

Words and History Mean Things

A Response to “Addicted to Losing”

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Most of what comes out in the text “Addicted to Losing” is not new. Black anarchists and anti-authoritarians have been critiquing black non-profits, Black academics, Black activists and black authoritarians for years before the 2020 uprising. Black anarchists who have been active PRIOR to 2020 have been deeply aware of these critiques, mainly based on their experiences. We are unsure how connected the author is to Black anti-authoritarians but, best believe Black anarchists been having these conversations. There has been so much talk over the past four years about Black counter insurgency. It is important to recognize that Black revolutionaries have been theorizing about these formations long before it became popular or deemed important to do in the anarchist scene. We think it’s also important to recognize that most Black anarchists have been too busy doing anarchy to write articles on the cracker anarchist-baiting websites. We’ve included two critiques of the Black Counter-Insurgency written by Black revolutionaries prior to 2020. We don’t agree with everything in the texts; however, we think it is important to acknowledge that there is a history of Black radicals making our own critiques separate from the white, ill will editions and crimethinc milieus who continue to trail us politically.

<https://archive.iww.org/content/4th-precinct-black-anarchist%E2%80%99s-perspective-struggle-minneapolis%E2%80%99-northside-streets/>

<https://libcom.org/article/why-black-lives-matter-cincinnati-changing-its-name>

While there are actually parts of “Addicted to Losing” that we agree with, we struggle with a variety of parts within it as anarchists. We imagine the author(s) would consider us and our comrades as the people who hold “ressentiment” because we are critical of “efforts of radicals to increase their power of acting.” But what exactly does this mean?

For us, as anarchists, we have a certain set of political values that we operate from. That doesn’t mean we are “addicted to losing”, it means we have standards when it comes to our ethics. For instance, many Black male revolutionaries within the 60s and 70s engaged in misogynistic behavior towards Black women while simultaneously facing serious political repression. But because these men were engaged in revolutionary activity and faced repression, misogynistic violence was often covered up or excused. Assata Shakur talks about this in her autobiography and how detrimental the culture of protecting abuse was to the struggle. Were Black revolutionaries who critiqued misogynistic violence “addicted to losing” or “violating security culture” or

“engaging in horizontal repression?” As Kuwasi Balagoon said, those unwilling to critique racism, authoritarianism and misogyny when it rears it’s head are ROBOTS.

The argument on the necessity of revolutionary strength and castigating those who are critical as “nihilists enemies” or “resentful” is essentially the same as those who ignored the gender based violence back in the 60s/70s. This is a serious backpedal from the 60s and 70s in terms of gender politics in particular. But this can be applied to anything that is viewed as a revolutionary “strategy.” It is politically convenient to call anyone who is critical of a tactic, strategy or behavior as “ressentiment.” We think it is strange that the text focuses upon “ressentiment politics” as “police attempts at freedom that lie outside of their preferred grammar of conflict.” It is extremely valid and necessary for political formations/groups to reflect and critique themselves and others. We were again confused on how buying property, which the text mentions is a very standard and correct thing to do in racial capitalist society, is somehow an attempt at freedom not a continuation and investment in white, western, and bourgeois lifestylism. Perhaps in the text, there is an underlying right wing association of property with freedom (unsurprisingly considering the appelist flirtation with right wing politics). However, we desire property to be destroyed.

“Efforts of radicals to increase their power of acting, whether through acquiring spaces like houses and social centers, money for bail funds and projects, or even forming larger strategies about how to defeat the police in the streets are treated as a violation of an implicit set of values that venerates the experience of being trapped.”

This part of the text is so convenient as it speaks of radicals as if we do not exist within a racial and gendered society. “Increasing our power to act” is not something that happens outside of racial, class and gender confines. As the author suggests, these contradictions have to be moved through and addressed rather than derided as “ressentiment”. But again, it’s easier to defame your critics as do nothing nihilists who are “addicted to losing” while you gentrify Black neighborhoods to build your isolated “community.”

The whole text becomes even more strange and contradictory when the author references widespread rape culture and segregation of revolutionary formations. The question is why the author chooses to acknowledge these problems while contributing to them by writing what essentially reads as an upset screed conflating anarchists who critique with the black counter-insurgency. This is why it is hard to take the text seriously especially since it’s been published on ill will (a well known appelist project). To read a deeper critique of the appelist tendency and why they love property (whitey loves property), go check out Against the Party of Insurrection.

