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Anarchy and Chaos in Black Communities

Robert A. Wicks

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People often use anarchy and chaos interchangeably. They refer to civil unrest as “anarchy, total chaos.” As an anarchist of the anarcho-libertarian variety myself, naturally, this habit irks me. Anarchy is simply the absence of forceful authority. Chaos is disorder. The two things can coexist, but it may be shocking to some to find that the presence of the one does not imply the presence of the other. Nor does the absence of the one imply the absence of the other. They are neither unrelated nor equivalent. And the correlation between the two can often be surprising. This is particularly true among blacks.

I grew up in a black, rural community in Mississippi. I have always enjoyed listening to the stories of the past from my elders. Many of them were relatives from other cities such as Detroit and Chicago. Others were local, or from other parts of the South. One common thread among their reminiscences was the notion that while things were in many ways worse, since there were legal barriers in place which limited black property rights, the neighborhoods themselves were safer than the surrounding areas. In short, blacks

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were endangered when they encountered law enforcement or people who had the support of law enforcement, since those things enabled them to use force against blacks without fear of retaliation or negative repercussions. Within those black communities in many areas, however, there was no law enforcement, unless they had been summoned. The day-to-day life of those blacks, so long as they remained within their own neighborhoods was essentially anarchic. The state was what was encountered when one left the neighborhood, be it for business or pleasure.

Those neighborhoods, with their localized anarchy, were nonetheless orderly places. The communities policed themselves through ostracism and familial ties. There was little disorder within anarchy. Black-owned businesses served primarily black customers, unless the state intervened to prevent even that bit of freedom. Even during my own childhood in the 1970s, police presence in my community was an almost unheard of occurrence. Crimes and vices were handled among families and family members. Even though some people could be considered leaders, those leaders were followed voluntarily. There was no mayor who forced his edicts upon supporters and opponents alike. Each community was usually a little pocket of anarchy. The well-known negatives associated with involving oneself with a hostile state made self-governing a far better alternative. Consider, however, the situation today: Blacks often have far more frequent encounters with the state. Everything is regulated. There is little anarchy. From drug laws and house raids, which limit what a person can do with his own property and body, to welfare and subsidized housing, which allow a person who has not shown the ability to earn his own keep to remain housed, clothed, and well-fed without having to display character traits which are necessary to earn those things, the state is a constant intruder on the social order. And what do we frequently see in those areas now? Chaos. Disorder. Mayhem. Government.

What afflicts many American black neighborhoods and communities today is not the absence of rules so much as the natural effects of rules forced upon the unwilling. In stark contrast to the more organic leadership of church and business leaders of past generations, modern “leaders” are most frequently bureaucrats or government skills who profit from government action. Since they profit from the state, they are naturally disposed to defend the state. This treachery is clearly on display when we look at how these so-called leaders endorse two things which are devastating to blacks nationwide: the war on drugs and welfare. When we look honestly at the actual effects of these two programs, we see a horror story of nearly unparalleled proportions. Illegitimacy is rampant largely due to the state’s subsidizing of irresponsibility. The high levels of violence in many neighborhoods is almost entirely the product of the barbaric war on drugs. Despite these things, the misguided, the foolish, and the downright evil continue to support both of these horrible assaults on property rights and common decency. Make no mistake: any black person who is in favor of the war on drugs is morally defective, mentally defective, or both. The argument for welfare is the common mistake of all socialists. There is no way to do evil and produce only good as a result. What these communities, and all others, need is the elimination of the false, imposed “order” of the state, and more of the unpredictable, natural true order of voluntary association. The state, by attempting to control the natural tendencies of humans to improve themselves and their own conditions, causes the very chaos it claims to prevent.

This really should be surprising to no one. Most of us live in homes which are largely anarchic, yet which have less crime and violence than city streets, which are completely owned by governments. Far from bringing chaos, the anarchic portions of our lives are usually the most peaceful and orderly parts of them. So, when someone asks me “what do you want, anarchy?” I feel completely justified in saying “I can only hope.”