

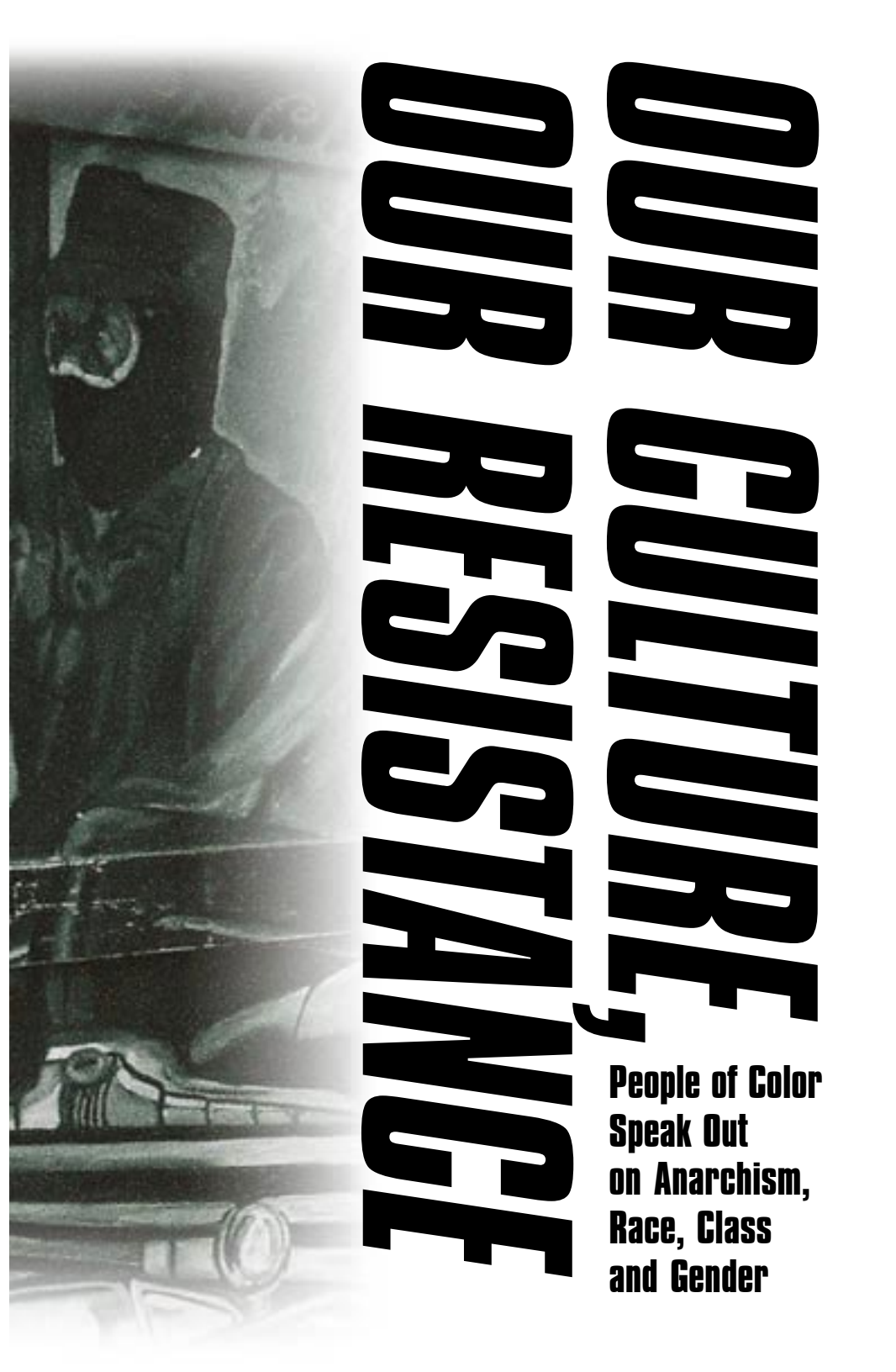
O ver the last decade,

Third World peoples' movements against globalization, neoliberalism and related issues have captured the imagination of the world. From the militancy of street protests to the fight for autonomy advocated by the Ejército Zapatista de Liberación Nacional (EZLN, also known as the Zapatistas), radical politics led by people of color is quickly evolving. We are hearing less of old top-down strategies and more about popular education and grassroots organizing.

A small but growing movement of people of color is developing a new conversation that advocates anti-authoritarianism and anarchism as solutions to our collective struggle. Such a movement is largely led by youth, and such advocacy is a departure from the old-guard politics espoused by revolutionaries of color. Many of these people of color met in October 2003 in Detroit for the first Anarchist People of Color conference. Others continue to organize, agitate and act to find bottom-up answers to the freedom movement's most perplexing questions.

Our Culture, Our Resistance: People of Color Speak Out on Anarchism, Race, Class and Gender is the first compilation of writings by people of color covering the concepts of anarchism, race, class and gender. The purpose of this book is to contribute to the ongoing dialogue among people of color and others as we strive toward freedom.

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Ernesto Aguilar, editor
www.illegalvoices.org



OUR CULTURE, OUR RESISTANCE,

**People of Color
Speak Out
on Anarchism,
Race, Class
and Gender**

Sara Ramirez Galindo writes, "I was born in the southeastern Mexican state of Puebla, migrated to the U.S. at the age of 11 and grew up in Compton, California. I started taking part in leftist political activism & organizing while in high school. Today I'm part of the collective at Casa Del Pueblo Cooperative in Los Angeles. My 'formal' institutional education is being completed at UC Santa Cruz with a focus in Community Studies and Latin American Studies; the informal education I'm learning comes from everyday people like my family, the CDP collective, and the children, señoras and señores who make up the Casa Del Pueblo Housing Cooperative, who like me are 'soñadores, seeing, thinking and acting for dignity, community, 'convivencia,' and autonomy."

Our Culture, Our Resistance: People of Color Speak Out on Anarchism, Race, Class and Gender
First edition, published September 11, 2004

Disclaimer: This work has been edited for typographical errors and formatting. Authors' structure and flow, for the most part, has been left intact, so to support people of color's efforts to speak in their own words as they wished. This work may not be free from editing faults, however.

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Our Culture, Our Resistance

Contents

Introduction by *Ashanti Alston* 2

Experiencing Anarchism by *Sara Ramirez Galindo* 8

Hearts Spark Arson by *Heather Ajani* 14

Puppets, Pageantry and Protest Politics: White People and the Anti-War Movement by *Tiffany King* 21

On Competition and Solidarity by *Soo Na* 27

The End of Idealism: Honest Conversations about Race, Class, Self-Determination and Anarchist People of Color by *Ernesto Aguilar* 36

Raising Children of Color in White Anarchist Circles by *Victoria Law* 51

Love and Respect: Parenting and Identity with Rivka Gewirtz Little and Bruce Little 56

The War of Art: A Conversation between Walidah Imarisha and Not4Prophet 65

No Way As A Way: An Interview with Greg Lewis 75

About the Authors and Interviewees 90

Dedication

This book is dedicated to people of color around the world and our just fights for consciousness, justice, land, freedom and liberty.

Acknowledgements

Thanks to the authors; to Heather Ajani for tremendous support; and to AK Press for its work, but also for rejecting this book and inspiring independent people of color publishing.

Introduction

The white fathers told us, "I think, therefore, I am" and the black mother within each of us – the poet – whispers in our dreams, I feel, therefore I can be free. Poetry coins the language to express and chart this revolutionary demand.

– Audre Lorde

Here we are, and the APOC phenomena continues. From the Detroit Conference to the build-up for the Republican convention and onward, folks of color with anarchist and anti-authoritarian politics are making a presence. And it couldn't happen at a better time!

If I may pull my age card for a moment: I am a very proud product of the 1960s' Revolution. It was that time when all things seemed possible, like Revolution in the very belly of this beast. It was in the air and folks from all walks of life were joining up. Some movements in particular were grounding the charge. The "American Indian Movement," the Chicano Liberation Movement and the Black Liberation Movement. And why do I say "grounding?" Because without the recognition of these movements having to deal with the very structure of the Empire of the U.S., the anti-war movement would only fight for reform and reform would mean the wholesale selling out of those of us at the very bottom for the interest of well-meaning white folks. It would be just another version of selling out folks of color as throughout the history of our struggles from the moment of European invasion. For the same reason, folks of color decide that that it is necessary to close ranks, so to speak and figure out how to ensure our different freedoms.

Tiffany King lives in Wilmington, Delaware and is currently working with P.O.W.E.R. People Organized Working to Eradicate Racism

Victoria Law has been a self-identified anarchist since she was sixteen. Since then, she has participated in various collectives and anarchist endeavors, learned photography, been published on-line and in print, made zines, traveled overseas and become a mother. She and her daughter will be visiting her great-grandmother's former house in Shanghai in January 2004 between the Western and the Lunar New Years.

Greg Lewis writes, "I was born December 2, 1970 to a white mother and black father. I was raised mostly by my mother. I became politicized largely due to being targeted for racist violence by white kids in my neighborhood, along with being on welfare from birth until I was 17. This also helped jump off my journey in the world of martial arts, starting with boxing. Today, I'm a certified personal trainer, karate instructor, and I serve the people as minister of information for the RBG hip-hop liberation group dred-i."

Bruce Little is an anti-authoritarian of Afrikan descent living in New York City. He works on technology volunteer projects that are focused on bridging the Digital Divide. **Rivka Gewirtz Little** is a New York City-based freelance journalist, who focuses on issues in criminal justice and urban education.

soo na is an activist, student, and writer. She believes in articulation of the possible, which is desire. In the past, she has organized community dialogues on women of color and sexual health; worked with the online website for young women of color and sexual health, MySistahs; and co-founded the D.C.-based Coalition Against Rape and Re-victimization (CARR), which first took to the streets on 13 September, 2003.

Not4Prophet is with the band Ricanstruction. You can learn more about Ricanstruction at www.ricanstruction.net.

About the Authors and Interviewees

Author and interviewees in alphabetical order

Ernesto Aguilar is based in Houston, Texas. He started the Anarchist People of Color listserv in 2001, and the APOC website shortly thereafter. He edited *Our Culture, Our Resistance* and works on the monthly APOC publication *Wildfire*. You can reach him at apoc@illegalvoices.org.

Heather Ajani recently moved to Houston to focus on community level organizing amongst people of color and to finish her oral history project, "Black Star Rising: People of Color and Resistance in the New Millennium." Over the past six years, she has written several articles and has been involved in various forms of organizing around issues such as labor, immigration, prison support and abolition, and police brutality.

Ashanti Alston, presently the Northeast regional coordinator for Critical Resistance, is a former member of both the Black Panther Party and Black Liberation Army, and was a political prisoner for over 12 years. Currently, he is a member of *Estacion Libre*, a people of color Zapatista support group, as well as a board member for the Institute for Anarchist Studies. He also authors the zine *Anarchist Panther*.

Walidah Imarisha is a spoken-word artist (part of the group Good Sista/Bad Sista) and helped to edit *Another World is Possible: Conversations in a Time of Terror*. She works with the crew of AWOL as well. More information on AWOL is at awol.objector.org.

Living in the '60s and '70s meant living at a time when modern technology, especially the revolution in communications and transportation, meant that the "world" got smaller. A teenage boy in New Jersey could turn on the TV set and watch his folks in that Black Nation called Down South get water-hosed and beaten by rednecks because they dared protest for the right to be free from racism and terror. It also meant that we got to see televised accounts of the U.S. invasion of the Vietnamese people and sometimes even an African revolutionary diplomat speaking eloquently on a newly independent nation or liberation struggle on the verge of victory. Come to find out that your very own revolutionaries here, like Robert Williams, Malcolm X, Stokeley Carmichael, the Panthers and even folks like Maya Angelou had been traveling overseas to visit and learn from these other kindred struggles. Cuba, Vietnam, China, Algeria, Tanzania, Kenya, Nigeria. Folks were reporting back new information before they could even get back. And folks here were just moved. It was the true beginnings of the anti-globalization movement. But folks of color revolutionaries here weren't hoping from one revolutionary uprising to another like it was fun, and no doubt it was exciting. But folks belonged, for the most part, to organizations on the ground level who needed, wanted to know what thinking and organizing styles seemed to be working for others around the world so that we might incorporate them, like in jazz improvisation, into our movements and move forward. Communications and transportation technologies were being used by the slaves to hook up with other revolutionary slaves around the world in the hope that we would all be on the same page in bringing down The Beast. The Babylonian Monster.

Interesting about this '60s period that is so instructional for those of us today who are bringing anarchist and anti-authoritarian revolution to our communities, is that '60s revolution began as a rejection of old revolutionary thinking and styles of organizing. When we research that early period we find that young folks, regardless of racial background, were tired of the various communist and Marxist parties, and the liberal organizations. They were not lonely, led by old folks but displayed such a rigid, Catholic

adherence to dead white male revolutionary thinking that it felt like parents. It felt like parental rule that upheld hypocrisy and materialism and individualism and willful blindness to racism, war and class privilege. So, on their own, young folks were searching for more egalitarian, communal and spontaneous ways of just being in the world and of making revolution in the US in concert with other struggles around the world. France, May 1968. Mexico, 1968. The Congo, 1964...

In this early period, the anti-authoritarian spirit was dominant. It was organizationally expressed in early Students for a Democratic Society (SDS) and Student Nonviolence Coordinating Committee (SNCC). It was expressed in terms of vision in terms of creating a "Beloved Community." Revolutionaries like Elder Ella Jo Baker was able to impart to young folks in the South to look to themselves for leadership and to help Southern communities raise up their own indigenous leadership instead of relying on the privileged ministries and old liberal guard to guide them. SNCC, as just one example, took Ella's advise to heart and was able to help build a dynamic revolutionary movement for voter registration and community liberation like the racist, fortress South had never saw. And when we look further into this period, we can see that as long as folks kept to egalitarian, participatory democratic and grand visionary politics, the movements kept a vibrancy and growth. But as we go further, we also see that at the same time the more rigid liberal and revolutionary influences had not given up their religious fight to lead the movements. Black, Native American, Chicano, Asian, Puerto Rican and white "worker."

As the battle for ideological leadership, organizing style and revolutionary "agency" grew, folks were hitting normal growth roadblocks. They had to do with membership growth, the constantly changing picture of the system we were up against and its fascism against us, questions of allies, weapons of fight-back, etc. Folks needed answers. The pressure was on. Revolution now. Seems like quick fast solutions were needed and folks were leaning more to the more "scientific" approaches coming from the

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 Ghandi; 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.

