

Anarchist Panther

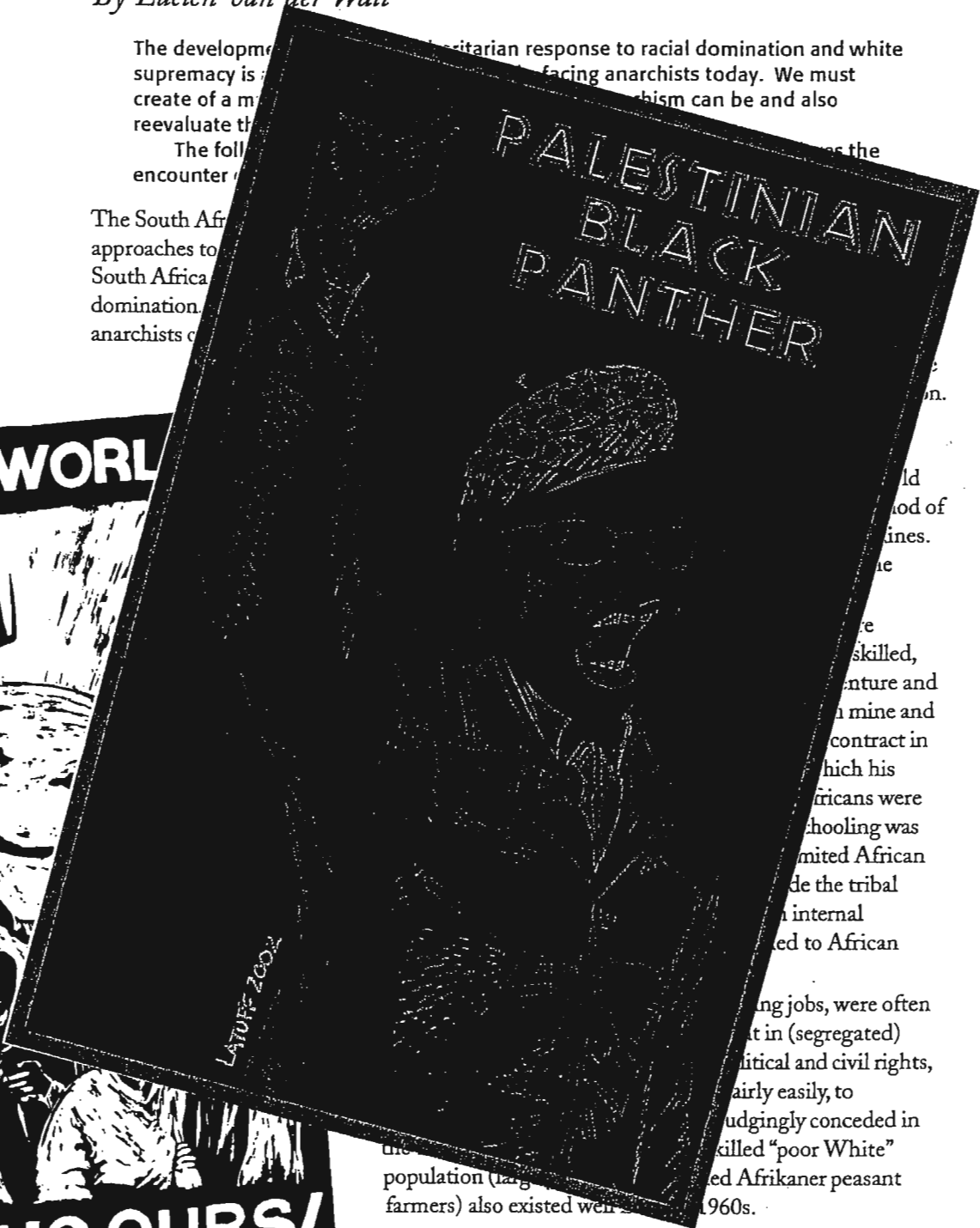
Reflections on Race and Anarchism in South Africa, 1904-2004

By Lucien van der Walt

The development of an anarchist response to racial domination and white supremacy is a key element in the history of anarchism in South Africa. We must create a model of anarchism that can be and also reevaluate the role of anarchism in the struggle against racism.

The following is a reflection on the encounter between anarchism and the struggle against racism in South Africa.

The South African approach to the struggle against racial domination is a key element in the history of anarchism in South Africa.



the population (largely Afrikaner peasant farmers) also existed when the 1960s.

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Black Anarchism

By *Ashanti Alston*

Many classical anarchists regarded anarchism as a body of elemental truths that merely needed to be revealed to the world and believed people would become anarchists once exposed to the irresistible logic of *the idea*. This is one of the reasons they tended to be didactic.

Fortunately the lived practice of the anarchist movement is much richer than that. Few “convert” in such a way: it is much more common for people to embrace anarchism slowly, as they discover that it is relevant to their lived experience and amenable to their own insights and concerns.

The richness of the anarchist tradition lay precisely in the long history of encounters between non-anarchist dissidents and the anarchist framework that we inherited from the late 19th and early 20th centuries. Anarchism has grown through such encounters and now confronts social contradictions that were previously marginal to the movement. For example, a century ago the struggle against patriarchy was a relatively minor concern for most anarchists and yet it is now widely accepted as an integral part of our struggle against domination.

It is only within the last 10 or 15 years that anarchists in North America have begun to seriously explore what it means to develop an anarchism that can both fight white supremacy and articulate a positive vision of cultural diversity and cultural exchange. Comrades are working hard to identify the historical referents of such a task, how our movement must change to embrace it, and what a truly anti-racist anarchism might look like.

The following piece by IAS board member Ashanti Alston explores some of these questions. Alston, who was a member of the Black Panther Party and the Black Liberation Army, describes his encounter(s) with anarchism (which began while he was incarcerated for activities related to the Black Liberation Army). He touches upon some of the limitations of older visions of anarchism, the contemporary relevance of anarchism to black people, and some of the principles necessary to build a new revolutionary movement.

This is an edited transcript of a talk given by Alston on October 24th, 2003 at Hunter College in New York City. This event was organized by the Institute for Anarchist Studies and co-sponsored by the Student Liberation Action Movement of the City University of New York.