<https://www.anarchistfederation.net/against-the-party-of-insurrection-a-look-at-appelism-in-the-u-s/>

And finally, maybe the authors should consider that Black anarchists and revolutionaries are having strategic conversations and building projects that they have just not been invited to participate in? As participants at Bash Back 2023 discussed the problem is not just resentment of whites but, also tokenization and Black radicals safety in that tokenization.

“One of our comrades back home who didn’t attend remarked that he felt anarchist convergences are often disappointing because very often the Black people who attend them don’t really fuck with Black people. Anarchism, unfortunately, can exist as a subculture for Black people who are uncomfortable being around other Black folks, which opens up the space for tokenism.”
– From Black Anarchist Reflections from Bash Back and Beyond

Unfortunately, the politics of “Addicted to Losing” seem to lose the plot when it comes to actually moving through Black liberation alongside Black people. Generally, there are parts of

this text that read like someone airing out their personal problems and we think it maybe speaks to the author(s) lack of presence within the “autonomous organization of racialized people” that they speak of. As an aside, white people are racialized too but, we understand they meant organizations of racially oppressed people. But again, a lot of the problems described in this text just seem like the result of spending too much time in a white milieu. And by white, we mean politically white as well as phenotypically.

For instance, “the militant embodies a knight-like position with respect to the crowd: rather positioning themselves within it, they act like a kind distant protector, ever anxious to ensure that the membrane between savior and saved is never breached.”

This sounds like a personal problem. No Black militants we know be doing this shit, it sounds uninteresting and boring. It gives the vibe of white militants being scared to do something because they don't want to deal with social repercussions of their racism.

“Either they make themselves so small as to avoid influencing anyone, or they assume a paternalistic vanguard posture that tries to safely, but separately, guide the little lambs.”

Like who are you spending your time around? This sounds like a horrible time and lacks centering people's autonomy.

Finally, “for instance, why do people of color so often find themselves exempted from the practices of folk justice applied to everyone else in radical milieus, prompting jokes about people of color being “uncancellable?”

We've seen multiple examples to contrary to this. It just sounds like the author spends a lot of time in mostly white milieus so, they don't ever see folks handle business cause we don't know any “uncancellable” Black or Brown folks. We suppose that's a reality that some white liberals and their tokens live in. We'll definitely will put hands on someone regardless of what they look like. But we suppose if you exist in a scene, like the appelist scene, with mostly tokenized Black and Brown individuals, who are comfortable and happy in that tokenization, this “cancellableness” probably only occurs with Black or Brown people who are critical and deemed useless. Luckily for those of us who organize, live, and fight alongside Black people, we don't deal with those sorta problems. If you don't like whites....you can just not spend time around them.

The author also clearly has little command or knowledge of Black liberation history. Unsurprisingly, this is quite common if you are a member of a mostly white milieu as the engagement with Black revolutionary history among the appelists is largely surface level and for show. Their reference to a “rapidly deteriorating New Afrikan hypothesis” is quite strange when the Five Southern States remain where the largest concentration of New Afrikans live not to mention that Black people are returning to the South in record numbers (<https://www.brookings.edu/articles/a-new-great-migration-is-bringing-black-americans-back-to-the-south/>). While New Afrikan thesis is still hotly debated in Black anarchist circles, we would invite the author to study a bit more instead of repeating tired ass lines about Black liberation that they learned from whites.

Their engagement with the Black Liberation Army is also dull and uninspired. Understanding the Black Liberation Army as a formation that “failed to build a popular guerilla movement” rather than a formation that was forced underground due to mounting repression is an important historical consideration. While as anarchists we share critiques of authoritarianism, it is strange considering when the most recent text from ill will (“states of siege”) advocated for a specialized formation-a vanguard-and against the power of spontaneity. Rather than appelist understanding the importance of interplay between mass movements and guerrilla formations, they are simply

pushing for anarchist to abandon a belief in mass struggle. We highly encourage the author to study some documents from the Black Liberation Army as well as reading Akinyele Umoja's text *Repression Breeds Resistance*.

https://www.researchgate.net/publication/232940302_Repression_breeds_resistance_The_black_liberation_a

Little in "Addicted to Losing" is new. Resentment of whites is not a stand in for real Black liberation based politics but, tokenism within and for white milieus isn't revolutionary either. Or at least not revolutionary in a way that is interesting to us. The variety of essays on the Bash Back website after the Black anarchist convergence that happened in Chicago in 2023 addressed many of the questions internal to Black revolutionary spaces that the author discussed. Though without the apologism for the white gentrifier clique in Atlanta. We hope the author(s) finds some Black revolutionaries to build alongside.

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