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.

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

Marxists, communists and Third World revolutionaries. And the Third World revolutionaries were taking on more Marxist and communist ideas. Eurocentric ideas. Scientific ideas. Modern ideas of making a revolution in their respective nations. And being that the liberation movements were succeeding so quickly in kicking out their imperial masters, then it seems to make sense that we take on that kind of thinking and style. We did.

As our movements here became more Marxist, we will see that they also became less inclusive, less spontaneous, less democratically participatory. One did not continue to pursue the Beloved Community; one now increasingly talked about "scientific socialism." One did not try to discover new ways to deepen the participatory democracy which "took too long" or contained too many different ideologies; one went for the more serious "vanguard" small, tight-knit organization of the more brilliant speakers, theoreticians and organizers who knew what to do, because they had read more, traveled more and spoke more. The Women Uprising within SNCC and SDS and other organizations would be stifled because, I don't care how you look at it, this new revolution would boil down to men shit. And though it may have been a blessing in disguise, because a women's revolutionary movement would seriously take off at this point, the overall movements would fragment in a not-good way while the Monster would recover and its Counter Intelligence Program (COINTELPRO) shored up its fascist work. In this sense, though a lot of great resistance was waged under the growing Marxist-Leninist-Trotskyist-Maoist direction of grassroots movement, overall, it killed our spirit, our spontaneity and our faith in our own indigenous knowledge production.

Our anarchism
has meant for us
a return
to something old
yet so new

Within the Empire, be we folks of color, workers, students, we have histories and herstories of resistance nurtured by visions of freedom. We have ways of knowing and figuring things out that have allowed us to draw from Iroquois to Franz Fanon and Herbert Marcuse.

Why I originally said that all this was instructional for us today is because it was that anarchist and anti-authoritarian spirit of the early '60s that gave that period its revolutionary dynamism, its, originality. Folks were so inspired by international movements but mores by our own folks of color movements here in the belly. But we lost it. All of us. And in many ways, their ain't been a comparative movement of movement since. By the early '70s, for all intents and purposes, we were not able to sustain our growth to effective challenge the Empire and COINTELPRO, and the mass media wrote the rest of the story.

But then out of nowhere, seemingly, comes Seattle and the WTO battles and we begin to hear faint sounds of revolution again and some of them voices are ours. Ours. Folks of the Tribes, indigenous to Turtle Island, here by way of the slave ships, here by southwestern wars of U.S. annexation, World War Two koncentration kamps descent and then our more recent immigrant communities of color who take their turn at becoming the latest fall-guys diverting attention from the real empire designs of world domination.

Our anarchism has meant for us a return to something old yet so new, Not only in terms of our people's ancient stories of stateless times but just being here now knowing that even within the resistance stories there has always been the spirit of freedom, direct action direct participatory democracy and communalism. We, like the Zapatistas, are both ancient and new, embracing cutting edge thinking on our own terms, i.e. not slavishly. We will use both the drum and the Internet, the sacred prayer and the gun; and we will be as grandly and wildly visionary in drawing new worlds as we wanna be.

Folks wanna know what anarchism is? It's freedom, it's creativity, it's

I have no beef with the RCP or its supporters at this time; they know perfectly well what I think, they know where I stand on important issues, and what I am willing and capable of doing. They may not like me as a person, and this could be said for some of the anarchists out here, but I'm pretty sure they respect me as activist.

Do you think it's still fair to call the RCP, and particularly its portrayal of people of color in its paper and literature, when the organization is white-dominated?

Although the argument could be made that having images of people of color protesting and speaking out is good, it also comes off as ultra-liberal and even pimping the images and histories of the oppressed, particularly when the RCP is against decolonization and other issues.

There is not one white-led organization out there above criticism for racist practices, no matter how 'revolutionary' they claim to be. This one of many reasons this APOC network exists. Some groups are better than others.

The only way this will change as far as the RCP goes is when the people of color within the party or those who support the party make that change occur. I notice that top-down leadership type organizations tend to improve when the rank and file either leave or force the leadership to leave.

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

outside their party, and the movement generally; and either didn't know, or didn't care, or didn't care to know.

I was under the impression that they didn't care, since conversations around various issues (some brought up in the pamphlet, some not) with local RCP members always degenerated into shouting matches, veiled threats from both sides, routine vandalism upon their bookstore and occasional violence.

It was to a point where other organizations were calling for 'party discipline' from the national RCP leadership. Some actually attempted to contact the RCP's central committee with their concerns. I was one of them. At one point (around 1997) some black activists ordered them out of the Central District (a historically Black neighborhood in Seattle) because of how they treated oppressed people.

I don't know about other cities, but the Seattle RCP behaves considerably better now. I believe they have a clearer understanding of their role in local politics and realize that they too cannot afford to be alienated anymore than any of us already is.

In all reality, that piece was written in the spirit of Mao's principles of "unity-criticism-unity" and "let 100 flowers bloom, let 100 schools of thought contend." And this, despite any personality conflicts that activists may have with individual RCP cadre, is precisely what happened.

The October 22nd event locally, which was for years exclusively an RCP event, is now more diverse and powerful. Many activists are still critical of their overall political line, but they do make an effort to involve as many people as they can reach out to. They attend all the major political events out here. They make an effort to encourage people to pack the courtroom for every police shooting inquest and activist trial, and they sent members to both of my trials (criminal and civil) around the events of September 1998.

culture. It's people and people's diversity. It's people finding themselves right now from all walks of life here in the belly of the beast and not giving a damn about how we got here via the Empire but deciding that it is gonna be here where we plot the Empire's demise. Fuck ya bourgie-ass white rights, borders, patriotism, their weapons of mass distraction and destruction. On to the return of an old family grandchild to home: Revolution anarchist-style, communal, earth-loving, dancing, throwing bricks, squatting abandoned building, creating quilombos. In the hands of your soulful playmate, we APOC are here. Let the games begin!

Ashanti
Anarchist Panther

PS – Thank you for letting an ole man hang with y'all. Because of you, I still believe that with the torch in your hands, we can kick ass and help make this world of worlds ... free.

Behold, I am Funkadelic. I am not of your world. But fear me not. I will do you no harm. Loan me your funky mind and I shall play with it. For nothing is good unless you play with it.

And all that is good, is nasty!

""What is Soul," Funkadelic, 1969

GOOD MORNING, REVOLTUION, you nasty cat you!
Sorta Langston Hughes, uh-hun.

Experiencing Anarchism

by Sara Ramirez Galindo

It is difficult to write about a topic like anarchism, which is already controversial enough, to people who are familiar with its theory and practice without being intensely judged and questioned about what is written. Not that questioning is wrong. It is necessary, but in my opinion, it is unproductive if it lacks respect for someone's ideas, thorough thinking, reflection, and constructive feedback. That is why I ask that you, the reader, to please just read, think and reflect about what I am expressing here. It might not be a perfectly written composition but it is not meant to be one, it is simply my experience with anarchism.

I first learned of "Anarchism," the kind known to most activists in the United States, through literature given to me by a friend who had traveled to Washington State for the anti-World Trade Organization actions in Seattle of 1999. My curiosity about the subject led me to research more about it. I never read entire books by Proudhon, Bakunin or Emma Goldman for lack of time, so I read articles, zines and excerpts of books instead. Through this literature I learned of an anarchist conference.

This first anarchist conference I attended left me perplexed, for I had read about anarchism as the theory and practice towards the abolition of authority, hierarchies, practicing collectivity and active organizing. The feeling I got from that conference was uninviting, dry, alienating, extremely sub-cultural and life-stylish. I could not understand many of the things

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.

A lot of people still pass around "Mythology of the White-Led 'Vanguard': A Critical Look at the Revolutionary Communist Party, USA," your article and analysis on the RCP. Some people – mostly whites but even a few people of color – allege the piece was divisive. But most really feel it and say it's time opportunist elements like the RCP get called out for how they target people of color. How do you respond to the critics of that piece, and what's your take on that piece now?

To the critics I ask, "If you can't criticize them while they do not hold state power, what happens if or when they do have state power and they are criticized?" This question also applies to any other organization jockeying for a position of leadership in "the movement"; claiming to be a vanguard or whatever. Are the critics saying that the RCP and/or other organizations are above criticism? Are the critics saying that they themselves are above criticism as well?

I agree that criticizing allies or potential allies should be done in a way that is constructive and doesn't purposely hurt them, but at the time this was written the RCP was doing things to directly hurt groups and individuals

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."

Right now, my advice would be for everybody who was at this historic event to stay in contact with one another. Organize similar APOC affinity groups in your city. Attend the next conference if you can and bring as many people as you can. Go to the APOC website (www.illegalvoices.org/apoc) and review the notes that were posted from the various workshops. Discuss what happened with other people in your community, especially the youth. And read this book. Twice. And discuss it in your community. 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

people were talking about in discussion circles. I could not understand why several of them had re-named themselves after plants and animals. I did not understand why they wore no deodorant; and it seemed weird to me that nobody bothered asking others how they were doing, if they needed anything, or even took the time to offer a greeting or a smile. I did not enjoy the conference but still remained interested in anarchism telling myself, "I'm sure this isn't all there's to it."

Once I got in contact with a self-defined anarchist group in my region that was holding weekly meetings, I decided to check them out. The way I was received by the people in the group was not any different from what I'd experienced at my first anarchist conference, except that after the conclusion of the meeting a couple of women in the group approached me to ask my name and how I was doing and invited me to their next meeting. I did not stay in that group long. I never spoke up because I was afraid of saying something wrong, something outside the "anarchist" terms they understood, and I did not want to be the center of attention if anything I asked became controversial, for I felt none of that "solidarity" and less of that "collectivity" that anarchism is supposed to generate. Though some people were very nice, others were very arrogant, unapproachable and plain intimidating, so I moved on.

While visiting "anarchist" groups every now and then, I was simultaneously involved in anti-sweatshop student activism, not because it was the "thing to do," but because my mother, uncles, aunts and myself had worked in clandestine garment sweatshops before. From this student activist work, I met a woman who introduced me to her collective, the Zapatista Committee of Los Angeles.

That day was the beginning of a life-changing experience.

Nobody in any activist or typical anarchist organization had greeted me with honest handshakes and looked at me in the eye with interest of

knowing who I was or what I had to say like the people in this collective did. I was once again confused because this group was not self-defined as anarchist, but they based their practices on non-hierarchical, anti-authoritarian politics, they did

...our communities need non-traditional anarchist projects that could be constantly assessed to see if they are indeed creating solidarity, mutual-aid, self-determination, self-sufficiency and autonomy.

practice collectivity, held weekly reading circles, and most importantly they were organizing events, not just shows – these were based on accomplishing truly radical and practical goals. And I for the first time felt these actions were building a true sense of community.

As I became to know each and every one of the people in the collective, I was not surprised to know many of them were in fact self-defined anarchists who had simply felt the need to work with a group of people who could produce and provide what mainstream anarchist

circles had not. Upon experiencing anarchism through those events, groups and people, I constructed this view about today's many types of anarchists: the self-defined image anarchists, the read-only anarchists, the underground and non-self-defined working anarchists, the anarchists who are a combination of all these, and others.

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-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

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

At this point I had understood that the anarchists I had initially met did not necessarily comprise what the theory and practice of anarchism was, as I understood it. It was like understanding that in the world there are nation-states and then there are the people living in them, two different entities. It was also at this point that I openly acknowledged that I was not wrong for being one of the few women and people of color walking into a predominantly-white anarchist book fair, but that is was in fact this homogenized "movement" of anarchists that had unfortunately allowed things to be structured this way.

This homogenization has unfortunately built boundaries that mark what kind of issues are of priority, what kind of actions are "revolutionary," the kind of workshops to be given at a conference and so on. It was difficult for me to feel connected to these anarchists; our realities and priorities had nothing in common. Anarchist literature circulating in the majority of anarchist groups today speaks mainly of European (and European descendants') anarchists' history and present. I'm sure that is not on purpose, yet the beginning of this trend led to the simplification of ideas, such as that of Europe being the "birthplace" of anarchism and this information was used to simplify another idea, that supposedly anarchism later "reached" Latin America in the mid-1800s. I saw how this was not questioned often or ever by mainstream anarchism. Was it never considered that other people, whose histories just never made it to books, could have been practicing anarchism?

Understanding the importance of rescuing other anarchist histories has led to the emergence of materials about Cuban anarchism, African anarchism, Argentine anarchism, etc. At the same time a growing number of anarchists – including myself, a non-white person – have started identifying as anarchists of color in order to rescue and expose (to everyone, not just to mainstream anarchists) our struggles and those fought by historic individuals like Luisa Capetillo from Puerto Rico, Lucy Parsons from the United States, Julia Arévalo from Chile, Maria Angelina Soares from Brazil and others.

Being part of this is my attempt to break up this standardization of anarchism's current Eurocentric tendencies that, in my opinion, could be causing some of the stagnation of its theory and practice; and to use it as a supplement to the gradual dismantling of racism and similar hierarchies of power that unfortunately exist in mainstream anarchism.

I keep mentioning, "mainstream anarchism" because in the United States, the only anarchism recognized is that which is externally visible, while it is in fact being "actively and seriously" taken into practice in other parts of the world through struggles that are simply not getting the amount of solidarity an all-white-boy black-block "action" gets. I am certain that the anarchist activity taking place right this minute in Magonista communities in the Mazateca Highlands in Oaxaca (Mexico), and in the Bolivian region are not the type of anarchist "scene," we are accustomed to see, for these movements include bloody confrontations, tears, death, mutual trust and hope, and most importantly constant struggle as a priority to survival. The realities for U.S. anarchism are others, and so the responses are going to be different, that is understood. Yet, this mainstream anarchist movement in the U.S. lacks understanding and consideration for the realities lived by non-privileged anarchists in the same region. Mainstream anarchism in this aspect lacks the solidarity, the convivial feeling needed to work with each other, to learn and unlearn from each other, and most importantly to build trust to back each other up.

I was fortunate enough to participate in an amazing event where these elements of respect, solidarity, inspiration and revitalization were experienced.