Chuck Morse

Although the Black Panther Party was very hierarchical, I learned a lot from my experience in the organization. Above all, the Panthers impressed upon me the need to learn from other peoples' struggles. I think I have done that and that is one of the reasons why I am an anarchist today. After all, when old strategies don't work, you need to look for other ways of doing things to see if you can get yourself unstuck and move forward again. In the Panthers we drew a lot from nationalists, Marxist-Leninists, and others like them, but their approaches to social change had significant problems and I delved into anarchism to see if there are other ways to think about making a revolution.

I learned about anarchism from letters and literature sent to me while in various prisons around the country. At first I didn't want to read any of the material I received—it seemed like anarchism was just

about chaos and everybody doing their own thing—and for the longest time I just ignored it. But there were times—when I was in segregation—that I didn't have anything else to read and, out of boredom, finally dug in (despite everything I had heard about anarchism up to the time). I was actually quite surprised to find analyses of peoples' struggles, peoples' cultures, and peoples' organizational formations—that made a lot of sense to me.

These analyses helped me see important things about my experience in the Panthers that had not been clear to me before. For example, I realized that there was a problem with my love for people like Huey P. Newton, Bobby Seal, and Eldridge Cleaver and the fact that I had put them on a pedestal. After all, what does it say about you, if you allow someone to set themselves up as your leader and make all your decisions for you? What anarchism

helped me see was that you, as an individual, should be respected and that no one is important enough to do your thinking for you. Even if we thought of Huey P. Newton or Eldridge Cleaver as the baddest revolutionaries in the world, I should see myself as the baddest revolutionary, just like them. Even if I am young, I have a brain. I can think. I can make decisions.

I thought about all this while in prison and found myself saying, "Man, we really set ourselves up in a way that was bound to create problems and produce schisms. We were bound to follow programs without thinking." The history of the Black Panther Party, as great as it is, has those skeletons. The smallest person on the totem pole was supposed to be a worker and the one on the top was the one with the brains. But in prison I learned that I could have made some of these decisions myself and that people around me could have made these decisions themselves. Although I appreciated everything that the leaders of the Black Panther Party did, I began to see that we can do things differently and thus draw more fully on our own potentials and move even further towards real self-determination. Although it wasn't easy at first, I stuck with the anarchist material and found that I couldn't put it down once it started giving me insights. I wrote to people in Detroit and Canada who had been sending me literature and asked them to send more.

However, none of what I received dealt with Black folks or Latinos. Maybe there were occasional discussions of the Mexican revolution, but nothing dealt with us, here, in the United States. There was an overwhelming emphasis on those who became the anarchist founding fathers—Bakunin, Kropotkin, and some others—but these European figures, who were addressing European struggles, didn't really speak to me.

I tried to figure out how this applies to me. I began to look at Black history again, at African history, and at the histories and struggles of other people of color. I found many examples of anarchist practices in non-European societies, from the most ancient times to the present. This was very important to me: I needed to know that it is not just European people who can function in an anti-authoritarian way, but that we all can.

I was encouraged by things I found in Africa—not so much by the ancient forms that we call tribes—but by modern struggles that occurred in Zimbabwe, Angola, Mozambique, and Guinea-Bissau. Even though they were led by vanguardist organizations, I saw that people were building radical, democratic communities on the ground. For the first time, in these colonial situations, African peoples were creating what was the Angolans called "popular power." This popular power took a very anti-authoritarian form: people were not only conducting their lives, but also transforming them while fighting whatever foreign power was oppressing them. However, in every one of these liberation struggles new repressive structures were imposed as soon as people got close to liberation: the leadership was obsessed with ideas of government, of raising a standing army, of controlling the people when the oppressors were expelled. Once the so-called victory was accomplished, the people—who had fought for years against their oppressors—were disarmed and instead of having real popular power, a new party was installed at the helm of the state. So, there were no real revolutions or true liberation in Angola, Guinea-

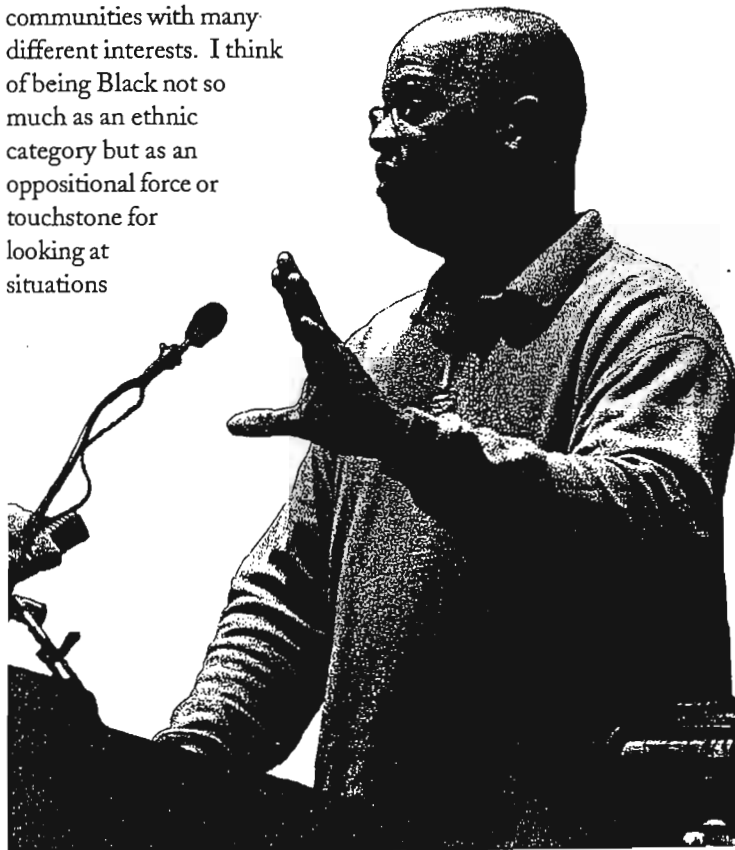
Bissau, Mozambique, and Zimbabwe because they simply replaced a foreign oppressor with an indigenous oppressor.

So, here I am, in the United States fighting for Black liberation, and wondering: how can we avoid situations like that? Anarchism gave me a way to respond to this question by insisting that we put into place, as we struggle now, structures of decision-making and doing things that continually bring more people into the process, and not just let the most "enlightened" folks make decisions for everyone else. The people themselves have to create structures in which they articulate their own voice and make their own decisions. I didn't get that from other ideologies: I got that from anarchism.

