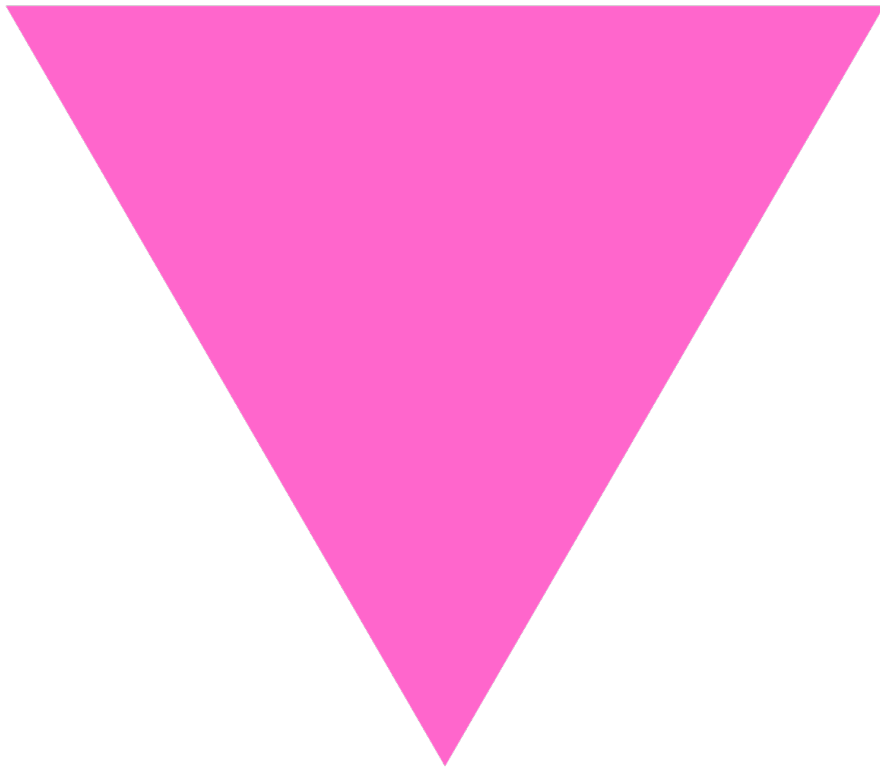


Questions to be Considered Before Chicago

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Introduction

“What is Bash Back!?”

“What does it mean to resist oppression?”

“What is our purpose?”

“Is our violence of substance or of image?”

These are questions that have ruptured throughout queer anarchist history since the late 2000s. Bash Back! has been called many different things over the years. If you ask 5 queer anarchists, you’re likely to get 6 different answers. Some have claimed that it is a decentralized network of autonomous queer anarchist cells. Others have considered it a gang, a tendency, or even just a symbol. According to certain folks, they’re all of these things and more.

These questions, and their answers of the past, have become much more than historical intrigue in the past few months. A new Bash Back! Convergence¹ has been announced to take place in Chicago from September 8–11, 2023. This announced resurrection of Bash Back! has caused me to dive further into its history not only to find out potential contradictions and pressures that caused Bash Back! to disband, but also the lessons that have been learned so far by former participants since its death. I seek to explain what I have gathered from this dive. Most of the information that I will be repeating and responding to comes from essays found within the collection “Queer Ultraviolence.”² This revisiting of Bash Back! history is done so that we can enter this convergence with at least a set questions that are rooted in analyzing this network’s history. We can use these questions to set the stage for our upcoming dialogues, conversations and actions.

The History of Bash Back!

Bash Back! was an incredibly decentralized network due to the insurrectionary and nihilist anarchist principles that were put into it at its founding. This helped the tendency grow exponentially as a short Points of Unity list and initial diversity of tactics helped different chapters and groups form quickly and autonomously after it’s creation.

The chapters under this battle cry in its initial heyday would go on to commit many infamous actions. They would crash church services, deface Mormon temples, march in the streets in the most gender-fucked and fabulous clothing, have Sextravaganzas, occupy vacant buildings in collaboration with homeless queers, and of course bash back against fascists and dominators within their communities. One of the biggest events that Bash Back! cells organized in its early years was the opposition protests to the Republican AND Democratic National Conventions in 2008. Bash Back! was a force to be reckoned with for both fascists and the liberal rulers and gay assimilationists who betrayed the queer and trans community for their own personal gain.