The Anarchist People of Color Conference in Detroit boosted up my hope for anarchism. This was an event that became controversial (to mainstream anarchists) from the very beginning, as many considered it exclusionary, "racist" and every other negative thing possible. I did not pay much attention to this drama, as I knew we were not gathering to plot a battle against white anarchists, we were simply in need to meet and share ideas

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

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.

with each other. It felt humiliating to have to explain to some white and non-white anarchists why we wanted to meet. We wanted to meet for the same reason anarchist women gather separate from anarchist men: to empower themselves; we gathered, with similar reasons to those anarchists break away from authoritarian nation-state governments: to change things that were going wrong, to change things in the system. To me this conference meant meeting people who had experienced the discrimination I had lived within mainstream anarchist circles. It also meant meeting individuals who were highly interested in developing and carrying out projects, not just for those in the "scene" or in their cliques, but mainly with those in their communities (community meaning neighbors, co-workers, families, etc.), projects that could truly exemplify the ideals of anarchism rather than simply spending time theorizing about them. This conference did not produce a separate anarchist group, as that was not our purpose. We created a different understanding of its practice and theory.

To us, anarchism meant something diverse, since we all came from different communities and with different psychological, emotional and spiritual experiences. We stressed on the importance of having serious commitment on building relationships with our community rather than encircling ourselves in a subculture that unconsciously excludes others around us. We also planted that this anarchism we were talking was non-vanguardist, non-elitist, non-arrogant, respectful, humble, honest, loving, gentle and accountable to others. As revolutionary anarchist people of color, we understood our communities need non-traditional anarchist projects that could be constantly assessed to see if they are indeed creating solidarity, mutual-aid, self-determination, self-sufficiency and autonomy.

Experiencing anarchism to me has not been what books say it is. It has meant how my actions can in fact produce it effectively.

Hearts Spark Arson

by Heather Ajani

Over the past few years, my involvement in movements against police brutality, globalization and other political movements led me on a path to understanding how race works and how it affects me as a woman of color. Over the years, I have studied race theory, women's liberation movements, the criminal justice system, classical and contemporary political theory, as well as drawing from my own experiences. It is because of these academic exercises and personal growth processes that I write this article. I learned a lot about myself over the past three decades, figuring out why I am angry, why the way I feel has a bigger context than just my being and that as a brown woman in America I am forced to feel a duality wherever I turn.

There is a lot of debate about the political versus the personal. The debate started hitting mainstream activism during the second wave women's movement. The argument boiled down to whether the personal experiences we had belonged in political debate, more easily analogized as taking a more professional approach in our activism, checking personal problems at the door. To me this argument plays into the colonization of thought we struggle against each and every day. We use it and other terms to stifle each other and ourselves, including when we need to be accountable for our actions.

There have been times in history when the most beautiful revolutions, revolts and uprisings have been sparked because of the personal. Such examples include the abolitionist movement, civil rights movement and even mother's movements such as the Argentinean group, "Las Madres de Plaza de Mayo." Some of the most successful movements are borne of passion in one respect or another and that personal drive, commitment,

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,

for a lot of movements today – Seattle Copwatch and the Federation of Black Community Partisans. Can you talk about those groups and what, in your mind, made them significant?

The Copwatch was significant since it was the first one in Seattle since the Black Panther Party did their patrols in the 1960s. We were the only group at the time that monitored the police directly on the street. We defiantly got the attention of the police department, the local media, and attorneys on both sides of the police accountability issue. I don't think the FBCP was all that significant; it wasn't widely supported.

How big was FBCP at its peak, if you can mention that? And can you drop some knowledge on the FBCP formed?

I honestly don't know. Lorenzo was the common contact we all had. It basically came about from discussions I had with him, and discussions he had with black activists in the various cities he spoke in.

Do you think that kind of dynamic – where one person was the conduit and leader, for lack of a better word – hurt the organizing generally? And being who you are, one could guess you were not comfortable with such a communication flow.

For me, the problem was more of a lack of numbers locally. I got calls and emails from other folks involved with the project all the time. I had plenty of allies locally, but the organization itself wasn't growing. Another problem was people not following through on what they said they would do on a consistent basis.

In what ways do you think FBCP 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.

self-discipline and self-determination, or whatever is at the base of a revolutionary's heart is balanced with the political context of their environs. These movements are sparked by fires that burn the very foundations of the people involved, threatening their identities, who they are, leaving them with their backs against the wall.

As a person of color, activist, organizer, agitator, anti-authoritarian with strong anarchist leanings, I have often been accused of being too emotional, too critical, or too truthful. I can't say that I've always displayed the best behavior when confronted with these paternalistic statements often bestowed on women in radical circles, but I have tried to hone those accusations into something I can reclaim in a more principled way. The pain I feel when I hear these accusations and when I think of the way that these statements become internally oppressive it makes me wonder if what we give each other leaves us empty handed.

In my journey to developing a political and personal praxis, I have come to an understanding that my oppression comes from a system that depends on the privileges of a few and the oppression of those who are denied those privileges. This oppression eats people of color alive, depends on false dichotomies, hierarchies, systematic genocide through the continual colonization of non-whites, the perpetuation of capitalism and unholy alliances between workers and bosses. I have also wondered if it is possible to have the passion necessary to combat these social and political ills without emotion, self-criticism and truth.

In *All About Love*, bell hooks stresses the need for openness (i.e. honesty,) nurturing, self-discipline, justice and love as a means for social and political change. In a recent project, I had the opportunity to speak with several elders who had taken part in movements such as the Black Panther Party, Student Non-violent Coordinating Committee, and others. Most stressed the need for spiritual and political balance, stating that often times the connections between mind, body and spirit are ignored in lieu of personal gain. In another, more locally based project in Houston, this

reality took another turn as I asked people why commitment to political organizations/movements waned. Often times the answer was simply that there is a lack of passion for what we do. The balance between the personal and political is necessary to successfully create revolutionary potential. How do we seek to build a better world when we can't deal with ourselves or each other? How do we set examples for our dreams, our goals, or our visions without the internal healing that needs to take place?

We need passion to make change. We also need political direction and unity. In order to do this we must find the balance between the personal and the political worlds we live in. Sometimes we need to take our personal experiences to build a political analysis while understanding that political change can't successfully occur until we are left without those personal choices. I often quote one of my favorite people in the anarchist people of color movement, Ashanti Alston in saying, "change doesn't come until you are made to feel uncomfortable."

Building the Political and its Relation to the Personal

Drawing upon what I know, I will use the struggle of women as an example. Due to racial oppression, struggles of women of color have not focused on women as women, but against various oppressive systems. Often in our struggle, women of color experience issues of tokenism, stereotypical oppression, as well as blatant exposure to sexist behavior. We are not only subject to our identities as women, but also as women of color. Theorists often refer to this identity as "the other." Another term I prefer is the "third world women" (Anzaldúa, 64). This term encompasses the need for decolonization of the oppressed in our communities, the need for self-empowerment and -determination and knowledge of the history of people of color in this country. We are part of a system that seeks to destroy us, we are the "developing" and "war torn" peoples within Amerika, we continue to be colonized through lack of education, healthcare, employment, decent housing, child care and decent food. We have been taken from our lands

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.

You were a founding member of two groups that planted the seeds

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?

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

and our lands have been taken from us and we continue to experience this displacement through modern day Jim Crow systems such as the police and prisons. No matter what, the culprit is the same. It is our common enemy and the only way that we can fight it is by addressing our issues, finding solutions and developing political unity in order to build and strengthen social movements.

Before we can go on to developing a theory for freedom, we need to recognize and understand power. Power is often defined as the capacity to exercise control over another. Power is also the ability to perform or act effectively. At a women's studies conference in 1981, a group of women who were part of a consciousness-raising group for women of color concluded that they needed to define a common ground for how power worked within the United States. This model has four categories and signifies a hierarchy from which power flows. It begins with the idea that freedom in the U.S. is most easily achieved by the reality of the white, capitalist male. Next in line is the white woman, who achieves her will to power through her whiteness and though she is objectified by white men, she still bears the privilege of whiteness and draws on that privilege objectifying people of color in order to gain a solid sense of self. Men of color or "third world" men do not benefit from racial hierarchy, but do utilize their identities as males to confront their oppressions, which leaves women of color in a place where they are neither white, nor male (Anzaldúa, 64).

Even when trying to understand power as something that is interconnected through race and gender, it is important to think in terms of political change, where the weak spots are. Though power has been displayed in terms of hierarchy above, there is a need for a common goal, not just against whiteness and patriarchy, but against the weak spot in the system that divides these struggles. For critics of capitalism, it is class, but beyond that, what has historically divided struggles against those in power in the United States? Power differentials in the U.S. have been dependent on a system of white privilege. This privilege has separated movements of

women's liberation, labor movements and hinders self-determination of the poor and oppressed. Whiteness as a system determines who goes to the best schools, who lives where, employment, healthcare, and allows for an alliance between the bosses and the white working class. Whiteness keeps people of color from meeting basic needs and the power differentials that white privilege creates keeps the entire working class and sectors of the poor from resisting en masse because of the benefits it creates for those who identify as "white." This benefit for whites is sometimes referred to as the "wages of whiteness" (Roediger).

We need to recognize this system of domination that we live under if we are going to struggle against it. It is also important to understand what we go through on a personal level and how the wages of whiteness often times affect us. In a discussion session held amongst women of color at the 2003 Anarchist People of Color Conference in Detroit, a decision was made to discuss how we were made to feel as women of color and what we saw as solutions to those problems. We made this decision in order to start a dialogue amongst ourselves that started with a healing process, so we could gain strength in fighting our oppressions. When I look back upon the following list, I feel empowered because I no longer feel alone in system of oppression and domination that often sparks self-hatred and identity crisis among many women of color.

We came to many conclusions as to how we are oppressed, internally as well as externally. One was that women of color are often tokenized. Women of color (and our brothers) are often looked to by whites for answers and opinions about their [whites'] race politics, how they are working within a community, etc. When a cultural or racial question comes up, many times whites have a tendency to look towards the people of color in the room to view their reactions. This is not to say that whites should disregard the opinions of people of color, but that we shouldn't be asked for our opinions simply because we are non-white. A twist to this problem is when whites start to pontificate about our struggles as people of color.

No Way As A Way

An Interview with Greg Lewis

In the early 1990s, under the name "Greg Jackson," Greg Lewis was the editor of Black Autonomy, the first Black anarchist newspaper in the United States. Lewis, along with Lorenzo Komboa Ervin, became the most high-profile members of the Federation of Black Community Partisans, a Black autonomist formation. Today, he is a self-defense and fitness trainer still living in the Seattle area. We talked about his history, the trails blazed by Black Autonomy and Copwatch 206, and struggles today.

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

struggle we were born into (and born to win, as the hip hop group The Coup says). We can all remember a song, a poem, a single word even that moved us beyond measure, that gave us the strength to get back up and push forward. Historically we can see that at the center of almost every fight for freedom and justice was some form of art to carry people's spirits when their bodies were too tired to stand.

Whenever I think of the question of is art important, I think of Nikki Giovanni's poem "For Sandra," where she is asked by her neighbor is she ever wrote happy poems, and so she tries to write a tree poem, or a beautiful blue sky poem, and she can't because of the despair and destruction she sees out her window. She writes:

"so i thought again
and it occurred to me
maybe i shouldn't write
at all
but clean my gun and
check my kerosene supply
perhaps these are not poetic
times
at all."

For me, this was so incredibly moving, because it's what I think all the time. Franz Fanon once said something like, "A poet must learn that nothing can replace the unequivocal picking up of arms on the side of the people." It's such an important reminder, that these words, this art, is part of a larger struggle we must be engaged on many different levels. But I think the fact that Nikki asked that question in a poem shows that there is some purpose, because it reached mine and many other people's eyes and hearts. There is some sort of redemption after all.

Sometimes whites will say, "if you all did this..." or "if you did that..." Why would a white person know my struggle better than me? Why would I listen to a white person when all the white people in my life have said something either intentionally or by slip of tongue denoting that I am less than deserving: things like I am not fit for school, I shouldn't have kids, that they wish that I could stay and take care of their kids and help around the house, reinforcing that I am subordinate in one way or another?

Often women of color experience tokenization by whites in various ways; one is that we are exoticized for our unique qualities and physical attributes. There is more than one tale of a black sister walking into a room where a white woman wants to feel her hair. Other forms of oppression include unconscious sexist behavior amongst women, competitiveness, communication problems (not getting heard, getting talked over), being put into caregiver roles (we are called upon to be the secretaries, the organizers, the errand runners, the nannies and the mammies) and there are times when we fear for our personal safety because women of color are often perpetuated as whores by the corporate media. After each of us at the discussion brought up an issue, we finished our sentence with what we wanted in order to address the issue, so we were problem solving as we went along. Some of the solutions we came up with were: healing ourselves, finding balance, defining our boundaries, taking responsibility for ourselves and our actions, developing respect for ourselves and for others, and building communication skills. These solutions clearly spelled out the need to deal with the personal as well as the political in building strength among the women in that room.

What We Need

We need to build solidarity amongst each other through sharing our experiences, recognizing our differences and building support for each other. True solidarity creates awareness amongst oppressed peoples, and helps them to recognize the need to forge political unity. Because our

identities as third world peoples are multiple, this means defining who we are and at the same time, redefining what it means to struggle for liberation by building on our commonalities. The struggle for liberation should seek to end the subordination and domination of oppressed peoples and create a shift in power differentials that concentrate on a weak spot within our current power structure.

This means that we need to deal with who we are personally (both politically and spiritually) in order to be able look beyond ourselves and truly see how we as oppressed peoples are affected as a whole. This does not mean that we stop at struggling against our own angst, or for equality and individualism—this means that we use our consciousness of self to begin to collectively envision a society without domination by white, capitalist males; that we need to challenge what whiteness means in terms of actual privileges and to bankrupt that system so that it does not provide wages to those who draw on their identities to oppress others. We also need to create spaces that help to develop and empower ourselves and others. We need to understand that without our own fires we cannot spark the creativity, desire, and strength needed to struggle effectively against our oppressors.

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hooks, bell. *All About Love.*

Roediger, David. *The Wages of Whiteness: Race and the Making of the American Working Class.*

NOTE: the title of this article is not of my imagination, it is taken from a friend's former band, Bully Rag, a.k.a Fucking Thunder's CD, which ironically they put out before he was unfairly replaced. Anyways, to make a long story short, they consequently suffered as a result of their bad decision. Solidarity with friends, oh yes...

we often put limits on our art. Which in a way is a very good thing, to be very aware of what you're putting out in the word and how it will be interpreted. But at the same time, sometimes it becomes more about the right language and the mechanisms of intent, rather than creating something powerful and beautiful and terrible, all at the same time. I have written pieces that I love and feel are some of my best work, but I would not put them out in a book or read them at a performance, because of some of the language I use, and mostly the fear that what I have written is vague enough that it can be misconstrued in a way contrary to what I intended. So you try to create work that is art and not just propaganda, make it wide enough for other people to immerse themselves in it, to put your poem on and call it their skin, while at the same time making it narrow enough that they can't pull at it and stretch it large enough to clothe whatever they want to.

