



Ashanti Alston, 1954- A Biographical Sketch by Andrewism (2021)

Ashanti Alston joined the Panthers and the Black Liberation Army in 1971, but before then, he'd been attending Nation of Islam meetings. He was imprisoned in 1974 for taking part in a robbery meant to raise funds for the BLA. While in prison, a fellow Panther named Frankie Ziths would first introduce Alston to anarchist texts. He was being sent a lot of letters and literature that he dismissed at first, because he thought anarchism was just about chaos. Eventually though, while in solitary, he finally dug into anarchism, and was surprised to find analyses of peoples' struggles, peoples' cultures, and peoples' organizational formations.

But he wasn't seeing anything that touched on the struggles of Black folks. There was a lot of emphasis on European struggles and European writings by European figures. It didn't fully speak to him. He had to seek out the anarchic practices of non-European societies, from the most ancient to the most contemporary. He realized that all of us can function in an anti-authoritarian society. He began to see that we should not allow anyone to set themselves up as our leader or make decisions for us. He began to realize that "I, as an individual, should be respected, and that no one was important enough to do my thinking for me."

He realized that the anti-colonial struggles of his time and of the past, whether in Angola, Guinea-Bissau, Mozambique, or Zimbabwe, still failed. The people lost popular power, and the foreign oppressor was replaced with a local oppressor. He became resistant to the influence and intervention of so-called leaders, wanting instead for "power to the people where it stays with the people."

He was released from prison in 1985 and became heavily involved in organizing as a Black Anarchist. He published critiques of top down organizing, explored the influence of childhood on our psychology, and, although he saw the shortcomings of Black nationalism, he still saw it as a force for unity and a direction for social change, with the potential to be anti-State.

As for why he calls himself a Black Anarchist, he says that, "I think of being Black not so much as an ethnic category but as an oppositional force or touchstone for

