003)

Greg Jackson was born in 1970 in Seattle to a white mother and black father, he was raised mostly by his mother. He became politicised due to racist violence he experienced & growing up on welfare until he was 17. This also helped jump start his career in martial arts, beginning with boxing. His answers to some question in the 2003 interview provide excellent insight to his early life and political experiences.

Was there a defining political moment in your life?

One thing just led to another. All my life my mother struggled to feed us and keep a roof over our heads. Welfare used to send her on jobs that didn't pay a living wage. But she was required to go, or else we would be cut off for good. But, if by some miracle she made any money, it would be deducted from her monthly check and they would threaten her with prosecution or being cut off for making too much money. Every year I had to take a form to the school to fill out and send to them to prove I was in school. One more reason other kids had to pick on me.

The day she died, she was a college grad, Phi Theta Kappa, with a bachelor of arts in journalism; but she was working at a fast-food restaurant because local newspapers refused to pay her a living wage or didn't hire her at all.

When I was a teenager, I was on the bus going to work as a dishwasher at an upscale restaurant when a group of white police stopped the bus and ordered all of the black people off, accusing us of shoplifting at a local mall. I glanced at one officer's badge as I got off, he saw me do it, and said that he would be more than happy to put a third 'eye' in my forehead. Years later, I was confronted by neo-Nazis in the University District, and I successfully defended myself against them. At the time, I was a trained kick-boxer who fought ring matches regularly; they never saw it coming. I later found out that I wasn't alone; there was a "movement" of punk rock homeless kids, gangster types and weed dealers who were doing their part to run them off the Ave also.

It wasn't until I read *Revolutionary Suicide* and *The Autobiography of Malcolm X* that I began to get a clearer picture of what I was dealing with. Later, some of the homeless kids turned me on to Marxist and anarchist writings.

I drifted from one struggle to another. First, there were the protests due to the police raiding a squat. At the same time, the former City Attorney, Mark Sidran, was pushing for an anti-sitting and anti-panhandling ordinance. Then, the neo-Nazis returned and stabbed a black man on a bus on the Ave on Christmas Eve. It was shortly after that the homeless kids got organized and marched to Broadway 100 or so deep to confront them. Then the first Gulf War happened and the large protests shutting down the freeway, and finally the beating of Rodney King, which led to two nights of riots, fires, and fighting the cops downtown and on Broadway. All of these things happened one after the other with very little time in between events.

It was in this climate that my politics began to expand and change.

How would you say your politics evolved over time, and at one point in that development would you say anarchist ideas became most real to you?

A: What drew me to anarchism was not so much the theory or the ideal, but the way the anarchists did things. The Maoists were around in greater numbers back then, but they seemed a lot like religious people seeking converts. And they would get mad if you didn't agree with them. Some of them would actually challenge you to fight!

The anarchists did things. They took over buildings and lived in them, they chased the Nazis off the streets, they would go to community meetings and blast the so-called "experts" on homelessness or youth issues, and they would share whatever they had with you without asking for anything in return except for your opinion on whatever subject.

I used to call myself an anarchist, until one day an older activist, now a political prisoner, Omari Tahir (he was convicted of hitting former Seattle mayor Paul Schell in the face with a bullhorn; it took them two trials to get the conviction), said to me, "I know what you're against, but what are you for!?" He also warned against letting others put you in a box by of labeling yourself in way that is alienating to others.

To me, all "isms" out there are a form of ideological and social prison. Like Bruce Lee said in *The Tao of Jeet Kune Do*, "Absorb what is useful; discard what is not. Use no way as a way."

If I am to be labeled, here's the box to put me in: life-long black man in amerikkka of mixed racial background, a so-called "person of color." I am a certified personal fitness trainer, and professional martial artist and instructor. I am for reparations

(for chattel slavery, for genocide of indigenous people and the theft of their land, and for police terrorism/murder of people of color; white people should also be compensated for being assaulted by cops or losing loved ones to police violence), self-determination (individual and collective), direct workers control of community institutions by those within that particular community, and an economy based the equal distribution of wealth and resources. I am for freedom, justice, and equality for all the human families of the planet. I am a revolutionary.

In what ways do you think FBCP (Federation of Black Community Partisans) contributed to the theoretical framework of today's Anarchist People of Color movement?

I do believe it gave a voice to what many folks were already thinking.

Beyond that, it's hard to say. Usually it's the white anarchists that come up to me talking about how moved they were by the newspaper, how they were inspired by what Lorenzo had to say in their town, etc.

Why did the Federation of Black Community Partisans end? And what would you have done differently if you knew then what you do now?

It barely even started. It was really a formal organization in name only.

People weren't interested in a formal organization. I received very little help in funding or publishing Black Autonomy or in building an organization.

To do it all over, I wouldn't have done it at all had I known that people's word was not bond and that I would be used and abused for my work ethic. Or maybe I would have published it as a more of a personal 'zine. Lately, people have been asking me if I ever thought about starting it up again. I don't know. It was a lot of work and most people, even so called "conscious activists," don't have the discipline for the tedious work that it was.

A lot of organizations and work relationships suffer from disparities on several levels. Could you break down your experience for newer activists to avoid similar pitfalls? And do you think what happened with FBCP could have been avoided?

When I was doing the newspaper, I didn't even own a computer. I had to arrange to use other people's gear or go to Kinko's or to a college campus. That took planning and organization in itself. Then, I had to assemble the graphics and pictures. That

meant lots of cutting, photocopying, scanning and re-scanning. Then I was forever waiting on people to send their articles and letters, especially FBCP comrades who were doing work in the streets. People had a really hard time with deadlines. And all of that had to be spell-checked and edited for length.

Once that was done, I had to send the hard copy to a printer down south, since printing is so expensive out here. After that, distribution took up more of my time. And I still had to go to work, do my own local activism, answer mail, maintain accounting, train in karate, teach the occasional self-defense seminar, and stay current on what was going on in the world.