N4P: Which I think is also the beauty of art. It is not something that can be straight-jacketed unless you let it be. It is not a political speech. It's not an ideology or a party line or a ten point plan. It's free to talk about fighting or fucking, freestyle or funk. Yes, people can stretch it and clothe themselves, and stay warm in the winter or cool in the summer, or bulletproof on the frontlines. The language can be raw, "real," or revolutionary. Redemptive like a Bob Marley song or Bad like the Brains. It can call us to fight the power, encourage the people to get up, stand up, or go to sleep. In the end it can be madder than Malcolm. Or not even matter.

W: Which is the all important question, that keeps political artists awake at night: does it even matter? Does all the thinking and agonizing and debating I put into my work really make a difference in the grand scheme of things? I have to believe it does, both as a poet, but also as a person who has been moved by art. It's not the revolution by any means, and people sometimes get it so twisted, thinking that spitting radical rhetoric on a stage is the extent of their responsibility and obligation.

But art is salve for the soul, and we all need that to continue in the lifelong

N4P: Well, we are still trying to figure out exactly what part does art really play in this struggle at all. Is there such a thing as an anarchist poem, and, if so, what the hell is it for? Is art a tool for revolution? Does it lead us any closer towards an ideal? And, if so, how? Is arts power in it's lyrical message, or is that yet another straight jacket? Maybe its power is in its sense of freedom. When we first formed the group of artists that we now call Ricanstruction, many people automatically expected us to play a specific kind of music based on where we grew up, our ethnicity, our race. So we made sure that the music would instead be a fusion, a not-necessarily describable amalgam of everything that ever inspired us, everything we ever heard in the air. We didn't want to be pigeon-holed, so we made sure that one person would say, "They're a punk band," and another, "They're a hip hop group," or "They're a salsa orchestra," or a "jazz combo." We used to say that revolutionary music should sound like everything you've ever heard before and nothing you've ever heard before. So I sometimes feel that in this quest for revolution music, and how it works as a tool, that the sonics are more "important" than the words because you can only go so far with language.

But then of course, it's not so simple because the words are still important and they are the easiest way to communicate, short of throwing a molotov cocktail at an appropriate target. The words are no less important than Malcolm preaching on 125th street, or George Jackson writing from prison, or Che writing Guerrilla Warfare, or even Abbie Hoffman writing Steal This Book. Or for that matter, Nina Simone writing and singing "To Be Young, Gifted, and Black." I think it's easy and expedient for the shitstem to write art off as being nothing but some sort of entertainment, which serves as a way of declawing art so that they can then commodify it and put it in a pretty wrapper and sell it back to us as packaged "political album." But as artists who are engaged in the struggle, it's important that we not get caught up in "bizness" and start second guessing ourselves.

W: Yeah, there's always that questioning process going on inside you, and

Puppets, Pageantry and Protest Politics

White People and the Anti-War Movement

by Tiffany King

Reflecting on my own participation as a person of color in the 2003 protest marches of the anti-war movement, I am now aware my presence is being manipulated and abused. I have been rendered a puppet for white liberal pageantry. Any time I have attended a march I find I subject myself to objectification, marginalization and exploitation. Beyond the personal offenses I have incurred, I now truly believe the presence of people of color in anti-war and other so called "global justice" protest marches led and organized by whites legitimizes tactics that undermine a true pursuit for justice.

On February 15, 2003 grappling with my own frustration, anger and feelings of impotency as our country charged towards war; I attended a protest march. The march was organized by the usual suspects, A.N.S.W.E.R, Not in Our Name, Unite for Peace and Justice and the other white led coalitions here in Philly. As the Bush Administration moved closer and closer to dropping the first bombs on Iraq, I caved in and decided I had to go regardless of who organized this thing. I thought to myself, that if there was ever a time to momentarily get over the racism of the white left and past scars from previous interactions, it was now.

My justification for my attendance was we were facing war, and at least the

illusion of a collective and unified voice would be "more powerful" than the efforts of isolated communities of color or my own for that matter. In that moment, I had just given into white supremacist systems of domination. White supremacy asserts its own agenda by absorbing, subverting and negating any dissent and resistance to its domination. The structures of white supremacy demand submission by professing to be both the norm and alternative.

In the book, *Black Anti-Ballistic Missives*, activist, author and poet Ewuare Osayande argues white supremacy is the critical component that the anti-war movement fails to address, thus rendering it irrelevant. The racist anti-war movement is devoid of any self-critical process to acknowledge or address how white supremacy contributes to the oppression of people of color within the movement, so how could it possibly have an analysis of how white supremacy oppresses people of color around the world?

Given the reality the anti-war movement does not address white supremacy, it is to be expected that people of color would be objectified and exploited at one of its protest marches. On February 15, the people of color contingency I attended the march with decided to create a feeder march that would join the larger march on Broad Street. I assume this was an attempt to empower the POC who would be participating that day. We would temporarily march on our own terms, citing white supremacist imperialism as the true evil. Momentarily, I had the feeling that we would reclaim the political act of protest as a relevant and meaningful tool used by self-determining people of color around the world who have and continue to resist white supremacist imperialism. Yet I realized once I got to the march that this would not be possible.

We would chant Black, Latino, Muslim, Asian and... so forth to evoke a feeling of camaraderie and equal partnership. Yet the unequal distribution of power and privilege amongst people of color, which played a part in determining the convening groups ability to organize this very effort, staved

doesn't mean that the person who does is not making some kind of political statement, for better or for worse. A lot of people make the mistake of believing that if you are talking about so called "political" issues than you are a political artists. But that means everyone else gets to be just a straight up "artist," regardless of what they talk about or don't talk about. If we are "political artists," then everyone else are "a-political artists," but then what does their A mean? If we are "anarchist artists," then everyone else are audio slaves I guess.

I don't imagine that there could be such a thing as an anarchist poem unless it were totally free. But once it's committed to paper it ceases to be free. We've called our music revolution music at times, and other times we've just called it music, but we try to make it at least free and flexible and, I guess you could say anarchistic. Beauty and harmony within the chaos.

W: That's such an important point, that everything is political. If you aren't conscious of what you are promoting, then you are promoting the same ole mainstream politics, which are still intensely political.

Sometimes, I feel like the artist in me and the organizer in me are at war, with the organizer saying, "Well, why are you writing about love or heart-break or relationships, when there are real issues to write about? You should be writing a political poem." I know that the two sides aren't opposed, and that how we love is political, and therefore a love poem is a political poem. Like you said, "All Ricanstruction's songs are love songs." But still, I do find myself trying to walk a line, because even if love poems are political, there are still bombs dropping on babies' heads around the world, hungry bellies growling, nightsticks beating tender flesh, over 2 million people in this country going to sleep in a prison cell. So then do we start rating the issues we discuss in our art in terms of social relevance, do we ration out one relationship poem to two police brutality poems? How do you keep that balance?

W: That idea of giving people on the street more credit is a really important one. It goes back to the class issues we were talking about before, because what's being implied is that folks on the street aren't sophisticated enough to get what you mean, so you have water it down for them.

N4P: The hip-hop artist Jay-Z recently copped to the idea that he "dumbs down" his lyrics and message for his audience so he can continue to sell a bunch of records. This, to me, is a really sad premise, that you would perceive your audience as a bunch of dummies that you have to step down to talk to. It would be even worse if those who consider themselves activist or soldiers in the struggle felt that it was necessary to "dumb down" our struggle politics in order to "reach" the "people" or the sufferahs.

W: That speaks to the larger dilemma of doing political art that I know I have experienced; how do you keep it fresh and interesting, not let it turn into propaganda, while at the same time still making sure that your music expresses the politics you believe in, so you're not watering it down?

As a poet, the politics of my art are pretty overt, because all I have are words to make my work. But I've also felt a trend as a poet to produce art that is personal, and, not to trout out a worn cliché, prove how the personal is political. But I have realized that none of my poems are expressly anarchist in nature. I'm not even sure what an anarchist poem would look like. And Ricanstruction's music is obviously extremely political, but I wonder, do you consider anarchist? And if so, what makes it that way?

N4P: We've always tried to avoid the cliché or propaganda or the "political song" by simply writing about what is important to us, regardless of what we are talking about. If we feel strongly about it, we write about it. So we are firm believers in the idea that the personal is political. Fact is, a song about fucking in the back seat of a Lexus is no less political than a song about dropping bombs on innocent people. Just different reasons... or maybe not. Just because I am not interested in writing about big pimping

us in the face and was left unaddressed. Still, we feigned a content and empowered united front and proceeded to Broad Street to meet up with the rest of the protestors.

As soon as we approached the sea of white folks and they became aware of our presence we became a sideshow. White people started to clap and cheer as if we were the long awaited people of color parade float they could awe and point at. They appreciated our presence and danced to our drumming as long as we were their entertainment. However, as soon as members of the contingency started to pick up our bullhorns and speak to the white supremacist imperialism that murdered people of color they became offended. We were suddenly the recipients of annoyed stares, shushes and interruptions because we were talking over the "slated" speakers.

We kept on speaking, however our attempts to define and adhere to our own agenda did nothing. We did not create self-determining space that would allow our particular analysis of the war and white supremacy, as the global terrorist, to challenge the shallow, racist analysis of the white activists and organizers. We were not even able to make the white folks aware of their own racism at the protest itself. We became a pawn, a mere prop, one of those larger than life puppets (often rendered to depict oppressed people of color) that white groups make for "protests."

I don't know how many times I saw and heard white people look at us and say... "It's sooo good to finally see some color here." I could see them patting themselves on the back for the good work they had done to reach out to people of color and educate us or make us feel welcome to join them.

Our presence only legitimized the work of whites, which is to stay in positions of power and control the discourse, action and direction of so called progressive politics. By participating we allow them to delude themselves that, 1) their particular analysis of the war and imperialism is a legitimate one and 2) the power and resources at their disposal to lead "social change" movements are legitimately earned. Our presence at the march made the

statement that we support the white supremacy of the left.

Many non-white critics of white leadership within the "global justice movement" have challenged the analysis of whites who have reframed and distorted issues of justice. Whites conveniently impose an anachronistic time period on imperialism, with a NAFTA obsessed political analysis, that places the start of multinational corporate imperialism in the early 1990s. Whites on the left also relegate the issue of accountability and blame to that of the corruption of a select few corporate executives and their Washington DC cronies. They conveniently ignore their own culpability in reinforcing systems of white supremacist capitalist imperialism.

I actually heard white people saying things like, "We're all French now" and "Long live the French." How can a credible and legitimate global justice movement congratulate a country that actively engages in the white supremacist, imperialist exploitation of people of color all over the globe? French multinational corporate monopolies are currently fueling conflict and repression in the Ivory Coast and West Africa. The French are white supremacist imperialists just like the U.S. The tyranny of France's white supremacist imperialism is a present day political reality people of color all around the world are suffering under and resisting. This lack of analysis of French imperialism and global repression is lost because of the racist analysis of the white leadership that dominates the current "global justice movement."

In the past, like many others, I would be inclined to engage in the ongoing discussions of Where was the Color in/at..., in order to try and address the lack of participation/leadership by people of color at anti-globalization marches and other mass mobilizations. So often these discussions lack a sound analysis of the structures of white supremacy and its' impact on why mass mobilizations look the way they look. These arguments frequently end up placing the burden on people of color to explain why they are not present at an event or protest. In her introduction to the essay Where's the Revolution? Part II, activist and author, Barbara Smith cri-

the community organizing I do, mostly work with prisoners' families and hip hop organizing, I don't necessarily introduce myself as "Walidah Imarisha, anarchist poet activist." I have tried to find a balance by instead incorporating anarchistic ways of working; consensus and mutual aid, into the work I do, without expressly calling it that. I feel it bypasses the stigma, and gives people a chance to experience what anarchism is really about, without getting caught up on titles.

N4P: Personally I am not down with any titles, tags, or designations. I've spent most of my adult life trying to find ways to do away with genres and borders and envelopes, so I think we are always better off if we don't label ourselves or allow anyone to label us. Anarchy or anarchism is really something we seek and live and struggle for, so it doesn't matter what we call ourselves (or don't) if we are in the midst of action doing it.

At the same time, we do live in a world of designations based on our perceived politics. Socialist, communist, Marxist, nationalist, capitalist, terrorist, and often these tags are overstood by the people better than some amorphous non-definable non-title. So I think, sometimes these "names" are just a way of giving some kind of clarity (to others) as to what we are doing or trying to do. It could be easier to say to someone on the street, "We are anarchists and here's what we want," then "I don't want to be labeled and neither do any of my companer@s, but here's what we want."

I think also a lot of "activists" are afraid of scaring the "people on the street" or confusing them, so they don't want to use any terms that they feel might be misconstrued by "the people," but I think you gotta give the "people" more credit than that. So, really, putting an A in front of POC is really just a way of defining what we want to others and to ourselves. But I tend to tell folks not to sweat the A in apoc. It could mean anything: Anarchist, anti-authoritarian, autonomous, activist, armed, angry. I like that one. Angry People of Color.

televised, and it may not make it on to the radio (unless it's pirate radio), but it damn sure will be seen and heard on the streets. For us, we have mostly tried to make our art another part of the resistance struggle, the anti-authoritarian struggle, the struggle for freedom. We create political resistance murals on "private property," outlaw art, and we encourage the passerby, the ghetto dweller to join us, even if all they feel that all they can do is paint the red line on the Puerto Rican flag. We show films on the sides of buildings while abuelitas sell cuchifritos that they made at home. We always overstood the need for the people to take back the streets from the authorities, to not allow them to have authority over us, so we tended to utilize our art in this capacity. We would set up our instruments on the street, plug into a light pole for power, start jamming and encourage others to join us. Those who couldn't play musical instruments could draw on the walls around us or dance and sing, jeer at the pigs as they rolled by. What could they do? The people had created a TAZ (temporary autonomous zone) and the pigs feared turning a "revolution party" into a "riot," and the sense of liberation is so deep, so thick in the air itself that the people can feel their own freedom.

Art is only effective as a tool of community organizing when it is as real and honest as the people and their quest for liberation; if it doesn't engender the people's rebellion, quest for autonomy and ultimate freedom, then it's just entertainment waiting to be swallowed whole by babylon, regurgitated and wrapped up in pretty ribbons or punk patches, and sold back to us, revolution in Nike kicks and gap jeans. Art is only worthy of the people's struggle if it, as Amiri Baraka said "screams poison gas on beast in green berets and cleans out the world for virtue and love."