I also began to see, in practice, that anarchistic structures of decision-making are possible. For example, at the protests against the Republican National Convention in August 2000 I saw normally excluded groups—people of color, women, and queers—participate actively in every aspect of the mobilization. We did not allow small groups to make decisions for others and although people had differences, they were seen as good and beneficial. It was new for me, after my experience in the Panthers, to be in a situation where people are not trying to be on the same page and truly embraced the attempt to work out our sometimes conflicting interests. This gave me some ideas about how anarchism can be applied.

It also made me wonder: if it can be applied to the diverse groups at the convention protest, could I, as a Black activist, apply these things in the Black community?

Some of our ideas about who we are as a people hamper our struggles. For example, the Black community is often considered a monolithic group, but it is actually a community of communities with many different interests. I think of being Black not so much as an ethnic category but as an oppositional force or touchstone for looking at situations



differently. Black culture has always been oppositional and is all about finding ways to creatively resist oppression here, in the most racist country in the world. So, when I speak of a Black anarchism, it is not so tied to the color of my skin but who I am as a person, as someone who can resist, who can see differently when I am stuck, and thus live differently.

What is important to me about anarchism is its insistence that you should never be stuck in old, obsolete approaches and always try to find new ways of looking at things, feeling, and organizing. In my case, I first applied anarchism in the early 1990s in a collective we created to put out the Black Panther newspaper again. I was still a closet anarchist at this point. I wasn't ready yet to come out and declare myself an *anarchist*, because I already knew what folks were going to say and how they were going to look at me. Who would they see when I say *anarchist*? They would see the white anarchists, with all the funny hair etc, and say "how the heck are you going to hook up with *that*?"

There was a divide in this collective: on the one side there were older comrades who were trying to reinvent the wheel and, on the other, myself and a few others who were saying, "Let's see what we can learn from the Panther experience and build upon and improve it. We can't do things the same way." We emphasized the importance of an anti-sexist perspective—an old issue within the Panthers—but the other side was like, "I don't want to hear all that feminist stuff." And we said, "That's fine if you don't want to hear it, but we want the young folks to hear it, so they know about some of the things that did not work in the Panthers, so they know that we had some internal contradictions that we could not overcome." We tried to press the issue, but it became a battle and the discussions got so difficult that a split occurred. As this point, I left the collective and began working with anarchist and anti-authoritarian groups, who have really been the only ones to consistently try to deal with these dynamics thus far.

One of the most important lessons I also learned from anarchism is that you need to look for the radical things that we already do and try to encourage them. This is why I think there is so much potential for anarchism in the Black community: so much of what we already do is anarchistic and doesn't involve the state, the police, or the politicians. We look out for each other, we care for each other's kids, we go to the store for each other, we find ways to protect our communities. Even churches still do things in a very communal way to some extent. I learned that there are ways to be radical without always passing out literature and telling people, "Here is the picture, if you read this you will automatically follow our organization and join the revolution." For example, participation is a very important theme for anarchism and it is also very important in the Black community. Consider jazz: it is one of the best illustrations of an existing radical practice because it assumes a participatory connection between the individual and the collective and allows for the expression of who you are, within a collective setting, based on the enjoyment and pleasure of the music itself. Our communities can be the same way. We can bring together all kinds of diverse perspectives to make music, to make revolution.

How can we nurture every act of freedom? Whether it is with people on the job or the folks that hang out on the corner, how can we

plan and work together? We need to learn from the different struggles around the world that are not based on vanguards. There are examples in Bolivia. There are the Zapatistas. There are groups in Senegal building social centers. You really have to look at people who are trying to live and not necessarily trying to come up with the most advanced ideas. We need to de-emphasize the abstract and focus what is happening on the ground.

How can we bring all these different strands together? How can we bring in the Rastas? How can we bring in the people on the west coast who are still fighting the government strip-mining of indigenous land? How can we bring together all of these peoples to begin to create a vision of America that is for all of us?

Oppositional thinking and oppositional risks are necessary. I think that is very important right now and one of the reasons why I think anarchism has so much potential to help us move forward. It is not asking of us to dogmatically adhere to the founders of the tradition, but to be open to whatever increases our democratic participation, our creativity, and our happiness.

We just had an Anarchist People of Color conference in Detroit on October 3rd to the 5th. One hundred thirty people came from all over the country. It was great to just see ourselves and the interest of people of color from around the United States in finding ways of thinking outside of the norm. We saw that we could become that voice in our communities that says, "Wait, maybe we don't need to organize like that. Wait, the way that you are treating people within the organization is oppressive. Wait, what is your vision? Would you like to hear mine?" There is a need for those kinds of voices within our different communities. Not just our communities of color, but in every community there is a need to stop advancing ready-made plans and to trust that people can collectively figure out what to do with this world. I think we have the opportunity to put aside what we thought would be the answer and fight together to explore different visions of the future. We can work on that. And there is no one answer: we've got to work it out as we go.

Although we want to struggle, it is going to be very difficult because of the problems that we have inherited from this empire. For example, I saw some very hard, emotional struggles at the protests against the Republican National Convention. But people stuck to it, even if they broke down crying in the process. We are not going to get through some of our internal dynamics that have kept us divided unless we are willing to go through some really tough struggles. This is one of the other reasons why I say there is no answer: we've just got to go through this.

Our struggles here in the United States affect everybody in the world. People on the bottom are going to play a key role and the way we relate to people on the bottom is going to be very important. Many of us are privileged enough to be able to avoid some of the most difficult challenges and we will need to give up some of this privilege in order to build a new movement. The potential is there. We can still win—and redefine what it means to win—but we have the opportunity to advance a richer vision of freedom than we have ever had before. We have to be willing to try.

As a Panther, and as someone who went underground as an urban guerrilla, I have put my life on the line. I have watched my comrades die and spent most of my adult life in prison. But I still

believe that we can win. Struggle is very tough and when you cross that line, you risk going to jail, getting seriously hurt, killed, and watching your comrades getting seriously hurt and killed. That is not a pretty picture, but that is what happens when you fight an entrenched oppressor. We are struggling and will make it rough for them, but struggle is also going to be rough for us too.

