

Mapping our Legacy

The Narrative of Black Freedom Struggle

Afrofuturist Abolitionists of the Americas

Black liberation is a living lineage. All of us inherit it and all of us can be part of it. Like with any people's tradition, we have to go back and fetch the history of Black freedom struggle, and place ourselves within this beautiful heritage of resistance, in order to begin understanding how we roll and why.

Black Anarchic Radicals, aka "Anarkatas," trace our revolutionary trajectory all the way back to precolonial Africa, to some of the communal, gender fluid, ecologically sensitive, and egalitarian societies indigenous to the Motherland. But more immediately, how we move is traced to lessons learned from the Black Panther Party (BPP), the Street Trans Action Revolutionaries (STAR), and the Black Liberation Army (BLA) in the mid-to-late 20th century.

The Black Panthers (or BPP) began in Oakland with Huey Newton and Bobby Seale, building off the influence of Malcolm X and the militant energy of the Black Power movement that became more prominent after Martin Luther King was assassinated by the US and many cities were torn apart by riots from the Black masses. Their history is deep and worth more in depth study, but the basics are that they highlighted the need for armed resistance in Black liberation, and that they challenged the Capitalist economic system and US aggression against global oppressed people. The party structure needed to move away from its masculinist and hierarchical set-up, however. These characteristics were what made the BPP vulnerable to the divide-and-conquer tactics the feds played. Through counter-intelligence and infiltration programs, the colonizer took advantage of gender violence, ego-driven beef, and personality clashes in the Party to decimate its unity. Despite this, the BPP was well known and influential, for not just their speeches and guns, but their community survival programs, for providing free breakfast and free education and medical testing and other forms of care, and for their work in solidarity with many other movements. This inspires Anarkatas.

Street Trans* Action Revolutionaries (or STAR) began in NYC with Marsha P Johnson and Sylvia Rivera, a few years into the Black Power era, building off the trans-led and working class street organizing which confronted the pigs at the Stonewall Riots. Their history is deep and worth more in depth study, but the basics are they brought to light the need for anti-capitalist and racial liberation organizing that prioritized the needs of houseless, queer/trans or gender variant communities of color. STAR was still in the process of developing their politics and their community programs, but unfortunately faced a lot of betrayal and backlash from more Assimi-

lation aligned folk in the gay movement at the time. STAR had a holistic view of liberation, and was a groundbreaking outgrowth of on the ground queer/trans abolitionism and struggle in anti-war and other movements at the time. The cooption of the impact made by the movements STAR came out of at the hands of assimilationists posed a huge challenge to Marsha P Johnson,

Sylvia Rivera, and other revolutionary street queens and QTGNC rebels at the time. Despite this, STAR made an impact in the lives of many Black and Brown gender variant youth, reclaiming empty properties and collaborating with other orgs to help provide housing for young queer/trans Black and Brown folk. They hosted parties and used political education as well radical organizing and protest and sex work and prisoner support and even ritual and African spirituality as ways to sustain the revolutionary community building they did. This inspires Anarkatas.

The Black Liberation Army came out of the Black Panther Party and larger Black Power era. Their history is deep and worth more in depth study, but the basics are they formed in order to provide a clandestine/illegal and militant or underground organ that supported and defended above ground revolutionary activities happening at the time through armed struggle and guerilla methods. Certain tactical mistakes, but also conflicts in the radical movement, along with media narratives that were boosted by treacherous Black boujie leaders to villainize Black militants, all served to weaken the BLA's impact/relevance—removing the necessary community support that would have allowed their escalated efforts to flourish better. These forces isolated as well as exposed revolutionaries and got them jailed or killed. Despite this, the BLA reappropriated funds from the agents which rob and disservice the people, such as banks, and like robin hood, would redistribute those moneys to the people's liberation movement. They also moved in a more decentralized fashion and some of them sought to challenge the sexist nature of the larger Black Power movement at the time. This inspires Anarkatas.

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We go directly to 60s/70s organizations such as the BPP, BLA, and STAR because during that time mad uprisings and riots and movements were popping off all over the world all at once to destroy the white power structure. Sylvia Wynter teaches us that this worldwide challenge was part of a broad anti-colonial upheaval, even it was eventually suppressed or coopted by the Man. Collectively, the movements of the mid-to-late 20th century broke down various forms of white power over the economic, cultural, environmental, as well as racial and gender/sexual levels of human life. Six of the major results from that time period that we still live with today are flag independence for formerly colonized nations, as well as civil and workers' rights (including for disabled and queer/trans folk), environmental protections, community welfare programs, and a change in consciousness toward Black self love, toward a drive for self-naming/self-defining, and an understanding that all Black people globally are united as one people. This inspires Anarkatas.

