

# **Our Culture, Our Resistance**

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

Ernesto Aguilar

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# **Volume One**

Over 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 advocate 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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# Dedication

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



# Acknowledgements

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# Introduction

## *by Ashanti Alston*

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 it is necessary to close ranks, so to speak and figure out how to ensure our different freedoms.

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 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 has meant for us 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.

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 effectively 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 concentration 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 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, REVOLUTION, 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 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 ac-

tivist 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 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.

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 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, 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 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.

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 mummies) 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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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. Anyway, to make a long story short, they consequently suffered as a result of their bad decision. Solidarity with friends, oh yes...

# **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, stared 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 critiques 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.

# 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 organizing. 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 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 lifelong 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 lessens 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(l). 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 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.”

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 desafío, 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  
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 everyone of us  
as difficult to find  
or keep  
as irreplaceable  
as frail  
as everyone 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 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 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 importantly, 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 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 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 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.

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 recog-

nize 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-acculturated 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 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 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 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;
- 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.



# **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, Suzhonesse 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 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.

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.

"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 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.

# 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 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 meeting s 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 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 capital-ism? 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 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 it's 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 in and 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.

## **How do you handle discipline?**

**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.**

**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 blond 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 blond 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 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, 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 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.

# 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 conquerors, 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 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 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 pocs. 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 125<sup>th</sup> and Lenox Ave., our feet as the tap the sound of the calle as we run from the cops across 110<sup>th</sup> Street. The revolution may not be 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 art-work? For me, it feels tricky when you are trying to reach folks in the community who know about anarchism through main-stream 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 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.

**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 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?

**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 125<sup>th</sup> 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 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 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 Saundra," 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.

# **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 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 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 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.

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, 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.

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](http://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 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 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 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](http://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 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 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 22<sup>nd</sup> 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.

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 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 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 Gandhi; 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.

## 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](mailto: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](http://awol.objector.org).

**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](http://www.ricanstruction.net).

**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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Over 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 advocate 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, Volume Two is the continuation of writings by people of color covering the concepts of anarchism, race, class and gender. Released simultaneously with Our Culture, Our Resistance, 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



# **Volume Two**

# Dedication

This book is dedicated to people of color around the world and our just fights for consciousness, justice, land, freedom and liberty. This volume is also dedicated to the memory of Houston activist Olaniyi Labinjo and all anarchists of color fighting the good fight everywhere.

## **Acknowledgements**

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# Culture Clashes Among American Anarchists

*by Victoria Law*

My great-grandfather was the type of man who refused to get out of bed unless there was breakfast waiting for him. Since he wouldn't get out of bed to go and work, there was never any breakfast waiting for him. It was a cycle that did nothing to alleviate the family's poverty.

When he grew old enough, his son, my grandfather, left the small village to seek work in Shanghai. He found it and spent the next year shoveling manure for a living. He worked his way up to become a jeweler's apprentice, eventually opening his own jewelry store. He returned home to build the village's largest private house for his mother, who had long endured the ridicule of her neighbors and acquaintances. When the Communists won the Civil War, confiscating both the house and the jewelry store, he started again in Hong Kong, this time with a family of six and a wife who loved the latest fashion. One year, he held the traditional Chinese New Year's party.

It was packed with fellow entrepreneurs. The next year, his business crashed; their doorway remained empty. The visitors of yesteryear, who had eaten all his snacks and drank all his liquor, had found more lucrative families to call upon.

My other grandfather was the unsuccessful owner of a factory that made burlap bags. Rarely did these bags yield a profit and so my mother's strongest childhood memories are of eating salted peanuts one at a time to make them last. Her younger sister died of hunger. One of her older sisters had to be given away.

Despite these inauspicious beginnings, both of my parents had attained middle-class status by the time I was born. They had come to the States to go to college. Both were the first generation in their families to attend, let alone graduate, high school. They owned their own home in a predominantly white area in Queens. Both parents worked white-collar office jobs. I have no childhood memories of material want.

This last fact has been used against me when I bring up race and racism.

There have been more than a few occasions when white anarchists quickly shift the conversation from my discomfort at being the only non-white face in the room to class issues. I had a middle-class childhood. How dare I complain about, or even question, the lack of racial diversity in any given anarchist project when I have never experienced material deprivation? It does not matter that I grew up to become a single mother making less than fifteen thousand a year. The fact that I grew up privileged invalidates anything I might have to say about discrimination—whether it be based on race, skin color, gender or even my status as a parent—both in and out of anarchist circles.

In their attacks on my well-to-do childhood, white anarchists overlook some deep-rooted cultural differences. For instance, I grew up with a series of amahs. In pre-1949 China (and in



post-Revolution Hong Kong), Chinese parents rarely cared for their own young. Instead, they turned them over to amahs, who acted as wet nurses, babysitters and maids.

Most amahs remained with the family until all the children were grown and continued to maintain close ties with their nurslings. For the poorer families, like that of my maternal grandfather who could not afford to hire a woman, the elder children took responsibility for the younger. In earlier times, the son was married off-at the age of two or three-to a preteenage girl whose role was more that of surrogate mother than wife.

American culture has nothing that resembles the amah. Wealthier families may have nannies, which is what I suppose the average American anarchist envisions when I talk about my childhood. Because many of them have grown up in places that encourage ethnic and cultural segregation and because Chinese culture discourages unnecessary interaction- particularly more intimate interaction-with other cultures, they have no frame of reference for my stories. I am seen as having grown up with the privilege of having had servants. There is little attempt to probe further into the culture and understand that amahs, while technically employees of the household, had more intimate relationships than an American family's maid, cleaning lady or dog walker.

Perhaps this refusal speaks to the internalized notion that only American heritage and tradition matter. If an experience comes from someplace else, it doesn't count.

It is not just the differences in culture that cause misunderstanding. What many self-proclaimed working-class (white) anarchists fail to understand is that having money did not insulate me from the insults American society heaps upon its children of color and its girl children. The fact that my parents held white-collar jobs did not prevent me from encountering grown men who believed it was within their right to approach a ten-year-old girl and quietly say, "Nice pussy." My parents owning their own home did not protect me from other children pulling their eyes sideways and taunting me. Living in a well-to-do neighborhood did not shield me from the history teacher who looked at me and the Indian girl in his sixth-grade classroom and said, in all seriousness, "It's too bad that you come from inferior cultures."

Such closed-mindedness is not limited to anarchists focused on class struggle. Although all anarchist groups and projects proclaim, "We welcome all who agree with our mission statement, regardless of race, sexual orientation, etc.," what many of these groups fail to realize (or perhaps don't care to realize) is that their mission statements and their ideal visions often fail to address, or even acknowledge, the very different realities we come from.

Their mission statements may sound good on paper, but often fail to take into account that many people of color do not feel comfortable in almost all- white spaces. They refuse to acknowledge that we may have had bad experiences with predominantly white groups both in and out of the anarchist movement. They refuse to understand that we automatically notice when we are the only ones in the room. They refuse to comprehend that we are tired of being touted as the group's (sole) member of color, of being accused of being overly sensitive to skin color or of having our concerns ignored altogether.

They refuse to see that overthrowing the capitalist system will not automatically address the institutional and internalized racism, sexism and other forms of discrimination that we experience every day.

Last winter, I went to a meeting of anarcho-feminists. The flier offered childcare — a rarity in the anarchist scene. That alone made me hope this would be different than other meetings

and groups I'd attended in the past. After all, the organizers, neither of whom were parents, understood the need for childcare.

They might be more open-minded about other issues as well.

After dropping my daughter off in the childcare space, I entered the meeting room. A circle of chairs had been set up. As the room filled, I noticed every face except mine was white.

A few years ago, this would not have bothered me. I had entered the anarchist scene in high school and hadn't cared much about racial diversity or differences. I was just glad that no one made fun of me because I looked different or acted different or actually cared about what went on in the world. As I grew older, I began to notice my difference more and more. I noticed that people sometimes treated me differently, as if they were going out of their way to welcome the one woman of color and prove that they were not racist. In high school, I was invited to a Love and Rage meeting.

Love and Rage was a closed collective; more than a few older white anarchists in the scene were surprised that I, a girl so new to politics, had been asked to participate while they had been ignored by the group for years. I arrived to the meeting late. The discussion was going full force.

The topic? How to bring more people of color into the organization.

That day, I was acutely aware I was very unlike the others in the circle. My discomfort lessened only slightly when another woman of color entered.

Throughout the meeting, I struggled with the prospect of bringing up the group's lack of diversity. I wondered if my concerns would be dismissed or even ridiculed. I wondered if I would be accused of being divisive or of distracting from the "real" issue of women's status in the anarchist movement.

At the end of the meeting, as a sign-up sheet was being passed around, another woman — one with blond hair and blue eyes — saved me the discomfort. "Before I agree to be on any sort of listserv or be part of any kind of network, I want to ask about future outreach. I'm not interested in being part of a predominantly white group."

All eyes divided between darting towards me and towards the other woman of color on the far end of the room. I was glad that a white woman had brought up the subject. However, since half the people in the room were looking at me and no one at all was speaking, I decided to add my thoughts. "I think the term anarcho-feminist might turn away some women of color who share the same politics but don't explicitly identify as anarchist. Maybe the next flier can drop the term."

As I spoke, I remembered past conversations with radical women of color- women who shared anti-authoritarian ideas and beliefs but who didn't want to be identified with a movement that they saw as white brick throwers. I thought about the woman of color who had attended a few different anarchist meetings and been turned off by white male anarchists' dismissal of race issues. I thought about the woman of color who had posted the article, "Where was the Color in Seattle?" Her concerns had been dismissed as unimportant; what really mattered were class differences. I thought about the radical women of color who had the perception that anarchists were either unwashed, smelly white punk kids or white academics. Both had the option of renouncing radical politics and rejoining the mainstream world. This was what the word anarchist conjured up for them.

Why would they want to get involved with any group that labeled itself that?

There was an uncomfortable pause. After some hemming and hawing, an organizer suggested perhaps instead of directly trying to reach out to women of color, this group could do fundraisers and donate the proceeds to women of color organizations “that are doing good work.”

I felt as if I’d been smacked. I wondered if the woman realized how patronizing and racist her suggestion was. In my mind, I could see Charlotte Mason giving money to the black artists she deemed “primitive” enough. Only, instead of the 1930s heiress who demanded her artists sit at her feet and call her “Godmother,” these were post-millennium anarchists deciding which women of color were anti-authoritarian enough to receive their money.

The other organizer had a different suggestion, one which also circumvented the possibility that they would have to reach out to women other than the same old (white) faces. She suggested that the group work around issues facing women of color, such as the prison-industrial complex. Although she didn’t outright say it, I felt that her suggestion was that this predominantly white group speak for and act on behalf of women of color rather than actively trying to get them involved or even find out what their main concerns were.

Later I learned that one or two of the attendees had felt offended on my behalf. How dare someone bring up race and the lack of non-white faces with Vikki sitting right there? Is she blind? Doesn’t she realize that Vikki is a person of color? Is she implying that Asians are not really people of color? They refused to see her question as anything other than an attack on me. I tried to explain that I was glad that a white person had broached the subject because, frankly, I was tired of being the one who always had to. Instead, I began to understand that many white anarchists are unwilling to talk about race. They would rather dismiss it as a social construct that does not apply to anarchists and, thus, ignore the issue altogether.

The next time I saw this woman, I thanked her for bringing up the subject. I wanted to let her know that I was not angry or offended by her observation.

“You shouldn’t have to always be the one to bring it up,” she stated.

Since then, I have not had a white ally in other projects to pipe up and point out the obvious. It has fallen to me—the woman of color, often the only woman of color in the room—to point this out. The responses have ranged from uncomfortable silences to lukewarm acknowledgments to outrage. Whatever the tone, the common defense is always, “We don’t discriminate against people of color.” What is left unsaid is, “See? We welcome you. That’s proof that we don’t discriminate.”

I now understand why so many people of color are wary of working with whites. When I first encountered the suspicions and wariness of people of color towards white anarchists, I dismissed their concerns. “Hey, they’re doing good work,” I defended. “Who cares what color they are?”

I now see that it is not that white anarchists are white. It is that many of them are unwilling to try to understand the needs, concerns and experiences of those with different skin colors.

As an anarchist of color, this disturbs me. I am tired of always being put in the position of explaining racism and race issues to white anarchists, sexism and gender issues to male (and sometimes female) anarchists, or some form of discrimination to virtually everyone I encounter. I am tired of the prophecy that in an anarchist society, racism, sexism and all other forms of discrimination will magically cease to exist. Such explanations no longer appease me. Instead, I see them as white anarchists’ way of not confronting the problems and issues within our own movement and within themselves.

# Pencils like Daggers

## *by Tomás Moniz*

It starts with a story:

My grandma, worried that her 3-year son had not spoken a word yet, had him chase down a grasshopper. Diligently, without complaint, the boy did and returned with a smile. Open she said; confused and scared, he did.

She shoved it in and closed his mouth. *Hablas, mijo, hablas.* He spit it out crying. Crying and yelling. He has not stopped either since, she says, and smiles thinking of her now 50-year-old son talking his time away in a New Mexican state penitentiary.

This is not make-believe. This is how we find our voice. This defines our language.

Here is my story. Or the start of it. My name is Tomas Ignacio Aragon; everyone calls me Tom. This I know for sure. I come from families of lies, of stories to deceive you, to deflect discovery. As a bicultural child, I was not comfortable in nor completely accepted by either side of my families. In the white world of my working class mother, I was the visible mistake, the dark stain on the family name. White working class military folk, dealing with the daughter who runs away to find her place, to save the world in the late '60s, and comes home struggling to save herself and feed her two year old son. With her, I was raised to avoid declarations of race, of difference, trying not to discuss my brown skin and brown hair in a family of blonds and blue eyes, forgetting my Spanish, speaking English only. I hid my shame with my silence.

On the Chicano side, I was the product of typical male weakness, the sign of my father's co-option and ultimate demise by white women come to save the poor, the natives. He was seduced by her presence, her education, her future. And those things he loved about her, she used to leave him when he found his place in *el pinto*, the typical educational facilities for poor Chicanos in New Mexico. His anger at her transferred in to his abandonment of me. No letters. No contact. My father running from the law, running, running, knowing the inside of a cell more than his son. Wait. This is not a story. This explains nothing, so I create my own explanations.

I started writing to find my color, saying on paper in black indelible ink what I couldn't to my classmates, to my first few lovers, to my mother and members of my own family: I am Mexican. I am white. I am.

'Fight one bean you fight the whole burrito.' I remember this saying as a warning white kids said about fucking with Mexicans in Ventura, California.

I remember the sound that they made on the school bus, slapping hands, laughing, all building a solidarity of whiteness or non-brown-ness when one kid calls out 'smells like beans' as the Mexicans leave the bus, walking down the aisle. At 15, I couldn't stand it any more. I stood up and hit the kid in front of me with my backpack breaking my connection to them. I wanted to be the burrito. I am Mexican; I am not white. But in the end I was wasn't welcomed. I am the one who had to find trouble rather than it finding me. It has been the same ever since. I walk the borders of cultures, the too white to be brown and too brown to be white. Sometimes hassled by

both sides and sometimes passing into each. Sometimes seen as one of the boys, sometimes the affirmative action product. I enter college deciding to claim, to rename, to embrace and revel in my contradiction, my displacement, my ambiguity, my absence of certainty.

MEChistAs in college scoffing about my lack of Spanish and complaint that meetings were in held only in Spanish. ‘Chale, man. What’s up with you?’ Because I was raised by a English speaking white mother. Awkward silence.

My teacher asked why the absence of Mexican American writers in a California literature class bothered me. Because I am one. Awkward silence.

This is the only way I can speak to you. I am an academic and I am not afraid to talk that talk — the hybridity of myself causes these contradictions that I embrace like old lovers knowing how to soothe each one, how to excite and comfort. I was freed in theory and abstraction finding voice in books by Moraga, Anzaldua. Finding fathers in Acosta, Reechy. Finding heart in the radical acts of violation and violence like Tijerina at the New Mexican courthouse, Murrieta’s refusal to bow his head, Los Crudos’ demand for an uncompromising politic, Rage Against the Machine’s connection to difference and abhorrence of authority. I became a bicultural, Chicano with no respect for authority, no time for lazy assumptions about race, culture, politics, class, sexuality. I found myself in the refusal to singularly define myself.