This is why we have to find ways to love and support each other through tough times. It is more than just believing that we can win: we need to have structures in place that can carry us through when we feel like we cannot go another step. I think we can move again if we can figure out some of those things. This system has got to come down. It hurts us every day and we can't give up. We have to get there. We have to find new ways.

Anarchism, if it means anything, means being open to whatever it takes in thinking, living, and in our relationships—to live fully and win. In some ways, I think they are both the same: living to the fullest is to win. Of course we will and must clash with our oppressors and we need to find good ways of doing it. Remember those on the bottom who are most impacted by this. They might have different perspectives on how this fight is supposed to go. If we can't find ways for meeting face-to-face to work that stuff out, old ghosts will re-appear and we will be back in the same old situation that we have been in before.

You all can do this. You have the vision. You have the creativity. Do not allow anyone to lock that down. ✨

IAS On the Web

As reported in our last newsletter, we continue to be very busy publishing material to our new website. In addition to our monthly web column "Theory & Politics," we have begun building an on-line library of works that the IAS has supported through its granting program. New material now available in our on-line library (<http://www.anarchist-studies.org/library>) include:

Three articles by Lucien van der Walt including *In This Struggle, Only the Workers and Peasants will Go All the Way to the End: Towards a History of Anarchist Anti-Imperialism* (<http://www.anarchist-studies.org/article/articleview/48/1/7/>), *Fight for Africa, Which you Deserve: The Industrial Workers of Africa in South Africa, 1917-1921* (<http://www.anarchist-studies.org/article/articleview/47/1/7/>), and *A History of the IWW in South Africa* (<http://www.anarchist-studies.org/article/articleview/52/1/7/>). All three articles draw from van der Walt's IAS supported study of *Anarchism and Revolutionary Syndicalism in South Africa, 1904-1921*.

Peter Lamborn Wilson's complete final project *Brand: An Italian Anarchist and His Dream* (<http://www.anarchist-studies.org/article/articleview/46/1/7/>) is now available. In this piece, Wilson pays tribute to the life of Stirnerite anarchist Frank Brand.

In *Where Does Anarchist Theory Come From?* (<http://www.anarchist-studies.org/article/articleview/51/1/7/>), Sandra Jeppesen uses Ann Hansen's book *Direct Action* to explore where anarchist theory emerges from, and the relationship between anarchist theory and practice. This essay is drawn from Jeppesen's larger IAS supported study of anarchist culture titled *Anarchy, Revolution, Freedom: Towards Anarchist Cultural Theory*.

"Theory & Politics," the IAS's semi-regular web column (http://www.anarchist-studies.org/publications/theory_politics), features the following new articles:

In *Post-Left Anarchy: Leaving the Left Behind* (<http://www.anarchist-studies.org/article/articleview/43/1/1/>), Jason

McQuinn of *Anarchy Magazine* offers an overview of post-left anarchism and why anarchists should embrace it as a platform for moving anarchism. In response to McQuinn, and post-leftism in general, Peter Staudenmaier of the Institute for Social Ecology counters the post-leftist argument in *Anarchists in Wonderland: The Topsy-Turvy World of Post-Left Anarchy* (<http://www.anarchist-studies.org/article/articleview/45/1/1/>). Following Staudenmaier's critique, several exchanges between McQuinn and Staudenmaier ensued, including *The Incredible Lameness of Left-Anarchism* (<http://www.anarchist-studies.org/article/articleview/49/1/1/>), *Challenge Accepted: Post-Leftism's Rejection of the Left as a Whole* (<http://www.anarchist-studies.org/article/articleview/50/1/1/>), and *Worthwhile Debate Requires Communication: Evasion and Denial Don't Cut It* (<http://www.anarchist-studies.org/article/articleview/56/1/1/>).

In *Anarchism's Promise for Anti-Capitalist Resistance* (<http://www.anarchist-studies.org/article/articleview/53/1/1/>), IAS Board Member Cindy Milstein explains how anarchism has been a defining force within the development of contemporary anti-capitalist struggle.

Inspired by the debates surrounding contemporary anarchist theory and post-anarchism, including articles run in "Theory and Politics" on this subject, IAS grant recipient Sandra Jeppesen offers an overview of the issues she believes a contemporary anarchism needs to engage in *Seeing Past the Outpost of Post-Anarchism. Anarchy: Axiomatic* (<http://www.anarchist-studies.org/article/articleview/55/1/1/>)

Lastly, many articles from the IAS's new publication, *The New Formulation: An Anti-Authoritarian Review of Books* (<http://www.newformulation.org>), are now available on-line, including a new review by Michael Glavin: *Power, Subjectivity, Resistance: Three Works on Postmodern Anarchism* (<http://www.newformulation.org/4glavin.htm>). ✨

Resistance, Community, and Renewal

The Anarchist People of Color Conference

On October 3-5, 2003 approximately 140 anarchists of color gathered in Detroit, Michigan to participate in the first ever Anarchist People of Color (APOC) Conference. We asked four conference participants to reflect on various aspects of this unprecedented event.

Given the history of the Left and the anarchist movement in the US, why was the APOC gathering significant? What were some of the conference's successes and what, if any, difficulties were encountered?

Ernesto Aguilar: Our biggest success is that we affirmed that we are not alone. We also encouraged real reflection about our identity as a group, which isn't terribly political in a conventional sense but is very important in a day-to-day way.

The conference has inspired local groups to come together and discuss how we work together and make a difference on the neighbourhood level. It also prompted one-on-one discussions about what anarchism means and how we can make it accessible and understandable to everybody. I think subcultures give people the privilege of taking for granted what it means, but we need to bring our ideas and struggles to the masses of people, not to mention our grandmothers and people who don't have a personal or emotional investment in being political or even liberal. Struggling on these fronts brought us together.

One of our biggest challenges coming out of the conference is differentiating ourselves, and understanding that we are not just an anarchist faction of brown people. We need to see ourselves as part of and allied with an oppressed peoples' freedom movement that prioritizes organizing and social structures in bottom-up ways.