I think the way to avoid those kind of pitfalls is to be prepared to do it all yourself, no matter what anyone promises. Plan ahead prior to trying to put the paper together. And be sure that you have a way for the newspaper to make money, because with publishing you will usually lose money. In the four years that Black Autonomy came out, I never broke even.

Same question about the group ending, but regarding Copwatch 206?

Lack of money. Political hatred from other local anti-police brutality groups.

Eventual burn out. No non-profit funding agency will give you money to really and truly solve the problem of police terrorism. They, like the paid activists, are too tied to the system. Without the problem, they won't collect a paycheck. They don't grasp with real depth that capitalism and white supremacy are necessary components for keeping "the American way" alive and well. And because of that, they are generally more a part of the problem than the solution. Another Copwatch exists in Seattle, born out the WTO protests, but they focus more on the large demonstrations and confronting the city council on police accountability to the public.

Can you talk about Copwatch 206's tactics and political objectives, and how those differed from others at the time, and even now?

Our job, as we saw it, was to 'police the police' and educate the public on what their rights were under the law. Our slogan was "Copwatch 206: the REAL civilian review board!" We even considered conducting citizen's arrests of police officers, but decided that would be inviting death even more so than we already were. As it turned out, the people weren't ready for that; it was all we could do to get them to share information with us.

We advocated for an independent civilian review board with broad legal power, with a well funded over sight patrol, the copwatch, as the “eyes and ears” of the board. We would use the investigative tactics of the police against them. A brother by the name of Diop Kamal, who heads the Police Complaint Center in Florida, is already doing it. He, along with the Black Panther Party, was our inspiration.

The line that the rightists like to use is “well, if you aren’t doing anything wrong, you have nothing to worry about.” This what we would say to the police when they would pitch a fit about us filming them.

I cannot talk specifically about our tactics, since some of them are still in use by Copwatch volunteers throughout the world. I would advise folks to learn the law, learn how to use a camera under pressure, get in shape and stay in shape, fix any legal contradictions you may have before you go deal with their contradictions (pay your fines, do your time, etc), learn the investigative techniques of the world’s law enforcement agencies, surround yourself with lawyers and media people, read (and re-read) Sun-Tzu’s “The Art of War” or Mao’s “On Protracted Warfare,” and plan, plan, plan. And be prepared to be killed in action; Copwatching is serious business and is not to be taken lightly.

How do you look at some of the criticism of Copwatch work today?

Every Copwatch is different in every city. I believe that over time a uniform standard will develop. For me, the current standard of service to the people has been firmly established by the Police Complaint Center (www.policeabuse.org). Ultimately, it’s a question of what a cop watch actually does day to day and what community a cop watch actually serves. If it is limited to just the large demonstrations involving the “usual suspects,” then its obviously not keeping it real. If it’s only a cop watch in name, limited to informational forums, harassing politicians, and doing its own demonstrations, then its not keeping it real. All of the above are important, however the cop watch is most needed and effective when it serves the interests of people of color, primarily, in a real and tangible way.

As I see it, the real test of a Copwatch’s validity is measured by how many beatings and killings of the most directly affected are actually prevented. If the people the cop watch serves and the organization itself can look back after a year and say, “see, because of our vigilance in the streets, in the courts, in the media, and in the halls of government, no one has been hospitalized or died at the hands of the police in the past year!” or, “because of our vigilance in the streets, in the courts, in the media, and in the halls of government, not one police officer has gotten away with assaulting or killing anyone in the ‘hood or on the campus!” then all will have to

bear witness that the cop watch is real, is revolutionary, and is effective.

Where do you think the Copwatch movement as a whole needs to be going tactically and politically?

Tactically, the Police Complaint Center is the current model that activists need to study, dissect and improve upon. Diop Kamal and his team have been instrumental in successful lawsuits and convictions against abusive police officers and their leadership. Study the methods used by the great reactionary law enforcement groups of the world, FBI, CIA, Mossad, MI5, etc; and use their investigative and spy tools against them. Just don't kill anybody, like they do. It might be a good idea if some folks actually went to school to learn how film making, criminology, police science and other skills, at a professional level, to make Copwatch that much better.

Something else that we found in our time doing it was that Copwatch was also an effective deterrent to crime; no one wants to look stupid on camera, and no one wants to get caught on tape.

One thing that progressives don't usually get involved in is the neighborhood watch programs. At the very least by being involved progressive forces will know intimately well who the reactionaries are in the community, what they are up to, and be better able to deal with them before they get anymore out of hand than they already are.

In addition, the police are very open about the fact that they cannot operate effectively in a neighborhood without the help of civilian auxiliary organizations. I wonder how would they would operate if the neighborhood watch or the local police reserve unit in a particular area was dominated by radicals and the local copwatch was on a first-name basis with just about everybody who lived in the 'hood and all the activists on both sides of the color line and the language barrier?

Same question, regarding the Anarchist People of Color movement?

Oh boy, here we go; you had to ask the 'million-dollar' question...

Well, first of all, I believe that the term Autonomous People of Color movement is a more accurate description of what's really going on today. I can't speak for everybody, but I'm sure there are others who feel me on this.

Let's face it, we are separate from, yet at the same time allied with, the main anarchist movement, the left, and the various struggle-based tendencies (anti-

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globalization, anti-racism, Palestinian independence, reparations, police brutality, tenant rights, homelessness, religious freedom/post 9–11, etc) that call themselves movements. We may do work with individuals and organizations within these circles, but I can almost guarantee that we are a new breed of activist; a new type of people, based on how we see ourselves, how we see the rest of the world, and how we see ourselves in the world.

We may agree (or disagree) with some aspects and concepts that are espoused by the various anarchist/anti-authoritarian groups out there in the world, or we may (or may not) take positions on other subjects that casual observers may label “Maoist,” “Islamic,” “Christian,” “Indigenous,” etc. Our political, cultural, and, for some of us, even our genetic influences are diverse. Our needs, wants, and desires transcend mere political struggle; we are outside ‘the box.’ There are spiritual dimensions to all of this, regardless of whether we pray to a God (or Gods), don’t believe in a God, or call ourselves “God.”