Wait. This is a lie. These words. Stories.

How do I claim myself: how to separate what I feel as a Chicano, as a male, as a person of privilege. How do you claim anything when you can’t claim the authenticity of your own voice? Remember: speak clearly, be careful if your pronunciation is off, if your skin fades too pale in the winter, present you color in your movements, your clothes, your lovers.

In a world that wants singularity, I choose both. In a culture that wants uniformed sexuality, I choose to embrace bisexuality. In a society that denies authentic autonomy, I found myself in anti-authoritarian histories, in the romance of clandestine organizations. I was seduced by the pen and the gun, by non-monogamist lifestyles, by radical, dissident Chicano nationalism, by the feminist rhetoric to reclaim our selves, our lives, our sex, our religion, our consciousness. This has defined me and hurt me. I tend to be the problem, the one who asks too many questions, who is never comfortable with the way it is. With the way I am.

But now I refuse to be silent or shameful or half-hearted. I tried to avoid it for a while, but if I wanted to find and meet other anarchists in the East Bay, I needed to go to the Long Haul, an anarchist infoshop in Berkeley. So I took a deep breath, opened the door and entered, trying to free myself of my previous feelings, my stereotypes, my love and hate for the anarchist community; and yes, I know it ain’t one homogeneous thing, but regardless, my experiences with it have been fraught with good ol’ revolutionary angst.

Let me explain.

I have never been into the punk scene, I am not white, I became a father at 20 and had to think about changing diapers, not just about changing social structures. I remember being chastised by someone trying to get us to go up one summer to the logging protests and when I reminded him of my responsibilities, he snapped back: ‘what was more important.’ I wanted to punch him, to make him see his ignorance, the elitism of privilege, the typical dismissal of people with children, with jobs to pay for food and rent.

Yet, this has happened over and over. Meetings at 6 p.m. or reading my child a bed time story? How to choose? It felt as if I could never fully commit, never be as dedicated as the people I met — mostly younger, white, students, who were mobile, who could survive on a fluctuating income.

Now there is nothing wrong with this, but this was not me, not my experience, not my culture. But I knew that the anarchist views more closely resembled my views about how life could be lived than anything else, so I tried as much as I could to find that community. I brought my kids to meetings; I swapped childcare with other parents on my block (a nice way of realizing it truly does take a neighborhood to raise a child). I tried to figure out how to balance riding bikes with my kids around the block versus riding in critical mass, which is right at dinner time.

I realized I needed the anarchist community after years of trying to compartmentalize the seemingly disparate aspects of my life — the non-monogamist, the self-schooling parent, the activist, the Chicano academic, the fuck-the-police poet. But how I got to this point is another story. Is in fact many stories.

Let me start at the beginning. I began noticing the glaring discrepancies in my life; I grew up on hip-hop and could see it being co-opted into cheap fronting and frivolity. This was not the community I was a part of, dressed in hand-me-downs and learning to break on ripped up sections of linoleum.

I simply couldn't handle the growing consumerism, the value placed on objects, after having lived in poverty, after scoffing at and detesting the symbols of wealth for so long (yes, out of envy and jealousy at the time perhaps). Yet, I desperately needed to believe in the anti-authoritarian politics of NWA, Public Enemy, Freestyle Fellowship and others, for I was not hearing it from anyone else nor in any other way that spoke to me.

It continued in undergraduate classrooms in which I was appalled at the refusal to engage in anything but what was deemed 'practical and possible realities.' After being told that Republicans and Democrats held the only legitimate and viable worldviews, I wondered how the hometowns I grew up in — Las Vegas, New Mexico, Kailua, Hawaii, Ventura, California — were included in anything we discussed. How did these 'viable' political choices account for the poverty, the single mothers, the drugs, the lack of choices available? There had to be another way. And when I did make my way to an anarchist study group. I seethed at people's unwillingness to even attempt to connect anarchy with issues of race and privilege. There had to be other ways. Other places. Others.

So I retreated for a while into my own experiences, creating and nurturing a lifestyle that embodied the values I couldn't find elsewhere. I found connections with my imprisoned father and prison issues that introduced me to Attica, to my father's penitentiary, to political prisoners. I reveled in becoming a father and was soon horrified as disciplined behavior became the primary learning objective in my son's school. What could I do, where to turn? I refused to participate in the privilege of private schooling so that was out. And then I found The Teenage Liberation Handbook, and we created our autonomy, but struggled to connect with others who chose to homeschool for reasons of liberation rather than Christian bullshit and racist, classist fears about public education. Where were the other parents? People fuck, so I know people reproduce.

Moving to the East Bay from the city did help me meet more people with similar values. While attempting to create a relationship based on free choice rather than social coercion, my partner and I met another young parent questioning the rigid social definitions of what relationships could be. With the inspiration from Emma Goldman and the practical advice from The Ethical Slut, we began to embrace non-monogamist freedom to explore our own sexuality, our growing identities, our interests. But even here we felt out of place: we weren't 50-year-old hippies reminiscing about free love, nor were we new age converts trying to fuck while rubbing crystals

and engaging in tantric poses. We were in our late twenties, we were looking for others more like us.

All these interests and choices of my life culminated in the tear gas of Seattle. Studying globalism as an advisor to student clubs on the campus I taught at, we decided to participate in the WTO protests, not realizing the dramatic and liberating events that we would be a part of.

So after the smoke cleared from Seattle and then DC and then Quebec, I realized that I could no longer chase the revolution, that I could no longer compartmentalize the different aspects of my life. I needed a way to synthesize them all. After ten years of making half-hearted attempts to connect with people who looked and lived so differently it seemed than me, I decided to toss aside my ego, my attitude, and my fears and both find and help create the community I wanted.

In the three years since I have made this commitment to be involved in the anarchist community, I have met some powerful and inspirational people; I have learned to see that resisting the oppressive and seemingly undefeatable social world we live in can be practiced in so many minute, marvelous and meaningful ways — in fucking, in gardening, in punk, in slumming it, in cooking. Perhaps even in crystals. I've been a part of RACE (Revolutionary Anarchists of Color), been to and participated in the anarchist conference, started a zine, boxcutter, with a few others to explore aspects of personal liberation. I even staff a shift now at the Long Haul.

With each step I try to bring my stories and my experiences with me. I want to be a part of something that combines theory and praxis, that can talk the talk and walk the walk, I want to work with people that I can learn from, that inspire me in my own efforts of teaching, parenting, living my daily life. I want to try and fail rather than remain safe in stasis. And yet, at times I still feel like an outsider to the radical/anarchist community. But now I know that I am apart of it, and so I have a responsibility to it, to help shape it. I am writing to engage myself in this process that will force me to embrace more of it, to be more involved in it, and to welcome other people like me — marginalized from the mainstream, yet not quite the typical anarchist — to join this discussion. I know many more people are out there, many more stories, and I hope we can start sharing them.

Anarchy is the radical approach to life of not simply living a fair equal and free life for yourself, but making the connection and working for the liberation and equality of everyone. It is anti-authoritarian; it is non-coercive; it is based on the principles of active involvement, of direct action, of a radical faith in diversity. Now this doesn't imply that the struggles of all communities are equal. Therefore, it is imperative to recognize, within ourselves individually and within our individual cultures, the points of privilege we may have access to and benefit from. It is crucial in anarchist thinking to understand the workings of white privilege, male privilege, heterosexual privilege and so on, and to work to destroy these forces. And one of the first things to realize is that the state in all its aberrations must go. We need to radically imagine new ways to relate to each other within communities of our devising — until then, police will always be an abusive presence of control and white privilege, behavior will only be tolerated that works to reinforce the status quo.

I am tired of anarchist thinking that only serves intellectual exercises and academic notions of social discourse and I fear generally white male punk violent angst against private property that serves only the transitory pleasure of the actor while serving to marginalize poor communities and heighten the repression of difference by condoned state terrorists — the cops. I also am tired of isolated individual anarchist practices that serve only the development and liberation of the

individual who has access to and time for these pursuits such as veganism, voluntary simplicity and conscious social marginalization. There is another way.

People of color and the anarchist tradition are now set to revitalize that. I came to anarchy through sex and Seattle; and now that I'm here, now that I've plundered my way through the 'classical or canonical' texts (how ironic that so many fight for these labels as if this provides some authority to these anti-authoritarian texts), I've come to fuck it up, to shake it down and push it forward into the multicultural, diverse pedagogically flexible revolutionary philosophy it is. No longer will I be told that real anarchy is not related to struggles for national liberation, not about the praxis of living a life defined by radical honesty and trust, not about coalitions and communication.

For me anarchy must be linked to the individual only in relation to the communal, whether that community is lovers, or family, or children, or employers, or neighbors.

I cannot separate my political growth from my personal growth. Nor will I even try. I knew there must be something out there, something to validate what my partner and I felt but could not articulate — that true commitment, true respect and love was not linked to ownership, possession, fear, and distrust. After years of working hard to 'make it,' to be successful, good, liberal citizens, we looked around and realized there must be more than what we have been striving so hard for. We rejected marriage, but were unable to articulate a philosophical reason yet, we had kids, but refused to become the conservative self-centered parents we saw other new mothers and fathers becoming, we were political in all the condoned ways — liberal Democrat, wanting taxes to go to public schools and senior centers.

All wasn't perfect; we each wanted things, but we wanted to be together, we each had attractions to other s but know it was wrong, we each understood that after working so hard raising three kids, a few years away from our thirties, that we had to change something or choose this path forever. And then came Emma and Andee.

Emma Goldman hit us like a ton of bricks — non-monogamy, freedom to do and love who you want, to choose to be together rather than to have to be together. The essays spoke deeply to our own unspoken philosophy.

Let me tell you a story:

At 20, I hitchhiked from Las Vegas, New Mexico down the highway to see my father face to face. To try to find some answers. He tells me he fucked up.

He should be out there with me, working with me, living life with me. Because, he says, I realized I'm a slave in here. And now I can only fight against other slaves. Out there, when I realized I was a slave, I coulda done something, I coulda fought back at least. Somehow. In here, it's just fucked up.

My father explained that in jail, pencils are like daggers, you can write and you can stab. 'Mira, ' he points to his arm, 'here are the pencil tips that I cannot get out.'

This is not a metaphor. This is a warning.



# **Strong Hearts and Poisoned Waters: Exclusion and the Reproductive Rights Movement in the U.S.**

*by Puck*

Abortion is not and has never been only a “white issue.” Although few people today realize it, women of color have been involved from the very beginning. Women of color have played and continue to play a crucial part organizing for and shaping the struggle for reproductive freedom in the US. Who Gets Abortions?

Currently, Latinas are two times as likely as white women to have an abortion; black women are three times as likely. Black women obtain 24 percent of abortions in the US. Indeed, polls show that over 80 percent of African Americans support family planning, yet few are members of the prominent reproductive rights organizations.

Why? A look into our recent past shows that people of color have valid reasons to suspect the motives of predominantly white groups advocating for the single issue of abortion rights.

During the last century, the pro-choice movement, or the family planning movement, often dismissed or ignored concerns of women of color when they weren't problems for white women as well. Devastatingly, the reproductive rights movement of the past at times allied with eugenicists and other white supremacists in opportunistic political coalitions meant to further the abortion rights movement.

## **Understanding the Past**

Being pro-choice or a feminist today means having to acknowledge and transcend the racist legacy of collaborations between white feminists, conservatives and eugenicists who shared common ground on parts of the abortion issue. How we fight for reproductive freedom today must be informed by the reality that for many women of color, abortion is just one fight in a larger struggle of class and racial oppression. Unlike for some white or middle class women, the lack of access to reproductive freedom that many women of color face has more to do with the limitations placed upon them by their ethnic and class background than by the actual legal status of abortion or geographic availability of abortion clinics.

Early on, the Black community saw reproductive control as being an essential key to liberation, and they have fought for it since the times of slavery. Black women have been underground providers of safe and affordable abortions. Later, African American women organized with other women of color and brought tens of thousands to participate in rallies demanding an end to forced sterilizations.

Then and now, many feminists of color challenged white feminists who framed abortion rights as a woman's issue that was unconnected to other social injustices.

As Black feminist and activist, Loretta J. Ross explains:

Many Black women still do not see abortion rights as a stepping stone to freedom because abortion rights do not automatically end the oppression of Black women.

Sadly, the vital participation and intellect brought to the reproductive rights movement by women of color are noticeably absent from many white feminist accounts of history.

## **The Privilege of “Choice”**

Until recently, mainstream and preeminent pro-choice organizations have promoted a narrow view of reproductive liberty that focuses on the “right to choose” abortion. This can come across as sounding trivial and consumeristic. The language of abortion rights politics can also be culturally insensitive and alienating to recent immigrants and women who come from religious backgrounds- even those who support and get abortions.

Women of color have also been subjected to controlling and coercive reproductive policies and, as a result, many continue to distrust public health services and are more apt to view family planning programs with apprehension.

As Brenda Romney, an African American activist, explained:

“When our children were [white men's] property, we were encouraged to have children. When our children are ours, we are not worthy parents. Those are the messages, the background and the context of health care in general.

This is some of what Black women bring with them when they seek health care information or abortion services.”

Therefore, many women of color feel that it is more central to their needs to demand for economic justice and healthcare- including reproductive rights- instead of focusing on the aspects of “choice” and availability regarding abortion and birth control.

## **An Issue of Survival: Birth Control as Social Control**

Abortion was not openly discussed in the Black community because other survival issues were key.

– Lois Smith, an African American member of the Jane collective (a collective that provided safe and sliding scale abortions before *Roe v. Wade* passed)

Eugenicists promote the idea that essentialist traits such as intelligence and criminality are biologically determined and can thus be eliminated or emphasized through the selective breeding or elimination of “pure” races.

The ideology of eugenics became applied public health policy in the U.S. during the 1960s and '70s. Industrial tycoons like the Rockefeller family funded it; prestigious universities studied it, and governors introduced legislation proposing the compulsory sterilization of Native American,

black and poor women in order to “fight the war on poverty.” In truth, these policies were aimed at decreasing the explosive political potential of minority populations and pacifying white fears of social unrest during a time of increasing militancy in the struggle for civil rights.

During the 1960s, family planning services became accessible for large numbers of poor women of color through federally subsidized programs like Medicaid. Although this was seen by most feminists as a victory, on the flip side, the government also began coercing Native American and black women on public assistance into getting State-sponsored hysterectomies by threatening to revoke their welfare benefits if they refused.

During the 1970s, it is estimated that up to 60,000 Native American women and some men were sterilized. Indian Health Service had a “captive clientele,” since Native women often lacked access to services other than those paternalistic public ones located on reservations. In 1975, for every seven babies born, one woman was being sterilized. Shockingly, the IHS sterilization campaign was paid for entirely with federal funding.

Puerto Rican women were also sterilized at astronomical rates by U.S. tax dollars. During the same time, several Mexican American women were sterilized at a County hospital without much explanation or information. A national fertility study conducted by Princeton University found that 20 percent of all married African-American women had been sterilized by 1970.

Given that experience, it is no surprise that in the communities of color targeted by government-controlled depopulation programs, birth control and abortion were equated with genocide for years to come. Many poor women of color felt that they had been “tracked” toward sterilization and were outraged at having been denied the opportunity to have children in numbers of their choosing.

“While birth control was demanded as a right and an option for privileged women, it became an obligation for the poor,” Ross recalled.

When women of color organized successfully for laws requiring the “informed consent” of patients undergoing hysterectomies in an effort to cut down on forced sterilizations, they had to do so often without support from mainstream white abortion rights groups- who were then too obsessed with their own narrow self-interest to see the broader feminist struggle at hand.

## **No Substitute for Social Justice**

Access to abortion and birth control do not exist free of social values. White people of all political motivations have supported abortion when it suited their interests and set the stage for years of racial tension and mistrust in the arena of reproductive rights policy. Today, eugenic ideas like “overpopulation” and biological determinism continue to influence public health and social policies that blame poverty, crime and pollution on the rising population growth of brown and black people- ignoring the root causes of social ills: unequal distribution of resources in a society deeply segregated by white supremacy.