So what caused Bash Back! to die? When looking at the surface level, tactical and political differences that arose as a result of the network’s incredibly loose form of organizing that the network took started intense discussions, debates and divisions among the participants of Bash Back! They didn’t make a point to more closely define its political analysis, as they were only

¹ Bash Back! is Back - CrimethInc

² Queer Ultraviolence - Various Authors

interested in maintaining the minimum amount of organization necessary to keep a network between autonomous queer anarchist cells.

For the Pink and Black Attack 6³ and Tegan Eanelli⁴, the death of Bash Back! as a network does not need to be a negative event. From their perspective, it was never the point of Bash Back! to have any formal organizational structures that could better deal with or address the differences between chapters that ultimately led to its dissolution. For the Attack 6 especially, they see Bash Back! as something that formed specifically for the queer anarchist protest of the 2008 RNC and DNC events. Both of the authors claim that this death may even be a positive event in regards to the evolution of the nihilist anarchist practice that Bash Back! helped explode into popularity among queer anarchists. They say that the actions and connections that Bash Back! helped forge will last much longer than the network itself, and that the work Bash Back! brought to the national stage is still being done across the country. The main takeaway that has been made by those within the Bash Back! tendency closely after its fall was that its lack of organization and working towards negation in the present moment was the point of such a network.

The Future of Bash Back!

So, now that we have discussed the reasons as to why Bash Back! died and what some of its members learned from it, let us consider new questions:

Is Bash Back! going to be organized around building the new in the shell of the old, or complete negation for its own sake?

One of the major issues that divided members and chapters within Bash Back! was the issue of organization and negation. There were members of Bash Back! that supposedly wanted Bash Back! to become more of a federation structure that could more clearly communicate its principles and hone its practice among those that participated. This suggestion was something that nihilist anarchists within these discussions would flatly oppose. As it was said in "Questions to be Addressed Before Denver:"⁵

"If BB! is an organization, we are doomed from the start... If we are ever to have a member-list, count us off of it."

This legacy of some members' extreme dissociation from and hostility to more formal organizations and prefiguration within Bash Back! is something that we as a wider community of queer anarchists today have to decide to keep or to change when we converge this year. The landscape for struggle has changed drastically since the last time Bash Back! had a convergence, and we have the tools necessary to understand and analyze why Bash Back! existed and what we can do now. From what I have observed, there has been a resurgence in social anarchist organizing within the queer community in the last few years. It's quite likely that a greater number within this new convergence will be more open to formal organizations to help make this network a reality. This potential reality is something that those within the perspective of negation are going to have to contend with, though that is something that will have to be addressed further in Chicago.

³ Reflections on the Demise of Bash Back! - Pink and Black Attack 6

⁴ Bash Back! is Dead; Bash Back Forever! - Tegan Eanelli

⁵ Queer Ultraviolence - Various Authors

If Bash Back! is to be organized around the philosophy of attack and negation as queer practice, what is the role of queer social anarchists and their organizations within this network?

The history of Bash Back! has within it a pointed conflict between anarchist perspectives that prioritize more formal organizations and nihilist anarchists who are critical of such perspectives. This conflict, among many others, divided chapters amongst each other to the point of fracturing the network permanently. I hope that we can avoid repeating that same mistake by making more clear the role of social anarchists and the organizations we bring to the table within this network so that the relationship between these tendencies can lead to better outcomes. Even if there is no role at all for social anarchists within this project, it would be better than it fracturing from that same conflict again.

If Bash Back! is to be a very loose and decentralized network towards a specific purpose or event, what is that purpose?

As stated earlier, the Pink and Black Attack 6 suggest that the specific event or purpose that Bash Back! was set out to do when originally formed was the 2008 RNC and DNC protests. If the same decentralized structure is to be taken as the path for this modern Bash Back! tendency, what is going to be the specific goal that will be pushed towards before it's likely to start breaking down?

Conclusion

Ultimately, I cannot give any definitive answer to the questions that are now posed in anticipation of this upcoming convergence. It is up to all of us as queer anarchists to determine how this ship is to be built and what course it's going to take. I hope that through this essay I could help make the outcome of this convergence all the more sound and the love we make together all the more sweet. See you all in Chicago!

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