To that end, there has been a debate since the conference, on occasion led by confused colored folks, over autonomous people of color spaces and why they are important and why our autonomy is necessary. My expectation is that people flipping for their "white allies" and fighting against autonomy will be rejected. Yet, this debate is healthy and needs to be had, because it speaks to our core values as a movement. Are we a faction of the white-dominated struggle because we call ourselves anarchists or is our primary alliance with Black people, Third World insurgencies, and all people of color because we are united in our struggles and are still willing to work with, and be challenged in, our politics? Do our politics shape our aspirations or do our aspirations shape our politics? We are still engaged in this important discussion.

I've heard criticism that there wasn't enough of a focus on anarchist politics at the conference. I share the concern that we need to avoid workshops on things that people can hear at other events. But for us to root up preconceptions and forge anarchist ideas that are successful, we need to pitch the old and start having a new, constructive conversation. However, a weakness of the conference and in our struggle is that we are replicating some white anarchist trends, and covering the same ground. The key is starting those new, constructive conversations. We can't talk about anti-war organizing, for example, before we talk about the war within ourselves, internalized oppression, white supremacy, and self-determination, not to mention national liberation and independence.

Heather Ajani: The APOC gathering was significant because the history of the left and the anarchist movement is so dominated by white people. I can't recall a time when anarchists of color have come together in a separate space as we did in Detroit last October. The fact that this conference happened at all, and that so many people came, is a huge success. What is most important is that the APOC conference created a space that hadn't been physically carved out within the current radical milieu: folks were able to come together and dialogue about their experiences as people of color and talk about how to gain empowerment and strength, not only among other activists but also as radicals in their own communities. Any difficulties that occurred were prior to the conference and had to do with our organizing efforts. That kind of stuff happens and it didn't overshadow the conference,

Ernesto Aguilar is the founder of the APOC list and website (www.illegalvoices.org/apoc/) and hosts the Latino-issues radio show *Sexto Sol* on Pacifica Radio KPFT. He lives in Houston, Texas.

Heather Ajani, recently from Phoenix, Arizona, is currently traveling and conducting interviews with various people of color for an upcoming anthology that will highlight resistance and radicalism in communities of color. For the past five years she has worked with Phoenix Copwatch and various other projects related to criminal justice.

Walidah Imarisha is editor of *AWOL Magazine: Revolutionary Artists Workshop*, a political hip hop magazine. She is also one half of the poetic duo Good Sista/Bad Sista with her partner Turiya Autry.

Angel González is a working class Puerto Rican/Spanish Revolutionary Anarchist currently involved with organizing in Portland, Oregon. He is involved with APOC organizing locally, the Federation of Northwest Anarcho-Communists, a forming male ally group, and worked until recently with the Portland Anti-Capitalist Action newspaper *Little Beirut*.

because people didn't let it. People realize that our movement is what we make it, that the conference wasn't centered around any one person, that it didn't represent a "changing of the guard" from older politicians to newer members of the radical people of color community. It was about people working together, learning from each other, listening, and taking the experience away with themselves. Even when there was a glitch with a workshop or a debate, folks were able to step back and immediately reflect on why things happened the way they did. I have never seen such open dialogue and immediate, on-site resolution of issues.

Walidah Imarsha: The history of the left and the anarchist movement in the US has been one very heavily dominated by white standards and ways of organizing. People of color have had to try to work within an overwhelmingly white movement that often acted with indifference or outright racism to their issues. The APOC gathering was momentous in that it helped to place APOC in a political context here in the US, helped us to see that we were not alone, and that there are many, many anti-authoritarian or anarchist folks of color.

It also helped us connect to our own history of anarchism. As various peoples of color, most of us have a culture of anti-authoritarianism, whether it was called communalism, tribalism, primitivism, or whatever other name given to it by European colonizers. Anarchism, to me, is a fancy name for what cultures of color have been practicing for millennia. The APOC conference gave us a foundation to realize this and to work toward rebuilding what has been stolen from us.

Angel González: Everyone I knew who participated in the conference was aware that something big was happening. What we are seeing is the emergence of a new movement, even a new identity. To myself, and many others, the conference was about building community and reconnecting with our identities in different ways.

As far as difficulties, there were rumors of a potential attack by white supremacists and internal disputes among organizers, but these were overshadowed by the overwhelmingly positive conference experience. There were, however, minor issues with fundraising for transportation. We had a lot of support but unfortunately we received the money too late for it to be of any use!



Clearly, anarchists need to continuously innovate and learn from thinkers outside of the anarchist tradition if anarchism is going to be relevant to the world. Can you identify some non-anarchist thinkers that are or could be especially relevant to anarchists of color? If so, why are they relevant?

AGUILAR: I mentioned various authors worth reading in an interview I did with *The Female Species* zine some time back and a lot of people took offense at the fact that I named figures like Che Guevara, for example. I'm glad you are asking that question, because I think this relates to another healthy debate that speaks to our core values.

It is not enough for anarchists to speak up against the state, uphold the necessity of anti-authoritarianism, and revolt. If previous rebellions have shown us anything, it's that our idealism and taking to the streets can only take this so far. We may feel righteous about our action, but we leave no legacy and the powers never change. In my opinion, we need to be more conscious of the world around us and its history. Knowledge of the past is essential for understanding the present and grasping what forces are at work: it gives us hints about future developments. We need to start examining what non- and even anti-anarchist thinkers of color have to say. Anyone who is open to learning should be willing to look beyond the tradition and see where we can grow.

There are some pretty obvious anti-colonial movements that should be required study material, if only because they did something that inspired so many by standing up to settlers and showing them the door. That's a beautiful thing, no matter how you slice it.

I always recommend J. Sakai's *Settlers* (Chicago: Morningstar Press, 1989) and Reies López Tijerina's autobiography *They Called Me "King Tiger"* (Houston, TX: Arte Publico Press, 2001). In addition, a compañera recently shared with me some powerful writings by academics (a category of writers I normally dismiss): Jared Sexton, Steve Martinot, and Tomas Almaguer have all written some fantastic works.