A recent example of this phenomenon was the Norplant controversy during the 1990s. Norplant is unusual because it is a contraceptive that is 99 percent effective and can last up to 5 years after its initial administration.

However, it requires the insertion of six matchstick-sized capsules under the skin of a woman’s forearm. Although Norplant is expensive and can cause negative side effects including depres-

sion and irregular, heavy bleeding, public subsidies covered the costs for many poor women of color.

Politicians framed the initial cost as an expenditure that could save millions of dollars nationally in the welfare costs it would take to raise the children of “irresponsible women.”

Several states wanted to require mothers on welfare to use it as a condition of receiving their benefits. Debates ensued in the national media: “Can Norplant Reduce the Underclass?”

Commonly, women who suffered negative side effects and asked for their Norplants to be removed were denied and had to endure paternalistic, bureaucratic and controlling service providers.

## Hope Prevails

During the 1980s, feminists of color clamored louder than ever to be heard.

Women of color gained in numbers as well as prominence within mainstream pro-choice organizations, and some assumed leadership positions.

Reproductive rights groups put more energy into reaching out to people of color. Health activists of color broke through the “conspiracy of silence” surrounding abortion in their communities, framing reproductive rights as a human rights and healthcare issue. The first “March for Women’s Lives” was organized in 1986. Ross, who worked with the National Organization for Women (NOW), was employed to find organizations of women of color to endorse this first national march dedicated to abortion rights. She reflects on the changes in the years since:

In 1986 Black women were skeptical about joining a march for abortion rights sponsored by what was perceived as a white woman’s organization. Although all the leaders of the Black women’s organizations I contacted privately supported abortion rights, many perceived the issue as marginal, too controversial, or to ‘white.’

By 1987 NOW was responding more clearly to the voices of women of color.

By 1986, the annual march was endorsed by 107 organizations of women of color, and by 1989, “more than 2,000 women came together to form the largest delegation ever [at the time] of women of color to support abortion rights.

Women of color were responsible for expanding the focus of the abortion rights movement. Their influence can be found in the shifting language used by mainstream groups — from one centered around abortion to one emphasizing reproductive rights. The work women of color had been doing all along in their communities to support reproductive freedom slowly began to be recognized and at times supported by mainstream feminist groups. Most importantly though, women healthcare activists of color continued to push for more and more justice- for more social justice in the pro-choice movement and more feminism in their communities.

Here in the year 2004, at the eighth March for Women’s lives, let’s reflect on the mistakes of the past and the injustices of the present. We still have a long way to go. Let us constantly strive to bring about more instances for increasing numbers of people to experience self-determination, true democracy and justice in their lives. We must not let our vision of liberation be obscured by political compromises that promise only a few of us legitimacy and victory. We must all be free simultaneously, or none of us can truly be free.

# **A Critique of Gangsta Culture**

## *by Suneel Mubayi*

I see it all around me in my neighborhood – the people who I claim to be fighting for; the people whose oppression fuels part of me; the people whose rights I want increased. The young people I want to join in struggling with, to ally. But wait, there’s something wrong. I don’t see them struggling; I see them conforming. They have no meaning or idea of what oppression is, even though they’re enacting it and internalizing it in public.

Every time I walk past them, they’re loitering on the streets, on street corners, on the bumpers of cars, in clusters, like gangs. They look at me with my pale skin, smooth, silky dark hair, colorful clothing and piercings and give me long stares. They hoot and catcall at me. Sissy-ass white/ honky fag wanderin’ in the wrong ‘hood. They have no notion or idea of “the struggle” or “the movement.” For them, politics means who’s the best gangsta on the block; who’s got the coolest clothes and chains; the most money and pussy.

A few weeks back, I walked into this Russian-run jewelry/piercing place on Broadway and 145<sup>th</sup> to get a third piercing on my ears. The guys who run the place, two slightly built, pale Russians, have already exoticized me in my previous visits by directly associating me to the Kama Sutra and wanting to know whether I have a copy, only because I say I’m from India, even though according to them I don’t look it. Once you say you’re from somewhere else, that’s all that matters. These guys basically make a living by pawning and selling jewelry to the aspiring young would-be gangstas of the neighborhood, apparently ripping most of them off and cheating in the process. Their mannerisms are very deliberate, exaggerated, and put-on, from the constant use of “my brother” to the gangsta embrace and the hand on the heart. Of course, they deal with even their most trusted customers through bulletproof glass and an entrance door that must be buzzed to open. So anyway, as I was getting my piercings done, which were \$10, there were other customers negotiating the price of gaudy gold chains in thousands of dollars, in a community where I wonder who can genuinely afford that. In walk in a group of young teenagers, mixed sexes, but definitely in their younger teens. They all crowd around a showcase to my left that has more gold chains displayed and one of them starts exclaiming, “Oh, man! That’s gangsta! That’s gangsta!” So few words, yet revealing so much. Obviously, they’ve learned from somewhere or someone at a very young age, that being a gangsta is something to look up to, aspire and revere. I wanted to scream at them, shake them and tell them how they were perpetuating their own oppression and how the establishment wants them to be gangstas precisely so that it can lock them up in jail for the rest of their adult lives. But something stopped me; something said, they’ll have no idea what you’re talking about, they’ll laugh at you; look at how they’re already giving you weird looks with your long hair, multicolored clothes and multiple piercings. All these feelings and signals leave me heartbroken and not knowing what to do to help the people I claim to be fighting for.

Please. This is not some pissed-off white liberal guilt. Neither is this an attempt to say that minority folks, particularly Blacks and Latinos, have themselves to blame for the oppression they suffer. This is not some grandiose attempt to generalize and categorize every youth in Harlem. These are just observations I make, walking to and from home, every day.

Even though I've been living here for more than a year, I hardly know anyone even in my own building, other than polite greetings. But when I'm walking around outside, or doing stuff within the building like laundry, even if I don't interact, I'm always observing. My eyes and ears are always perked. I guess little pitchers have big ears, right?)

The youth I describe, again, do not represent a gross generalization that the reader might think I'm attempting to make. What they do represent is the visible face of the youth of their community, what an "outsider," who's not "in" or "down" with them might see as (s)he walks or drives through the neighborhood. The fact that they do represent the visible face is something very important, especially for all the youth of the community who aren't so visible.

They portray variations of what is commonly known in American popular culture as the gangsta mentality. If they do not seem to quite succeed at it, they certainly do not have any lack of aspiration or enthusiasm to become gangstas. Here is the point that must be made — their visibility has everything to do with their aspirations to gangstahood.

These youth are visible and become the de facto representatives of young Harlem because American popular culture, the mass media, and the establishment have made the gangsta identity. They have created it, seizing on certain alternative politico-cultural trends in the African/Latin-American communities and forging this identity of the gangsta, simultaneously elevating it on a very high pedestal, one that is near impossible to reach for the youth it calls to. They have then made it acceptable for this identity to be portrayed in their own channels as being representative of all minority urban youth. So one channel is spewing lyrics and images glorifying murder, rape, drug dealing, looting and lavish wealth as somehow being the only path to success for these youth; another channel is simultaneously reporting how "gangsta rap" is encouraging violent and delinquent behavior amongst these very same youth, and the apparently pressing need to "crack down" and "get tough" with these kids. It wouldn't be uncommon for these channels to have common owners, stockholders, financiers, backers and investors. But what is the effect it is having on these kids? On one hand, they are constantly told that the only way they can be successful in life is to become a gangsta or a gangsta's bitch; on the other hand, as they become more and more deeply immersed into this culture, the very same establishment starts enforcing draconian laws and regulations on them, and criminalizes them without ever trying to show them that one can be successful and happy in life without being either a gangsta or Colin Powell. The cops and the judges will listen to our whining and tell us they don't criminalize the kids; they are already criminals and need to be dealt with before they get out of hand. The news producers, MTV execs, rap artists and record producers, etc will tell us they're just doing whatever makes the most money for them for the longest time.

The result is that the kids who are perpetually loitering outside are objects or pawns being kicked around in a power game, seen as criminals in the eyes of the rest of the world. One never sees any cops stopping and telling these kids to go buy a book, or guide them toward more meaningful social interactions, or just talk to them. One neither sees any cops ordering them to disperse immediately, even though there are "No Loitering" signs in bold around most buildings. This isn't a coincidence. They are allowed to loiter perpetually and hang around, so that they can self-affirm their identity as gangstas to the cops, who will then trawl the streets in their police

cars and go around “busting” random people, subjecting them to humiliating searches and arrests in public on mere suspicion of behavior or activity associated with the gangsta mentality. The same cops will then go home and find their kids being drawn to the same thing.

And what about the faceless masses, those youth who refuse to accept this manufactured criminalization that looks so cool, who refuse to conform? We must remember that there’s no black and white, no two distinct groups here necessarily, but shades. There could be kids in the gangs who long not to be there, who long to be productive, creative, and successful, but are just afraid of the backlash by the cool ones for daring to be different. There could be kids forcibly kept at home by paranoid, scared parents who don’t want to see them spend the rest of their lives in jail under racist Rockefeller drug laws, who are nevertheless blinded by the gangsta illusion. And then, somewhere, are my crowd – the friends I’ve never met, but whom I talk to all the time.

I hope my Black and Latino friends and comrades, especially those in Harlem, will read this and try to understand my perspective. I hope they will understand that I’m not being racist here and not at all attempting to stigmatize. I am trying to find reasons for the perceived image of young people of their communities in popular culture as being unreformable delinquents and criminals; why that path looks so seemingly attractive and how it has so much to do with what the media and the establishment creates; what it says is OK and what it says isn’t; how it can say both about one thing simultaneously for its advantage and to oppress. I hope these comrades will give me their feedback and point out any places I’m incorrect or going wrong. I will be the happiest of all if my analyses based on my own perceptions are proved to be categorically wrong and incorrect.

If they are, it shows the media and the pigs haven’t got to absolutely everybody. If they aren’t wrong, then I’m afraid that we as far left radical people of color, have a hell of a lot of work to do, and as our respected Anarchist Panther comrade says, a lot of painful growing, learning and changing ahead as well.

## **Journal Entry**

I what? You what? Feeling lonely? Trying hard to find polemical analysis to figure out why you’re feeling lonely in a suite with 9 other people? The closer you are to them, the more isolated you feel?! How does that make sense? Me, the seasoned New Yorker with all the older friends, the older ladies, suddenly on campus and with her (I will stubbornly use the pronoun of my choice) age group – feels lonely. Feels jealous as she sees clumps of excited, giggling happy teenagers walking, no bouncing, past her. It acutely touches on that nerve that has always been so sensitive inside you, babe, that nerve that holds companionship and abandonment and friendship and partnership. You know inside you that you’re years more mature than them, that you made not just a fist of it alone in Harlem for a year, but a stable home.

Are the most brilliant of us destined to be alone? Why does everyone seem to have bosom buddies already that they’re hanging out with all the time? It touches on all those memories that can never be erased, the memories of abuse before awakening, through suffering, when as a frightened little girl inside a boy’s body who understood things too well for her own good, you looked around you and everyone seemed to be coping, everyone seemed to be stable and connected to each other except you.

You established yourself in a world outside of this gated campus when this gated campus seemed to big and complicated a world for you. And you never knew then that in a year, you

would be a blooming, beautiful flower of a boy-girl becoming man-woman in the infinitely bigger world of the whole city. You've combated racism both inside and outside of you, expunged the colonialism and casteism from within, and not so politely alerted the rest of the world of much of the same present in it. You found out about Orientalism and Eurocentrism and dealt with those, no sweat. Those are serious characteristics in one's mindset to deal with, babe, and you did it with no problems.

You learned the hard way how to deal with problems that manifest themselves in the form of people. From the racists to the establishment pigs, to the infatuations to people who needed to be avoided but tempted you so much. The people who hurt you when they wanted to nourish you; the people who broke your heart and nearly broke your spirit. But nothing broke you. You realized that there is no heteronormative idea of a woman – that you were the woman who broke that notion that occupied your mind – you made yourself the woman who can be smooth and sensitive and soft, and at the same time, tough as nails and durable through the roughest weather. You broke the barriers that heteronormativity had set up between male and female, masculine and feminine, and showed by your own example that there could be the woman who could fight for herself without losing any of her femininity.

Now suddenly, you feel small, young, and fragile again. The thought of classes tomorrow and a schedule scares you and makes you feel weak, when the racist pigs of the NYPD couldn't do that after even having you cornered and alone. It's just the memories, babe, it's just the memories of when you were young. In recalling, you regress into the past, leave the present and that's why you start feeling crumbly again, because the little boy-girl lives in you only as a memory, not as a current and tangible reality.

That makes it a little more scary and harder to grasp, but it being a memory as opposed to an existing identity makes you safe from vulnerabilities, but you are not that person anymore, so that little child will not think for you, and its weaknesses will never affect you. Definitely, you will get upset when you think of how much you suffered as him/her, and the memories will be vivid and frightening like nightmares, but you will never be her ever again. Sometime, when I feel like it, when I feel ready, I will write in detail and specifics about my suffering. The incidents, from the earliest to the latest to the ongoing; the abusers and predators (with special mention to brainless children in all the schools I was put in and the bitch who appointed herself as my mother/colonizer); the mistakes I made; and all the trauma I went through. It's too much right now – the thought of delving so deep into the filthy muck makes me shake and unable to type.

People tell me come on, Suneel, everyone's suffered, everyone's been hurt, and so, and therefore, there's nothing special about your pain and your pain. Wrong. There are people out there who'd have suffered less than me, more than me, or as much, in similar ways or different. But the fact that I choose to express them, the fact that I have the ability to write about them like this, analyze them, and not just stuff them under my exterior until I explode and injure everyone around me, like I see most others do, is special. And if others choose to do so as well, then that's special too.

Don't believe what the capitalists and the pigs and the wolves tell you.

There is room enough on this earth for all of us to be happy, successful, well off, and well known. Because if we all know each other, and understand each other, we'll all be famous and we'll all feel we're getting enough attention from each other. And there is no such thing as the human face of socialism, because socialism is all human, all one hundred percent of it, and anyone



who thinks otherwise and still calls themselves a socialist are only living a more contrived and subtle version of machismo and militarism.

I didn't mean for this to touch so much on my sexuality, and my sexual awakening, but it is so present in everything I think and do, from my daily existence to my radicalism and sociopolitical thought to the way I relate with friends and with lovers too.

I've endured the taunts and the doubts. My dad telling me that feeling like I'm a woman inside is just another source of confusion, and that I'd do better with less confusion in my life. Wrong, dad. I'd do worse if I tried to be something I know I wouldn't be happy being. The worst combination of my grandmother and my stepmother telling me that with my current identity, straight girls would be turned off because they want men, gay men likewise, and lesbians too because they want women who have women's bodies (I might still have one yet!), and that I'm sexually frustrated! Turns out she doesn't know all the girls out there. My womanhood endures.

Often I'm plagued by self-doubt — am I doing this just to attract attention? Am I taking being a stage-whore too far off the stage? I answered it myself when I expressed these doubts to my friend Erica (thank god for her) and she asked me the most fundamental question of all: what does being a woman mean to you? I thought for a few moments and answered: being a woman means simply that. Being a woman. It's a feeling, a sense that's hard to express in words, because to me, being a woman means having an identity that is feminine, but without any preconceived notions, ideas, or mindsets about what a woman is or what a woman should be. In any sense, be it in terms of looks, actions, habits, social roles, or anything else. Everybody feels like there is some kind of 'ideal' man and an 'ideal' woman too. Well I reject that. I am a woman with no conditions and no strings attached. And no presumptions too. You may find me rather androgynous, deviant, and genderbending. I like to dress up, be pierced, and be 'effeminate' or 'girly.' But those are just tastes and habits, like preferring cookies 'n cream above butter pecan and not to be confused with my sexual identity and preferences. Yes, I am all those things, or rather, I possess all those qualities. But I claim the right to choose my ultimate sexual identity beyond my traits, looks, qualities and features, even if it is different from the sexual organs I possess. And whether that's feminine or hermaphrodite or my desired blend of masculine and feminine is my choice. You can love it, be OK with it, be uncomfortable with it, be revolted by it, or leave it. But it's my choice. Being a woman means being a woman.

