

Black Anarchist Reflections, From Bash Back! and Beyond

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We are writing this document as black anarchist attendees of Bash Back! who are trying to grapple with some of the broader issues/organizational questions within the black anarchist milieu and how those convos came up during the weekend for us and our homies. While we come from a variety of political backgrounds, we share a committed desire to insurrection and revolt for black autonomy. It was great to meet one another and kick it over the weekend. We got to hash out the answers to some questions. There was a lot of necessary conflict at Bash Back!. While reportbacks are fun, though often misleading, our aim in this document is to talk in a broader, abstract way about some of the questions and dynamics that occurred for black participants.

In a more positive spirit, the self-organization of black anarchists was happening over the course of the weekend. Examples include but are not limited to the Blacktivities cookout Friday night, formal and less-than-formal self defense demonstrations (wink wink), long convos at house parties and spontaneous meetups and conversations in parks. It's clear we are building a tendency parallel (but not in reaction) to the white anarchist milieu.

BIPOC and the Politics of Resentment

It's important to contrast activities like the black anarchist cook out and other informal gatherings with what seemed to be more prevailing attitudes, namely the BIPOC caucus on Saturday.

The reason to contrast these dynamics is due to the fact that it seems that within Black anarchist circles, there is not a clear answer or consensus on how we orient towards nonblack POC and white radicals. It often feels that BIPOC spaces only exist as a place for people to vent about white anarchist racism even though these concerns and frustrations are valid.

We also feel that "BIPOC organizing" or even the idea of POC solidarity is a dead end for Black radicals. We don't think any POC group has more inherent solidarity with the black struggle and BIPOC organizing runs into the same issues that much of black-white organizing does.

An observation was made about the desire of black radicals to even purposefully remain in BIPOC and all-white spaces behind what might be a misguided craving for perceived uniqueness, inexperience with all-black spaces, and an assumption of power that they think accompanies being the only black person in a room.¹ These appetites, while not at all reducible to singular reasoning, can stem from a larger alienation that has yet to be exorcized. The baggage of the dominant social order is heavy. Having to not only analyze and dispel that baggage while bolstering a new sense of being aligned with a radical politic can venture into the traumatic. Complaining about white people is seen as a comforting political language but retreating into that comfort gets misconstrued as a significant, unifying political identity among black people. Hating white folks is not a meaningful politic. It's unsubstantial and very surface level, if not lazy.

One of the main weaknesses of such a politics of resentment can be located in an unfulfilled desire for a place within dominant power structures rather than a precise critique and push for its diffusion and ultimate destruction. What's often confused for liberation, especially within black radical politics culled from authoritarian inspirations, is no more than the age-old reform of power, hierarchy, and authority. Whether or not total freedom even enters the picture is up for debate.

¹ Note: We feel it's relevant to all of these points that the demographics of black anarchist spaces aren't immune to pigmentocracy and complexion and has to be considered a major factor in one's relation to those spaces.

A refreshing difference about the Black anarchist cookout was that no one even brought up white people. There's enough issues internal to Black anarchism and the broader Black liberation struggle that need to be grappled with. Limiting our ideas and actions to addressing white people is fruitless. It's not expansive and it centers the actions of a group that historically and currently oppresses us. For many of us who talked over the weekend, developing autonomous projects as Black people is far more interesting.

Abolitionists, Liberals, Authoritarians, and Black People Who Simply Aren't Anarchists

It's clear that autonomy and freedom mean different things to different people. To be frank, a lot of self-described Black anarchists just simply aren't anarchists. In fact, they tend to be liberals or even authoritarians who exist in the anarchist social spaces out of convenience or as tokens. It's also clear that as much as Black radicals in an anarchist spaces may share a critique of whiteness, we may not share anything other than that.

Luckily, on this front, there have been developments. A good example of this was the debate during the Maroon workshop that happened over the weekend. The two presenters (black and indigenous, respectively) were pushing a political position that many in the crowd found to be authoritarian and vanguardist and numerous Black anarchists criticized their hierarchical approaches. Comrades remarked that in the past, they'd seen Black people circle up in radical spaces despite political differences almost out of a scarcity mentality. Or going even further, Black authoritarian or liberal perspectives would go unchallenged because the speaker is Black in a mostly non-Black space.