The one common ideological thread I saw at the conference with those I spoke to and the discussions I heard in workshops was that no one was down with a leadership clique, a messiah or savior leading ‘the masses’ to the promised land, or individuals doing what they pleased with no regard for others. People were for collective decision-making and the idea of leadership by personal example. I think that’s what makes us all “anti-authoritarian” and “revolutionary.”

I feel that the way forward is through all of us, in our own way, making a conscious effort to contribute to the (r)evolution of popular culture from that of consumerism and backwardness to that of intelligence and popular resistance. Many of the artistic types (emcees, spoken word artists, DJs, etc) are already doing it. This means more networking, this means making communication between groups and individuals easier. This means building more bridges between artists, street activists, certified professionals in various fields, academics, and the “average” brother or sister on the block.

This means being careful not to reinvent oppressive social relationships (we must get rid of fear, hate, greed, and jealousy in our own heads, amongst each other, and amongst our respective peoples; all of these things breed reactionary ideas and actions) since this kills activism and popular struggle from within, and allows COINTELPRO-type operations to kill it from without. Out of that will come trust; then tighter, more formal organizational structures; necessity is the mother of invention, and I believe this is how it will occur. This is how we will build our power.

Power consists of four main elements: knowledge, wealth, violence and unity.

Together, we possess more than enough knowledge collectively to do great things; the wealth and unity will come with the proper utilization of the knowledge we all have. If violence can be avoided, that would be great; but if our enemies want to box, then we will have to defend ourselves.

Today, you teach karate and self-defense, and you've been an advocate of self-defense awareness. How important is self-defense in the lives of people of color?

Self-defense has been extremely important in the life of this particular person of color. My journey in the martial arts began due in large part to being regularly attacked because of how I look, how I speak, how I used to dress, how I was a klutz and had asthma, the fact that my dad was not around, and my mother was white. To this day, there are people who hate on me for some of the same reasons.

What I teach is more rooted in the real living struggles of the oppressed, rather than any ideological posturing. Historically, traditional Okinawan karate was refined in the struggle of peasants against Japanese invaders and the sell out king who disarmed them in the 1600s. Later, Japanese- adapted karate was used by some elements of the population against G.I.s during the U.S. occupation of Japan after World War II.

In this country you have the legacy of the Deacons for Defense, the BPP as well as the Brown Berets, Puerto Rican Independence Movement, AIM, etc and the Black Liberation Army. Most of them, probably all of them, taught some form of unarmed self-defense to anyone willing to learn. And then there's the reality of domestic violence; this is something Franz Fanon actually touched on indirectly when he wrote about how the oppressed will attack each other if they are unable to attack their enemies.

This goes on amongst men and women daily in this country, regardless of sexual preference. People of color are the targets and victims of violence more often than white people are; often at the hands of other persons of color; people who look like us and speak our language(s). Sad, but true.

The reactionaries are light years ahead of the forces of progress on this subject. There is an entire industry devoted to teaching middle class white America, both civilians and cops, how to fight back against terrorists, car-jackers, thugs, serial rapists, etc.

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Thankfully, there are small groups of progressive folks like Home Alive in Seattle and Girl Army in Oakland who teach self-defense in a way that is not about patriotism, racism, xenophobia, or personality cults around a fighting style or teacher.

Many of those who are progressive, anarchists in particular, often fail to deal with “what is” and try to leap directly to “what they wish to be.” Some progressives grew up bourgeois and sheltered, and never have been placed in a situation where their lives were truly in immediate peril (until they got involved in radical politics). Or they got their first education in the concept of self-defense from someone who used the words and the overall concept to justify targeting them for abuse.

There are still those out there who subscribe to the ideology of “redemptive suffering,” a pacifist politico-religious doctrine advocated by Bayard Rustin, Martin Luther King, Jr., and Mahatma Gandhi; that somehow those who do evil to the most defenseless segments of the population will finally ‘come to their senses’ or ‘repent’ for their sins against humanity because of the willingness of a few nonviolent martyrs to be brutalized. Those who advocate non-violent resistance have been jailed and killed in numbers equal to or greater than those who (as Malcolm X put it) “stop singing and come out swinging.”

Proclaiming yourself to have sole ownership of the ‘moral high ground’ or ‘the truth’ in a situation only leads to alienation from those around you and execution at the hands of your enemies, with help from those around you who are now alienated from you. Jesus is a prime example.

I believe in self-defense by any means necessary, but what I specialize in is unarmed self-defense and the use of improvised weapons. In an age of tighter control on handguns, knives, and specialty blunt force weapons (sap gloves, brass knuckles, etc) and longer prison sentences for their use (even if its justified), it makes more sense in my opinion. At the same time, it is good to be well rounded in the use of tools other than your bare hands and I study in that direction.

Philosophically, I believe as Gichin Funakoshi (the founder of the Shotokan style of Karate) did, that “karate is for the development of character.” If you can control yourself, then no one else can control you. If you cannot control yourself, then someone else will control you.

Sam Mbah, 1963 - 2014

**Based on a brief sketch taken from his website and an article in
Perspectives on Anarchist Theory (Spring, 1999)
(1999/2024)**

Born in 1963 in Enugu, Nigeria, Sam Mbah embraced anarchism shortly after the collapse of the Soviet Union while studying at the University of Lagos. Like many radicals, he entered a period of deep political reflection after the break down of the Eastern Block, one that prompted him to re-examine his previous Marxist commitments and ultimately led him to the anti-statist, anti-capitalist politics that is anarchism. North American publications such as *The Torch* and *Love and Rage* were especially important to this process.

Sam played an important role in the 'Awareness League' – a Nigerian anarchist organization that flourished in the 1990s and was active in the struggle against the dictatorship. Sam co-wrote the influential 1997 book *African Anarchism - History of A Movement*. Later, Sam was an active campaigner for human and environmental rights, and against corruption. For most of his life, he lived in Enugu, in south-eastern Nigeria. Sadly, Sam Mbah died on November 6th 2014, of complications arising from a heart condition.