AUANI: There is a tendency among the anarchist community to cling to the sacred texts by folks such as Bakunin, Goldman, Berkman, etc. Though their ideas and vision are important as the foundations of anarchism, they failed to address race, which was problematic during the development of anarchism at the turn of the 20th century and remains a social problem today (as do class and gender). Off

the top of my head, I can name a number of authors/theorists/thinkers that people of color should read, such as W.E.B. DuBois, C.L.R. James, Reies López Tijerina, Gloria Anzaldúa, Assata Shakur, and Malcolm X. These authors are relevant because they not only address the way race functions but also look beyond traditional ways of thinking. I would also recommend looking at past resistance movements, especially within the American context, like as the Abolitionists, Civil Rights movement groups such as Student Non-violent Coordinating Committee, the Black Panthers, the Brown Berets, the feminist struggle, farm workers struggles in the southwest (César Chávez, etc.), and the resistance of black workers in Detroit's auto factories as spelled out in Dan Georgakas's book *Detroit, I Do Mind Dying* (Boston, MA: South End, 1998). I would also recommend Rodolfo Acuña's *Occupied America: A History of Chicanos* (Boston, MA: Pearson Longman, 2003) and works by J. Sakai and Noel Ignatiev.

González: I think it's important to read current writings. Anarchists have a tendency to get stuck in turn of the century authors and their views. Some current writers I would recommend include Arundati Roy, Ward Churchill, bell hooks, Angela Davis, Audrey Lorde, Gloria Anzaldúa, among many others. It's important to understand where people are coming from, to understand their struggles, and to understand what being an ally means. A lot of anarchists have a tendency to think that they really do know everything, which in itself proves them wrong.

I also feel it is important to look at anarchist history and read writings by anarchists from non-Western countries. It is a racist concept that all anarchists writings come from "whites" or Western countries. Anarchism has a rich history in Japan, Korea, China, and throughout Latin America. Anarchism is still strong and vibrant in many of these countries—which is continuously ignored—and still

generally seen as a Western identity, even though as an idea it has been applied to various peoples' struggles throughout the world.

There was a lot of diversity among participants in the APOC conference: people of African-American, Arab, Asian, Latino, and indigenous descent were all present. Was there a strong sense of shared identity among the conference goers or was this diversity difficult to negotiate?

Imarisha: There was a strong sense of unity because we all knew we were there for a collective purpose. Most of us had never been in a space like this before, with so many other APOCs, and we were in awe. Everyone I talked to left feeling invigorated and rejuvenated after seeing the complex, multi-faceted, and determined face of APOC.

Ajani: I think it is safe to say we were able to feel a shared identity through our identities as people of color. Dialoging about those cultural differences, their histories and points of unity amongst radical/anarchist people of color is a natural step and one that hasn't been overlooked. The diversity at the conference didn't seem to me something that needed to be overcome: people were excited and inspired to see each other and to have a space in which we were not made to feel tokenized or left on the margins—that in itself was tremendous and empowering.

Aguilar: I caught two currents here. One was the vibe that all these other people of color were there and that we were thinking on another level. That was deep, because it speaks to the sense of humanity you can feel with people you've never met and the alienation many of us have experienced when in contact with white-led movements. The other current was one of curiosity, because some folks have never met, for instance, another Asian anarchist.

CAPITALISM IS ENSLAVING OUR PEOPLE



TOWARDS SOCIALISM FOR LIBERATION

This page and previous page: Illustrations by two printmakers from the Community Arts Project (now renamed as the Arts and Media Access Centre), Cape Town, South Africa.

One of the most essential things is extending collective love and respect to the level of Black attendance at the conference. One of the things we don't acknowledge is that Black people carry a heavy load into this. Many other groupings clash with Black folks, and there's an unspoken prejudice that permeates the room anywhere. Everyone there seemed to have the good fortune of breaking away from the external tensions between ethnicities in many areas—Blacks and Latinos comes to mind—and bringing a really open spirit to the gathering. The level of trust was touching.

Proposals for the development of APOC organizations where dropped at the conference in favor of dialogue and more informal movement-building activities. Do you believe there is a need for APOC based organizations/networks and, if so, what form should such organizations take and what role would they play? What problems do you think such organizations might encounter?

Ajani: The proposals were dropped because a need was seen to first create a dialogue amongst people of color and figure out where we are, what kind of work we are doing, what we need, and why. Every group of people goes through this process in some capacity (or, if they don't, they should). As one of the co-authors of the first proposals for an APOC network, I see the need for APOC based organizations/networks and think that we should collectively decide how that group is structured and what our political points of unity are. But I was not surprised that people wanted to take a more organic approach in building APOC. I didn't expect to leave with an organization that people signed on to: I expected to leave with exactly what I left with, a starting point. In the future I think we will have to address how we intend to work together. An APOC organization could only mean a strong movement of people of color who are coming together to challenge their oppressions as marginalized peoples. For people of color, our struggle is not necessarily out of choice, but a refusal to assimilate into a system of complacency. There are potential problems in every organization, and the key is to have spaces for self-reflection, room for fluidity, and not to ignore history.

González: Currently there is a strong need and desire to redefine anarchism within the context of our experiences. "What does a people of

color Anarchism look like?" was a question discussed at the Detroit conference, and the dialogue is still happening around the country. Although I do believe organization is needed, and will likely form at some stage, right now the emphasis is on community building and consciousness raising. There are several APOC collectives forming around the country, so something is happening organically. Communications networks are also being created.

In regards to difficulties we might face, I would say the notable difficulty would be one we already face: police repression. I hope both APOC collectives and future, larger structures will organize with security in mind.

Imarisha: We always have to be careful when building institutions, because people of color are already trapped in institutions that smother us. APOC is so newly birthed and we are still figuring out this new and yet very old child of ours. As we grow together, as a movement and as individual organizers, and as the organizing work we're already doing grows, we will decide what shape our work will take. I have no doubt it will take many different shapes, molded by the powerful and insightful work already being done.

Aguiar: Looking back, one of the best things to come out of the conference was that no organization came out of it.

As I mentioned earlier, I think one of the biggest issues we face as a freedom movement is dealing with internalized issues such as self-hate, disunity, and lack of trust. Unfortunately, many political movements are not equipped to deal with these. Although a righteous sense of indignation makes us want to fight back, we're lost without a clear base of unity. Without an analysis and a willingness to fight the war on all fronts, including the war in ourselves and among our nations, our anger is ruling the work instead of our vision for the future.