W: Do you have a problem calling yourself an anarchist when you do community-based artwork? For me, it feels tricky when you are trying to reach folks in the community who know about anarchism through mainstream media, who think of anarchist as black mask wearing white punk kids who throw rocks and start fires but who don't do any work. I know in

tiques the racism of so-called "progressive" movements in general and the LGBT movement specifically. In speaking about the state of progressive movements in general, she states, "Thanks to racism and elitism, progressive people of color are barely allowed to share movement leadership, let alone control it. Rest assured if we did get to decide movement agendas, they would be a lot different from what they are now." (Smith, 1998)

Some people of color are challenging white leadership in the global justice movement by acknowledging people of color need to organize on their own terms without the presence of whites and then bring our own platform from the margins of the global justice movement to the center. People of color are absolutely right that we need to organize ourselves on our own terms without whites. However, when we come back to the table have we done anymore to challenge the power structure that marginalizes us? This strategy was attempted on February 15 at the anti-war demonstration in Philly, but as people of color we still found ourselves marginalized and exploited.

An even better example of how the racist power structure of the white left marginalizes and then kills acts of self-determination is the more recent October 25, 2003 Anti-War March. As early as summer of 2002, Black Voices for Peace, The Black Radical Congress and other people of color led organizations were planning a Black led mobilization in October of 2003 to resist the war in Iraq before the first bombs even dropped. There was no mention of A.N.S.W.E.R. or any other majority white groups playing even a supporting role in the effort. This Black led mobilization which was acknowledged by the White left almost from its inception interestingly enough would be reduced to a feeder march and side show for the larger mass mobilization orchestrated by A.N.S.W.E.R. The Black March for Peace became a mere "feeder" march that ended up feeding into the white supremacy of the White Left.

I am no longer frustrated or disturbed by the often failed attempts to mobilize Black people and people of color in the numbers that white people

are mobilized for protest marches. We need to begin to question the value and relevancy of the protest march for people of color, particularly as they are currently conceived and organized. The protest march has become nothing more than a vapid cultural product of the White Left used solely as a means to attract media attention and funding to sustain its elitism and racism. I struggle less and less with answering the question of "Where are the People of Color?"

Ewuare Osayande, who I have cited earlier, has offered an alternative view on the question of where people of color are in the anti-war and "global justice" movements. "White people will start to see people of color when white people start doing the work that people of color have always been doing. The question people of color ask is: Where are the white people?"

White privilege so often positions whites outside of the very oppression that they speak about resisting. Revolutionary movements do not willingly permit oppressors or collaborators to lead movement struggle. White leadership in the anti-war movement has resulted in the development of an analysis and tactics that are far removed from the daily reality and revolutionary struggles of oppressed people of color. The racist analysis and the misguided tactics of the White left have resulted in exploitative "protest art" inspired by a vicarious objectification of the lives of oppressed people of color and shallow symbolic media events like the protest march/pageant.

Oppressed people of color, on the other hand, are engaged in daily acts of resistance that appropriately place white supremacy at the root of injustice. This work is being done on the margins in communities of color, without the prodding of the white left or in front of the glare of media cameras. This work is rarely ever acknowledged or is more often dismissed by the white left as not being real "social change." People of color who have a clear commitment to resisting all white supremacist systems of domination will not be found organizing protest pageantry and they will definitely not be featured as the premiere puppets of these spectacles.

the laws that have been created by the shitstem. I started trying to create not just a counter culture but also an autonomous culture. And I stopped discussing how we need to reform the police force, and instead began talking about abolition. And instead of discussing our right to food, shelter and clothing, I began stealing food and clothing and squatting.

But of course, police brutality, hunger, homelessness, a corrupt government are problems that affect all ghetto dwellers; these are not specifically anarchist issues. What's "anarchist" is what you do about these things. Yeah, I do think that APOC will have to deal with issues of class and privilege if we are really gonna get anything done on the streets, which is where it counts. We can't just assume that we are all in the same boat because we are all poc. Some of us may have a boat with a hole in it, and some of us may not have a boat at all. Maybe a tire, if we're lucky.

W: What tie do you think art has to community organizing? Is it important in reaching out to folks, or are the more immediate concerns of food, housing and clothing what matter most? I think it's really easy for middle class folks to lose focus of those basic survival needs while getting caught up in the lofty ideals of making art, or on the other side, it's easy for them to think that working class and poor folks only need their physical needs met, while neglecting the soul. So how important is art to community organizing?

N4P: For us, it's been very important because art is used by downpressed cultures as a tool of resistance against the enslavers, the "authorities," and it's everywhere; in the streets, the barrios, ghettos, shanties, prisons, churches and mosques. We use art to communicate, to resist and to rebel, so it's importance can't be denied or minimized. There's music in the domino players slapping the dominoes down on the table, the baby crying cause momma's got no more milk to give, the brother preaching on the corner of 125th and Lenox Ave., our feet as the tap the sound of the calle as we run from the cops across 110th Street. The revolution may not be

had to get a late pass. So by the time we became "artists" we were already engaged in a battle for autonomy, a struggle for freedom, so the art just became a reflection of that and another beautiful, raging and vivid outlet for that necessity for freedom and autonomy. I don't think we could have come to it through books, because the quest for freedom is not something the slave has to be taught. It's something we live everyday.

W: Right, and it's that real life struggle that is the focus. Anarchism, or any political ideology or movement, can't just rely on art or subcultures or youth rebellion to give it life in communities of color, as it often has in white communities. I think a lot of the difference for political artists of color and activists of color is that connection to the community, being strongly rooted in where you came from. And while in idealist terms, both for myself and other APOC folks, that's true, I know a lot of us in the APOC movement are middle class, and that affects the way we approach anarchism, art and community-based organizing. I know your experience has been different.

N4P: Yes. In the case of Ricanstruction, we were Puerto Ricans from the barrios of *Nueva York*, whose parents came to the U.S. as exiles fleeing a colonial condition, only to enter into a neo-colonial condition. Babylon hasn't been kind to boricuas. When you gotta dumpster dive or beg and borrow to eat, and be homeless in the dead of winter or live in condemned buildings waiting for a knock at the door at midnight (if there's even a door), and you get stopped by the ghetto occupying forces we call pigs on the daily because you "fit the description," then you're always trying to find a better way, a better place.

Speaking personally, I've been a gang banger, a nationalist, a Marxist, a rasta and a santero, all in search of something better than this. It took me a long time to realize that there is nothing better than this, unless we create it ourselves. It was when I came to this realization that I began living what some might characterize as an anarchist lifestyle or perhaps an outlaw culture, which is just another way of saying you are existing outside

On Competition and Solidarity

by Soo Na

There are many discussions happening around the purpose of conferences. Often, people feel tired and frustrated at such gatherings. While serving as connection points – where isolated people can find a sense of safety for a few hours, or even days, long-time comrades can meet and catch up, and networking occurs – conferences can also be points of frustration. Critical observations were made at the DC APOC conference, where people felt that certain issues were not being addressed. In the spirit of constructive criticism, I wanted to share my experiences. I hope that in my sharing, it opens up spaces for other critical and necessary discussions to occur.

More and more, I question the ability of weekend-long, or any length, conference to really act as a place of sustainable connection. Much of the connecting often occurs in the hallways between workshops, where people find the time to, as Ashanti talks about in his zine, "unmask" what has been kept hidden from the majority of people that one might interact with in a given day. It is difficult to find places where vulnerability can be risked, and that difficulty is proportionate to the joy one experiences when a sense of safety is attained, however briefly. I am not criticizing nor judging that safety.

The general feeling I received from previous APOC gatherings, whether in Detroit, or in the regional organized gatherings since (and prior to) then, was that these spaces felt safest to share experiences, as well as organiz-

ing. In that collective spirit of shared vulnerability, beautiful spaces are created. I experienced that while in the queer and trans APOC workshop. One person stated that they "felt at home." However, that collectivity is difficult to create and maintain. It can happen spontaneously, but it's not inevitable, nor is it magic. Creating that sense of community often means unlearning and actively challenging internalized ideas of charismatic personalities, and learning to be critically aware of judgment and criticism – one's own and that directed at other people.

Now, if you bear with me, I will make a contradictory statement. In light of what I said about charismatic personalities, I will reference Ella Jo Baker, who cautioned against singling out a single person as spokesperson, in her speech which came to be remembered as, "More Than Just a Hamburger." Her belief is that people must not look for a (s)(z)(h)ero; rather, people must believe and love and empower themselves, with collective help, to "lead," that we are all leaders, and that this can be taught and passed on. Ella's work with young people, and her own life experiences, gave her insight into thinking about the ways in which people's internal fires are extinguished when they are silenced, overpowered, or seen as less exciting than another person's.

We have all, in one way or another, been silenced in our lives. Popular culture, revolutionary culture, cultures, whet us (and I use the "us" with caution) to the idea of celebrity. It is romantic and deeply compelling. But, it is important to think about what one is seeking in such aggrandizing of another person over and beyond one's own power. There is a quote by Julius Lester, from his fictional novel, "And All Our Wounds Forgiven," where he talks about the dislocating positionalities of both the "admirer" and "admired":

I don't watch much TV anymore. I found myself on constant emotional overload because in the course of an evening I would have fifty relationships, intensely liking

The War of Art

A Conversation between Walidah Imarisha and Not4Prophet

What role does an artist play? What role does a politically conscious anarchist artist of color engaged in community organizing play? And a bigger question, what social responsibility? Not4Prophet, voice for the Puerto Rican political band/collective Ricanstruction, speaks with Walidah Imarisha, the bad half of the poetry duo Good Sista/Bad Sista, about anarchism, art, creation and the different ways of struggle.

Walidah: Right now we are seeing the birth of an anarchist people of color movement here in the United States, which is really exciting to me. I think that artists have a role to play in that movement, because art occupies a unique space in social struggles. In fact, the members of Ricanstruction came to anarchism partially through the art you were creating together, right, rather than through reading about it in books?

Not4Prophet: Well, I don't know so much if we came to it through art or if we just started interpreting it through art once we started engaging in "art." As I said before, the quest was always to find your own way, but not because we were trying to adhere to, or create any kind of lifestyle or ideology. Fact is, that when we came to the realization that we weren't really meant to exist within this shitstem that was created and engineered by our conquerers, then we came to understand that we were already, for hundreds of years, resisting it in order to continue to exist, and that we were in the process of finding ways to live outside of this shitstem in order to survive it. So the idea of the necessity of living an autonomous lifestyle was already in effect. It was just my "intellectualizing" of the situation that

chants. They still joke "1, 2, 3, 4, we don't want your stinkin' war. That's part of "imparting" culture and politics. It would be good for parents to work in cooperation so that when scary things happen, there are parents who can take over and get the kids out of the crowd or help form shields around the kids so they don't get injured.

Bruce: Yes, the parents definitely need to be organized, networked to come to a demo and form contingency plans for when the police begin to riot and break up a demo.

There is also the school of thought that you should be more selective about what kind of demos you can take your children to. But in light of the police assaults in some of the most peaceful actions that took place in Florida around the FTAA, I don't really know how selective you can be. The police are defiantly following a decree to break up actions as quickly as possible and as they see fit. Still some common sense and a heightened sense of when things go wrong could be a parents' best tool.

How prepared are you for her teenage years?

Rivka: Not. It's all about instinct. My big fear there is that she will come to think of MTV's pimp and whore culture as her own urban culture. I really want to help her get around that bullshit that so victimizes women and criminalizes youth of color for the fun of white kids.

If Navah were to read this interview in 20 years, what would you tell her?

Rivka: We have the utmost love and respect for you and all that you embody.

this one, disliking that one, wondering what this actor and that actress was like, that politician or that celebrity without portfolio. It is psychically disorienting having powerful emotions about people you know only as images. But television seduces us into trusting image as reality. Daily I watched people approach him. There was always an instant when they realized that all the love and emotion they had for him was not reciprocated, that he had been in their homes and had not known it, that his existence was crucial to their lives while they were nonexistent in his. They had no alternative but to make themselves known to him because they had been forced into a relationship with him.

I want to think about forced relationships, forced ways of relating, and habitual ways of connecting that may or may not be connected with liberation, trust, and mutual growth.

I am Korean, and have been living in North America since age six. My experiences as an Asian yellow woman are complicated as, I am sure, all people's experiences are. One thing I notice consistently among other Asian women is a feeling of competition. Often, when I am in a room, I will notice the eyes of other Asian women, and there is a feeling of endangerment. It is as though we are in competition against each other. I think that competition between women has many origins, but I think there are specific racialized, gendered, and heteronormative reasons why women, including Asian women, see each other as competition.

I want to state that, as a personal belief, women are not endangered as a people. In stating that, I am not erasing or ignoring the realities of sexism, white supremacy, misogyny, homophobia, transphobia, intersex phobia, classism, ableism and the numerous oppressions that people of color face. These oppressions also seem to be places of solidarity. But I think

it's important to think about how that solidarity can occur even though the most challenging conversations do not take place, precisely because the connection itself, so desperately sought, suddenly overrides the desire to actively decolonize and *liberate* one's self, one's desires, one's body and one's politics. That, in fact, those challenging conversations become places where the connection, so desperately forged, becomes endangered through the idea of it being in crisis and precious, fragile. That is a dangerous place to be. It is my belief that connections should not be places where difficult conversations cannot occur.

Part of why people attend conferences has to do with the idea of wholeness. It is possible that certain people, through their activism, seek to find that sense of wholeness, but it is difficult. There are powerful connections made at conferences, even life-long friendships, lovers, partners, creative erotic movements. Audre Lorde defines the erotic in the following way:

The erotic functions for me in several ways, and the first is the power which comes from sharing deeply any pursuit with another person. The sharing of joy, whether physical, emotional, psychic or intellectual, forms a bridge between the sharers which can be the basis for understanding much of what is not shared between them, and lessons the threat of their difference.

Much dispute exists around whether or not there is an APOC "community" per se. From what I heard, many people feel that APOC, like the concept of queer, is an ambiguous, fluid concept. It is visionary, an idea(I). With vision comes spaces, pushing and pulling of limitations, expansion and stretching of internalized self-robbings and robbings of each other. Likewise, APOC is heterogeneous, multi-level, and multidimensional. It is never one thing, and it never remains the same. Can we, as APOC, and as people and individuals in our communities, experience the erotic with people without it devolving into heteronormative ways of relating with each other?