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PROGRESS

APPENDIX #2
Organisations

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Black Autonomy Federation **Black Autonomy Federation** *(Formed 1994)*

Black Autonomy Federation formed in 1994 in Atlanta, Georgia. Throughout the 90s the organisation appeared in several cities under a few different names. Below is a pair of texts published in the 90s in their newspaper called Black Autonomy. The Black Autonomy Podcast, a collaborative project between JoNina Ervin, William C. Anderson & Lorenzo Kom'boa Ervin has been active in the 2020s.

Provisional Program Of The Federation Of Black Community Partisans (1994)

Taken from Vol.1 No.2 of Black Autonomy

- 1.) We want an end to police brutality in our community and the complete withdrawal of all existing police forces. We want the creation of a volunteer Black community self-defence force.
- 2.) We want an end to racism and all forms of white supremacy.
- 3.) We demand full employment of the Black community.
- 4.) We want and call for worldwide social revolution and the dismantling of the system of capitalist imperialism.
- 5.) We want and call for the dismantling of all nation-states, governments, and their replacement with revolutionary communes.
- 6.) We want an end to homelessness. We want decent housing, fit for human beings.
- 7.) We want the immediate release of all political prisoners, prisoners of war, and victims of racial injustice.

8.) We want an end to Amerikkka's imperialist wars and the use of Black people and other non-white peoples as cannon fodder.

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9.) We want the freedom and unity of our people all over the world.

10.) We want autonomy; freedom to determine for ourselves how to solve our problems, rebuild our communities, and move forward.

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Awareness League Sam Mbah *(Formed in the 90's)*

The Awareness League first of all, derived its lifeblood from the resistance against military rule in Nigeria. The continuation of military rule acted as a spore. It was one of the inclusions that continued to give oxygen to our existence then as Awareness League. It is on record that between the late 1980s and the late 1990s, Nigeria witnessed the toughest anti-military struggle. Awareness League joined forces with other anti-military groups in resisting military rule in Nigeria. It was in the process of coming into touch with a lot of anarcho-syndicalist groups around the world, in Europe and America, that I and my friend decided to intellectualise the the subject of anarchism by producing a book, which you very well know.

The struggle against military rule ended with the coming of civilian rule in 1999. I would say that the antagonism of not only the Awareness League but all the civil society, community-based groups, and leftist organizations in the country, virtually evaporated. Because the military was a uniting factor, I would say, in the sense that every person – whether you were anarchist, Marxist, leftist, socialist – saw in the military a common enemy to be resisted, to be opposed, to be overthrown if possible. With the coming of civilian government, we did not have that kind of common enemy any longer. Because some of the groups, some individuals from these groups, now started gravitating towards bourgeois politics. But let me say that for the most part, the problem was not individuals gravitating towards bourgeois politics, it was really that the civil society groups, the leftist groups and organizations, were not prepared for the consequences of [civilian] rule. We did not analyze in a serious sense what would be the consequences of the end of military rule and the coming of civilian rule, in the place of the military. We took it for granted that it would be business as usual. But as it happened, the end of military rule singularly signaled the end of most of these community-based, civil-society-based groups. Most of these groups, including the Awareness League, fragmented.

Zabalaza (2003)

The Zabalaza Anarchist Communist Front, or ZACF – Zabalaza meaning ‘struggle’ in isiZulu and isiXhosa – is a specific anarchist political organisation based in Johannesburg, South Africa. It is a unitary organisation – or federation of individuals, as opposed to a federation of collectives – whereby membership is on an individual basis, by invitation only. This is because we have seen – through our own experience, as well as that of global anarchism historically – that we can accomplish more as an organisation, and be more effective, when our members share a certain level of theoretical and strategic unity, and collective responsibility. Our activities include study and theoretical development, anarchist agitation and propaganda, and participation within the class struggle.

The ZACF identifies with the anarchist communist, Platformist or Especificista traditions within anarchism and, as such, we subscribe to the idea of active minority. What this means is that, unlike our anarcho-syndicalist comrades for example, we do not seek to build mass anarchist movements, nor to turn existing social movements into anarchist movements, but to participate in existing movements – and assist in creating new ones where necessary – with the objective of spreading the influence of anarchist principles and practices, even when these mass organisations remain ideologically heterogeneous. In fact, it is our belief that – as the mass fighting organisations of the working class – we should not seek to homogenise mass movements and organisations ideologically, as the strength of these movements lies in their ability to unite and mobilise the largest possible number of workers, regardless of their religious, ideological or political affiliations. Rather, we hold that it is the role of the anarchist political organisation to fight for the leadership of anarchist ideas within mass movements, and for the implementation of anarchist principles therein (even if not recognised as such by the majority of members of the mass organisation), such as: direct democracy, mutual aid, horizontalism, class combativeness, direct action and class independence (independence of working class organisations/ movements from political parties and electoral politics).

Founded on May Day 2003 – at a time when political space was closing down in the trade unions, with them coming increasingly under the control of the African

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National Congress (ANC) government through the tripartite alliance, and it being increasingly difficult to criticise the ANC-led Alliance or raise alternatives within the trade union movement – a decision was taken by the ZACF to orient itself towards the emerging popular social movements that had been mushrooming around South Africa since the turn of the decade in response to the failure of the ANC government to fulfill its election promises.

As anarchist-communists, we struggle for a classless, stateless and non-hierarchical society. We envision an international confederation of directly democratic, self-managed communities and workplaces; a society where all markets, exchange value systems and divisions of labour have been abolished and the means of production, distribution and communication are taken over by the workers and placed under workers' self-management (socialised) in order to allow for the satisfaction of the needs of everyone, adhering to the communist principle: "From each according to ability, to each according to need."

Tokologo African Anarchist Collective *(2013)*

STATEMENT OF INTENT

What is the TAAC?

The Tokologo African Anarchist Collective is a loose collective of anarchists and anarchist-sympathisers who are community and worker activists. Its members function primarily as educators.