So just ride through the fear and the sense of isolation, babe. You've settled in a world much bigger than this. And nobody says you have to settle here. Just like dad (thank god for him too) said, you're not here to socialize, you're here for an education. And those who party nonstop and think they're being really bad/causing lots of trouble don't know that they're playing the exact moronic role that the system wants them to. You and your friends know what causing real trouble means. And you know it's a good thing, something to be proud of, feel noble and just about. Look beyond the social butterflies and the people who pretend so much that they're just pretenses of themselves. You're about to grasp knowledge, analysis, understanding, and ability. And with it will come your destiny, and the revolution.

# **Free the Land: Social Justice and the Environmental Movement**

## *by Ewuare Osayande*

The following is the edited transcript of the keynote address given at The Climate Control Conference, February 21, 2004, Harvard University, Cambridge, MA.

Since we are dealing with the question of environmentalism I thought it might be appropriate to introduce my sharing with you by quoting from the most celebrated scientist of the previous century, being that environmentalism relies heavily on science. The person being Albert Einstein who himself was not just concerned with theories of relativity but was a committed socialist and used his popularity and influence to speak out against oppression. He says, “A human being is a part of the whole, called by us — universe. A part limited in time and space where we experience ourselves, our thoughts and feelings as something separated from the rest, a kind of optical delusion of our consciousness. This delusion is a kind of prison for us restricting us to our personal desires into affection for a few persons nearest to us. Our task must be to free ourselves from this prison by widening our circle of compassion to embrace all living creatures in the whole of nature in its beauty.”

The struggle on the part of the environmental movement is the struggle to free itself from that delusion that separates itself from the rest of the struggles against oppression on the planet, as well as the rest of the planet itself. This optical delusion, this way of viewing the world through rather white, western and elitist eyes ... this is more than a call for inclusion. It is a call for making the movement contextually aligned with the ideology and the ideologies of oppressed peoples’ struggles for liberation.

There is a profound reluctance on the part of activists in the environmental movement to embrace a social justice platform that is accountable to the lived reality of people of color worldwide who live in poverty and under oppression due to the legacy of European colonialism and American imperialism.

According to the London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine and the World Health Organization, Global warming is already responsible for the deaths of some 160,000 persons a year already. The study concluded that children in developing countries are the most vulnerable to the impact of global warming. So here at the outset of our conversation I want to make it clear that we are already dealing with a circumstance that the environmental movement is prepared to address if it would only heed the call.

Malaria, diarrhea, malnutrition, from droughts and floods are all the result of climate change brought on by the industrialized efforts of the West. Robert Watson, former chairperson of the United Nations Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change has stated, “Almost any change in climate will reduce agricultural productivity in the tropics and the sub-tropics. Climate change is a developmental issue, not an environmental one.”

In other words he is saying that, given the way in which global warming impacts the planet, the areas of the world that get impacted the most and experience the greatest chaos, crises and disaster as a result are those areas are all too often underdeveloped. We are not talking about Europe. We are not talking North America, Canada, Russia even. We are talking about the tropics and sub-tropics, Africa, Southeast Asia, Latin America. Nations that are under-developed and thus don't have the infrastructure to respond to the threat of global warming. And so disease is rampant.

Malnutrition, diarrhea, all of these issues that in developed nations all you got to do is go to the hospital and get a pill.

For this reason social justice cannot be an afterthought for environmentalists. For in truth it lies at the very heart of the movement itself, of the struggle to save the planet. Save the planet from what? Save the planet from whom? From what? The answer could be from global warming, from the effects of what occurs in what is called the greenhouse effect. From whom? From multinational corporations who pollute our air and governments that allow these corpses to get away without restrictions in most cases particularly when they set up shop in communities of color.

The question becomes and the question that lies at the heart of the environmental movement is how did this occur? How did multinational corporations gain access to the lands and lives of so-called Third World peoples over the globe? This is a question of colonialism. This is a question of the history of conquest on the part of Europe. Those people are still oppressed. They still suffer the legacy of colonialism and national oppression.

But here is the problem. See we can talk about theory and ideology but when the rubber meets the road, when we really get down to it — the very corporations who are involved in some of this mess fund many of our organizations in the environmental movement.

So the question becomes if you are really about doing the real work then you may in fact end up sacrificing a large part of your funding. I've had conversations with a number of activists over the years. I have been involved in this struggle for some decades now, and over the years we activists understand and appreciate that if you are going to deal with truth, if you are going to deal with the root causes of oppression and suffering then you are going to need to find alternative sources to fund your work.

And history speaks to this. I will share how. Earlier I spoke about Robert Watson, who was the former chairperson of the UN Intergovernmental Group on Climate Control. He was removed from his post by an alliance between Exxon, Mobil and the US government because of his outspokenness, because of his willingness to place the issue on development. He was ousted because he went on record stating that the people experiencing the heaviest impact on global warming are poor and oppressed.

The question for the environmental movement is: Are we going to try to cooperate with corporations? Or are we really going to begin to try to challenge the corporate structure in a way that truly redresses the problem toward the benefit of the majority of people who suffer, not just those of us who live in the most privileged generation in the history of the planet.

The corporate response is often to kill the messenger. For activists of color all over the globe the term kill here is not meant as a metaphor. That is actually what happens. The threat of death and the terrorism witnessed and visited upon communities of color that seek to respond to the reality of corporations coming into their communities, setting up plants, polluting the air, the soil is real.

I want to share two examples of this. Just for the sake of time we just got to deal with two. There are plenty more. Many people are aware of the activist Ken Saro-Wiwa of the Ogoni people in Nigeria and how he was executed in '95 for representing the interests of his people. Many folk are aware of the activist Chico Mendez from Brazil who was also killed. Both killed by corporations. Both killed with the backing of their respective governments. Both killed with the funded support of the US government.

There is a connection here that we as activists can't get around. Their lives become the litmus test. I am not saying that we have to put ourselves in front of bullets or put ourselves in the hangman's noose. But at the same time what about their lives becomes instructive for how we ought to be engaging this work?

The sad thing is and this is my personal criticism. It ought not take somebody's death to cause that community's struggle to gain access to the media. It shouldn't take someone having to be imprisoned for years before activists in the West catch wind of the worry and begin to talk it up.

That's a problem again of the lack of network, the lack of an international outlook on the part of activists in the West who are the ones with the most access, no doubt, no question. When you listen to their stories, when you read their writings, you'll understand that for people of color throughout the world, those in so-called third world countries, particularly, the environmental struggle is not simply about saving trees. It's about saving people. It's about freeing the land. It's about liberating the land. There is an acute awareness on the part of activists throughout the globe outside of privileged nations that our land has been robbed from us. That is why the pollution is occurring. We lack control over the very land we live on. And understanding that, walking with that analysis, we realize that we will never change the condition of our environment until we are able to liberate the land, until we are able to get these corporations off our land.

That is why in the case of the Ogoni in Nigeria they tied their struggle against Shell with their struggle to political rights. It was not simply about getting Shell out of Nigeria. It was also coupled with the struggle to gain parody politically within the structure. But those of us here in the West who take what we believe is democracy for granted, we don't understand and appreciate that.

In Brazil the struggle was about gaining land rights. These were small time farmers. These were people who lived in the forest. They had no contact to the world per se. They were comfortable with that. They were fine. Along comes some cattle herders and they wanted to tear down all the trees so they can make land into pasture so their cattle can eat. So Americans can buy beef.

I read a study just recently that said that the fact that people buy beef has had a greater impact on global warming than humans themselves, than human consumption itself. Meaning that cattle eat more than we do and their waste contributes more to global warming than ours does. And they are being fed so we can feed on them. Because of our consuming drive there are whole populations of people in South America who are being removed from their land. And are being killed if they refuse to get off.

We got to make the necessary connections. It is not enough to call for a boycott of Shell. It is not enough to stop eating meat. When their blood, Ken and Chico's blood comes all the way back to the White House. We can talk about the corrupt Nigerian government.

We can talk about the corruption in the Nigerian government. But who made the corruption in the first place? What does US foreign policy have to do with any of this? Plenty. And so our struggle as environmentalists here has to be about charging the government responsible for the

crimes and atrocities that occur all over the globe wherever American interests are present. And we have to support the indigenous people's struggle to liberate their land.

Malcolm X, who was assassinated this night back in '65 himself gave a number of addresses here at Harvard, stated in his speech, "Message to the Grassroots," that, "Revolution is based on land. Land is the basis of all independence. Land is the basis of freedom, justice and equality." The environmental state of the Ogoni people, the environmental state of the Mapia people from whom Chico Mendez's folk come from in Brazil will not fundamentally change until they receive justice. And that justice cannot occur ultimately until they are able to liberate their land. We have to understand this. We have to understand that there is a relationship between Bush's war in Iraq, Bush's so-called axis of evil when the evil starts here at home.

See what many fail to understand is that if you don't have money you have little to no defense in our times. And that can be made in a very general way even in terms of what I am talking about here about oppressed peoples across the globe. If you are poor you have no defense. And the sooner that we who are more privileged begin to understand or appreciate that fact and create a movement in alliance with that reality to remedy the same, the sooner we will begin to see true progress. Until that occurs we're in trouble.

This next quote I am going to share with you is from Ken Saro-Wiwa. He is talking about Shell and its relationship to what's going on in Nigeria. He said, "Shell has waged ecological war in Ogoni since 1958. And ecological war is highly lethal, the more so as it is unconventional. It is homicidal in its effect. Human life, flora, fauna, the air fall at its feet and finally — the land itself dies. Generally it is supported by all the traditional instruments ancillary to warfare — propaganda, money and deceit. Victory is assessed by profits. And in this sense Shell's victory in Ogoni has been total."

Over the 39 years of exploitation at the hands of Shell some 30 billion dollars in profit Shell has accrued in the Ogoni region alone, which is only 3% of the total oil production in Nigeria. That's a billion dollars essentially a year since Shell has been in Nigeria. Yet, in spite of all this production and profit, the condition of the Ogoni people remains ridiculously sad. No running water. No electricity. Yet the corporation can come in and make that much money and not have any obligation to the people whatsoever.

Shell's profit motive is largely responsible for the repression of Nigeria's democracy. It is that factor that leads to the corruption of the government and the denial of democratic rights. See, here is a clue. We don't need to look overseas. We don't need to go over or across our borders to see the corruption cause it is happening right here. In America those who are the poorest and not white, it is in their communities that corporations set up their toxic waste dumps and pollution centers that produce major respiratory problems for the poor and of color in our own country. The term environmental racism coined in 1982 grew out of the learning that the most significant factor in the siting of hazardous waste facilities nationwide was race. Ask yourself where do the corporations in this community dump their trash? Where does Harvard dump its trash?

Just as in the case of the Ogoni people, the Mapia people and other oppressed peoples, majority Black cities like Camden in New Jersey and St. Louis, Missouri and others, have been robbed of their political rights due to state takeovers. The argument made by state governments used to justify this anti-democratic, in fact fascist act, is that the political structure in those cities have been corrupted. No one bothers to ask how those structures got corrupted.

The same stuff going on in Nigeria is going on here. So people get denied political rights because corporations have corrupted the politicians. And then you get other corrupt politicians coming in saying we are going to take over. Why? Not so that democracy can be reestablished but so that more corporations can come in and set up shop. That's what is going on right now in Camden. It is what is going on in St. Louis and other places throughout the country where the majority populations are Black and Latino and poor.

The struggle is about the land. The struggle is about the political struggle and rights, self-determination of oppressed peoples. Whoever owns the land determines the quality of the air, thus the quality of life. According to a recent study done forty of the world's poorest countries face losses of more than a quarter of their food production as a result of global warming by the year 2080. Those forty nations are home to 2 billion people on the planet. That is about one third of the world's population. The future is now!

Here is another example. I just happened to hear this on NPR one night about the Inuit of Alaska and how they found large quantities of DDT in the breast milk of the women. Now most folk would ask the question, "how did they get that stuff there?" The scientists were dumbfounded. They would think that these folk farthest removed from the sprayers that go over crops would be the last people to be at risk. But it is due to the wind patterns. They had higher quantities of DDT than Canadian women because of the wind patterns and the climate in that region around the North Pole.

So people who don't even have a hand in the exploitation suffer as a result of our desire to live comfortably. Something is wrong. Something is wrong I tell you. There is a growing divide between rich and poor nations, between the industrialized and the underdeveloped nations, between the West and the rest. The question for the environmental movement is: What side are you on? You must become radical. You must radicalize your movement to place it in alliance with those who suffer the most. They're not looking for a handout. These aren't people who are ignorant of the issues. These are folk who are very aware, who live in the reality you've researched.

The environmental movement at its most authentic state is an anti-imperialistic movement, is an anti-racist movement. So if you as an environmentalist are not demonstratively resisting and fighting imperialism, if you as an environmentalist are not demonstratively resisting and fighting racism then I question their commitment to environmentalism.

I am going to leave this on your head and hearts. I have worked with a number of groups represented here and others. And the issue always comes up and hopefully may come up during the Q and A about diversifying membership. Many predominantly white organizations want to make themselves more aware of the issues and concerns of people of color, to make your organizations more friendly and cooperative, but are experiencing trouble. It doesn't seem to work. Your initiatives aren't making progress. I challenge you to study, to reconsider your ideology, the way in which you go about movement, the way in which you go about struggle, how you develop propaganda, the kind of language style and usage that you use.

Because I am telling you and I am telling you the truth. There are people of color who are prepared. There are people of color who are already engaged in this very work. They may not consider themselves environmentalists.

They consider themselves mothers and fathers, sons and daughters, living in urban wastelands, concerned about the lived reality of their people. They don't need a title. They don't need an organization. They are doing the best with what they got which ain't much. I challenge you to

reimagine your movement not in leadership but as following the direction of these activists of color who exist on the frontlines of the movement itself.

The problem is that all too often is that white activists tend to believe that they know best, tend to believe that you all know better how to engage struggle than people actually living it themselves.

The number one thing, then I am going to bring it to a close. The number one thing you can do for the environment this year is to beat Bush. I am not aware of how many people here are a part of the Green Party, or whatever your politics are, whether you are Republican, Democratic, Independent or Libertarian or whatever. But I am thankful that Nader decided not to run for president this year. [Within a few days of this address, Nader would announce that he was again going to campaign for the presidency; this time as an independent — go figure!] Not just because we have a better chance of getting Bush out of office cause that vote now will hopefully go to the Democrat to make sure that happens. But it is also because there is a greater issue here. And it's an issue that is going to stay with the Left or the movement, if you will, until we remedy it. And that is this: When Nader ran in 2000, there was a split between the progressive vote that partly enabled the fiasco that led to Bush being appointed the president. My point is that had there been some kind of coalition among progressives that cut across race and class lines we might have been able to avoid that. The problem with the Green party is no different than the problem with the environmental movement and other majority white movements in this country. That it is bogged down by a racism that even the most enlightened, the most concerned still have trouble addressing. Given that, we all lose out.

We have to begin to enter into dialogue as different organizations, as different communities, as people just concerned about the future of not just our country but the world. We have to do that with the same amount of fortitude and passion that we engage our particular issues. That is our only solution. Me personally, I believe that we need to radicalize the Democratic Party. No, I do not suffer from the delusion that we will be able to wrestle it from the clutches of the corporate structure. But if we were able to develop a progressive radical wing that is vocal, that is clear on the issues, that knows how to use the media to our advantage, then we're better able to capture the imagination of the American people. And that could be the starting point for the development of a third political party that truly represents the misrepresented and those of us that are not represented at all in government. The Green Party is not that kind of party. The propaganda machine of the Republican Party is well money and very sophisticated but it is not undefeatable.

So I'll close up with this little thought. You know, the people responsible for why global warming is such a problem is the rich. Not just because they own the corporations that pump pollution and toxins into the air, but also because they eat the most and thus have the most gas. All those bad emissions in the air aren't just coming from the smokestacks but from the asses of the upper classes.