People are different and complicated, come from different places, both

even PTA meetings.

Most importantly encourage the child to satisfy their curiosity by challenging the school authorities on the stuff they are teaching.

**How can political meetings and spaces improve child-friendliness?
What behaviors – conscious or unconscious – need to be more actively checked when it comes to welcoming parents?**

Bruce: Political meetings and workspaces can improve with the increased involvement of politically conscious parents. Building the APOC movement means reaching out across class and age lines. If there are more parents involved in radical community building, I believe that will improve child-friendliness at meetings. Parents could organize themselves to switch off in the child caring area from meeting to meeting so it just won't be any particular person's "job" to watch the children.

So far I have been to meetings that have offered childcare, but I have never really used that resource because Rivka and I usually plan ahead of time when it comes to managing our time to attend meetings. As for what kind of behaviors that needs to be checked, I can only say that hopefully you can work with people who are patient and understanding with children who cannot or will not sit through a four hour meeting patiently.

What do you think about taking their kids to demonstrations?

Rivka: Take them, take them, take them. We had a scary experience at one of the anti-war demos here in New York where police on horses were trampling folks without regard to age or physical stability (including seriously old folks). Navah and her cousin (also a toddler) were pinned against a wall on our shoulders, just watching the horses charging people and we couldn't move and could barely breathe. It was terrifying. However, both girls remember the experience with love and they remember all the

Rivka: I have a very unpopular take on this issue. I am all about Navah honoring her many cultures, i.e. Black, Jewish, etc. But at the end of the day, when the police stop her ass driving a car, she will be a Black woman and they will treat her as such. While that officer is beating her ass for whatever sick reason he finds, he won't be asking her if she is a quarter French – know what I mean? My feeling is you provide all the beauty of culture in the house in a positive way, but you let your kid know the ropes on the outside world – bottom line. If there is some confusion or refusal to accept at some point – well hey that's normal. As someone who comes from a multicultural home, I have gone through my periods of self-doubt and even hatred, but it all shook out in the end.

What advice can you offer other parents to keep their child's curiosity and spirit going in a school system in which conformity is most pressing?

Rivka: Provide examples of alternative ways of being on their free time. Go to plays, free art exhibits and concerts, libraries, etc. I think it takes providing alternative perspectives to keep kids away from that conformist thinking. No kid will remain a conformist when they know there are cool alternatives. And if they do, that will all change in time.

Bruce: Deprogramming at home is the key. First you need to know the school your child is attending. Who are the teachers, what are they teaching, etc. Then ask your kid what they are being taught. It will be the usual shit, like the first Thanksgiving where the first colonizers partied with the indigenous Americans. Here is the opportunity to arm them with tools like *A People's History of the United States* by Howard Zinn. It provides an alternative to conforming to the reactionary historical perspective of the school system.

But you also have to be active in countering the stuff being taught in schools by speaking out when you attend school board meetings, or yes,

geographically and psychically. There are critiques of the phrase, "people of color," which is also, for lack of a better word, inadequate. But it is a ratchet, a visionary ratchet from where movement can begin. There is always creation of languages during times of connection and vulnerability. I am wondering how people of color, and people who identify as womyn, can employ Audre's definition of the erotic to think about the ways in which APOC people (don't) relate with each other. As a queer Asian woman, I struggle with heterosexism, both internalized and in my interactions with people and institutions – whether family, school, health care, and the like. I think heterosexism occurs in many of my interactions with Asian womyn, not because they "know" I identify as queer, but because of the ways in which gender and sex have been conflated as one and the same. Fear is a product of heterosexism, as is competition. When I see an Asian person in a room, I do not assume that we will have things in common. Part of this comes from experience. As an adopted Korean woman, I have often interacted with Korean North American folks who regard me with pity or unmasked disgust when they learn I do not speak Hangul, the official spoken language both in the Republic of Korea (southern Korea), and the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (northern Korea). Many people have experienced similar separations and experienced the pain of what Gloria Anzaldúa refers to as "existing in borderlands."

We have all, in
one way or
another, been
silenced in our
lives.

But, when I get the endangered, or what I refer to as the "heteronormative fear" glance, it is painful. Heterosexism operates in tandem with misogyny and patriarchy, in that womyn are meant to compete with each other, in the

service of men. It is for their benefit that we are kept separated from each other, we being womyn, queer folks, femmes and all people. I want to ask, is the separation worth it? Or, rather, what do we gain from competing with each other? Where is the fear coming from? And how is the interesting mental health idea of self-esteem, or the anarchist idea of self-management (which I heard a lot this weekend) bolstered by this fear?

At this conference, I went up to a person because I knew that if I did not approach them, we would never end up talking. This is not coming from a place of forced interaction, but a place where I sensed competition and in order to bridge that fear and that separation, I moved to correct it and started a simple conversation, at the level of small talk. I do not think this person was necessarily queerphobic. I simply think that this had to do with heterosexism and the competition that often occurs between Asian womyn. I want to think about why I feel it, and what it reinforces.

We are traumatized daily. We struggle with differences. It is not the call of political and self-revolution to perpetuate that trauma through fear, indifference and its product, inaction. And it is also not my intent to reduce my experiences and observations into rhetoric. I want to think about trust and fear, connection and political engagement. I also want to think about the beauty in the ordinary, and the challenges and also the necessity of having difficult conversations. I think another word for difficult conversations is "ordinary." Isn't that true? That the status quo, though perhaps indifferent, monotonous, is also challenging, that which so many people rail against, so that it becomes un desafio, a challenge? June Jordan, in her poem, "On A New Year's Eve," talks about the ordinary:

let the world blot
obliterate remove so-
called
magnificence
so-called

Bruce: We started getting white Barbie dolls for gifts from some relatives when Navah was like, one. Granted we did not lay ground rules to our peoples not to give us Barbies of any color, but regardless, we always knew that we had our work cut out for us to counter indoctrination of white supremacy and negative body image via Barbie's marketing.

Barbie's blonde looks and body image are targeted to girls Navah's age and it can have that effect of self hating of a child of color hating their brown skin and dark unruly hair. I think of the old Whoopi piece she used to do portraying a young black girl with a yellow towel on her head pretending that it was blonde hair. We counter this in a couple of ways like telling her how she and other kids that look like her are beautiful too. As she gets older it will be easier to explain that there is an industry out there making mad dollars off of people of color who have been tricked to hate themselves and in turn will want to look like someone they are not, or kill themselves trying. I would hope that she will make her own conclusion that she should love her natural self.

Rivka: I think the way to impart culture is to provide it without ramming it down your child's throat. In other words, surround the house with cultural books, and avoid the typical children's crap, have parties in which people are naturally wearing cultural dress, instill values of your culture in simple ways like focusing on community and story telling. However, I don't think it's helpful to start some sort of counter indoctrination. I was raised with a little of that and had a severe rebellion. I am hoping that if the parents love and are proud of their cultural heritage and fill the home with ceremony and other folks living the same way, the child will incorporate that in their way of being.

One thing many multicultural adults say is that they struggle with confusion about who they are and being accepted. How are you encouraging your daughter to honor her many cultures and feel confidence in that?

Rivka: I have spent a lot of time thinking about this very issue. Is it possible to raise a kid that questions and bucks authority while instilling "discipline" in the home? In other words, how do you tell a kid to challenge the state and existing laws and then tell them to shut up and listen to your rules? On the other hand, four-year-olds don't necessarily have the capability to know that playing with the stove could kill them-hence the clear need for rules: "Hey kid, stay away from the stove, or else!" Ultimately, as a mother, my job is to extend the womb for as long as possible until my child doesn't need the support anymore. The womb provides boundaries that make a fetus feel safe. On the outside world, toddlers seek instruction to feel safe in a big scary park, for instance. The trick is to provide rules for safety, while teaching kids to question rules that seem bogus – including their parents. Oddly, the safety and security that comes from a disciplined home can empower kids to become adults who are strong enough to fight the system. Of course, I'm talking a lot of shit right now. What am I gonna say if Navah heads out the house in a hoochie skirt to the club at 16 and "challenges my authority" on going ... Hmmm ass whoopin's all around!

Bruce: Although I kid around the house about passin' out ass whoopin's and I also make threats if I'm caught in bad mood, I have realized how my upbringing instilled that "fear of getting in trouble" as a kid and how we track that same fear into adulthood in the work place or at a protest dealing with cops. I don't want Navah to fear other people, just respect other people who respect her. So I take my cue from Rivka's ideas on discipline, which means talking things out with her, not bargaining. But also pointing out the consequences of your actions: if you don't clean up and take care of your shit, it's not gonna be any good to you in pieces if someone steps on it or it gets lost, or if I get tired of picking it up all the time and it "disappears."

Can you talk a little about how to impart culture to your daughter, particularly when the push for assimilation is so intense for youth of color, especially young girls.

almighty/fathomless and everlasting
treasures/
wealth
(whatever that may be)

it is this time
that matters

it is this history
I care about

the one we make together
awkward
inconsistent
as a lame cat on the loose
or quick as kids freed by the bell
or else as strictly
once
as only life must mean
a once upon a time

I have rejected propaganda teaching me
about the beautiful
the truly rare

(supposedly
the soft push of the ocean at the hushpoint of the shore
supposedly
the soft push of the ocean at the hushpoint of the shore
is beautiful
for instance)
but
the truly rare can stay out there

I have rejected that
abstraction that enormity
unless I see a dog walk on the beach/
a bird seize sandflies
or yourself
approach me
laughing out a sound to spoil
the pretty picture
make an uncontrolled
heartbeating memory
instead
I read the papers preaching on
that oil and oxygen
that redwoods and the evergreens
that trees the waters and the atmosphere
compile a final listing of the world in
short supply

but all alive and all the lives
persist perpetual
in jeopardy
persist
as scarce as every one of us
as difficult to find
or keep
as irreplaceable
as frail
as every one of us

And Alice Walker also writes about this in her poem about loving what is abundant more than what is scarce.

In the spirit of the deep love and affection I have for people of color, in the

to live lives where they raise children "unplugged" from the dominant culture and it can work. I just see it as a "Your Mileage May Vary" kind of thing. There shouldn't be rules on how to build a family under an oppressed state. I follow my instincts and common sense along with Rivka's consul as a partner. We may choose a medical doctor for Navah based on the individual and how they practice medicine. Do they blindly prescribe the medicines of the industry when there are alternative medicines to consider? Are they open minded to holistic alternatives? Do we as parents decide if we want to give our child those medicines when we know based on our own research that that medicine may not be good for Navah? I think being a conscious and thoughtful parent leads to practical decisions.

Rivka: It's totally possible, though hard. To me its all about collaboration and cooperation. If you want to keep your kid out of the system by way of doctor, school, etc, it takes a group of people who are willing to chip and in cooperatively provide services. For example, the only way for parents without cash to get daycare without going through the state is to come together with a group of other parents to form a daycare collective. I think the hard part is making the connections with other people who have committed themselves to raising their children in that environment. Once you make the connections, I believe it to be possible.

'My feeling is
you provide all
the beauty
of culture in
the house in
a positive way,
but you let your
kid know the
ropes on the
outside world'

How do you handle discipline?

year we were playing survival games with the State in trying to keep our daughter in affordable child care. In a situation like that, you almost have to be living on the street to qualify for these kinds of services.

And you have to be in a single parent situation as well. I was unemployed and R was working, but that wasn't enough. The State wanted me out of the picture altogether in order for N to be qualified to continue to get childcare services. We wanted to look at certain daycare programs that were started by grassroots activists back in the day because we knew that they had progressive learning curriculums for toddlers. But as funding for alternative grassroots based schools become scarce, they get swallowed by the State and hence the classist guidelines.

Rivka: Again, instead of looking at all the issues all the time, I have really begun to focus on what's happening to inner city kids. Being involved with children all the time thrusts it in our face. Right now the scariest part seems to be the prison state we have created for urban youth in public schools, which later transfers into the prison industrial complex. But then it's also terrifying that mothers on welfare are forced to deposit their newborns into the hands of strangers so that they can meet welfare guidelines. There are so many issues it seems overwhelming – so the thought of having to organize around something like globalization (though I know its crucial) seems to dilute my efforts on any front. Maybe in 18 years, I'll start to branch out again.

Is anti-authoritarian parenting possible or practical?

Bruce: I believe it can be, but it really comes down to the parent. What are they willing to live with or live without as they raise a kid up under capitalism? There are networks of alternative health care providers although small and scarce that anti-authoritarians can turn to if they do not want to go to take their child to a "real" doctor. There are alternatives to public schools and you can even squat or choose a primitivist lifestyle in a remote setting. What I'm saying is that radical parents throughout the years have chosen

spirit of thinking about joy's proportionality to pain and my acknowledgment that I have responsibility for the pain that other people in the world experience, in the spirit of healing, I offer my thoughts. I do not identify as anarchist. I am still learning about this political visioning ideology / way of life. As such, I draw from numerous living philosophies and ideas.

I appreciate this space for engagement.

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The End of Idealism

Honest Conversations about Race, Class, Self-Determination and Anarchist People of Color

by Ernesto Aguilar

I first began writing for *Our Culture, Our Resistance* on anarchist people of color and the conversations I believe we need to get started. During that process, very kind individuals offered up much help in ideas and structure, but at some point, the work became academic. So, stepping back, I realized that, to be compelling and motivate change, starting any conversation has to be fluid and open, but also geared at accomplishing something. I took a step back and returned to the roots of my piece, of the conversations we need to get started if we are going to grow and politically advance ourselves as revolutionaries of color. And here we are.

When people visualized the emergence of a tendency of anti-authoritarian people of color, no one believed it would grow at the pace and direction it has. It is sprouting up and fostering awareness in ways few people envisioned, which has been fantastic. At the same time, we are at a critical point; where many see our organizing must evolve. We need to create a space for our unity, culture and identity, but also our politics.

We need to be clear that advocacy of rights and roles for people of color, while certainly needed, permits the state and white-led movement to institutionalize and mediate our struggles. Fighting racism and white supremacy, when included at all, are problems typically regarded as line-items for social change. Even among anarchists of color, the attraction is

25 years of our shit on the street and dragging me out kicking and screaming. Yet I hated the left and all that it embodied. My mother (a Jewish woman) and her partner (a black woman) forced me to canvas for the Rainbow Party and I had been to more patchouli-smelling sing-ins than any kid could handle. I didn't see anything concrete being done. I tuned out as much as possible. Thank god for that blip of a conscious era in hip hop. I put my thinking cap back on and began to organize around issues in college and later as a journalist focusing on criminal justice issues.