It seeks to meet regularly to learn about and work towards spreading the ideas of anarchism within the working class residing in South Africa. These ideas are aimed at contributing to building:

- a revolutionary counter-culture, and
- revolutionary organisations of counter-power to fight and defeat domination and exploitation. This can be done by promoting direct working class organisational democracy and accountability

B. What does the TAAC seek to do?

The members meet regularly at general meetings once a month to discuss, debate and learn about the ideas of anarchism. The members meet to learn community and worker organising skills.

The members meet to co-ordinate the activities of the TAAC. These are:

1. Organising and carrying out working class community-based workshops
2. Creating and distributing propaganda relevant to the work of the TAAC and anarchism (this propaganda includes, but is not limited to TAAC newsletters, statements and t-shirts).

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C. Why do we do this?

The TAAC seeks to develop an understanding of anarchism – its ideas, strategies and tactics – amongst those living and organising in working class and poor communities in South Africa. The TAAC seeks to do this through the activities mentioned in B.

The TAAC seeks to organise these activists and communities around the ideas, strategies and tactics of anarchism.

The TAAC seeks to build itself by attracting more people to join the TAAC.

The TAAC seeks to revive a spirit of counter-culture and optimism about struggle and organisation against domination and exploitation in these communities. Another way of doing this is by seeking to regularly meet with active community-based organisations.

D. Who can join the TAAC?

Membership to the TAAC is not open to everyone on request.

Members must be educators of the ideas of anarchism. As such those who seek to join the TAAC must have been educated about these ideas beforehand, as well as being taught how to educate others about the ideas.

The TAAC seeks to develop an individual's understanding of anarchism. In so doing, the individual must become fully aware of the ideas of the TAAC and the processes and commitments required to join the TAAC.

Membership is granted to an individual by collective member decision. It will be based on:

1. An individual having participated in a community-based workshop. At the workshop, individuals either approach TAAC members with a desire to continue their anarchist education, or are identified by a TAAC member present;
2. These individuals are then invited to participate in the already existing process of education (the Anarchist Political School, APS); and then
3. the individual's own desire to join once they have graduated from the APS

Membership is open to APS graduates who identify as anarchists or to those who do not identify as anarchists. However, membership is granted to those who share the vision of the TAAC. Members then commit to spreading the ideas of anarchism in working class and poor communities as determined by collective TAAC decision.

E. How are TAAC decisions made and by whom?

All TAAC decisions are agreed to at the monthly general meetings of the members. It is at these meetings that mandates are decided on and volunteered to. These decisions and mandates are decided by general agreement at these monthly general meetings.

The TAAC may choose to form smaller collectives to carry out specific tasks, e.g. an Editorial Collective. These collectives are decided on and formed at their monthly general meetings. These collectives may decide on their own tasks. However, these collectives must be accountable to the general body of members. These decisions and tasks must fall within the mandate for these smaller collectives as decided by the members at the monthly general meeting. These collectives must report back to general monthly meeting, as determined by their mandate and collective decision.

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Revolutionary Abolitionist Movement (2017)

RAM was a Black led revolutionary organisation founded in 2017, with deep ties to the prison struggle in the US and the armed revolution in Rojava. They organised demonstrations in several cities in the US and embarked on projects to educate imprisoned people.

The Kurwasi Balagoon Liberation Project - An educational project that began as an introductory class designed to bring in a new generation of revolutionaries. It has now been compiled into a text and reader titled 'The Kurwasi Balagoon Liberation School' meant to be sent to comrades behind bars.

Below is their founding statement, later followed up by a small book by the same name in 2018. The organisation have been inactive since the end of 2020.

Burn Down the American Plantation: Announcing RAM

We are announcing the formation of the Revolutionary Abolitionist Movement and putting out a call to all those seeking freedom, who are committed to abolishing slavery, and who desire liberation for all.

The United States was built on slavery, and despite the American Civil War, this oppression never ended. The abolitionist movement fought against this tyranny, but modern slavery and mass brutality persist unchecked.

Around the world, fascism is on the rise. The state has openly declared war on our communities, threatening to ethnically cleanse Latinos, criminalize Muslims, destroy indigenous land, and oppress the LGBTQ community, while continuing to murder and incarcerate black people.

The Revolutionary Abolitionist Movement unequivocally states that the plantation system must be destroyed.

Today, the anarchist struggle, and anti-state feminism is on the rise, and authoritarian modes of resistance are now discredited.

The Revolution in Rojava in Northern Syria has set an exceptional standard. With a foundation in feminism, ecology, anti-state organizing, and armed struggle, it has actualized a revolution beyond 20th century nationalism. With the founding of groups like the International Revolutionary People's Guerrilla Forces, it is clear that this is the time for anarchist revolutionaries to act without hesitation.

We declare our solidarity with the international anti-fascist and anarchist struggle, and propose concrete steps in the struggle for abolitionism.

Revolutionary Abolitionists must fight hand in hand with those facing oppression. We intend to establish a new Underground Railroad to free people from bondage. By building revolutionary self-defense networks, connecting them to one another, and developing militant strategies in our neighborhoods, our network will create the capacity to destroy state power and defend our communities.

A new global paradigm for revolution has been established, to be taken up by dedicated revolutionaries, autonomous territories, guerrillas in armed struggle, and all those engaged in the global drive towards liberation and away from statehood, capitalism, patriarchy, and domination.

We call on anti-state groups to join the Revolutionary Abolitionist Movement and send this message to our comrades to help build the capacity to burn down the American plantation once and for all.

Revolutionary Goals

SHORT TERM GOAL: THE UNDERGROUND RAILROAD

We will create networks for those facing detention, incarceration, deportation, or white supremacist violence to escape and live with dignity. We invite revolutionaries to help build a contemporary underground railroad, outside the reach of the state. Revolutionaries, social centers, and antifa groups that are already active can help build greater infrastructure of resistance to support those fleeing the state. From this foundation, we set the political framework for the next stages.

LONG TERM GOAL: BUILDING THE ABOLITIONIST PROJECT

For the Abolitionist project to be successful we must eventually transition from resistance to a revolutionary situation. Relationships and groups built through the underground railroad have the potential to become the foundation for organized defense groups, local councils, and regional/national councils.

