

involved in protecting the area also serve as one example in a long history of the US settler state commandeering the ability to assess Indigenous peoples' claims of sacred land.

4.C.11.

Ashanti Alston

From “Beyond Nationalism but Not without It” (2001)

Ashanti Alston joined the Black Panther Party as a teenager in New Jersey, later going underground with the Black Liberation Army and serving more than ten years in prison as a result. His studies in prison led him to both post-modernism and anarchism. In this essay, first published in his zine *Anarchist Panther*, Alston outlines the relevance of Black nationalism to the new social movements of the twenty-first century.

... There are all kinds of nationalisms and there are all kinds of reactions to nationalism. Personally, I have moved through and grown within some of the black nationalisms specific to the black community.

Black nationalism saved my life, in a sense, as a teenager in the 1960s. It “jarred” my unconscious acceptance of amerikkanism dogging my peoples and helped me see the larger picture. I am a 60s child. There was Malcolm, there was H. Rap Brown and Stokely Carmichael of the Black Power movement, and then there was the Black Panther Party. All were nationalists, all represent an evolution of nationalism within the black community. . . . It was about our survival as a people, not as that mythical “working class” or that equally mythical “citizen.” For me, as this teenager who had just witnessed the 60s rebellions in my own thoroughly racist hometown, nationalism was a lifesaver: “*We must love each other.*” “*Black is beautiful.*” “*We must control our own communities.*” . . .

Nationalism and statism are different because nationalism can be anti-state. But they can have commonalities in that nationalism may only be against a particular kind of state, such as a racist state, or a fascist state. Anarchism and nationalism are similar in that they are both antistatist, but what does it mean when the specific anarchist movements within a specific country are racist and dismissive of any and all nationalism, be it reactionary or revolutionary? For me, even the nationalism of a Louis Farrakhan is about saving my people, though it is also thoroughly sexist, capitalist, homophobic and potentially fascist. Yet it has played an important part in keeping a certain black pride and resistance going. Their “on the ground” work is very impor-

tant in keeping an antiracist mentality going. As a black anarchist, that's *my* issue to deal with cuz they'se *my folks*. But it points to where anarchism and nationalism have differences: most anarchists in the US have *no* understanding of what it means to be *black* in this fucked-up society. We do not have the luxury of being so intellectual about this excruciating boot on our collective neck, this modern-day middle passage into the prison industrial complex and other forms of neoslavery.

As a postmodernist anarchist, identity politics is important to me. Every time I hear someone talk about my people as if we are just some "working class" or "proletariat" I wanna get as far away from that person or group as possible, anarchist, Marxist, whatever. . . . My nationalism gave me that kind of pride because it was such a rejection of white thinking or at least a decentering of the primacy of white thought, capitalist, socialist, whatever. Folks outside of our experience need to respect that they ain't got no monopoly on revolutionary thinking and damn sure ain't got none on revolutionary practice. It is easy to sit back and intellectualize about our nationalism from the modernist, eurocentric framework of rational, scientific, materialist models. While one does that, it is our nationalism that constantly rallies our people to come together, remember our history, love ourselves, dream on and fight back. Black anarchists and antiauthoritarian revolutionaries understand the limitations of nationalism in terms of its historical sexism, hierarchy, or its modernist trappings in general. But we also recognize anarchism's modernist trappings in the form of American racist/class privilege when it comes to people of color. . . .

White folks need to deal with being *antiracist allies* to folks of color communities and activists. Activists in particular because we are usually whites' entry point into any possible relationship with our communities. Anarchist theory and practice cannot take the form of a mere adherence to the founding fathers and canonical practices, such as Kropotkin, Bakunin, and the Spanish Civil War. Tired of hearing it! Anarchism *here* in Babylon must reflect our unique problems and possibilities for struggle. Our struggles are not just against capitalism. Too simple. Our struggles are not just against racism. That's also too simple. There are all kinds of negative "isms" we are fighting against and, just as important, all kinds of worlds we are fighting for. That's why the whole idea and practice of "convergences" and "spokescouncils" are so important to activists in general to learn from and enhance because they are about making space for all "voices" to be heard and factored into the decision making so that whatever activities come forth from it prefigures the kind of new worlds we truly want.

I end this by advising: *white anarchists: deal with being the best antiracist allies you can. We need you—and you need us—but we will do this shit without you.*

To my folks of color: *come envision: envision a world of worlds within our world where there's principled coexistence within the wonderful diversity of the black community.*

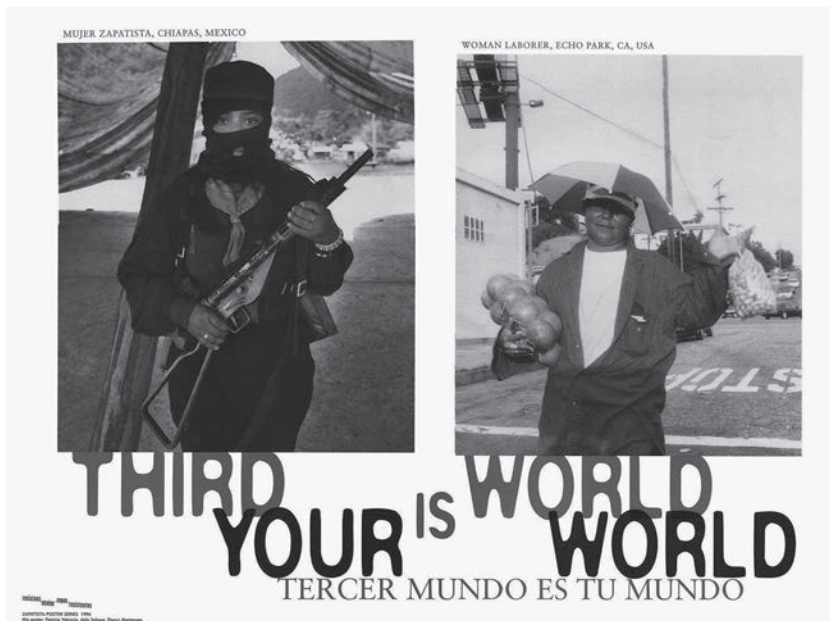


Figure 4.5. Patricia Valencia, Aida Salazar, and Shawn Mortensen, “Third World Is Your World” (1996). Image courtesy of and reprinted with permission by David Thorne.

Harlems / Spanish Harlems / Watts / hip-hop communities / villages of the Carolina coast / college communities / gay-lesbian-bisexual-transgender communities / zulu nation / New Afrikan / religious communities that come together mainly on Saturday or Sunday / squatter communities / outlaw communities / kemetic communities / Ibo-Ghanaian-Sierra Leonean-Ethiopian-rasta neighborhoods / nomadic poet-artist tribes / and then those of us who just be plain ignorant and harmless and crazy when we have to be and fun loving and like to journey through and between communities and sometimes just create new mixed ones [. . .] *what if?* [. . .] and *how?*

Ella Baker said we can do it if we can trust ourselves and get away from leadership-led revolution; Kwesi Balagoon said we can do it if we willing to create a chaos that will shut this mutha down; Audre Lorde said we can do it if we *learn to love and respect our beautiful diversity* and reject the tools of our oppressors; Harriet Tubman said, ain’t a better way to live *than at war for a righteous cause*; and Frantz Fanon said if we smack that mutha across the face, drive that pig outta our territory at the point of a gun, it is *liberating for the soul*.

Through the imagination, all is possible.