Can you talk about how having your daughter has changed your lives, and what you want out of life?

Bruce: Having Navah has definitely added on more consideration to how we used to function as activists before we became parents. We still strive to work for the transformation of our communities, but we do have to work through child care issues and "switching" to make meetings or get to certain protests.

Rivka: Having grown up in a severe state of urban emergency, affecting change has always been part of my MO. However, as N grows, my political work has taken a much clearer and more solid form. I am now desperate to work for underground education, cooperative child care and other services for children that function outside the oppressive laws of the system. If there is any sanity to be maintained for me on a Saturday night when my daughter becomes a teen, I know that I need to expose police corruption and exploitation of youth of color now. I know there needs to be an attitude that every kid in the 'hood could be my kid and therefore is my responsibility. My goals are very defined.

How has parenthood changed your politics, if at all?

Bruce: I was made more aware of issues like education and social services since we had been thrust into dealing with them first hand. All last

Love and Respect

Parenting and Identity with Rivka Gewirtz Little and Bruce Little

Bruce and Rivka Gewirtz Little met in Texas and now reside in New York City. Some may remember Bruce as a founding member of the Federation of Black Community Partisans, the predecessor to many APOC groups. Rivka is a great organizer in her own right. This interview focuses on parenting and how being parents has changed the lives to two kickass revolutionaries.

Can you give people a little background about yourselves and your political development?

Bruce: Being an introvert, I had a lot of political influence from books, TV and music. As a teen when I was in junior high, I read a lot of books on the Vietnam War and the international insurgent movements during that time period. I remember looking at CNN during the days I skipped school and recognizing the kind of military build up in the South and Central Americas as being somewhat identical to the kind of U.S military buildup that took place in Vietnam. Being a working class black male at 14, I knew for sure that I was gonna be drafted. Later, in my twenties, I read Malcolm X's speeches and got involved in peace and justice coalitions in Houston.

Rivka: The '80s affected my political development. I grew up in a lesbian-parent household in upper Manhattan. Crack hit like a ton of bricks, addicting or helping to jail many of my lifelong friends. AIDS hit even harder, with many of my mother's friends dying. Gentrification eventually claimed the apartment I grew up in. Marshals evicted my mother, throwing

strong to build own our anarchist movement, made up of people of color, or to demand greater respect from the white-led movement. In the process, we're failing to ask critical questions about the viability of the white-led movement or our own loyalties.

For people of color who identify as anti-authoritarians, bringing us into the clearest solidarity with oppressed people around the world should be our primary focus. We need to give respect to those who've come before us by building on their successes and learning from their mistakes, while bringing the anarchist people of color tendency to the next level.

Understanding oppression

Ask someone what they think of when they consider racism, oppression and white supremacy. You'll likely get many answers. What does oppression mean to you as a person of color? I believe that, in order to find answers, it's important to know what we're dealing with when we talk about such broad concepts.

Francis Cress-Welsing argues that racism is white supremacy. That distinction alone is significant. Some whites and a few people of color are confused by the word racism; they'll sometimes fall into traps of terms popularized by the far right, or take the word literally, thinking it to be a prejudice *of any race by any race*. Historically, however, racism has always meant white supremacy and collusion with institutional power. Race was, in many instances, a line of distinction separating Europeans from non-whites. Cress-Welsing states racism consists of "patterns of perception, logic, symbol formation, thought, speech, action and emotional response, as conducted simultaneously in all areas of people activity (economics, education, entertainment, labor, law, politics, religion, sex and war)." Cress-Welsing's definition grasps the totality of racism/white supremacy, and how it shapes our own views, as well as that of white people, virtually from birth. Cress-Welsing's clarity makes us think about how we got into the global mess we face. In truth, Europeans have waged

military and cultural war against people of color for nearly a thousand years. Such exercises were never a means of dividing rich and poor, but to unite the white masses to fight for the moral, political, social and/or economic superiority of their way of life over other races.

Addressing the social and political realities of white supremacy requires a strategy. In my view, that approach must make self-determination for oppressed people a basis of unity for looking at the world, among those professed anti-authoritarian people of color and all others. Our first stand must be with people of color worldwide fighting for room to breathe. Our first prerogative must be freedom for all oppressed people, by any means. At its core, self-determination is an opportunity to finally be free, to determine one's own political, social and economic destinies. For North American radicals of color, this kind of idea can be a leap; we live in a society of relative privilege, where corporate corruption, globalization and other movements compete for our hearts and minds. Occupation and oppression aren't harsh and in our faces as, for instance, in Palestine. As such, we're conditioned to think about our struggles related to what we're against, rather than that for which we are fighting.

Tactics and unity

Clearly, it's on us to start thinking about how we make efforts if we are to be self-determined. One of the beautiful things about anarchism, many people tell me, is that it is fluid and open; flexible enough to respond to social and political conditions, but strong enough in its anti-authoritarianism to stand up against dictatorship of any kind. However, all of us get frustrated in the roadblocks that come before any movement. I submit that we need think about our tactics and our unity.

It is crucial that we start looking at our politics with a nod to what we, as revolutionaries, hope to create of this world. We know what we're against, but how are we getting to the world we want to create? And, as impor-

circle, my needs and wants as a woman of color are ignored.

Sometimes I wonder if Siu Loong feels the split as acutely as I do. I wonder if she notices that, around white people, virtually anything is okay. She can run and climb and laugh and shout. She can even take all of her clothes off. No one will chastise her. The most that will happen is that the grown-ups will laugh.

However, among those who look more like she does, whether they be schoolmates or relatives, such behavior is not only not laughed at, but actively discouraged and chastised.

When I try to talk with my anarchist friends about this split in my life and hers, they don't get it. Why is it important that I send Siu Loong to "school"? Why am I subjecting Siu Loong to regiment and restrictions at such an early age? Can't I find an alternative source of childcare for her-one that does not reinforce models of hierarchy and oppression? And why am I so hung up on race? One anarchist described my concerns about race and ethnicity as "nationalistic bullshit."

How can I raise a baby anarchist of color if my choices lay between a white, color-blind movement or a gathering of those who can identify with her looks and heritage, but little else?

I'm still struggling to find some sort of balance between these two extremes. It's hard to think of solutions when those around me-both my peers and the parents of Siu Loong's peers-do not acknowledge that there is a problem. This reflects a larger issue-white anarchists' refusal to discuss race, racism and exclusivity in the movement. Knowing this doesn't make it any easier. I am still struggling alone with this concern.

"Put your hands like this," she demanded, intertwining my fingers and then folding my hands.

This was not a comfortable position for a grown woman in a chair, so I promptly uncrossed my legs and unfolded my hands.

Siu Loong tried to reposition me again.

"This isn't comfortable," I protested.

"It is comfortable," she insisted, trying to bend my fingers.

"You need to sit like that so I can read you a story," she added.

That was when I realized that, for some unknown and probably nonsensical reason, Siu Loong's teachers were having their charges sit for story time with folded hands and crossed legs.

The logic of this escapes me. Isn't it enough that the kids are seated and quiet? Why impose a needless rule? Especially one that she will parrot and annoy me with?

Often, I feel as if my life is split. If I want to be around people who think as I do, who believe and are willing to fight for the same things, they will not look as I do. They will not share the same culture or upbringing. I will have to explain certain aspects of my life and sometimes have these aspects be misunderstood or distorted. If I choose to be with those who share my culture and collective history, I risk having my individuality misunderstood or ignored. During high school, I chose to be with other Chinese. We shared nothing except a common ancestry. In that circle of friends, my needs and wants as an individual and as an emerging anarchist were ignored. As an adult, I have been asked why I choose to be around so many white people, why I do not choose to be around "my own." In this

tantly, what actions do we need to make to get there? What is a fundamental call from which our movements emanate?

Although I have spoken out frequently on the need to locally organize, I respect that not everyone is an organizer. It can be intimidating for even experienced people. In reality, I am an advocate of the growth of our movements on many levels. Whether you are an organizer, somebody just looking for answers, someone fed up with how the system works, or an intellectual, what you are about and what we as a movement stand for needs to be out front, fearless, imperfect and courageous.

Some ideas that touch on tactics and unity, no matter who you are:

- **Objectives:** What do you want? What are the long-term, mid-range and short-term goals? What are the process goals (i.e. building cultural consciousness among members) in reaching the objective?
- **Resources:** What/where are the alliances, money and relationships?
- **Audience:** Who are the people you want to connect to? Who are you trying motivate to action?
- **Message:** What do people need to hear? What parts of the message apply to people's sense of justice, and which to their self-interest?
- **Spokespeople:** If you are organizing something for your idea, who should deliver the message? Who is credible to the audience, and how do we equip spokespeople with information and comfort levels?
- **Jump-Off:** How do we kick off and move forward?
- **Venue:** How do we get the audience the message?
- **Opportunities:** What do we need to cultivate?
- **Evaluation:** How do we judge our progress?

As one example, I wrote a missive on tactical politics, focusing on lifestyle politics. Also called conscientious consumerism, lifestyle politics (and other forms of reactive activism), have come to the fore as leading trends in social action. Boycotts; buying green, fair trade, et al.; and voluntary

simplicity are everywhere. The failure of these kinds of strategies is in vision. Writer Angus Maguire argues that, at its worst, lifestyle politics "overemphasize the importance of white and middle-class buying habits while marginalizing the work of communities of color around the world to gain power in struggles against the same injustices our buying habits are supposedly addressing." And I concur. But the ensuing responses from whites as well as a few people of color failed to offer a vision about how such consumerism connects with our program for advancement. Many people are not ready for a discussion about a "program for advancement" or much of a program for anything, but we need to be. Time and conditions require we stop spinning our wheels. We need to see a strategic vision for our work as part of an explicit and comprehensive program for reaching political, social and economic self-determination. Lifestyle politics is perhaps an easy target, but this instance demonstrates our need to analyze tactics.

Unity is perhaps one of the most curious roads to navigate in this respect, because once you find out what you're for, your allies become a little clearer. It's vibrant, for sure, and presents opportunities for us.

I don't want to open the conversation with the typical us-versus-other-ideologies rhetoric, but nudge you to consider priorities. Herb Boyd writes in a revised edition of *Detroit: I Do Mind Dying* that ideologues on various sides of the political spectrum had, "political positions so bitterly opposed in the 1970s that it disrupted the remnants of the Black liberation movement, thereby ending any possibility of operational unity." Anarchists of color get caught up in that too; some of us see our internal contradictions as people of color as more important than the external contradictions of white supremacist-engineered society out to do us all in. We've been sold the line that joining the white-led movement serves "humanity," when humanity can't speak for itself in struggle in which it doesn't lead. Some of us eschew other people of color as being anti-white, et al., but fail to see who is served by our divisions. By no means am I saying to ignore our

Sometimes I wonder if I obsess about race too much. I buy her books that emphasize her Chinese heritage and, more importantly, have characters that look like her. When she began Early Head Start, I was secretly thrilled that there were no white children in her class. When she entered Head Start seven months later, I was delighted that ten of the fifteen kids running around were Chinese and that all spoke Cantonese. No one mispronounced Siu Loong's name, not even the non-Chinese teachers.

However, the parents and caretakers of these children are not ones with whom I share anything except an ancestral homeland. For the most part, we do not share the same language and thus cannot talk with each other. Some of them do not return my tentative or "Jou sahn" when we pass each other in the hall or wait for the elevator together. I do not know their politics and opinions. After seeing my punk rock babysitter, they may have guessed mine, although this did not prevent them from electing me the chairperson of both the Class Committee and the Settlement House's Policy Committee. But because we have virtually nothing in common, we do not arrange for our children to see each other outside the classroom. Perhaps because their children are full-blooded Chinese, often raised in a community of other full-blooded Chinese, they do not see arranging play dates with the other Chinese children as a concern. Or perhaps they already do, but because my Cantonese is limited to ordering food and asking for prices, I am left out of the invitation loop.

In addition, despite my visible pleasure at Siu Loong being around children who share the more neglected half of her heritage, I feel as if I'm compromising some of my anti-authoritarian beliefs by placing her in a school-like atmosphere. She not only picks up the odd Cantonese phrase but also the seemingly senseless rules and regulations found in all classrooms.

One evening, as I sat and talked with a friend, Siu Loong grabbed my legs. "Put your feet like this," she commanded, attempting to bend my legs into a cross-legged position. Then she grabbed my hands.

weeks of postpartum rest were up, I was up and about on my various projects. Virtually everyone was supportive of my new role as mother and on-call cow. However, I started noticing small things that bothered me about my (mostly white) activist circles.

For starters, no one could pronounce my daughter's name correctly. It was pronounced, "Sue Long," "Siu Long," "Sue La," any which way except the way it was supposed to be pronounced. If people didn't have trouble making a small circle with their lips to say the word "siu," they couldn't remember that "loong" had two "o"s. One person tried to shorten her name to Suzy. I very firmly put a stop to that.

Before Siu Loong could even remember her environment, I looked at the young children who made up the anarchist scene. Who would she be playing with when she grew old enough to interact with other kids?

Most anarchists do not have children. Whether this is a political statement or a personal choice, the face remains that anarchist children are few and far between. On the Lower East Side, the anarchists who choose parenthood and had enough support to remain somewhat involved in the movement tend to be white.

It bothers me that Siu Loong's companions are almost all white. I do not want her growing up in an all-white (or predominantly white) environment. I do not want her to wonder if she is somehow incorrect for not having blond hair and blue eyes as many of her peers do. When I have brought this up with other anarchist parents, they dismiss my concerns. Of course they do not have to worry about whether their child will feel as if she does not belong. Their children, even those who are of mixed parentage, have white skin. They do not have to worry that their child may feel as if she is not as good as her lighter-skinned, lighter-haired friends. They do not have to worry about the fact that our small community sometimes mirrors the racism and ethnocentrism found out in the larger world.

differences. I don't believe paper unity serves anyone. I encourage all my people to consider who you unite with, why and the interests it serves.

Allies and language

Whether we unite with white anarchists is a tough question. While I believe broad-based work presents unique opportunities, I am very passionate in feeling it's not our job to hold white folks' hands, make them feel empowered, good about their politics, not downplayed, etc. The white-led movement should provide that to them, since it's theirs and whites should be demanding more of other white progressives. But the subject of allies is altogether different.

