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Why the Black Flag?

Howard J. Ehrlich

1996

The black flag is the symbol of anarchy. It evokes reactions ranging from horror to delight among those who recognize it. Find out what it means and prepare to see it at more and more public gatherings... Anarchists are against all government because they believe that the free and informed will of the individual is the ultimate strength of groups and of society itself. Anarchists believe in individual responsibility and initiative and in the whole-hearted cooperation of groups composed of free individuals. Government is the opposite of this ideal, relying as it does on brute force and deliberate fraud to expedite control of the many by the few. Whether this cruel and fraudulent process is validated by such mythical concepts as the divine right of kings, democratic elections, or a people's revolutionary government makes little difference to anarchists. We reject the whole concept of government itself and postulate a radical reliance on the problem-solving capacity of free human beings.

Why is our flag black? Black is a shade of negation. The black flag is the negation of all flags. It is a negation of nationhood which puts the human race against itself and denies the unity of all humankind. Black is a mood of anger and outrage at all the hideous crimes against humanity perpetrated in the name

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of allegiance to one state or another. It is anger and outrage at the insult to human intelligence implied in the pretenses, hypocrisies, and cheap chicaneries of governments... Black is also a color of mourning; the black flag which cancels out the nation also mourns its victims – the countless millions murdered in wars, external and internal, to the greater glory and stability of some bloody state. It mourns for those whose labor is robbed (taxed) to pay for the slaughter and oppression of other human beings. It mourns not only the death of the body but the crippling of the spirit under authoritarian and hierarchic systems; it mourns the millions of brain cells blacked out with never a chance to light up the world. It is a color of inconsolable grief.

But black is also beautiful. It is a color of determination, of resolve, of strength, a color by which all others are clarified and defined. Black is the mysterious surrounding of germination of fertility, the breeding ground of new life which always evolves, renews, refreshes, and reproduces itself in darkness. The seed hidden in the earth, the strange journey of the sperm, the secret growth of the embryo in the womb all these the blackness surrounds and protects.

So black is negation, is anger, is outrage, is mourning, is beauty, is hope, is the fostering and sheltering of new forms of human life and relationship on and with this earth. The black flag means all these things. We are proud to carry it, sorry we have to, and look forward to the day when such a symbol will no longer be necessary.