# The Empire's Blindspots

**Reevaluating Poststructural Anarchism Through Anarchisms of Color**

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7/30/25

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## Introduction

In the early 20th century in America, the term "women's rights" was understood through a white liberal lens. It strictly referred to the expansion of rights, primarily for white women, with regard to voting and owning property. However, now in the 21st century, the term has expanded to include reproductive justice, trans inclusion, and intersectionality. While the term "women's rights" has not changed, its shift in meaning reflects the changes our society and culture has gone through. This same phenomenon can be seen in the words "liberal," "progressive," and even "terrorism." It generates the idea that fixed definitions are, in fact, not fixed. This is called anti-essentialism, which is the idea that the definitions we associate with a concept are not essential to its identity and can change depending on context or culture. Similarly, this is close to anti-universalism, which says that values and concepts do not mean the same thing to each individual. Mixed together with critiques of power dynamics, this makes up post-structuralism. Utilizing these viewpoints, the updated definitions of anarchism must appropriately reflect recent changes in society and culture, specifically regarding people of color. This piece aims to push poststructural anarchism further by emphasizing its anti-essentialist and anti-universalist dimensions as central to rethinking what anarchism can mean today. In doing so, the resulting anarchism would decenter its eurocentricity and whiteness, recognizing that anarchisms of color are key to reshaping what it must mean in the present.

## Racial Hierarchies in Anarchist Thought and State Power

The anarchist movement began and almost died in Europe. Had it not been for Black and African, Indigenous, and various Asian ethnicities to adopt it as a framework of anti-authoritarianism, it would have died in the alleyways of Paris or the fields of Spain. Nearly all writers within the field were white men, which is something to be critical of as it claims to be a philosophy that seeks to set all people free. Both of these identities, "white" and "man," are identities not oppressed by the state unless they hold another marginalized identity. Even a disabled or queer white man would have their whiteness act as a shield, granting them privileges and protections that people of color do not have access to. This is obviously due to white people, specifically white men, benefiting historically and materially from systems of colonialism, slavery, and imperialism. This imbalance of power and representation has deeply shaped the evolution of anarchist thought, generating an extraordinary amount of blindspots. For example, British anarchistic thinkers in the 18th and 19th centuries had some of the most detailed analyses on the crown, the state, the church, and even the patriarchy. However, since Black and Brownness was seen as subhuman, these anarchists rarely integrated empire and white supremacy in their analyses. This in turn renders white protests through a labor lens as justified struggles for freedom, with African, Asian, and Latin American revolts of the enslaved seen as violent and animalistic. This same paradigm was seen recently in the United States in 2020. Black Lives Matter protestors were teargassed, called thugs, criminals, and anti-American as they called for an end to policing. The same year, militant conservatives, neo-nazis, and white supremacists raided the Capitol on January 6th, escaping nearly all media accountability. After all, through the media, an armed white supremacist holds less of a threat than students protesting a genocide. This contrast does not only reveal how racialized state violence is but

also how it shapes public perception. Just as early anarchist thought failed to blatantly confront empire and white supremacy, society today continues to privilege whiteness and minimize the threat posed by white violence while disproportionately criminalizing and delegitimizing Black and Brown resistance.

This level of white dominance ties directly into white rage, which can be either premeditated or reactionary. It is a defensive action to perceived threats of racial and social hierarchies that have favored them. Premeditated white rage is a calculated effort to maintain white dominance and supremacy as time goes on. This can look like legislative suppression, segregation, redlining, and institutional racism. Reactionary white rage can look like the KKK, "backing the blue," and consciously not supporting ethnic liberation movements. Premeditated rage lays the groundwork while reactionary rage erupts when these structures are challenged. White vigilante and supremacist organizations see themselves as extensions of law enforcement. Instead of rejecting state authority, they act out on their own interpretation of what they think state power should be doing, which in their eyes, is maintaining a racial hierarchy. In wake of Hurricane Katrina in 2005, the elevated neighborhood of Algiers Point was fairly unscathed while the remainder of New Orleans was completely devastated and flooded. Relief efforts utilized the dry neighborhood as an evacuation and triage point, which very quickly went south. As hurricane victims approached the neighborhood for food, shelter, and medicine, vigilante white men on the backs of trucks began patrolling the streets to "prevent looting." Roughly thirteen African Americans were shot and killed by the racist white men hurling slurs. This pattern of white rage shows how deeply intertwined racial hierarchies are with state power. Even when anarchists claim to reject the state, failing to hold whiteness accountable allows these hierarchies to remain intact. The Algiers Point killings demonstrate that state violence is not always enacted by the state itself, it is upheld by everyday white people who see themselves as defenders of order, which includes supermarket Karens. The definitions built by white European men failed to address how power is upheld outside the state. Early anarchist thought, with its fixation on the state as a singular entity, rarely accounted for this racialized form of power. If anarchism is to remain a relevant tool for liberation, it cannot rely on static definitions built by old white men who failed to center empire.