We invite comrades to coordinate our activities regionally, and nationally as part of an Abolitionist Council.

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POLITICAL FOUNDATION:

Self-Defense

Defense of oppressed people and of our political projects is paramount. We propose developing and tying defense teams to localities and collectives that are based on abolitionist practices.

The Neighborhood Council

As the Underground Railroad network grows outside the jurisdiction of the state and reactionary forces, it is built through non-hierarchical relationships of trust. Collectives and councils developed according to needs, issues, and political motivation involve people in neighborhood self-governance.

Conflict Resolution and Revolutionary Justice

Forms of conflict resolution are essential for developing revolutionary relationships. Social cohesion, rather than punishment, must be the foundation. Abolitionist political growth seeks to destroy the prison, yet those oppressing others must be combated.

Abolition of Gender

The same forces that put people in bondage also utilize gender roles as a source of domination. Overcoming imprisonment and liberating humanity from captivity must happen simultaneously with the abolition of gender constraints.

Expropriation and the Cooperative Economy

To carve out an autonomous territory, or to begin the revolutionary process, goods, land, and tools must be expropriated, or taken away from those who withhold them. We are striving towards a situation where necessities cannot be taken away from those who need them, but instead are shared with those who lack them.

Take Action Now!

May 20th, 2017

Salish Sea Black Autonomists *(2017)*

We are an all black/New Afrikan network of Anarchists, Autonomists, and Anti-State Communists struggling in the Salish Sea region of the Pacific Northwest.

We recognize that the idea of black liberation has been stuck in the grip of elements that are antithetical to black liberation, let alone the liberation of anyone else. Whether the failed ideologies and methodologies of state communism, the opportunism, reformism, and radical chic of liberal and progressive NGO's and academics, or the reactionary hyper patriarchal, colonial, and homo/transphobic politics of the Nation of Islam or the New Black Panther Party. We understand black liberation as a struggle to destroy the entirety of the world that has been founded on black subjugation and see the only way to do this through autonomous, non-hierarchical, self managed revolt. We also understand our liberation to be bound in the liberation of all other oppressed peoples and while our main focus and theoretical lens may be black liberation we are always agitating, pushing, and building for liberatory revolt across all identity lines. Social war, not race war.

In the post Ferguson era, where black led revolts against the police and confrontations with civic nationalists and insurgent fascists are common place, we find it is especially important to push the thoughts, narratives, and actions of black/New Afrikan insurrectionists up as a counter to the popular black reformist or reactionary.

While we are focused in and on the Salish Sea region in the territories dominated by the United States, we maintain an internationalist perspective. We think it's important to link global struggles to our local struggles and vice-versa, and to provide material solidarity with struggles around the globe where possible. We don't think it's a coincidence that the high of the anarchist movement was when it was a global force and to further this we intend to do research and analysis on class struggle in areas all across the globe.

BLACK LIBERATION MEANS SOCIAL WAR.

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Black Socialists in America *(2018)*

The Black Socialists in America About Page begins with a brief summary of who they are,

“Founded in early 2018, Black Socialists in America (BSA) is a small coalition of anti-capitalist, anti-authoritarian, internationalist Black Americans who believe people should control the means of production in a directly democratic and decentralized way that allows symbiosis with non-human nature. We are not a mass organization, but instead a small national network of people using a shared platform to share knowledge, learn, and receive support for grassroots projects. We have a volunteer tech group open to people outside of BSA called Open Tech Development (OTD), and that was behind our Dual Power App and Stack efforts. We also hosted the Pan-African Social Ecology Reading Group (PASERG).”

Currently, OTD and their Dual Power and Stack apps are “in hibernation” according to the front page of their respective websites. Corroborating this, the last Twitter post from the Dual Power App’s account (@DualPowerApp) in December, 2023, says, “This project is on pause (indefinitely) as @BlackSocialists reassesses its organizational priorities” . A retweet of this post is the last post by the Black Socialists of America Twitter account. This is echoed by a total silence from the Black Socialists of America’s social media accounts.

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APPENDIX #3
Additional Notes

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Stateless Societies in Africa Sam Mbah & I.E. Igariwey (1997)

The term “stateless societies” has been used in a pejorative sense by certain European scholars to denote backwardness arising from the inability of African societies to establish their own states. State formation in Africa, says the “Hamitic theory,” was attributable to foreign influence, the belief being that Africans left on their own would never have been able to produce anything more than a “low” level of political organization. Among the stateless societies that existed on the continent were the Igbo, the Birom, Angas, Idoma, Ekoi, Njembe, the Niger Delta peoples, the Tiv (Nigeria), the Shona (Zimbabwe), Lodogea, the Lowihi, the Bobo, the Dogon, the Konkomba, the Birifor (Burkina Faso, Niger), the Bate, the Kissi, the Dan, the Logoli, the Gagu and Kru peoples, the Mano, Bassa Grebo and Kwanko (Ivory Coast, Guinea, Togo), the Tallensi, Mamprusi, Kusaasi (Ghana), the Nuer (Southern Sudan), etc. — numbering today nearly two hundred million individuals in all.

For the purposes of a clear and retrospective understanding of stateless societies, we shall present case studies of three of them: the Igbo, the Niger Delta people (in present-day Nigeria), and the Tallensi (Ghana). Stateless societies tended generally to be agricultural, sedentary, and homogenous in character.

The Igbo

Oral tradition has it that the ancestors of Igbos (also referred to as the Ibo) originated from somewhere in the Middle East. The earliest settlements of the Igbos were at Awka and Orlu, from which they spread south, pushing the Ibibios to the coastal fringes of the Niger Delta. The Igbo generally followed a segmentary pattern of political and social organization. As against large, centralized political units, Igbo society constructed small units, often referred to as “village” political units without kings or chiefs ruling over them or administering their affairs. “In Igbo, each person hails... from the particular district where he was born, but when away from home all are Igbos.” Among the Igbo, there is a popular saying, “Igbo enwegh Eze,” meaning Igbo have no kings.