Networks are coming together now, but our organization will spring forth in a way I don't think anyone has seen in many years. In unofficial ways, we already have an organization, meaning that we already have committees, local groups are forming, and so on. Our basis of unity is broad and, as the movement matures, clarifying it might be helpful. ✨

American APOC Resources

Anarchist People of Color Website: A clearing house of news, events, essays, and commentary. Also features the APOC email discussion list. <http://www.illegalvoices.org/apoc/>

APOC National Arts Festival 2004: A summer tour promoting local discourse around identity and anti-authoritarian ideals in communities of color while supporting local artists of color. <http://www.summertour2004.com/>

Anarchist Panther: On-line version of IAS Board member Ashanti Alston's zine, including various other essays and talks. <http://www.anarco-nyc.net/anarchistpanther.html>

NYC APOC: New York City based APOC group. <http://lists.riseup.net/www/info/apoc-nyc>

Chicago Anarchists of Color Tactically Unifying Struggles: CACTUS is a collective composed of and fighting for the struggles of people of color. <http://lists.riseup.net/www/info/cactus-announce>

Revolutionary Anarchist People of Color: Portland, Oreagon based APOC group. rapoc@ziplip.com

Revolutionary Anti-authoritarians of Color: RACE is a west coast collective of people of color with revolutionary anti-authoritarian politics. race@riseup.net or <http://passionbomb.com/race/>

East Bay Uprising: An anti-authoritarian of color collective located on the west coast which focuses on police repression and the drug war.

APOC Regional Gathering: A Northern California gathering happening the weekend of April 16th-18th at Barrow Hall at UC Berkeley. <http://sfbayapoc.org/>

Statement by:
 Dhoruba Bin Wahad
 U.S. Political Prisoner
 November 29, 1989

One of the most important issues requiring the attention of the African American community, its leaders and elected officials, but which is consistently shoved off of most of their political agendas is the issue of Black Political Prisoners in the United States.

The existence of Black Political prisoners in the U.S. touches on many facets of the struggle for African American political empowerment and the role of institutionalized racism in controlling that struggle. Moreover, the issue of Black political prisoners makes white America uncomfortable because it stabs at the heart of the racist injustice of a hypocritical society that speaks of Freedom and equality before the law while practicing political repression behind the guise of law enforcement. Many of our community leaders and elected representatives, lacking courage, are reluctant to disturb white America's sensibilities and therefore refuse to speak out on the very real issue of racist political repression and Political Prisoners in America.

Who among us can honestly say that many of today's political gains in the electoral arena did not come about as a consequence of the militant and uncompromising upsurges of the '60s and early '70s? Who then can deny that the repression visited upon the militant activists of that period paved the way for the Jesse Jackson and David Dinkins "democrats" of today? There can be little doubt in anyone's mind, after reviewing the facts of recent history, that the brutal government repression of groups during the '60s, such as the Black Panther Party, had a direct impact upon the contemporary struggle for Black political empowerment. COINTELPRO, while destroying militant African American organizations, at the same time permitted the system to become more "open" to those who were locked out of it because of the color of their skin or the status of their pocketbooks. Yet today many victims of COINTELPRO's rigged prosecutions still languish in prison - prisoners of the very institutions our elected representatives aspire to lead and absolutely nothing is said about the unjust nature of their imprisonment!

If it is politically acceptable for Jesse Jackson or David Dinkins to speak out on the injustice of Irish Republican Army Political Prisoner Joseph Doherty it should be acceptable for them to speak out on the numerous African American Political Prisoners held captive today, or is it safe to speak out about other political prisoners because their struggles are in other lands, in Northern Ireland, in South Africa. If our leaders can be vocal in support of Democratic Freedoms in Eastern Europe they should not be permitted to be silent on the lack of Freedom for Black Political Prisoners right here in the U.S. Those of you engaged in Community Activism should have the same access to our elected officials as the forces outside of our community to which they cater. If we are to be for real we must struggle against injustice at home and abroad.

Until such time as the issue of Black Political Prisoners is addressed in a principled and ethical manner by the entire spectrum of Black activists, community leaders and Black elected officials, it cannot be seriously proposed that we are struggling for the political integrity of the African American community. Because the right to organize oneself, to dissent, to defend ourselves from racist attack, to rid our community of the drug economy and value system, to assert our human rights over landlord property rights can never be contingent upon the repressive responses of the racist state. Such rights must ultimately rest upon the strength of our convictions and organizations. This means we must support those who struggled and sacrificed on behalf of the African American community. The Freedom of Black Political Prisoners is therefore an integral part of the total struggle for Black Political empowerment.

POWER TO THE PEOPLE
 FREE ALL POLITICAL PRISONERS

"Its about COMMUNITY yall. Facing each other and relying on each other for healing, strength and liberating power. Fuck the bullshit. We just gotta keep the forces of Hell outta our lives, our communities, our "nations," and our diverse communal world so we can begin to live GOOD LIVES. That's all. No rocket-scientist shit. GOOD LIVES that, in NO WAY will resemble this madness called the American Way of Life... hell yeah. QUILOMBOS, Communities of Resistance and Dignity..."

ALL POWER THRU THE PEOPLE

We need a Mau Mau. If they don't want to deal with the Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party, then we'll give them something else to deal with; if they don't want to deal with the Student Nonviolent (now National) Coordinating Committee (SNCC), then we will give them an alternative.

-- Malcolm X

The Anarchist People of Color Pledge without which One Simply Cannot be a *True* APOC revolutionary. Yeah, I said it! What! What!

-----I pledge ... One Nation Under a Groove-----

I pledge allegiance to the *funk*, the whole *funk*, and nothing but the *funk*, so help me James, Sly and George. Amen