## What Are Anarchisms of Color?

Anarchisms of color refers to the anarchist traditions and movements that emerge from and center communities of color. Radicals of color were seeking to build anarchist politics and movements informed by their own cultural traditions, experiences of marginalization, and struggles against white supremacy and capitalism. The biggest drive, as expected, was "traditional" or European anarchism's neglect of race and colonial histories. Using Indian anarchism as an example, conversations around caste-based discrimination, Vedic and Dharmic perspectives, the Sarvodaya movement, and British anti-colonialism is unique to the region's histories and culture. The takeaway is that the lessons South Asians learned from themselves and their cultures impacted their entrance into built anti-authoritarianism. The Indian anarchist tradition is deeply infused with spirituality, village-level autonomy, and anti-caste critique. Many Indian anarchists' values align with those of B.R. Ambedkar, a Marathi social reformer who made massive strides towards caste equality. Even though he wasn't an anarchist, millions of South Asians call themselves

Ambedkarites and vastly outnumber communists by more than tenfold. Since it is their Indian culture that informs their anarchist pedagogy, this does not inform the praxes of Chicano/a, Native American, or Black anarchists. Chicano/a radicalism largely discusses anti-border politics, farmworker struggles, and Indigenous cultural preservation. Native Americans have large discourse about decolonization, sovereignty, and environmental protection. Black anarchists run far and wide with prison abolition, systemic racism, and internationalism across the African diaspora. All of these examples show that anarchisms of color are not just "additions" to a pre-existing "white anarchism," but entirely new formations that emerge from distinct cultural, historical, and material conditions. This is precisely what makes anarchisms of color anti-essentialist; they each reject the idea that there is a single definition of anarchism. Ultimately, they each show that Eurocentric anarchism was not created to liberate people of color. France, Spain, Italy, and England were instrumental in developing the anarchist movement. However, it was these very countries that pillaged others, set up racial hierarchies, and suppressed Indigenous peoples globally. Colonization and white supremacy are the reasons why anarchists of color have the traumas and viewpoints they do.

Histories of communities of color highlight what the empire will do to its own people to preserve itself. Even President Abraham Lincoln's Emancipation Proclamation had nothing to do with the dignity of enslaved Black people, focusing instead on depriving the South of their largest asset which was exploited labor. State-preservation was more important than liberating people to Lincoln. What does this do to a field of dissent? In the United States, most "victories" within liberal democracy such as abolition, civil rights, and decolonization were structured to preserve state power, not dismantle it. Ask how the idea of freedom has been defined both by the people and the powerful, and eventually, you will discover that what counts as "liberation" for white people is not the same as liberation for colonized peoples. Thankfully, there are large networks of anarchists of color across the West. Black anarchists have been able to find each other, which makes the jobs white leftists chose for themselves much harder. I once sat in a workshop at the Oakland anarchist book fair in 2024 where a white anarchist asked why there were so few anarchists of color in the room. Obviously we're not gone, we're building movements that refuse to center white leftist comfort. Movements that are rooted in our own histories, cultures, and survival. We don't need permission to resist. We never did.