# Sheep Dreams and Kitten Memes

## *by Shawn McDougal*

My goal in writing this is to help expand the movement for human liberation which many of us understand ourselves to be a part of. First I'll explain a bit about the vision that drives me in my social change work. Next, I will offer one key practical idea for movement-building. I will follow the idea with a concrete example of how I and some comrades have put the idea into practice. Then, I will share some key concepts useful not only for explaining the practical idea, but also for developing and evaluating virtually any tactical plan for mass liberation that movement-builders might consider.

The ideas I present here are not new. I am a synthesizer; I like to take disparate ideas and fashion them into a synthesis that is my own. Feel free to take the pieces you desire and synthesize them in a way that makes sense for you.

The title of this piece was inspired partially by a leaflet I created a couple of years ago called "Mobilize like kittens, not sheep," and partially by the notion that culture is fundamentally about patterns of activity that we continually (re)create. But I'm getting ahead of myself. I hope the title makes sense by the time you finish reading this.

## **The Vision**

### *What is my vision?*

A world where everyone understands that they are creators of social reality, rather than spectators... a world where everyone feels worthy of the best in life, and no one feels subordinate or less worthy than anyone else... a world where our interactions bring out the best in us, rather than the worst... a world where our institutions are nurturing and life-affirming, rather than domineering and life-negating... a world where our hopes overcome our fears.

(Note that in describing my vision I do not mention the usual list of 'isms' that so many of us rightfully oppose: capitalism, racism, heterosexism, patriarchy, adultism, elitism, etc. I believe these dehumanizing social patterns are really symptoms of more fundamental problems: We are unconscious of our own power, and we are ruled by fear. To the extent we realize that we do not merely inherit the world but that we shape it, these destructive and fear-based patterns will be replaced by creative and hope-based patterns — at every level, and in every facet of our lives.)

### *What drives my vision?*

Growing up in an underclass Black family in Los Angeles, I experienced the effects of racism and classism — external and internalized — around and within me. (I call my family underclass and not working-class, cuz most of the time nobody had a job — it was mostly welfare and



petty hustles.) Seeing my older brother marginalized for being gay, and seeing my single mom have to hustle and get money from her boyfriends for us to survive ('Can you throw me down some change this month?'), taught me about heterosexism and patriarchy. Also, seeing people risk jail-time just so they could have something that looked nice taught me about the power of conformity and internalized oppression in people's lives. Seeing (and much later, experiencing) drug addiction taught me about the often self-destructive power of escapism.

Success in school shaped me to be a young elitist — the kid who was gonna make it out of the ghetto. That same success got me a scholarship to an elite boarding school in New England where I began to see the levers of elite power close up. I realized that the people in power were no more deserving than anyone else. Eventually, time spent as an exchange student in Brazil helped me see the global nature of class society, patriarchy, white supremacy and the other 'isms' I had come to despise, as well as the crucial role America plays in the global system. The people I met in Brazil also reminded me of the amazing power of the human spirit, and our capacity to create connections and joy even under miserable social conditions. It was in Brazil that I realized that I could not escape from or ignore the problems of the world, but that I had to live my life fighting them.

When I was in college I met people who called themselves anarchists. I saw that we had the same basic attitude on a lot of things — especially challenging authority and conformity — so I realized that I was an anarchist, too.

## The idea

Let's do a thought experiment. Two actually. Ready?

First, imagine a mass action in your favorite city. It's a march/rally. Five hundred (or 5,000) people gather in a park. You're there with them. While people stand around waiting for the action to begin, organizers circulate around with extra signs, chant sheets and whistles. You all line up and walk along a route — maybe a mile or two — where city officials make sure traffic is cleared. Or, maybe you couldn't get a permit and you're walking along the sidewalk. Along the way folk are chanting, singing, drumming, waving signs, a few even passing out leaflets to lookers-on. After an hour or two of marching, you reach the destination point. There is a rally. Great speakers, rousing performers, old acquaintances, drums and chants. You even spot a reporter or two from the local media. You and your friends go home, confident that you did your part for the movement for peace and justice today.

Now, change the channels.

A second mass action. Same city. Five hundred (or 5,000) people gather in a park. You're there with them. Organizers circulate around with handouts on how to approach strangers and talk politics in public and suggested locations. People share leaflets, surveys, stickers, street-theater scripts, chalk. You all form teams of 2 to 5 people. The teams — hundreds (or thousands) of them — fan out to locations all throughout the city. (Supermarkets, gas stations, post offices, shopping centers, laundromats, bus stops and movie lines are among the favored spots.) At these locations the teams talk to people about the issues, ask questions from a survey, hand out stickers and leaflets to those who are down with the cause. A few even perform theater or create chalkings on busy sidewalks. After an hour or two of connecting with people on the street, you all reconverge for a rally.

Folk share stories about how it felt to engage with the public — the challenges and the breakthroughs. Great speakers, rousing performers, old acquaintances, drums and chants. You even spot a reporter or two from the local media. You and your friends go home, confident that you did your part for the movement for peace and justice today.

Questions for you to consider before moving on:

- Which action has the greatest impact on public awareness?
- Which action is more likely to empower people to stay active in between the mass actions?
- Which action is more dependent on the corporate media to get its message out?
- Which action spreads more of a practical understanding of what it takes to build a movement among the people who participate?
- Which action creates a deeper sense of community among participants?

Any other differences you think noteworthy?

The second mass action is the practical tool — a tactic — that I promised to offer in this essay. I call it the kittens action. I choose this term because of what it evokes. Kittens (cats) are different from sheep in that, because they are not herd animals, their movements are not easily controlled or constrained by those who would domesticate them. If you've ever lent an ear to a frustrated meeting facilitator, school teacher, or soccer mom — or if you've ever been one — you will probably recognize the phrase "It's like herding kittens!"

The kittens action follows a very simple recipe:

**Step 1.** Converge.

**Step 2.** Form teams, share materials for outreach.

**Step 3.** Spread out.

**Step 4.** Engage the public.

**Step 5.** Reconverge.

**Step 6.** Share stories and celebrate.

The kittens action is similar to what some people call an organizing blitz, though blitzes usually have organization — specific goals (like signing up new members), and I've never seen this sort of tactic used at a mass action level involving people and groups with diverse interests. Also somebody told me once that in Mexico City they did something similar with teams called brigadas.

## The practice

There was a gathering of diverse organizers and activists in December 2003 to discuss community and autonomy in LA. The event was organized by folk who'd been inspired by their exposure to Zapatismo, such as the people at Casa del Pueblo. At the end of that meeting one of the requests was for a way for the diverse people and organizations present to continue to connect and work together. I suggested putting together a monthly kittens action, perhaps with a different theme each month, so that various forces around LA could come together on a more regular basis and do concrete work together.

Many were in agreement, so some of us organized the first event, called POP! the Revolution (POP= People Organizing & Partying), to happen in January. Here is the email announcement we sent out:

*Ready to see LA-area activism taken to the next level?*

*Ready to connect with diverse activists working on various fronts in the struggle for social justice?*

*Ready to stop feeling angry and start celebrating and building the culture of resistance?*

*Then you are invited to:*

*P.O.P.! the Revolution Party*

*People Organizing & Partying*

- People: because to win we don't need to convince those who stand against us — we simply need to activate those already on our side*
- Organizing: because it's time to move from the margins and into the center*
- Partying: because revolution needs to be fun!*

*Saturday, January 17<sup>th</sup>, 2004, 2 p.m.*

*Echo Park Methodist Church*

*1226 Alvarado, just north of Sunset*

*Sounds intriguing... In a nutshell, what is it?*

*Activists from all over LA coming together to join forces for a day of schmoozing and organizing in the community, to turn traditional protest into community engagement, and to have fun. A new way to help the LA left feel more connected.*

*agenda in brief:*

*2:00: PREPARE — welcome to the community, intros, brief training, form street teams*

*3:00: OUTREACH — street teams fan out to surrounding grocery stores, gas stations, connect with the public, ask critical questions, share resources*

*5:30: PARTY — food, music, open-mic, performance art, share experiences*

*This is the first of what will become a monthly event, held at different locations all throughout LA, highlighting our various struggles*

*If you are interested in teaming up with us, or to help make this and future events successful, then spread the word, and join our email list!*

At that first event about 50 people showed up. Many of the people present were not regular activists; just progressive folk who were fed up with feeling powerless and wanted to do something.

After intros we did a training on how to talk to people, on how to approach strangers to get their attention, on what to expect in terms of people turning you down or ignoring you, on how to focus your efforts on people willing to dialogue and not waste time debating people who

wanna be haters, etc. We gave everyone a list of questions to ask people about community issues, and a stack of informational leaflets with alternative media and community resources.

Next, people went out in teams of two to five. Some went to supermarkets, others to gas stations, and others to bus stops. People were out for about an hour. (From the agenda we put in the email you can see we'd planned for a longer time outreaching, but, shockingly, we were behind schedule.)

When the teams returned we had a debriefing session. The energy was palpable. Folk talked about how exhilarating it felt to approach total strangers in the streets and talk politics. Folk talked about some of the amazing and interesting people they'd met — for example, one guy who is not a typical 'activist' but who organizes his buddies every year to donate SUV-loads of food to homeless folk on Skid Row. Folk talked about how most of the people they met were actually pretty open to chatting and happy to receive info on alternative media. One guy mentioned how he realized how difficult it was to judge people by the way they look or dressed — an older guy who he'd assumed would be a Bush-lover was actually pretty critical of the war and complained about all the tax breaks going to the rich. One woman said how now she feels more confident, so that next time she's in line at a grocery store she'll be less afraid to talk to people in line next to her.

We did another POP! the Revolution event the following month, with similar experiences reported by a new set of participants. One complaint was that our leaflets didn't have enough info on local resources to help people in need of specific help: How to move more from talking to action?

Although the POP! the Revolution event was more like a workshop than a mass action, it is essentially a mini-kittens action. With more participants — hundreds or thousands instead of a few dozen — a mass kittens action would likely include many forms of outreach to engage the public, from various sorts of leaflets and surveys to street preaching to street theater and interactive art. My hope is efforts like POP! will help popularize the idea of the kittens action, so that more mass action organizers will think in terms of getting folk they mobilize to be organizers, outreaching in the community, not just warm bodies to fill the streets or hold one sign in a sea of signs. Imagine the impact of 5,000 activists spending an hour or two throughout the city having conversations with 50,000 or 100,000 people!

## **The theory**

One criticism often leveled at anarchists by certain segments of the left — in particular Marxists — is that we are all tactics and no theory. I vehemently disagree with this criticism. The reality is that anarchist practice usually has strong theoretical underpinnings. The problem comes with articulating those ideas in a way that non-anarchists can understand.

Before we continue, there is a term that I use that may be unfamiliar to many readers. It's that weird term that appears in the title of this essay: meme. (It rhymes with seem.) It was coined by zoologist Richard Dawkins in his 1976 book, *The Selfish Gene*. It was taken from a Greek root meaning 'imitate.' Memes are units of cultural information such as recipes, ideas, songs, social conventions, fashions, gestures, rituals and sayings.

Memes are to culture what genes are to biology. Like genes, memes replicate, mutate, spread and die out. Just as genes powerfully shape the form and function of biological organisms, memes shape the form and function of cultures and societies.

In the rest of this section I will give you a sense of the theoretical basis for and the visionary implications of the kittens action. I will do this by explaining five key concepts — five powerful memes that, taken together, may serve as tools to shift how we think about and do social change work. In explaining these memes I will show that the kittens action is not merely a tactic as it's commonly understood — a choice of action to be used or not as expedient. The kittens action carries within it both a strategy — a long-term plan of action and a vision — a place we want our strategies to take us to. I also hope to show that whatever one thinks of this particular tactic, there is a sore need for anarchists in particular and progressives in general to create and promote tactics whose long-term effects are similar to those of the kittens action if our vision for a more liberated and just world is to be realized. What exactly the long-term effects of the kittens action are will be clearer as we proceed.

What's the connection between tactics, strategy and vision?

### ***Meme 1: Feedback — everywhere***

Maybe it's because my first intellectual passions lay in the sciences and mathematics, but I often find useful metaphors for thinking about how people, social groups and society work coming from fields like mathematics, biology, and complex systems theory. For example, I've found the biological cell with its semi-permeable boundary — selectively and flexibly allowing in some but not all outside influences — useful in thinking about how an evolving culture or social group interacts with other groups or cultures.

In thinking about how society as a whole functions, one useful metaphor is the human brain. Like society, the brain is made up of multitudes of specialized yet adaptable, highly interconnected, dynamically developing yet historically shaped, semi-autonomous units. In the brain these units are neurons, while in society they are people.

In a complex system such as the brain (organisms and ecosystems are further examples of these sorts of systems), there are various levels at which one may examine the system's dynamics. These levels fall along a spectrum from the micro — the realm of individual parts — to the macro — the realm of patterns and relationships among parts. For example, in the brain there are neurons (micro level) and there are concepts (macro level).

Whereas small numbers of neurons may be involved in a processing a particular sense datum (for instance, recognizing the color green), large collections of neurons are involved with more emotional or conceptual work (for example, appropriately recognizing a green traffic light).

The standard view of the philosophy of reductionism is that a whole can be understood simply by understanding its parts. Classical physical science is the child of reductionism — for example, the search in physics for the smallest building blocks of matter. In reaction to the limitations of reductionism, holistic approaches to knowledge emphasize relationships and wholes — parts only can be understood in a particular context or environment.

Feedback — everywhere is the idea that reductionism and holism are both true, but only partially. Parts create the whole and the whole shapes the parts. There is mutual influence between the various levels in a complex system, a dialectical cascade between the micro and the macro.

For example, it turns out that in the brain not only do the things we sense, perceive, or experience inform our concepts, and shape our moods, but that our concepts and moods in turn shape what we perceive. Have you ever misinterpreted a friend's innocent remark? Then you know what I mean.

In the social realm these contending perspectives — reductionism and holism — play out in debates between rugged individualist 'conservatives,' and social constructionist 'liberals.' (A lot of contentiousness in our society actually seems to arise from these same clashing views on the relationship of individuals to groups.) Feedback-everywhere allows us to transcend this duality: not only do individuals create society, but society creates individuals.

As I mentioned before, a common criticism of anarchists is that we are all action without theory, tactics without strategy. A corollary of the feedback — everywhere principle provides adequate response to this criticism: the unity of tactics, strategy and vision. Although it is axiomatic among folk who wanna be smart planners that vision determines strategy determines tactics, it is rarely recognized that the chain of effect runs in reverse as well: what we do today (a tactical choice) shapes our path for tomorrow (strategic possibilities), and the unfolding of that path shapes our evolving vision. This corollary of feedback- everywhere — the unity of tactics, strategy and vision — is embodied in the classic anarchist understanding that our means (tactics/strategy) must harmonize with our ends (vision).

Thus, the kittens action is not only a tactic for mobilization, to be used or not as expedient, but it also implies a class of compatible strategies for transformation, and a class of compatible visions of the society its practitioners would like to create. Again, the kind of strategy and vision implicit in the kittens action will be made more clear as we look at the five other memes.

How do we fight the/for power?

### ***Meme 2: Power as a relationship (rather than a commodity)***

Power exists only in the interaction between people. Although the power relationship may imply different roles—the 'powerful' and the 'disempowered' — that relationship only has reality because of the participation and the acquiescence of each participant.

This principle has been recognized by generations of diverse social theorists and social actionists (e.g. Hume, Tolstoy, Gandhi, Foucault, and Biko, to name just a few) who have long argued that the power of an oppressive regime rests on the people's obedience to that regime. In the words of Steven Biko, "The most powerful tool in the hands of the oppressor is the mind of the oppressed."

Despite this long tradition of nuanced and dialectical thinking about power, many people, including many on the left, still tend to think in absolute and static terms when they ponder the nature of power: the elite or the privileged are 'powerful' while the oppressed and the marginalized are 'powerless.' Power for them becomes like a scarce commodity: some people have it while others don't.