The smallest unit in the segmentary political system was the extended family with a common lineage; several extended families constituted a ward; and many wards formed a village. The affairs of a village community were controlled by four major institutions: the general assembly of all citizens, the council of elders, the age grades, and the secret societies, that acted as instruments of social control.

There was also the Umuada, a parallel body of women either married into the village or born there. The Umuada played a key role in decision making and implementation processes, as well as in maintaining the social values of the society. It was impossible, for instance, to make a decision on an issue that directly affected women or children without the consent of the Umuada.

Members of the council of elders were usually heads of extended families and were sometimes required to perform priestly functions. To this day, general assemblies of all citizens are a common feature of Igbo society. It is the duty of the town crier, wielding his gong, to go around the village in the evening after villagers have returned from their farms to summon everyone to the village square at a specified time. The purpose of the assembly is often tersely stated. At the village square, elders outline an issue in detail and the people are expected to air their views as forthrightly as possible, until a consensus is achieved. Neither the elders, the secret societies, nor the age grades could drag the village into a war or armed conflict without first consulting a general assembly for a decision. The small scale of Igbo social institutions made true democracy possible. According to historian Isichei, "one of the things that struck the first Western visitors to Igboland was the extent to which democracy was truly practiced. An early visitor to a Niger Igbo town said that he felt he was in a free land, among a free people." Another visitor, a Frenchman, said that true liberty existed in Igboland, though its name was not inscribed on any monument.

Despite the segmentary lineage system of the Igbo, there existed links which brought several groups together as one people. Chief among these links were marriage and trade. [West Africa in general is known for its tradition of women traders — Ed.] Igbo custom and tradition encouraged intervillage marriage. Of the greatest importance in forging bonds of unity among the Igbo were the oracles, who served to bring them together to common shrines.

Being forest-dwelling people, Igbos grew enough food to feed themselves, using communal labor provided by both the age grade and extended family systems. Igbo social organization, like that of the Niger Delta people, Tiv, and Tallensi, manifested a definite inclination toward leadership as opposed to authority. Yet there were a few exceptions in Igboland, like the Onitsha and Nri communities, that had their own chiefs.

The Niger Delta Peoples

The peoples of the Niger Delta can be divided into Ibibios, Ijaws, Urhobos, etc. Slave trade was rife in this area in the 17th and 18th centuries. The people were mostly traders and farmers. The basis of political cum social organization in this area was very small units, referred to as the “house” system, complete with extended families, age grades and secret societies. The latter played an important role among the Ibibios particularly, where control of political institutions was in the hands of members of the secret societies rather than lineage groups, as was the case in Igboland.

A “house” consisted of a farmer or trader, his slaves, his own descendants, and those of his slaves. A number of “houses” comprised a city-state. Inter-house disputes were settled by a city assembly made up of house chiefs and presided over by an elected chief.

The Ijaws were divided into four main clans or city-states: Nembe, Kalabari, Brass, and Warri. The town assembly was responsible for communal policy making. The “Sakapu” secret society exercised both administrative and judicial functions. The mode of organization of the Urhobos was similar to that of the Ijaws in all respects. However, one group in the Niger Delta, the Itsekiri, had a centralized kinship pattern of government, similar to those of the Bini and the Yoruba.

As time went on, in certain areas the house system changed. With increased involvement in the booming overseas slave trade and later in legitimate trade, the house system, previously organized on the basis of lineage groups, was replaced by what was known as the “canoe house system.” Under this system, people from different lineage groups combined to form a corporation for the purpose of trade.

The Tallensi

The Tallensi occupy the northern territories of the old Gold Coast (now Ghana). Today, they are peasant farmers, engaged mainly in the cultivation of cereal crops. The essential feature of their traditional agriculture is mixed farming, involving permanent and stable settlements, which profoundly influenced the social organization which was based on the clan system.

Clusters of homesteads were known as “suman.” A residential aggregate constituted a clan, or a group of clans, members of which were kinfolk by consanguinity. Rights and duties, privileges and obligations were vested in corporate units, and any authorized member could act on behalf of the unit or clan. Each lineage was

headed by a senior male member, who together with other clan elders constituted a repository of social and ritual responsibilities. Both the age grade system and the practice of convening mass assemblies to make crucial decisions were prevalent among the Tallensi. Groups and not individuals constituted the source of political authority.

The various clans depended, for the most part, on communal labor. It was possible for large lineages within clans to accumulate wealth based on their size; however, no social privileges attached to wealth. Socially and politically, therefore, the Tallensi were a homogenous, sedentary and egalitarian society.

What is immediately prominent in our consideration of stateless societies is the absence of centralization and concentration of authority. For the most part it is difficult to point to any individual as the overall head or ruler of different communities. The exercise of leadership in the sense of full-time authority was similarly unknown. Whatever authority that existed often affected very limited aspects of the lives of individuals. At the same time, classes hardly existed in these traditional societies. It is indeed doubtful whether an equivalent for the word "class" exists in any indigenous African language — and language reflects the thoughts and values of those who speak it.

Increased productivity and specialization in the use of tools, together with increased trading activities between various communities on the one hand, and with outsiders on the other, gave rise to a steady growth of private property, internal differentiation/stratification, and semi-feudalism. Warfare, conquest, and voluntary borrowing were some of the other factors at work during the period of colonial transition.

Early authority patterns were commonly codified in ritualized forms of leadership. Even where systems of social control increased in scope, ritual leaders in many cases continued to exert a moderating influence over secular leaders. Empire states were established at Kanem-Bornu, Songhai, Mali, Oyo, Sokoto, Benin, Zulu, Ngwato, Momba, Bayankole, Kede, Somuke, Hausa-Fulani, etc.

Black Autonomy Is Not Separatist

Lorenzo Kom'boa Ervin
(2013)

However, we also have differences with the Black (and other race) nationalists, although we may share many basic ideas with them on cultural autonomy. We also believe in and treasure many of the traditions and history of our peoples, but believe it must be 'demystified' and made into a culture of resistance, rather than personality cults or escapism from the reality of fighting racism. Further, we categorically do not believe in any "race nationalism", which demonizes white people and advocates some sort of biological determinism. We are not xenophobic; so do not entertain any race mythology about European peoples as either a superior species or as devils. And although we recognize the necessity of autonomous struggles in this period, we can work with white workers and poor people around specific campaigns.