But the fight is not over. Surface level changes in the laws/politics and even cultural consciousness of global society have failed to fully guarantee us freedom, even if we have a few measures of safety. Over the last few decades, we have begun to experience a wider and wider gap between rich and poor all over the world, and mass environmental destruction, as well as steady genocides against our people through the corporations, prisons, police, hospitals, schools, and the military. Representation of our people within white systems/media has not promised us anything worthwhile at all, and often times our representatives betray the interests of the collective for their own benefit. And xenophobic narratives continue to be sown in our communities in order to divide us so we can throw our most vulnerable siblings under the bus and betray each other. Many legal protections are often denied anyway and even being rapidly taken away. All

of this has left our people and the entire planet vulnerable to death and destitution. And meanwhile, the liberatory traditions that were so impactful in the 60s/70s, are still being suppressed and marginalized—labelled ‘terroristic’ and suffering widespread repression.

Every time the enemy has tried to crush our lineages, however, our ancestors have found a way to revitalize them. When our Afrikan ancestors were violently invaded in the Motherland Afrika, and some were made into chattel/property for European capitalist/colonizers, we fought in our homelands to keep alive our people’s legacies so that we would be able to work out our own problems and control our own destinies. Anti-colonial and national liberation movements find their origin then. When the Man forced us into slave ships and shackles, we fought on the seas, hijacked the vessels, or even jumped into the oceans in pursuit of freedom and autonomy. Anti-slavery movements find their origin then. When we were brought to the Americas and other places, forced to work in brutal conditions to build societies that hate and exploit us, we still fought and fought and escaped and created independant social lives/structures. Maroon communities, religious/spiritual organizations, proto-anarchist initiatives, and early Black feminist as well as Black queer resistance—all of these find their origin then.

Each time a roadblock came, we would find a new way to apply our heritages of resistance in a way that adapted to new challenges/conditions. In Brazil, for example, as the kkkolonizer sought to suppress our combat/fighting styles, Afro-Brazilians found a way to keep their martial arts training alive through capoeira. To develop capoeira, our ancestors had to discover how to get around the fact that fighting was outlawed. They did it by using dance to revitalize and disguise their fighting systems. Similarly, in the US, as the kkkolonizer sought to suppress our musical communication/ritual styles, Afro-Americans found a way to keep our rhythm-based spiritual systems alive through the ring shout. To develop the ring shout, our ancestors had to discover how to get around the fact that religious congregation was outlawed and drums were banned. They did it by using coded songs and their bodies out in the bush/woods to revitalize and disguise their spiritual/communication systems. In both instances, something new was born in order to adapt to new challenges, all while keeping our lineage of resistance alive. While the legacy was being crushed, it was not and never has been, static or dead. Anarkatas keep this same energy.

People like Assata Shakur, CeCe McDonald, Kuwasi Balagoon, Miss Major, Lorenzo Komboa Ervin, and Ashanti Alston are some of the people who have given Anarkatas the understandings we need to fortify and revitalize our revolutionary legacy so that we can overcome the challenges we face. There are many other influences too, past and present, from throughout the world wherever Afrikan/Black people live, breathe, and organize, well known and unknown. They have gone by many names, taken on many labels, advanced many movements. “Anarkata” trajectories are like a cumulative outgrowth of of their diverse contributions (and a response to their limitations).

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What Anarkata is about, basically, is Black liberation through anarchy, or anarchy through Black liberation. Periodt. Anarchy does not mean “chaos” in the way we commonly think of it. As our comrade Jai Renee Gwalchmai says, anarchy is about “dismantling... [a]ll Systemic and Individual/Interpersonal Oppression.” The goal of Anarchy is to “move ALL humanity to a place where everyone holds material equity of power, resources, and humanity.”

[“With anarchy, the society as a whole not only maintains itself at an equal expense to all, but progresses in a creative process unhindered by any class, caste or party. This is because the goals of anarchy don’t include replacing one ruling class with another, neither in the guise of a fairer boss or as a party.”]

The formula for anarchic organizing is that individual autonomy and collective interests are balanced. Boundaries exist which are suited to the material needs and histories of the individuals and groups involved. And the work is about facilitating a dialectical pursuit of self-determination among and for us all, from the standpoint of the most marginal.

Jai Renee Gwalchmai teaches us: “[Anarchy] doesn’t mean that Nobody should be in charge, and that everyone gets to do whatever they like...quite the opposite.

The symbol for Anarchy looks like this: ⓐ The “O” around the “A” stands for Order. Not chaos. The goal is a more horizontal democracy... Every Single Voice Counts, and Must Be Included and Heard. The disenfranchised and marginalized must be given a seat at the table, and the power to shut down those who have traditionally held the lions share of power and privilege.”

Jai Renee Gwalchmai adds that because of this, anarchy requires a lot of “Self Work”...because We ALL Hold Areas of Privilege. Some folks hold a great deal more privilege than others...but if the goal is to move forward to a place of material horizontal equity, then we All have work to do. Some people don’t Want to give up their privilege and power, because they don’t have a lot of it and to have less sounds like death... We all need each other...and when we don’t recognize that, we all die in droves together.”

Furthermore, according to Jai Renee Gwalchmai, anarchy comes from an understanding that “oppression does not happen horizontally.. ..it looks like a cage, with the top Oppression (that of the Elites/Rentier Class who are more often than not CisHet & White) maintaining the... social system or set of connecting social systems built around domination, oppression, and submission.”