Why is this way of thinking so pervasive? There at least three reasons for the popularity of this idea of power: 1) It provides a kind of rationalization for resignation—'We have good reason to feel hopeless! We're powerless for chrissakes!'; 2) It results from internalized oppression—resistance becomes inconceivable when we see ourselves as powerless; 3) Our concepts work metaphorically. The commodity concept of power arises via metaphorical extension: Power is something we desire and that we negotiate in social transactions, and thus it is like a commodity.

The problem with this scarce commodity concept of power is that it can lead people to make bad strategic choices in their social change work, and it can lead to perceived and therefore manifest powerlessness. For example, radical social actionists often criticize liberal reformists for solving social problems in a way that reinforces the power of the oppressive social forces that cause the problems to begin with. By begging the master to throw you a bone, you affirm the master's power over your life. To the extent this criticism is true, it is the liberal reformists' assumptions about the 'powerlessness' of the people they want to save that is to blame.

A thought experiment I like to give people when it seems like their understanding of power is too absolute or commodity-like is this:

*Imagine you could get rid of the top 1,000,000 power people in the world- you know, the CEOs, the high-level officials, the presidents, the generals, the corporate boards of directors, the biotech wizards, the movie moguls, etc. Imagine you could just snap your fingers and boom! they would all disappear without a trace.*

After their twinkling eyes tell me they've gotten the picture, I then ask:

*Ok. So the rulers of society are gone. Now what happens next? Social liberation? The struggle's over? We won?*

After some moments of consideration, they usually will say something like, "Naw, it wouldn't make much of a difference. Other people — the middle managers, the staffers, the lieutenants, the assistants, etc — -would all just move up to take their places. What would need to change is the system, the consciousness."

To fight the power (and win), it is not enough to get rid of the people who are privileged. We must change the consciousness that the current power relations reflect. I'm reminded of the marvelous title of an anarchist pamphlet I've had on my shelf for the longest but that I've never gotten around to reading: *You Can't Blow Up a Social Relationship*.

A characteristically anarchist approach to taking action to challenge power relations is direct action. Direct action means taking action to directly address a problem or get your needs met, without asking the powers that be to do it for you. Direct action means fighting power by asserting your own power, as opposed to asking that others with power treat you kinder or gentler. Although many activists don't emphasize this, direct action isn't just about fighting power: it's also about changing consciousness. People who take direct action to improve their lives end up by having a greater sense of control over their own lives. By taking action they change the world, and by changing the world they change themselves. (This is another example of feedback-everywhere. Also, see Meme 5 for more on the role of action in shaping our sense of self.)

Some people confuse direct action with civil disobedience, especially after the dramatic protests involving mass arrests that we've seen in the global justice movement since Seattle. Though direct action and civil disobedience can overlap, they are not the same. Civil disobedience means breaking a law in order to get justice — either directly in the moment or indirectly through a moral appeal to other people. Direct action means doing what it takes to get immediate justice — whether the action is legal or not. Consider the issue of police brutality. An example of a civil disobedience response would be blocking the streets in order to highlight the issue for the public. An example of direct action would be forming a Copwatch group to show up and closely observe whenever folk get stopped by the police.

Since any tactic has implications for strategy and vision (cf. feedback — everywhere), when evaluating a tactic we should ask ourselves: Does the tactic (or its related strategy) work to

change power relations and consciousness in a fundamental way? If the answer is yes, great. If the answer is no, time to rethink our tactics.

How does the kittens action work to change power relations and consciousness? In some ways the kittens action is closer to direct action than the typical march-rally.

At a march, most participants do not directly engage the public; they are merely part of a crowd passing by waving their signs. The immediate target of a typical march-rally is actually the media, and only indirectly the public.

Organizers draw media attention in the hopes that the media will then communicate their message to the public. In contrast, at a kittens action, the participants interact with the public directly; they become the media themselves and take their message directly to the people.

Also, participants at a kittens action (kittens for short) must think and make decisions on the spot – where to go, who to engage, what to say, how to respond – whereas few such decisions need to be made by marchers following the crowds on a pre-planned route. And these interactions happen involving many, many more members of the public than the relative few who happen to see a march go by. Their autonomy combined with the widespread nature of their action means kittens pose a greater challenge than marchers to the taboos about how to behave in public.

Finally, kittens interact with lots of people who may not automatically agree with or be as passionate about the issues as them. Thus they work more than marchers in challenging their own fears of rejection. They become stronger organizers.

One visionary implication of the kittens action is thus revealed: building a society where everyone sees themselves as creators of social reality, with lead-not just supporting-roles to play.

There are other ways I believe the kittens action fits within a larger vision of consciousness change. I'll explain more below.

What needs to change in our culture?

### ***Meme 3: Transformation as Culture Shift***

Political structures and economic structures not only shape culture, but they arise out of culture (cf. feedback – everywhere). Social transformation of the kind people like us wanna see will require more than a changing of the guard-it will require a shift in our culture, a shift in our everyday habits of thinking and acting.

In what ways does our culture need to shift? There are many, many ways I can think of, and I'm sure you can, too. I'll list a few here that are of particular relevance to the kittens action.

First, mainstream U.S. culture has a bizarre taboo against talking politics in public. Our media primarily focus on personalities, trivia and tragedies. Social reality is mainly a show – one with us as spectators, and whose key events seem beyond our control.

How can people see themselves as creators of social reality?

Second, we have a dominant culture that squashes dialogue on deeper levels. For most people in our society, it is not cool to seem ignorant or confused, so asking questions is uncool. It is not cool to show a need for help or a reliance on other humans. We strive to be independent, so we tend to repress, not express, many of the feelings that arise from our basic needs. Hence, for these reasons and others, instead of communication, dialogue, and understanding, we have advertisements, announcements, and arguments.

How can we create dialogue that deepens our understanding of ourselves and each other?



Furthermore, our economic system actually depends on people feeling disconnected and unable to rely on others: individually wrapped lifestyles make us bigger consumers and more fearful workers. Ways of relating that are about mutual aid and interpersonal connection outside scripted roles — insofar as they are not marketable or commodifiable, and insofar as they interfere with workplace discipline — get deemphasized in our corporate-mediated culture. (The historical loss of the commons has been well-documented, and continues to play out in contemporary struggles over privatization.) The acceptable roles — consumers, workers, sports fans, et al. — get scripted for us. As we spend our time wearing masks not of our own creation, we feel less in control of our own lives, and a sense of powerlessness (or alienation) becomes pervasive. The alienation leads to greed and fear: Greed to beat out our competition (i.e., fellow humans), and fear that the competition will beat us out. The business and the government elites use greed and fear to increase the power they wield in our lives. And the alienation grows...

How can we stop this cycle of alienation, fear, and greed?

Finally, most forms of collectivity in our society — teams, companies, public agencies, etc. — are organized as clear hierarchies, with bosses, managers and followers. Very rarely do we have opportunities to work in groups that are organized in an egalitarian way, where the experiences of each participant are equally important. Thus, we get used to seeing collectivity as requiring a weakening of our individuality. We come to see individuality and collectivity as locked in a zero-sum competition. To be a 'strong individual' means to ignore the collective, and to be a 'good team-player' means to efface one's own needs.

How can we create social groups that both enhance and feed off of the power of the individual members? How can we create liberated forms of collectivity?

In reaction to the pervasive hierarchy that informs our social groups, and because they cannot think of alternative structures, some anarchists espouse doing away with complex forms of social organization altogether.

Some pine for an idyllic past where everyone lived in small egalitarian bands and complex divisions of labor did not exist. However, the majority of thoughtful anarchists make a distinction between the legitimate authority of experts who we choose to listen to for advice or situational leadership, and the imposed authority of bosses, rulers and elites.

But knowing in theory that legitimate and non-coercive leadership is possible doesn't mean that it's always clear how to make it work in practice. A huge stumbling block for efforts to create egalitarian social arrangements is that the vast majority of people's socialization has occurred primarily through hierarchical groups and institutions. One of the powerful and far-reaching impacts of the global justice movement's mass mobilization efforts has been the exposure of many, many people to effective egalitarian forms of decision-making (e.g. affinity groups). These people certainly take their experiences into other aspects of their lives and their social change work.

A question to ask about any tactics (or strategies) for social change is this: to what extent do those tactics (or strategies) help prefigure or bring about a desirable and necessary change in the way we live our lives, a desirable and necessary shift in our culture?

The kittens action promotes a culture-shift on all the fronts I've just mentioned.

First, it gets folk to transgress the taboo about talking politics in public. The demise of this taboo would have deep and far-reaching consequences in our society. No longer would the American public be content to limit its sophisticated analyses and passionate debates to sports, pop stars and movies. No longer would our roles as consumers or workers eclipse our roles as

community members, as citizens (documented or not). When social reality ceases to be a trivial show, when social reality is something that we have important things to say about, then we can move from being spectators to being creators.

Second, by breaking through not only the taboo against politics but the taboo against purposefully engaging strangers in dialogue, kittens renew their sense of interdependence and connection with the real people who make up the real society around them. Conversing about heartfelt stuff with people outside our normal circles makes it hard to reduce people to tokens in a theory, it expands our sense of our own humanity, and it moves us out of alienation.

Third, the kittens action — just like other anti-authoritarian forms of mass action (e.g. affinity group convergences) — engages participants in a form of collectivity where every individual is a key actor and decision-maker, and where the power of the group is directly dependent on the power of the individuals, and where the power of the individuals is directly connected with the power of their team and indirectly (especially at the final reconvergence/sharing stories step) connected with the power of the overall action. We learn to create liberated forms of collectivity through practical experience.

How do we move from the margins into the center?

#### ***Meme 4: Organization vs. Marginalization***

Anarchists who are into organizing are often critical of those who represent anarchism largely as a subculture or lifestyle. Anarchist organizers argue that lifestylist anarchists marginalize themselves in their safe subculture niches and thus become invisible and irrelevant in the wider movement.

The marginalization anarchist organizers worry about is not just a problem for anarchists — it's a problem for the left as a whole. (N.B. I know some of y'all don't like the word 'left.' Sorry for any semantic inconvenience. What I mean by 'left' is very broad: the people who believe we need more social equality, more sustainability, less hatred, and more liberation in the world.)

For most of us on the left, the longer we see ourselves as part of the left, the more we feel estranged and distant from regions of culture that used to be familiar to us. We spend more and more time with other progressives and activists, and less and less time with that 'conservative brother-in-law who just doesn't get it.' We shift our sense of community as we shift our sense of self. This is quite normal.

However, if we on the left are going to win the public to our side of the struggle, we gotta do more than complain about the people who don't know what we know, or the people who aren't activated like us. We gotta figure out how to teach people what we know, and we gotta figure out how to activate people. In short, we gotta organize.

A lotta people assume that organizing means organization-building.

Perhaps this comes from the (correct) notion that systemic change requires institutional change, and the (incorrect) notion that institutional change requires mass organizations. Or perhaps it comes from Marxist-Leninist party-fetishism. Who knows?

When I talk about organizing I don't mean getting people to join an organization, although that can be a part of it. By organizing I simply mean doing what organizers do — getting people to do something, getting people to take action. Ultimately, it doesn't matter if someone joins a particular organization, as long as that person is doing work to expand human liberation, and as

long as they understand that their work is part of a larger tapestry of transformation, a tapestry that includes the work I and people like me are doing.

This is a critical point so let me take time to be clear here. The impact and legacy of left social movements (e.g. the civil rights movement, the anti-nuke movement) cannot be measured simply by the policies that are passed or by the organizations that get created. After all, policies can be subverted and organizations can ossify. The main value of left social movements comes from the transformative actions they inspire from millions of unnamed and unaffiliated people, people whose lives are changed by something they are a part of, people who take what they learn into the rest of their lives. The main value of social movements comes from the way they deepen our consciousness and shift our culture.

Any tactic or strategy connected with a vision for liberation must say yes to the following question: Does this tactic or strategy lead to transformative action? Does this tactic or strategy organize?

It is clear that the kittens action, like any mass action, does organize people, at least its participants. Participants step outside their normal scripts of silence and anonymity in the face of the culture of complicity, and they do something about the ills they perceive. Further, by directly engaging the public, kittens can organize many, many others as well.

More on this to come.

How do people learn? What makes people change?

### ***Meme 5: experience over symbolism***

What makes people change? This is the fundamental question facing all organizers (and teachers). This question should be on the mental front burners of anyone who cares about changing the world.

There are essentially two views on the problem of getting people to learn or change. One view is that learning happens primarily through symbols — words, texts, stories, images, etc. The other view is that learning happens primarily through experience — things that happen to us and things that we do. (These two views are really part of a more complex continuum. For instance, consider role-models, people in our lives that serve as examples for us to follow. Are they experiences? Are they symbols? Both? Neither?)

Organizers (and teachers) who take the symbolic approach focus on making convincing arguments, telling compelling stories, showing people evocative images. Symbolic learning is the dominant approach taken in traditional schooling, and it serves important functions — the memorization of facts, the communication of the experiences of others. Also, within organizing symbolic work serves a vital function-background knowledge, raising critical questions.

The experiential approach to learning focuses on hands-on projects, field trips, apprenticeships, experiments, student-centered learning. (One example of student-centered learning is Paulo Freire's liberation pedagogy: it is all about privileging the 'subjective' experience of the learner over the 'objective' official knowledge of the teacher.) In organizing, the experiential approach focuses on helping people reflect on their own experiences, and pushing people to have new experiences-to expand their understanding of an issue and their relationship to the issue.

Although formal schooling is dominated by symbolic learning, experiential learning is almost universally recognized among educators to be the most powerful approach.

Pause for a moment to think about your most powerful and memorable learning experience. Did it happen because someone made an especially convincing argument to you, or told you a particularly compelling story? If you're like most people, chances are your most powerful learning experience was precisely that — an experience, something that happened that you were a part of.

In the realm of social change as well, the symbolic approach has limitations. One weakness of the symbolic approach to social change can be seen in the diluted and in some cases reversed. Policy victories of the civil rights movement, for instance; although *Brown v. Board of Education* (and following rulings and legislation) ended de jure segregation in schooling, de facto segregation continues. Fifty years after *Brown* the racial gaps in education persist, mainly because the racist attitudes of whites in America have not changed that much.

Another weakness with symbolic approaches to change as compared to experiential approaches has to do with long-term vision. Is our vision to continue a culture where politics is a spectacle, a parade of rhetoric and images, controlled by an elite minority of privileged and highly-trained image-makers, story-tellers and symbolic analysts (be they from the left, center or right)? Or do we want to create a culture where politics is not seen primarily as something you watch, read about or listen to, but rather as something you do, something you experience?

This is a really difficult thing to imagine. It is perhaps a universal of human culture that the leaders and chiefs tend to be the ones who are the most verbally astute. Throughout human history — and evidence suggests even in the days when we were all hunters and gatherers living in small nomadic bands — political life has been disproportionately influenced if not dominated by those who were the most adept at words and images. Is it even possible to have a political culture that doesn't have this sort of built-in status hierarchy?

(Additionally, personality typologies such as the Myers-Briggs and learning theories that look at multiple intelligences and learning styles suggest that symbolic-oriented learners — as opposed to concrete-experientially-oriented learners — form a privileged minority within our schooling system, especially at the secondary and post-secondary levels.)

Recognizing the problematics with this kind of power is difficult, especially as many of us, including me, have found a kind of power to fight oppression through our facility with language and symbols.

Yet there is a paradox. On the one hand, we want people to take action and take charge of their own lives, and not be led by whatever images they're fed by the elites, or whatever myths they're told by charismatic people around them. On the other hand, the most ready tool for social change many of us have is our own influential voice (be it spoken or written or performed or illustrated). (Eugene Debs, socialist presidential candidate in the early 1900s, illustrated this paradox when he said, "I don't want you to follow me or anyone else. I would not lead you into the promised land if I could, because if I could lead you in, somebody else would lead you out.")

It is essentially the question of how to promote revolution without promoting oneself. This question must be recognized and grappled with those of us who envision a society without elites of any kind.

The history of revolutions for social equality creating new elites and ruling castes shows the difficulty of overcoming this conundrum. Clearly, in these instances, symbolic revolution, articulated by revolutionary elites, won out over experiential revolution grounded in the unique perspectives of all members of society. Top-down won out over bottom-up.