Our major point of our differences is that we are not seeking to build a Black nation-state.

In fact, we believe the same class politics of "haves and have-nots" will show itself within any type of Black nation-state, whether it's an Islamic, secular New African, or African Socialist state, and that this will produce an extreme class differential and economic/political injustice among those oppressed peoples of color. We can look at a succession of dictatorships and capitalist regimes in Africa to let us know this. We believe that a bourgeois class and political dictatorship is inevitable and that a people's revolution will breakout under such a Black Nationalist government.

Look at what is happening today under the former Apartheid government, now under Black rule, united with the White capitalist class. The Black bourgeoisie and business class have been elevated as the nominal ruling class, while the same economic forces are exploiting and oppressing the African working class and poor. Millions are homeless, unemployed, exploited at law, wage, labor, jobs, and are landless. Capitalist Black Power has not freed Black people even after apartheid has been defeated. Can the capitalist imperialist financial institutions any less control a Black nation-state in America? Sovereignty is not an option in such a world dominated by this system. A new Black nation-state on a North American

land territory does not mean freedom any more than do the ones in Africa, Asia and Latin America.

We also believe that under the capitalist system that now exists, most manifestations of Black nationalism have never been a truly revolutionary doctrine, but rather such movements have asserted themselves most forcefully as a defensive doctrine for the protection of the Black middle class. It is not even a movement to fight white racism, but rather an interest group politics which can battle for equal political power for Black business people or the professional class under this system, not to remove it.

So, a Black nation-state is not the answer to our problems as an oppressed people, in fact it leads us back to slavery, just as it has not led to freedom for any of the world's people. Just flag independence. It replaces the white master for the Black master. We are not immune from the laws of social change; the state is an oppressive institution by its very nature.

In addition, those who argue for a Black state almost never tell how it will be obtained and many of their arguments that have been presented are intentionally vague and fanciful. Who really believes that America will just grant an Islamic state to the Nation of Islam, or give up five Southern states to the Republic of New Africa just because a small faction calling itself a "government in exile" exists and advocates for it? Who can even prove most people want it in the first place? Why, it would require years of a bloody struggle and a major organizing drive. And what are we to do until that great day comes (?); the Black Nationalist groups never tell us, but we can presume we are to blindly follow behind their leaders and pay our dues to their organizations. This is opportunism and treachery, leading us down a blind alley.

In addition, the only revolutionary nationalist group to even talk about conducting a plebiscite to find out what form African people in America believed our freedom should take was the Black Panther Party. They recognized that it was up to the masses to make such decisions, not vanguard organizations in their place. Like the Panthers, we believe that even before racism or capitalism are defeated, we can begin now to wage a protracted struggle against capitalism and its agents and that the only nation-state we should be concerned with is the corrupt American state still oppressing us and most of the peoples of the world.

In common with the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee, the leading militant organization of the earlier civil rights period, Anarchists believe that the role of the organizer is not to lead people, but to empower them and let them take

over their own local struggles. We also believe that such communities are virtual colonies or semi-colonies, which are under the military and political control of the state. But we do not believe that a national liberation movement alone can free us and that the real task is to dismantle capitalism itself. Our liberation struggle is part of a broader struggle for total social change.

Many middle class Black nationalist groups are tied to the Democratic Party or Ralph Nader's Green Party and do not offer any real radical alternative. Firstly, we do not believe in conventional or electoral politics in any form and reject coalitions led by liberals and social democrats. Finally, like the Panthers of the 1960s and contrary to today's Nation of Islam and the Afro-centric movement, we believe in a class analysis and understand that there were historical, socio-economic factors that accounted for both slavery and racism, not because whites are "ice people", "devils" or other such nonsense. The main motive was money, the enrichment of Europe and the "New World". This capitalist system produces racism/white supremacy. It is this capitalist system that must be destroyed to get rid of it.

Therefore, this is who we are, autonomous peoples of color, fighters for Anarchism, self-determination and freedom for our people and all oppressed people. The Panthers proved how dangerous Black revolutionaries can be to this system, now we will finish the job of putting capitalism in its grave. No freedom without a fight!

On Anarkata (2021)

A brief description by Andrewism

[...] Anarkata as a political tendency, developed out of Black Anarchisms and defined by the Afrofuturist Abolitionists of the Americas in 2019, it incorporates elements of not only Anarchism, but also Black Marxism, Maoism, Pan-Africanism, Black feminism, Queer liberation, etc etc. Thus, it stands opposed to not only the Western and capitalist forces oppressing Black people, but all axes of oppression that work against us. The term Anarkata is short for ‘anarchic akata,’ a reclamation of the Yoruba word for ‘housecat’ or ‘wild animal,’ considered a slur by some. Just to make this clear, Anarkata is not a term nonBlack people should be applying to any old Black Anarchic. It is an in-house term. Relax yuhself.

Anarkata is inspired by the rich history of Black resistance. From the communal nomads of Africa, to the stateless Africans who defied African empires, to the refugees who fled Saharan and Atlantic Slave Trades, to the Black captives who found queer love despite all odds, to the Black pirates who bled empire of its stolen wealth, to the Maroons of the Americas, to the slave uprisings and race riots that would threaten the white power structure, to the Black guerillas who resisted European colonialism, to the Black women who challenged white supremacist patriarchy, to the Black trans people who transgress the impositions of colonial gender binaries, to the Pan-Africanist struggle to connect the freedom of the entire diaspora, to the fight for disability justice, to the prison abolitionist struggle.

At the root of the Anarkata tradition is the Black tendency to defy rigidity, borders, hierarchy, and enclosure. To emphasize freedom through grassroots organizing, mutual aid, and revolutionary struggle. To quote the Anarkata statement, “Through countless moments of defiance and flexibility, our ancestors made a way for us to imagine an anarchic radicalism that is unmistakably Black.

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