When the Anarchist People of Color listserv began, some of us came to the table with the idea that we'd have this open space for ourselves to create a more visible presence of people of color in the 'anarchist movement,' essentially the white-led movement. Undoubtedly, our at-first unpopular little crew has now gotten more support from whites who see this effort as important. However, while most anarchists of color still participate in white-led organizing, our collective analysis is slowly evolving to a place where we are standing on our own, and what such unity means for us in the long term.

There's an equal amount of work around the question of anarchism, and how we can grow it to meet the needs of communities of color. Not a few people of color observe that the contemporary anarchist scene, if indeed it's embodied by testosterone-pumped white boys and *Anarchy* magazine, relates to a minuscule fraction of the populace. How do we make the ideas of anarchy relate to those who are not pissed off Caucasians and grad students? Such a question doesn't even get into the troubling failure in anarchism to adequately address white supremacy, e.g. Bakunin's anti-Semitism, Emma Goldman's advocacy of eugenics and modern anarchism's denial of the centrality of race in the dialogue. Anarchism, looked at objectively, should be applied as a model of social organization. North American trends in anarchist thinking have advocated anarchism as

an ideology, philosophy or lifestyle choice. Yet the fault of such application is that many assumptions made by anarchists deliver firmly Eurocentric values in their introduction.

Just to be clear, when I say Eurocentric values, I mean values that have become a little more complex than merely 'white values,' but concepts, through the system of white supremacy, capital and subjugation, that have become part of mass consciousness. The rise of modern Eurocentric values can be traced to the rise of capitalism, and embody ideas which, despite pretensions to the contrary by their most radical carriers, are intended to serve white supremacy and capital.

Calling individualism, liberalism, the rule of (natural, structural or other) law, democracy and free markets (e.g. free trade, fair trade, et al.) Eurocentric values denies the rightful link people of color have to them. In fact, Eurocentric values mean a sense of power, and of moral, political, social and/or economic superiority to other cultures, with the mission of assimilating them. For hundreds of years, European scholars have bemoaned the failures of "other" people as a means of talking up the superiority of their own belief systems, and assimilating them into Eurocentrism. All of us fall into the trap sometime; as people of color, we've been indoctrinated to tacitly accept the superiority of whites over us, while whites have been taught to assume their values are right. The "unite and fight" abstraction, at its core, is aimed at winning people to its philosophy and assimilating all struggles into "one." In another example, you regularly hear proponents of anarchism rejecting community cohesion and religious faith, but failing to grasp that, to many people, such things are important and can, in some historical examples, be an organizing spot. Even notions of consensus – an organizing model developed by white, middle-class anti-nuclear activists where a tiny group of people, often with many of the same values, get together and mutually agree to something – are an illusion aimed at reinforcing the values of a small group to the contrasting values of outsiders. Proponents of North American anarchism too often look to bring

Raising Children of Color in White Anarchist Circles

by Victoria Law

Siu Loong means "Little Dragon" in Cantonese.

But Siu Loong herself isn't Cantonese. She isn't even one hundred percent Chinese. Through me, she can claim to be Hakka, Suzhonese and Shanghainese. From her father, she can claim to be Finnish, Hungarian and Jewish. But she is also an American living among American anarchists, where none of this supposedly matters.

Before motherhood became a consideration, I paid little attention to the lack of color in the New York City anarchist "scene." So what if no one looked like me? Weren't we all struggling for the same thing?

Pregnancy made me sit up and look around at the demographics of the anarchists around me. Yes, I had followed (but not participated) in the short-lived discussion on white privilege in Seattle's protests against the WTO. Yes, I would confront my fellow anarchists about their internalized racism. But I never really went further and questioned why there were so few people of color-never mind people of color like me-in the anarchist movement.

Motherhood forced me to open my eyes. Before the recommended six

- Increasing the control that people have over actions that affect them;
- Building counterculture that uses all forms of communication to resist illegitimate authority, racism, sexism, and capitalism. Creating alternatives to the dominant culture; and
- Strengthening the 'social fabric' of neighborhood units that network of informal association, support services, and contacts that enable people to survive in spite of the negative influences of government and its bureaucracies.

Five criteria covered at the conference for measuring success:

- People learn skills needed to analyze issues and confront those who exert control over their lives;
- People learn to interact, make decisions and get things done collectively; rotating tasks, sharing skills, confronting racism, sexism and hierarchy;
- Community residents realize some direct benefit or some resolution of problems they personally face through the organizing work;
- Existing institutions change their priorities or way of doing things so that the authority of government, corporations, and large institutions is replaced by extensions of decentralized, grassroots authority; and
- Community residents feel stronger and better about themselves in the collective effort.

These aren't gospel, but they're a start in moving towards the conversations we need to have – whether you're an organizer or not – about self-determination, tactics, allies, privilege and more. As with anything, we need to treat each other with compassion and empathy; don't let hostility, resentment or a quest for 'accountability' color your efforts. Tearing each other down as people of color for perceived transgressions is never acceptable under any circumstance. We're not the military, and nor should we strive for that. We have serious discussions to have, and hopefully more learning, caring, fighting and loving in the future.

allegedly superior lifestyles and belief systems to the fore, and oppressed people, directly or indirectly, can be the victims.

I do think a revolutionary movement will take root, and that it will be broad-based. However, the mindset of many is a rush to idealism – that social justice is “all one struggle” and that we all need to be united to defeat fascism. I put forward the conversation that the rush to idealism will be our demise as a movement. The white-led movement should answer for its internal racism, and people of color should understand what we want, how we plan to work, and be conscious and organized as a struggle enough to fight this battle alone, if necessary. That kind of conviction is important in this undertaking. We should not make concessions to our demand for self-determination to win anyone's support.

Related: Class

Another issue on the unity tip is the anarchist romance with class. As we forge a new path of oppressed peoples' politics, as well as anarchist theory and practice, we must take a critical look at class. Are we surrendering our self-determination in the name of unity?

Within white-led anarchism, there is a subtle, and occasionally overt, competitiveness between race and class. For example, in “Race and Class: Burning Questions, Unpopular Answers,” a member of the North-eastern Federation of Anarcho-Communists brings arguments such as “racism is an excuse” and that racism is prevalent among people of color. These ideas are presented to show class is the primary issue we should unite under. “There's an overwhelming amount of class-privileged 'people of color' spearheading this movement, creating a culture that is class reactionary to all working class people of all races in the United States,” the piece notes. “These people are also quick to react to what they see as 'class trumping race,' and find the common class struggle between people of different races to be not as important as what they share in common

with the community in question.”

Similar points are made in a far cruder fashion. Most white radicals, and some radicals of color, have adopted old Marxist notions of class, class struggle and, most importantly, class solidarity. There are dozens of names people of color get called – from “nationalist” to “reverse racist” to “privilege pimp” – for pointing out the obvious importance of self-determination, racism and the historical fallacies of class unity. Although I do agree with familiarity with how capitalism functions is appropriate, my concern is many class-unity concepts are based on two fundamentally false ideas: 1.) that “the working class” (meaning the white working class and workers of color, in the United States and internationally) can unite to fight; and that workers of color and the white working class have common interests, from the workplace on down.

Even most anarchist intellectualism stakes positions to which the two misconceptions as their foundation. While there are indubitably surface commonalities (i.e. workplace, housing, etc.), history demonstrates that working-class solidarity between white workers and workers of color does not exist. History further demonstrates that white workers, in almost all cases, side with the oppressor and against workers of color. I’m sure there are isolated examples of unity. Does that mean I believe people of color should take such cavernous leaps of faith? Not without their eyes open and minds sharp.

J. Sakai, author of *Settlers: Mythology of the White Proletariat*, has been one of the hardest critics of the white working class. In an interview I conducted with him, Sakai explained he researched history and put his findings bluntly “I figured out that actually there wasn’t any time when the white working class wasn’t white supremacist and racist and essentially pro-empire.” Those who ad hominem dismiss Sakai ought to follow up on what he says. From colonization to ongoing wars and the dismantling of Affirmative Action, how many mass movements of white workers (or whites

campaign?’ If Adidas can have legions of cats wearing their \$200 gear, they’ve tapped into what we need to get a dose of, and quick. A few points that came out of the “Building an APOC Movement” workshop at the 2003 APOC conference, in terms of organizing:

- How people go about doing things; for the benefit and greater good take where people are and build from that. We have more to learn from people than they do from us;
- Using skills and resources already in existence; empowering to teach each other-working from our strengths; and
- More vision; not just talk about, make it more participatory, more organizing.

And in terms of networking and resources:

- Find common ground and be in the community;
- Bring together by using each others’ resources together;
- Focusing on commonalities;
- Be honest when balancing your values and other groups as a basis for building trust; and
- Be simplistic; talk about how you can support.

We also resolved on a few ideas related to points of unity:

- Ask people first; value system respecting existing knowledge;
- Clarity of goals makes things clear;
- Be aware anarchism is not better than what exists; be open; and
- Ultimately support community decisions; mistakes are part of the process.

Four key points of anarchist organizing:

- Helping people experiment with decentralized, collective and cooperative forms of organization;

spaces. From small things like showing up late to gatherings to major things like exclusionary organizing, the message is one of power dynamics and privilege. Sometimes it's unconscious. Sometimes people came up in a lazy political culture or one that didn't have to consider what starting a meeting 45 minutes late, for instance, might do for a poor person's bus ride or parent's time with their kids. Yet these examples are matters of privilege that mirror what is already going on in white anarchist milieus. This needs to be examined clearly.

What do relevant politics look like?

Think about Adidas. Its purpose is to sell expensive shoes. But nobody in their right mind will buy \$200 sneakers. So Adidas has to evolve from selling shoes to selling a lifestyle. The baller of the moment rocks a pair of signature shoes as a hot track bumps in the background. Adidas is flexible; it grows its campaigns as the tastes of potential buyers evolve. Now think about a movement. Making signs and sweating in the hot sun doesn't sell well. Who in their right minds wants that, *verdad?* So we need to evolve as people's media-savviness and minds evolve; the problem is not that people don't believe what we believe, but that anarchists can seem completely uninspiring doing what we do. Why would anyone care for a lifestyle of protests, long meetings, drum circles and getting arrested? Maybe those pissed-off Caucasians or grad students I mentioned earlier, but that's all.

We all want movements that are flexible and can respond to social conditions. We also need to work tirelessly to keep political goals like self-determination and tactics for getting there relevant to everyday folks. No, we don't need a movement led by Adidas, but we need to look at, without bias, the world our people live in, and how our messages can speak to them. I've heard 'we can't go to such-and-such because it's corporate' as proclamations of people's individualist politics twice as much as I've heard 'where do people hang, and can we go talk with them about such-and-such

altogether) were there, compared to instances where white masses either stood with the elite, actively or passively? 100-to-1? 500-to-1? Herein lies the dirty secret of class politics. If we have a few hundred years of history to look upon, in which the white working class has consistently and in most instances actively sided with oppressors and sold out people of color, what is the basis for solidarity? If working-class solidarity were more than a slogan, wouldn't the racial discrimination and even profound racism within the ranks of white workers have been obliterated years ago? If white workers have rejected significant demands supporting people of color, what makes them different now? They're not. As Sakai points out, and deftly illustrates, the white working class and people of color have divergent interests. White workers just side with their own interests and the empire's.

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Another conspicuous issue is the history of cross-class alliances among people of color in fighting colonialism. Read the histories of Algeria, Mexico and other countries and you'll discover the internal contradictions of class become far less important when faced by the external contradiction of an occupying army. It's the kind of history that swims against North American radicalism's beliefs that classes don't or can't unite. Moving forward as anarchist people of color means understanding our allies, as well as our enemies, and what that means for our freedom.

Privilege and Assertiveness

One of the beauties of self-determination is the fact that it draws lines of opposition, contradictions and prompts us to consider privilege. Not simply the (still important) roads typically hewn by activist-types — gender, sexual orientation and class — but looking at one another and acknowledging the privileges of people within this movement, and navigating that in hopes of being honest as possible. Being self-determined requires such.

For people of color who were raised in or politicized by white-dominant spaces, concept of self and one's relationship with non-white-dominant spaces represent one point of privilege worth exploring. In no other instance is the difference between anarchists of color bigger than between white-aculturated persons of color, and those socialized by their respective cultures. Relational views; concepts of autonomy/people of color spaces, racial experience, overall objectives for empowerment and more are thus profoundly varied. In many cases, being raised in white-dominant spaces is not a choice, although voluntary involvement is. In both cases, participants must recognize that, historically, such spaces impart values that, while dressed in democratic language, are intended to further white supremacy; create confusion and division; and, as a means of self-perpetuation, can make white-aculturated people of color unwitting agents of white supremacist ideology. How internalized marginalization and oppression function are critical considerations.

Very honestly, there are internal struggles being waged by conscious people of color all around us. The sense of estrangement from communities is real, as is the indignation some people of color feel when whites assume that people of color have no other interests but race. We need to be actively supporting one another through these explorations, exhibiting care and knowledge. Internalized oppression for people of color, manifested as guilt or defensiveness, helps no one, and we need to see these issues of privilege as collective issues for all of us in the movement.

Similarly, it's important white-skinned people of various cultures and ethnicities to understand the dynamics of race. This is a challenging segment of privilege to steer, but it's necessary. Light skin versus dark skin is a demonstration of our internal struggles, as well as the debates within our own colonies. As one person put it well: "How has your light skin operate like white privilege among people of color? How have you used your light skin to pass as white in the dominant culture? How has your light skin been used as a way to separate yourself from people of color? Do you use it to separate yourself from other people of color but not from people of your ethnic group? How does the collusion of your light skin give people of color the impression that you are not in their camp, but only come to their camp when excommunicated from the dominant culture not wanting to have these privileges is not the point here. The point is this: the fact that you do have light skin privilege in this racialized society, it is important to be racially responsible with it."

Talking about collective freedom through self-determination also requires we have a discussion about individualism. Individual freedom is one of the reasons we fight, and it is one of the highest ideals, although the ultra-competitive society fostered by capitalism has turned the idea of individual conscience on its head. Our objective as anarchists is not to emulate what the media tries to make of us, as self-involved monsters bent on greed and serving ourselves. Autonomy doesn't mean that our politics are defined by our moods or interests at the moment, but by study, struggle and discovery. Individualist politics are an exercise in privilege. Many Americans exercise that privilege every day by passively supporting the empire. Some anarchists of color get swept up in the moment, and start defining our politics by what's exciting at the moment, rather than realizing we don't have that many moments to lose.

Lastly, it is critical to recognize that the need for respecting each other and organizing ourselves collectively. I'm regularly surprised by the lackadaisical approach some people of color bring to anarchist people of color