Perhaps the conundrum can be canceled by an approach that combines actions with symbols in some sort of dialectic or transformation? To the extent both the actions and the symbols are controlled by each individual, elitist divisions of labor between those who instruct and those who follow instructions could be overcome. (I once chatted with a woman who was a self-made life-planning counselor. She told me a bit about neurolinguistic programming—a self-improvement approach that uses individually chosen gestures to symbolize moods or mindsets that we want to reinforce in ourselves. Something for further study...)

So we've considered some weaknesses with symbolic approaches to social change. What about experiential approaches?

An example of the power of action and experience in personal transformation comes from the field of social psychology.

There was a study conducted by a team of social psychologists in a suburban neighborhood. They posed as 'community workers' and asked the residents whether they would be willing to place a billboard in their front lawns as a public service. The billboards would say 'Please Drive Carefully.' Of course, the vast majority of them said 'hell no!' to the request — 85% of the people in the study's control group in fact refused to do this public service. In the test group, however, in the same neighborhood, with demographics exactly the same, 83% said 'yes' to the 'community workers' strange request.

One group was 85% 'no' while the other group just the reverse, 83% 'yes.'

Why such a dramatic reversal in response between the two groups of residents? The only difference between the two groups was that, two weeks previously, another set of 'community workers' had visited the test group, with a smaller and much easier request: Would they be willing to place a 3- by-3 inch card in their front window with the words 'Please Drive Carefully'? When given this token request, the almost all of the people said 'yes.'

Because the people in the test group had already done a token action supporting the cause (placing the card in their window), they were much more likely to do a bigger action (putting up a billboard in their yard) for the cause later on. By taking a small action people's sense of themselves had changed, and they were much more likely to do other and bigger actions in the future, consistent with their changed sense of self. (This study and similarly interesting results from social psychology can be found in Robert Cialdini's *Influence: the Psychology of Persuasion* and Eliot Aaronson's *The Social Animal*.)

This notion of getting people to do small things in order to make them more likely to do bigger things later on is known as baby-steps by organizers (and foot-in-the-door by sales people). It is a powerful example of the power of action in transformation.

The kittens action applies this notion of baby-steps on two levels, at the level of the wider public and at the level of the kittens themselves.

Firstly, in a kittens action, because the kittens are engaging the public, and not just holding signs or chanting in a crowd, they can get the people they meet to do things like write letters, sign petitions, put stickers on their cars, wear buttons, swear oaths, and a host of other token actions that will get the people who are not activists to move one baby-step in the direction of becoming activists.

Thus, the movement becomes bigger.

Secondly, by helping kittens have a baby-step experience as organizers directly and personally engaging the public to promote their cause, the kittens action helps the participants to see themselves as organizers.

Thus the kittens action help create more organizers, more people who will be active and effective over the long-term at expanding the movement.

These individuals will not only interact with the people they meet that particular day; they will go on to be more likely to interact with others they meet in the future-in their workplaces, in their neighborhoods, in the supermarkets. In this way, not only does the kittens action do like any mass action and organize the people who participate-the kittens action spreads the meme of organizing to create more organizers!

Thus, the movement becomes deeper.

With the help of baby-steps, we can see how the kittens action provides a powerful application of the meme of experience over symbolism, and a powerful tactic in helping us build a bigger and deeper movement.

## **Conclusion: Spreading Revolution**

For me, as an organizer and as a teacher, the biggest question I face everyday is: What can I do to get people to have experiences that transform and enrich their sense of possibilities? One of the things I've learned (and relearned many times!) is that this question is equivalent to the question: What can I do to transform and enrich my own sense of possibilities? As a religion teacher I had in college named Thandeka once told me, The inner and the outer are one.

On some days or at some moments I see the light and feel inspired, at other times it's enough just to get through the day without seriously wanting to hurt somebody or myself. Such is life.

Besides self-care, like walking or playing or staring at stars or fun personal stuff like that, one thing that renews my hope in a heartbeat, that allows me to smile and say things like "George Bush is good for America" to my friends and not feel like I'm telling a sick joke is this: remembering that I am just but a single thread in a huge and unfolding tapestry of liberation.

Every single person on this planet has a role in weaving that tapestry. And everybody's got a unique thread to weave. The best and only thing I can do is weave my thread and get out of the way of people trying to weave theirs.

The revolution is now. The revolution is all the time. Welcome to the revolution.

# **Race, Gender, Class: Structure of the Global Elite and World Capitalism**

*by Kapila*

Let's put one lie to rest for all time: the lie that men are oppressed, too, by sexism — the lie that there can be such thing as 'men liberation' groups. Oppression is something that one group of people commits against another group specifically because of a 'threatening' characteristic shared by the latter group — skin color or sex or age etc. The oppressors are indeed fucked up by being masters (racism hurts whites, sexual stereotypes are harmful to men) but those masters are not oppressed. Any master has the alternative of divesting himself of sexism or racism — the oppressed have no alternative — for they have no power-but to fight. In the long run, Women's Liberation will of course free men, but, in the short run, is going to cost men a lot of privilege, which no one gives up willingly or easily. Sexism is not the fault of women; kill your fathers, not your mothers.

— Robin Morgan

I look at their faces, I see reflection and masks that sometimes repeat my own in a strange cyclic pattern of power. Because in here, I am but a wage- slave, condemn sweating and hurting for eight bucks an hour, forced to smile and accept condescend behavior from the all-smiling, ever merry elite of the capital. Out there, they might call me a brother, an equal. We are not.

The system of class and the European system of white dominance and colonialism fused to became one single straight brute force, a giant juggernaut that tramples over the working-class worldwide and its two legs are racism and sexism.

Let us be realistic.

While I work at Stanford University, serving food for the sons of the elite and the future elite, it is increasingly strange for me to realize that this elite sometimes has skin darker than mine, accent thicker than mine, visible cultural roots sometimes more apparent than mine. The strength in which this realization affects me cannot be easily described — it is an eye-opener and is a mind narrower, it is both an epiphany as it is of such an obscurity.

This multicolored, multicultural bourgeoisie is always the enemy and sometimes the most unexpected and always undesired ally, which forces its "diversity" and its "oppressed situation" down my throat, in an obscene mockery of the plight of the workers of the world.

Let us be realistic.

Racism — white dominance — is not an American phenomenon. The "white race" supports a global system of racial inequality and prejudice where, worldwide, the white male has a hegemonic dominance. It is the new capitalist model, and it is the old. Imperialism is a stream that never dried because it is vital for the World Capitalism.

## **The World Elite – World Capitalism**

The capitalist globalization process that everyday kills and destroys the lives of millions and millions of people around the globe serves the political, social and economic agenda of a very well structured global elite. This global elite is composed essentially of capitalist white males, power-hungry and with no desire whatsoever of relinquish or divide power. It is paramount to their institutions of power to ensure the security of the ‘invisibility’ of the fact that the elite of the world is composed of one class, one race and one gender. This elite controls the levels of government and the levels of business. They are the church (the moral authority) and they are the creators of culture. They are the philosophers, the educators. They are too the most pernicious and dangerous group of people.

This elite has across the centuries used the divisions and social inequalities in society. In fact, they are the creators and the maintainers of this oppressive structure, and the sole beneficiaries of it. Through a structured and systemic misogynist, racist, homophobic, brutal capitalist protocol, they ensure the maintenance of their global empire and especially, the maintenance of their privilege domain over the majority of the people on earth.

It is, it always was, in the interest of that elite that we, the people, do not understand their affairs and could have no access to their domains. The institutions of race, class and gender are notably set to the advancement and comfort of these people and the exploitation of others.

This elite maintains nowadays a global system of exploitation, a structure that interlocks racism, sexism and “traditional” capitalist exploitation, which, for lack of a better word, I shall call World Capitalism.

Traditional Marxist and class struggle analysis have always had a very bad understanding of the race and gender – the concept that those two systems of exploitation were a “fruit” of capitalist society and would be eliminated when the class struggle is resolved fails to analytically criticize a culture based in racism and sexism – both of which came into the picture way before capitalism was around – and how the power structure of privilege does not have to be ratified by the police, the capitalists or even the State. Culture alone can be a catalyst of exploitation and submission, and the change and the complete revolution in the bourgeoisie social fabric cannot be done by simply taking the bourgeois out of the picture.

The understanding of the concept of privilege and how privilege imposes itself is necessary to understand why is that racism and sexism are so strong in our societies, why is that we to fight for the “right” of getting jobs (not goods jobs, just jobs in general), why it is two or three times scarier for us to walk at night, why is that, even when economically would make sense to alleviate the tension around race and gender – our society is adamant in keeping those tensions alive and burning.

This elite benefits threefold from the system of World Capitalism – the system devised, planned and structure around the white male bourgeois privilege, a system that connects the different levels of exploitation in one single machine.

## **Race**

Different from others, I firmly believe that the structure of the World Capitalism could not do without racism and sexism. The reasons for the existence of this two can be slightly different but



the end result is the same — the submission of the oppressed levels of the people to the elite of the capitalist society.

For the purpose of this analysis, racism and sexism shall be broadened to comprehend a multitude of other correlated subjects that are intrinsically tied to and share the same roots of those concepts. Racism, in this essay, refers (unless noted) to race dominance and privilege, national identity, nationalism, imperialism, colonialism and cultural repression. All those share a basic identity of a dominating ethnic/national group and a subordinated one.

To understand race and capitalism in a broader sense of the American concept of race, it is paramount to us to analyze race in its historical context.

Racism in Europe started before Capitalism. The feudal lords and the crown of Spain (absolutist and mercantilist) already obsessed over the concept of “limpieza de sangre,” the purity of blood. This concept became strong in Spain in the 1400s, when the Spaniards fought against the Moors invaders. A national liberation struggle, if you like.

These concepts of race and the purity of blood, however, were deeply ingrained in European culture. Europe was a continent driven by conquest and tribal wars. The Romans regarded the tribes of Germans and Franks to be barbarians, brutes of low intelligence and destined to be submitted to the rule of the Roman *fasciae*.

Examples run back in history ad nauseam, in demonstrating a racist culture and a racist system as an integral part of the European culture. Why should we be shocked that they, when spreading their empire, spread too their racist system?

It is sometimes a fairly common misconception that other cultures had no racist background until the arrival of the Europeans. That is not true. The African tribal wars that to this day plight the people in that continent are a living proof that race (identity) has been an issue long before Capitalism. What seems then to be the purpose of racism? In classical dialectical materialistic analysis, the constant struggle over power between forces of society shapes the format of the future and the present of the said society.

In the case of the disappearance of race and gender in our society, the only struggle to be faced would be the class war — and against a united working class, the capitalist are bound to lose. The need of a different struggle, the need of race and gender inequality for the capitalist is to engage the working class in different battles, to divide and conquer it.

Based on that, one could argue that, in the long run, racism has always been a structure designed to maintain the power of a certain class over another by creating a platform of “equality” of sorts, making them “brothers” of the oppressed class. This definition of racism carries more weight than we can initially imagine, but it fails to recognize that racism can outlive class oppression — and be still the source of power to a few that would dominate the hierarchy that from that would emerge.

Racism and Sexism are more culturally rooted in the world than Capitalism, more than the struggle between the bourgeoisie and the proletariat. Some cultures are feudal systems, other monarchic dictatorships (But I deny the Marxist evolutionism of societies in the sense of feudal-to-capitalist-to-communist-to-free-socialist as being an evolutionary process that is absolute to any society). Racism and Sexism are two paramount structures of domination with which the world dominant class maintains its power, and, without them, the structure of World Capitalism would collapse.

It is part of the strategy of the global elite to actively support and maintain white dominance worldwide.

The idea that white supremacy is an American phenomenon, that it is a national issue to be dealt nationally, and that racism in the U.S. have origins in American Capitalism is, in essence, a very American idea. At the same time, the complex aspects of race in the U.S. and the current debate on racism and classism might be the catalyst for the change in the perception of race and white dominance.

Global white dominance appears in two different aspects: privilege and de-facto ruling.

The privilege of the white race is an absolute in the world's politics and economics; nowhere in the face of the world are people of European descent the oppressed minority (or majority) to an elite of color. The "white race" enjoys a privilege that does not falter by geographic means.

The white colonial/imperial power stretched itself through the process of capitalist globalization. The consolidation of global capitalism is not only rooted in racism but dependant on it. From Brazil to India to Mexico, the lighter skin carries a lighter burden and occupies the higher place.

The de facto ruling of a white elite that controls the global capitalist state enforces the privilege of the "white race." Transnational corporate forces are massively concentrated in the U.S. and Europe and so are the powerful nation-states. The "white race" enjoys a position of privilege in these two segments.

Token gains on race and gender are not so much to pacify race and gender struggles, as it is to foment further struggle. The idea is to give the exploited a little taste of what they could get, but to make it clear that would have to carry a certain burden in order to get it. Just like a mule that tasted a piece of the carrot once is bound to want to eat the whole carrot, and will work with all its strength to reach the unreachable carrot, and carry the weight of the cart in its back. But, apparently contradicting themselves, the capitalist class shows its contempt by race and gender equality by openly attacking any form of improvement in the situation of the oppressed genders and races. This makes the structure, in the eyes of people of color, a racist one, instead of a purely classist one. It is necessary to keep people thinking that a) gains can be achieved inside the structure and b) racism is everywhere (which is true, but it needs to be really thrown at people's faces all the times). The objective of this exercise is to demonstrate both that power is in the side in the elite; and that the oppressed's situation can improve if only they submit enough so the elite do not seem them as a threat, but as something they can thoroughly control. At the same time, they need to keep the distance between those that have privilege, and those who do not.

It is interesting to see that the elite of color too benefits from the racist structure, and if racism were to simply be wiped out of the whole scenario, they would be in bad waters. It is of their interest that the white elite dominates – that would eagerly try to take over if they thought that they could do it without tearing the fabric of social control that the white capitalist elite maintains.

The racist structure of the system allows the elites of color to maintain their power and give them other possibilities. Imperialism has been used as a shield by every single dictator that had power threatened by the bigger shark, from Castro to Hussein to Milosevic. This dragged into direct or indirect the defense of their oppressive regime millions of people of color, working class people and anti-imperialist militants. This is not a justification to the U.S. actions, but an example of how the racist structure benefits not only the white elite and therefore supports directly or indirectly by the elites worldwide. It is a case of opportunism, where oppressors assume an "oppressed" mask to defend themselves against the taking of dominance against another.

A very concrete example of that is the role that Brazil plays now in the FTAA meetings. Lula and the PT (Brazilian Worker's Party) have been repeatedly trying to sell this image of a defiant Brazil, which is concerned with the imperialist role that the U.S. would play in South America in case the FTAA gets approved. What they are concerned about is that Brazil might lose its hegemonic dominance over the South American market; and then, if the U.S. does not open its market to Brazilian products, the Brazilian elite of landlords would lose power. They are not concerned with the effects of the FTAA on labor, environment and the people. It is just very convenient that those issues show up so they can rally public support.

This pattern repeats itself around the globe. Besides, the majority of this "elite of color" are actually descendent of Europeans. Just look at South America, the diversity and richness of races and cultures in it — then look at the elite of South America, a very white and European class of bourgeois. The elites of Africa, while not European in skin, are mostly educated and raised in Europe or the U.S. The pattern repeats itself.

In maintaining the white supremacy, the elites of color try to escape guilt-free. In the fight for racial and gender equality, the working class remains bound. It is not that these fights are not important; if anything, alongside with class, they are the most important ones. It is only that, without the fall of the capitalist system as a whole, any fight becomes just filler.

Other parts of the elites of color take a more aggressive position in the defense of the interests of the world capitalist elite. The elites of Japan thrive over the complete subjugation to the American empire. Make no mistake: this is hardly a submissive elite — they were imperial forces for centuries and held an elitist racial position over their neighbors. However, in this game they play, the subordinate elite because is very much in their interest to keep the status quo, and the rest is inconsequential. Japan, defeated on WWII, is reborn as a global potency. But in submission to the white empire. Their pop culture, their dream, their means of production — everything about modern Japan cries — slave, but this condition of slave to the elite of world capitalism asserts its hegemony and dominance over other nations. More than that, it asserts the dominance of the Japanese elite.