*P.S. I have ZERO idea where THAT amount of white anarchists came from. We were in Oakland, California. Where did you come from? I was maybe one of three POC's there.*

## Points of Tension

I spent a night in Paris early in 2025 on the way back from a trip to India. I was conscious that I was in a city that saw violent revolutions, including an anarchist movement worthy of a PhD dissertation by itself. Despite my limited time, I wanted to visit some radical bookstores, which I did a decent amount of research on while in the city. I entered one, looked around their philosophy section, and then asked if there was a devoted anarchist literature section. The owner recommended me the same small area I combed through, but then said "there's some anarchist literature down there in there philosophy section, mainly because anarchism is really only a theoretical concept." Other customers who were overhead him snickered, as if they said "isn't that obvious?" in their pretentious French laughs. Whether he's right or not is outside of the

question, but what it showed me is that my idea of France as a radical and anarchist intellectual hub clashed with how ordinary Parisians actually viewed anarchist thought. What problems arise from anarchism, or poststructural anarchism in our case, only being seen as theoretical? How can anarchisms of color avoid this? Are they already doing it?

> "I don't care how much theory you got. If it don't have any practice applied to it, then that theory happens to be irrelevant." - Chairman Fred Hampton, Black Panther Party's Illinois Chapter, Olivet Baptist Church, Chicago, 1969.

When anarchism is strictly seen as theoretical, anything remotely anarchistic becomes hollow. Palestinian children throwing rocks at israeli tanks is no longer viewed as a legitimate act of resistance against settler colonial violence, but instead reduced to "anti-semitism," "terrorism," or "extremism." As Chairman Fred Hampton said in 1968, theory loses power when detached from practice. Radical thought becomes a thing of the past, turning into something behind a glass case in a museum. Anarchisms of color are rooted in material necessities caused by racial hierarchies. For white working class people, their discontents stem from labor exploitation while anarchisms of color are born from colonialism, racial violence, land dispossession, and state repression. Since these struggles deal with survival, cultural continuity, and community autonomy, anarchisms of color cannot afford to remain theoretical. Black trans mutual aid networks, Indigenous land reclamation efforts, and Chicano/a prison abolition work are just a few examples of anarchism of color in action. They ground themselves in material struggle that blurs the line between theory and practice, which is expected. Rather than writing manifestos first and acting later, knowledge is generated through direct confrontation with systems of oppression. Anarchism's definitions of liberation mean different things to different people. Toppling one hierarchy does not mean all hierarchies are toppled. Economic justice for minorities in America cannot happen until racial capitalism is toppled. Class war is not the only war, for a woman can still be the victim of misogyny even if she makes the same as a man. Even if economic justice has been theoretically accomplished, there is still a patriarchy that wishes to exploit women first and men second. For communities of color looking inward, toppling hierarchies and resetting power dynamics is the most anarchistic thing they can do without being a full-fledged anarchist. It's up them to figure out what works for them and what works for each other. Marxists and communists tout that class war is the only war. To me, that couldn't be further from the truth.

## Conclusion

Poststructuralist anarchism offers practitioners the language to see why "universal" definitions of liberation ultimately fail. Anti-essentialism reminds us that anarchism cannot be reduced to a single framework developed in Europe by white men. It must shift as cultures, histories, and material realities shift. Anti-universalism reminds us that liberation cannot look the same for all people. So long as racial capitalism exists, there will be an anarchism of color prepared to resist it. Poststructuralist anarchism provides the theoretical tools to critique not only the state, but also the ways in which power, identity, and meaning are constructed and maintained. Anarchisms of color are inherently post-structuralist, anti-essentialist, and anti-universalist because their very existence rejects the idea that anarchism has a fixed definition. What freedom means for Dalits in India, for Black trans women in the U.S., or for Palestinians under occupation cannot be collapsed

into one vision. Anarchisms of color embody these principles in practice, showing that theory must grow from lived struggle and not the other way around. They reveal that power operates not just through the state, but through racial hierarchies, colonial histories, and cultural domination that outlive any single government. The state did not kill the thirteen Black men in Algiers Point, but it empowered and modeled for the white men with distorted views to enact their violence. To decolonize anarchism is not to add diversity to a white framework, but instead to rethink the framework itself, breaking away from the illusion of universality. Proper poststructuralist anarchism demands we let go of static definitions, listen to the communities resisting power on their own terms, and recognize that anarchism's future does not lie in returning to Europe's past, but colonized peoples' everyday.

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