It is because of this class-aware understanding of hierarchy, and our critical outlook on how race and gender condition access and oppression, that Anarkatas prioritize concrete and material change. We want to understand our positions in society, and put an end to our social or economic or racial or gender or sexual oppressions, so we focus on what actions we have to take to meet our material needs and take our power back. Anarkata is not just about lofty abstract ideals and a belief that we all matter and have value or deserve freedom. A belief/ideal is not enough to liberate anyone.

As our sib Jai Renee Gwalchmai reminds us, “action and actual physical/visible change that happens in Real Time is how we move. We want it Today...NOW...Immediately...ASAP. Making people wait for equitable access to material resources, humanity, and sociopolitical & socio-economic power is the physical manifestation of oppression. We are here to disrupt that...by any means necessary.”

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In short, “Anarchy,” means ‘without hierarchy’ and implies a society that lacks an unjust ruling class. Anarchy lacks any and all forms of material exploitation and domination. Anarchy lacks any form of social/racial/gender/sexual oppression. Anarchy is society without chains or cages. Anarchy is a society where all power is taken up by all the people (not just some ruling class). And, “Anarkata” is whatever works toward this total liberation from inside the expanse of global Black liberation and Pan African struggles.

For context, it was necessary to invoke “Anarkata” in the Black freedom struggle out of a recognition that our oppression is so volatile that only non-hierarchical and non-masculinist organizations can make our movements indomitable, ungovernable. “Anarkata” recognizes that the oppression of the Motherland and its peoples is the basis of all modern oppressions; that Afrika continues to be robbed by neocolonial rule and caged by US military forces, which enriches capitalism and worsens ecological catastrophe, threatening all lifeforms. Anarkata says we therefore

need an all-encompassing movement for Black people that builds from the ground for the liberation of all. Anarkata says that liberation cannot be skewed toward just straight men, or those in the US or who speak English, or to those who are able-bodied, or those who are not in prison or who are not forced to live on the streets, or even to just liberation of humanity. In other words, we realize the need for another age of widespread liberation movements, beyond borders and binaries, and we know that centering Africa/Africanness is the only way to sit in the heart and the horizons of what has become a truly planetary struggle.

What we suggest for beginning to align yourself with this narrative of Black struggle is to find space either alone or with community to pour some libations and say the following words:

“We pour one out for all our niggas: for the nomads, the ungoverned, the refugees, the lil friends, the kinfolk, the pirates, the runaways, the maroons, the insurgents, the gworls, the spiritual leaders, the guerrilla warriors, the maGes, the street queens, the rioters. And all the wild things Man cannot house.

And we pour one for all those who are forgotten and unprotected
All those who aren't allowed to love or live as themselves freely
All those who fought and died for our freedom
For all our people wherever they are, and for our homeland, and for our planet
For all beings, even those who are not human,
and for all the people everyone says are less than human
And for all people whose brains work different or whose bodies work different
And for all those in prison or on the street
For all power to all the people. Ase”

This libationary is based on the Tradition section of the text *Anarkata: A Statement* (which you can also watch on YouTube). Each of those invoked in the libation are a different inspirational element for Black Anarchic Radical histories. We suggest you research and study and learn from or about who they are. Think about how to apply their contributions and struggles to your development as Anarkata. Engaging with these iterations of Black radical tradition (whether you use the ritual of libations or not) is very important in allowing us to start moving along an Anarkata frequency. Each one touches on a facet of our diverse Black revolutionary heritage. We look back to those histories and contributions, so that we can then honor a fight for all Black lives. Take time to learn from these figures and formations as well as the radical frameworks that have emerged because of them (Black feminism, Queer/trans liberation, Pantherism, Pan Africanism, Black ecology, Afropessimism/antihumanism, disability justice, prison abolition, Anarkata). This is what we suggest so we can learn how we move forward, so that our people can sharpen what it means to be the wild thing that Man can never, ever again house, can never, ever again domesticate, can never, ever again suppress, can never, ever again coopt.

Suggested resources

Look for me in the Whirlwind by The Panther 21

Mapping the Margins: Intersectionality, Identity Politics, and Violence against Women of Color by Kimberle Crenshaw

Rapping With a Street Trans Action Revolutionary- An Interview with Marsha P Johnson

War Against the Panthers: A Study of Repression in America by Huey P Newton

The War Before by Safiya Bukhari

Assata: An Autobiography by Assata Shakur

Message to the Black Movement by the Black Liberation Army

Sylvia Rivera and Marsha P. Johnson: Listen to the Newly Unearthed Interview with Street Transvestite Action Revolutionaries by Women at the Center
African Anarchism by Sam Mbah and I.E. Igariwey
Black on Both Sides: A Racial History of Trans Identity by C. Riley Snorton
The Black Liberation Struggle in Philadelphia by Russell Maroon Shoatz
We Will Return in the Whirlwind: Black Radical Organizations 1960-1975 by Muhammad Ahmad

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