Bootsy Collins, Funkadelic

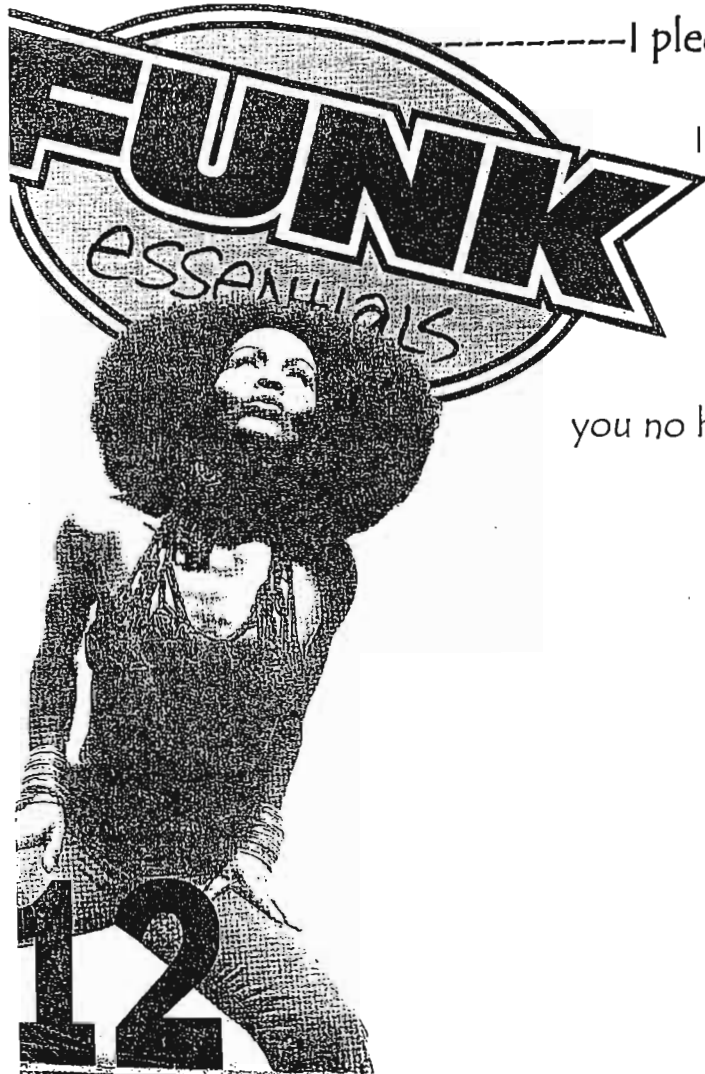
Behold, I am *Funkadelic*. I am not of your world. But fear me not. I will do you no harm. Loan me your funky mind and I shall play with it. For nothing is good unless you play with it.

And all that is good, is *nasty!*

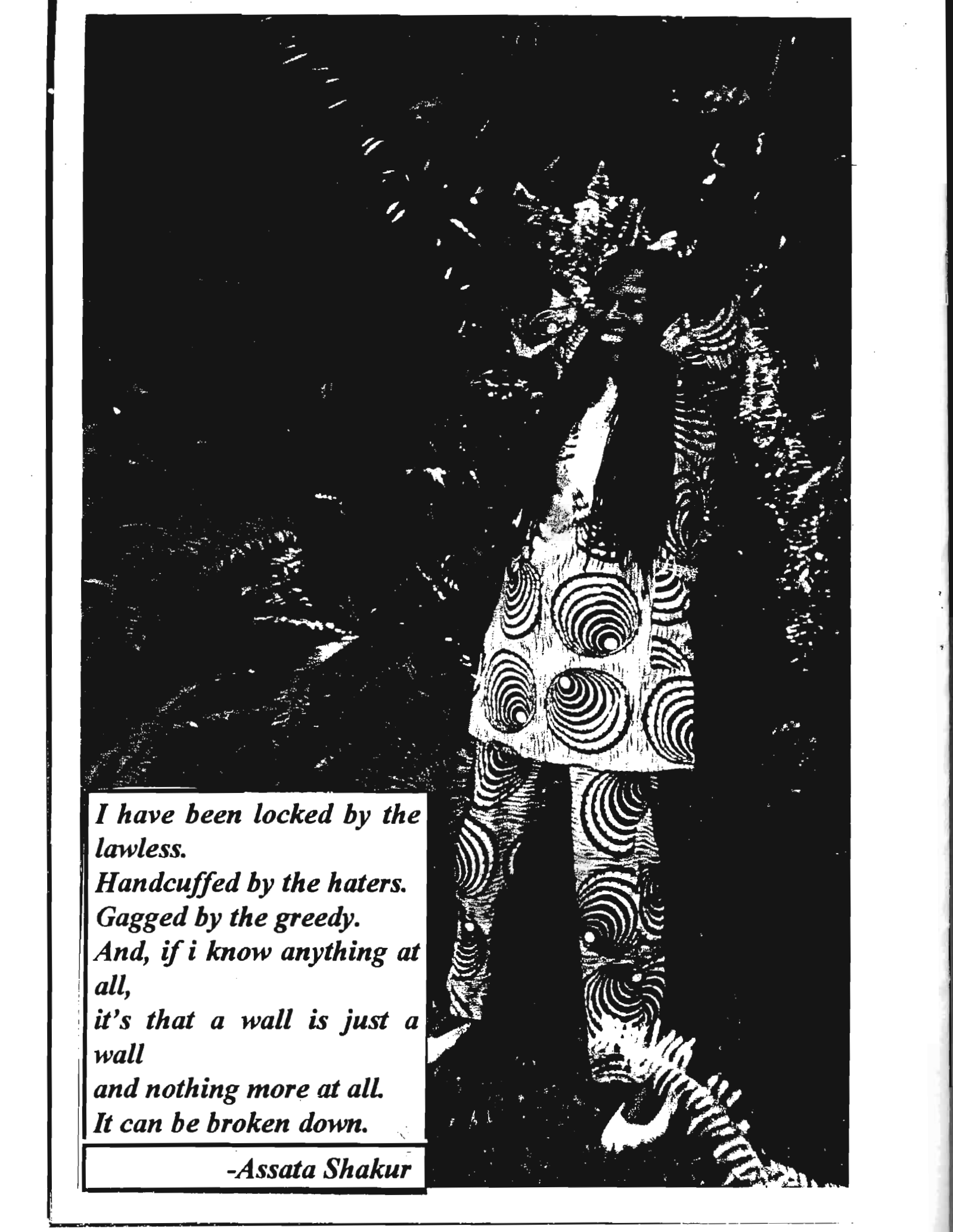
What is Soul, Funkadelic, 1969

I got a thing, you got a thing, everybody's got a thing (Lets get together and support one another).

Funkadelic



Must repeat **verbatim** to: Subcomandante delegate 0.097 Ashanti Omowali Alston, 347-403-5843, anarchistpanther@runbox.com



*I have been locked by the
lawless.
Handcuffed by the haters.
Gagged by the greedy.
And, if i know anything at
all,
it's that a wall is just a
wall
and nothing more at all.
It can be broken down.*

-Assata Shakur