Simultaneously, there were Black participants in the Maroon workshop who were upset about the conflict and ridicule directed at the presentation. They made comments about how we're "all on the same side" and other liberal platitudes such as "it's problematic to laugh during a presentation" that diminishes very real political differences between black people. This is just dishonest. To suggest that Black anarchists should have common cause with Black liberals and authoritarians is real goofy. However, an important development nowadays is that Black liberals and authoritarians can get challenged by people that look like them and be forced to actually defend their ideas.

As an increasingly prevailing form of liberal politics, abolitionism has so much territory in black radicalism that people assert false similarities between abolition and anarchy, and are too generous with what it means to be an abolitionist without any coherent critiques of the state and capital, while also lacking any real self-developed principles and action. Abolitionism is a political language of comfort, is devoid of the visceral nature of attack contained within anarchism, and is the perfect home for radlibs. The language of abolition has become so dominant in radical lexicons that it has warped people's understanding of material reality, where "informed consent," "restorative justice," and "communities" obscure our understandings of the ranges of repair, which frequently includes confrontation, expulsion and violence.

Black Anarchist Projectuality

The anarchist subculture is mostly white. This has been true for decades. Though there's some argument that it has improved in the last 5 years due to Black anarchists building consistent long term projects, whiteness remains common and alienating for most Black folks involved in anarchist spaces. Though it's uncomfortable, as we mentioned earlier, there were a variety of conversations and vibes over the course of the weekend that indicated that many Black anarchists are happy, or at least content, to remain within the mostly white anarchist space. One of our comrades back home who didn't attend remarked that he felt anarchist convergences are often disappointing because very often the Black people who attend them don't really fuck with Black people. Anarchism, unfortunately, can exist as a subculture for Black people who are uncomfortable being around other Black folks, which opens up the space for tokenism.

The lack of imagination for something better than the current white anarchist subculture is uninspired at best and problematic at worst. While there's nothing inherently wrong with remaining in white spaces politically if Black anarchists feel that they are beneficial, to remain in these spaces while constantly complaining about the white supremacy of the spaces is a bit odd. You can just leave and do something else. Do something better. That's the principle of free association.

However, a lack of resources for black anarchists remains a persistent obstacle for the materialization and/or actualization of many important Black anarchist projects. Between the isolation of Black anarchists in Black authoritarian leftist spaces, the Black nonprofit world (full of opportunists), or in white anarchist spaces, we find ourselves at a constant crossroads. The only political solution to the lack of resources is to orient ourselves in a way where we build autonomously amongst each other while simultaneously criticizing, attacking, and seizing resources from our political enemies whether they are authoritarians, Black nonprofiteers or (at times) white anarchists.

We also want to highlight what black anarchist projectuality can look like in light of the cookout and our overall desire to grow the tendency. A big part of the weekend, especially the informal conversations, was hashing out what the space can and should look like if we are truly organizing for revolt. Ultimately for us, conversations with other Black anarchists about tactics, strategy and the way we need to move are far more critical in developing black anarchism as a tendency with a real ability to refuse constraints, oppose authority and evade capture.

Suggestions

Black autonomy meet-ups in person in your city or online. We can't build a real tendency without knowing one another locally (make sure to tell people to leave their white partner or homie at home). Often times these meetups will start very small and that's okay. All projects gotta start somewhere. Building black affinity can be beautiful, is important, and shouldn't focus on scale. Prioritize building with other Black individuals with the same ideas and goals as you.

Black anarcho-caucuses at radical gatherings that focus on developing a set of Black anarchist politics that isn't just based on a resentment of white anarchists.

Confronting Black authoritarians and Black liberals about their stupid ideas at their events and conferences. We need to draw cleavages in the black liberation movement (works better when you got a crew).

Produce more Black anarchist works. If you disagree with us, write something in response to this.

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