The left worldwide have, for decades now, struggled with race and class and gender — which liberation should take precedence over another — without realizing that if any take precedence, the whole fight in itself is almost a moot point. Racism is not only a pillar of class oppression. It is one of the single bases of oppression itself.

## **Gender**

In this essay, when referring to sexism, the concept, unless noted, incorporates issues like women's rights, women's position in the bottom of the scale of the capitalist society, homophobia and male violence against women.

Sexism — male dominance — is the less addressed and consequentially the most widespread system of oppression in the world. The roots of sexism in societies cannot be easily traced and I will not even attempt to dwell in its history to avoid any fallacy. However, in this essay, we shall analyze sexism in its relationship with global capitalism and the struggle for liberation.

The revolution of the capitalists was an economic and political revolution — not social. The French Revolution, the fall of the Absolutists in Europe, the social changes that followed were design to enforce the rule of the bourgeoisie and strengthen the influence and power of this

rising class against outside forces. Representative democracy, liberty and freedom and all the other promises that the revolution made to the people were designed according to which form would create a favorable atmosphere for the establishment of capitalism.

It is interesting then to notice that the revolutionary leaders were quick to crush the women's movement that was born during the revolution. The establishment of Capitalism could not allow the development of such a movement, especially since, in order to satisfy what those women were demanding, a distribution of power was necessary. One pamphlet distributed by those women during the revolution was called Request for Women to be Admitted to the Estates-General, and had the following quote: "Man is born egotist... he reduces us to managing his household affairs and to partaking of his rare favors when he feels so inclined." Nothing could be more true and it exemplifies the relationship between the elite and women — the relationship of power and the need of a structure that 'justifies' and maintain such a relationship.

The strained relationship between capitalism and women has a lot to do, in a modern setting, with the fact that the elites of the world are — no matter their "color" — an oppressive majority of males. The male dominance is not only a "cultural trait" as it is one of applying a simple rule of power — those who have power will not give it up for free. Concentrated power is limited — the more you share the less you have and the elites of the World will not relinquish power for women.

The relationship of power between men and women needs to transcend race and class in order to be effective. Although one could argue that this is just another classist plot of the bourgeois to keep their economic rule over the working class, it is very interesting to notice that misogynist thinking is part (in different levels) of a multitude of cultures, even before they got in contact with each other. 'Primitive' societies had their good share of misogyny — they were hardly the utopia that certain people picture them to be. The dominant gender in our societies has been exploiting women's work and women in general for millennia after millennia. Sexism is not a capitalist invention. It is not accident that the bourgeoisie power is composed essentially of males, this is merely a consequence of the fact that even when the class struggle between the nobility and the bourgeois aristocrats was being fought, in one thing they agreed — that was a fight between men, to see which man was going to be the ruler. It is obvious then why the views of women like Olympe de Gouges were so threatening to them that she was guillotined in 1793 as a reactionary loyalist.

Robespierre, Marat and the men of the Revolution were most certainly terrified of losing their power to a woman who advocated not only the necessity of full legal equality between the genders, job opportunities for women, schooling for girls and the creation of a national theater were only plays written by women could be performed, but the creation of the National Assembly of Women, emphasizing the need for women of self-governing and equal power.

Gouges understood that — because the culture of sexism — a structure that "embraced" men and women as "equals" would do nothing to actually satisfy women's need and desire for liberation. It would be a token act. The need of self-organization for women came from the realization that in a social structure, every single relationship is one of power, and if men constructed the social structure, it would be inherently sexist. Only women could devise a structure that would really benefit women.

Sexism always had a condescending tone to its rhetoric, a view that men's subjugation of women was actually a necessity for the welfare of women.

What is interesting is that this view is deeply ingrained in the social fabric of our society, and to ensure this, it is necessary that all men participate consciously or unconsciously in terrorizing women — much like the State, the function of manhood is to terrify women into accepting men's 'protection' for the price of their total submission. As Susan Brownmiller puts it, rape "is nothing more or less than a conscious process of intimidation by which all men keep all women in a state of fear." Domestic violence, violence against women and rape are forms of intimidation and bullying through which, firstly, male dominance is imposed, and second, male 'protection' is made 'necessary.' Culture reinforces the dominant role of the male and its 'need' of violence.

The cult of violent behavior by men, against women and against each other, is more than just assertion of power against the recipient of violence. It is part of the engine that feeds of the terrorizing of women to keep them submissive.

Is the double use of the rod — it can beat you up or beat someone else to protect you. And, as Susan Griffin notes in the book *Rape: The All-American Crime*, "if the professional rapist is to be separated from the average dominant heterosexual [male], it may be mainly a quantitative difference." The level to which dominance and violence are exerted to the domination of women may vary in quantity, but not in substance.

The idea of our social fabric reinforcing gender roles of violence/passivity is to create an atmosphere of fear so overwhelming that the mere presence of the male becomes threatening. Male attitudes — tone of voice, way of sitting, conversation, clothing — everything is designed in order to keep women guessing and consequentially, afraid. Why is it then surprising that our movement and our spaces are normally male dominated if why do not critically analyze the balance of power in the attitudes and presence of men and women inside the movement.

A woman in a room full of men, no matter how strong, outspoken and determined she is, and no matter how much the men are determined to treat her as an equal — is definitively in a position of less power and thus will not have the same weight in her voice. And with the institutions are not conscious of this power imbalance and do not work actively in reverting this situation — the maintenance of the status quo is inevitable.

The oppression of women by the working class males is a phenomenon that can be traced back to almost every single culture. To see the feminist struggle as separate and a "division of forces" of the working class is a ludicrous statement — a reflection of a poor understanding of the nature of oppression and the nature of the working class.

Indeed, to separate these three fights is to divide the working class, but to set priority in any of them and have the others as a tag along is to destroy any hopes of liberation that the working class might have.

The gender-based oppression serves a political purpose too. It serves the elites that women have no political power for the same reason that it serves the elites that people of color do not enjoy political power. There is, however, a difference between the gender elite and the elite of color. The male-dominated elite of color is, globally speaking, fairly stronger and definitively more aggressive in its pursuit of power than the gender-elite. The gender-elite lives in a much more subordinate position (to their male counterparts) than the elite of color — thus putting them in a closer position with the women of the working class. An abused woman will identify with the plight of another one — independent of class or race; a queer person can identify with persecution and prejudice.

It is however, very important to notice that, empathy and de facto equality are a far cry from each other, and while the bourgeois women might have in common with the working-class women their subordinate position, they are enemies of class and therefore not allies.

## Conclusion

The union of the working class in one fight will not happen without the acknowledgment of the levels of oppression inside the working class itself and the actual facing and destroying of the power imbalance in the movement that proposes to change the reality of oppression lived by the working class nowadays. A forced union of the working class, with disregard of the real issues of gender and race except in a superficial way is bound to fail.

A world revolution is necessary — a complete change of structure, a social, economic and political revolution that destroys class, gender and racial oppression.

I disagree with the idea that the class struggle should take priority over the race and gender struggle. This centralist and elitist view of disregarding the concerns of women and people of color have been seen thousands of times before, and we have been betrayed and stomped on enough to realize that those with power will not relinquish it, it must be taken from them. Only the oppressed can liberate the oppressed, and it is vital that we understand people of color, women, queers and all the other oppressed people inside the working class have not only this motto repeated in their heads like a mantra, but that they actually need to exercise that line inside the movement and draw their own conclusions of where they want to go and what needs to be done.

I too disagree with the idea that race and gender should be taken a priority over the class struggle — the simple idea that race and gender issues could be solved inside the capitalist system in any frame is simply ludicrous. Inside the capitalist system, we have no real say in the affairs of business and very little (in the most optimistic of the views) in the affairs of the government. A feminist or a race movement that did not have as priority to smash the capitalist system would fall sort on its legs — gender and race justice are impossible inside the capitalist system. The capitalist system is not only a system based on class dominance, but one too that maintain women and people of color inside that class and oppressed inside of it.

The means must be coherent with the ends. A movement that disregards any of the oppression-systems is bound to be limited and to create a society based on elitism. Unless the movement is committed to be one that will be addressing those three issues seriously and not sidestepping it with “we are all equal” condescending behavior, its range is going to be limited and it will turn off people that see themselves as not only working-class, but feel other pressing form of oppression crushing them.

It is time to reevaluate the movements approach on issues of race, gender and sexuality — it is good to see there is a movement of people already working in that direction. It is time for us to have a revolution in ourselves to change our perception on what a real liberation of the people means.

I see their faces — their smiling brown faces — and there is nothing of me in there. We shall build a different world.

# **Eplilogue: Ricardo Flores Magon is Alive in All of Us**

## ***by Ramiro “Ramsey” Muniz***

“I covered my face with my hands as I was shackled and chained, beginning three years of solitary confinement in the belly of the beast. I sat still in pure unconsciousness, neither hearing nor feeling, nor knowing in the darkness of the dungeons of America, like the deep of the sea, with no time and no world. In the depths that are timeless and worldless, it was then that the revolutionary spirit of Ricardo Flores Magon reached into the depths of my heart...”

Into my second year of solitary confinement, in the mode of darkness, I was informed by the forcing oppressor that seventy four years ago, our revolutionary brother Flores Magon had been confined in the same cell.

Even before the latter information, his revolutionary spirits would appear at any given time or day. Fortunately, with the support of family and others, I was able to receive various books written on the life, history and death of Flores Magon. The most vivid and profound statement has made months before his death here at Leavenworth USP is the following:

“My dream of beauty and beloved visions of a humanity living in peace, love and liberty... will not die with me, while there is on Earth a painful heart or an eye full of tears. My dreams and visions will live...”

— March 16, 1922

His visions, his dreams and his revolutionary spirituality are very much alive tonight. Even though I have been condemned by the oppressor to a death sentence, it is my tonalli (destiny) to continue with the visions, dreams and liberation of all humanity, especially the oppressed people of color. It is in the dungeons of the oppressor where I have found the truth and direction that we as oppressed people must take in order to be free once again.

During my confinement in the hole, if I would wish to communicate in my dreams with my brother Flores Magon, I would concentrate for days on his spirituality and writings. Within a few days, he would appear in my dreams, not only sharing his inner thoughts, but, most importantly, what we must do to rise again and remove the chains that our people bear in the present.

His most profound statement was, “My brother, you must reach into the ancient past, reach into the roots of our hearts, reach into the strength of our revolutionary spirituality.” I will never forget how I would rise from my sleep and immediately begin to write the essence of our conversations.

Yes, he is very much alive!

Our Mexicano spirituality is alive and throughout all Aztlan and in our Holy Land (Mexico). In fact, it is more alive than those so-called leaders who pretend to represent the masses of our people while, at the same time, compromising and making political deals with the same oppressor that continues to tighten the noose of the rope of oppression.

In a letter to his attorney, Flores Magon said he would rather die in prison than abdicate his ideals. "I prefer this to turning my back on the organizers and having the prison doors opened at the price of my honor." Flores Magon wrote. "I will not outlive my captivity, for I am already old, but when I die, my friends will perhaps inscribe on my tomb, 'here lies a dreamer,' and my enemies, 'here lies a madman.' But no one will be able to stamp the inscription, 'here lies a coward and traitor to his ideas.'"

It is our duty and responsibility as liberators to pass on our oral traditions of struggle, sacrifice and freedom. From the medieval mazorra of this oppressor, we reach out of the voices of the mountains in Chiapas, where our brother Marcos continues to liberate our sisters and brothers from the same oppressor that rules here in America. And in this world of conflicts, that fire of spirituality continues to rise regardless of the genocide wrought. Everywhere throughout the world, the oppressed, people of color, are rising. It seems as if the entire universe is reaching into its ancient past for the answers of tomorrow. We of the sixth sun, Mexicanos from Aztlan, have reached and embraced the enlightenment of our spiritual, cultural and historical pasts for the last five hundred years. We have lived in a mode of darkness and ignorance. The oppressor has, with malicious intent, destroyed and/or refused the right for us to be exposed to the beauty and power of our ancient past. A race without a history or past is a race of non-existence.

In conclusion, it is with pride and honor that I share this by Flores Magon. It represents the purpose of this book on culture, resistance and anarchism:

"It is necessary to educate our people, to teach them the real causes of their misery and slavery... This is why our hands, instead of being armed with muskets, are armed with pens, a weapon more formidable and far more feared by tyrants and exploiters."

— 1916

Presently, we of Aztlanahuac are in the midst of rising, with a power of resistance and liberation like never before in our history. The silence has now become our new fire ceremony of liberation, justice and land. We must all come with clean hearts and be prepared to sacrifice, because without sacrifice, there will never be freedom.



## About the Authors and Interviewees

Author and interviewees in alphabetical order

**Kapila** is an artist, organizer, writer and poet born in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, in January of 1981. Started working with the Centro de Estudos Libertarios Ideal Peres — CELIP, a anarchist study group, and the Resistencia Popular (Popular Resistance). Came to the U.S. at the age of 21, and started to get involved in student organizing, joining Students for Justice, a group of mostly community college based activists, and was part of the process which created a federation of the different Students for Justice chapters in the San Jose area (Silicon Valley, in California). I am part of Silicon Valley De-Bug, a young workers and artists self-managed media and organizing collective. I joined the IWW and have been part of the effort of starting a branch in San Jose. Currently I am working on a book about art and revolution and am part of the Furious Five anarchist collective in San Jose.

**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.

**Shawn McDougal** is a Black man who's been an anarchist since before he even heard the word. He was born and raised in LA, but has spent time living in New England and abroad (years in Brazil and China, months in Spain and Argentina). After dropping out of grad school and moving back to LA in 1997, he's spent most of his time working as a community and issue organizer and—most recently—a public school teacher. His dream is to start a community center that promotes the sharing of resources, skills, and knowledge across boundaries of race, ethnicity, and class, and help people learn through experience their power to shape social reality. Tomás Moniz has been living, loving, fighting, writing, teaching and parenting three kick ass kids in the bay area for the last 12 years. Comments questions concerns, can go to Moniz at [tom\\_moniz@riseup.net](mailto:tom_moniz@riseup.net)

**Suneel Mubayi**, 18, born in NYC, grew up mostly in New Delhi, India, came to New York last June after finishing high school in India to study at Columbia. He started writing poetry and stories at the age of 14, and studied theatre for two years in school. After initially writing mostly love and emotional poetry, he began to explore political arenas as muses, and was inspired by post-9/11 and the war. At some point in time, around the age of 16, he realized that he wasn't really a he inside, despite being birth- assigned female, and Suneel's political revolutionization has been closely intertwined with her shedding of gender boundaries and categorizations. She has since pursued spoken word performance and theater acting fairly successfully all over NYC and is learning how to trash the system from the belly of the Ivy League beast.

**Ramiro “Ramsey” Muñiz** is a political prisoner remembered for his leadership role during the Chicano Civil Rights Movement in the 1970s. As an attorney, Muñiz defended the rights of Mexicanos whose constitutional rights were constantly violated. In 1972 and 1974, Muñiz was a gubernatorial candidate in Texas for La Raza Unida, a political party established and developed

solely by Mexicanos to articulate an independent political vision. Muñiz garnered six percent of the vote and, during the campaign, spoke widely of Mexicano political power and potential. He is now serving time in Leavenworth. Info on his case visit his website at [www.freeramsey.com](http://www.freeramsey.com), or write him at Ramiro R. Muñiz — 40288–115, P.O. Box 1000, Leavenworth, KS 66048–1000.

**Ewuaré Osayande** ([www.osayande.org](http://www.osayande.org)) is a political activist, poet and author of a number of books including his latest work *Black Anti-Ballistic Missives: Resisting War/Resisting Racism*. The former chairperson of the Philadelphia chapter of the Black Radical Congress, he is the co-founder of P.O.W.E.R.: People Organized Working to Eradicate Racism. The *Quarterly Black Review* has called Osayande “one of Black America’s newest insurgent intellectuals coming to the table with enough mental firepower to be a David Walker for our time.” He currently resides in Philadelphia, PA.

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