



“We’re Pro-Choice and We Riot!”: Anarcha-Feminism in Love and Rage (1989-98)

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Figure 1. Anarchist contingent at the “March on Washington for Reproductive Freedom” (1989)

“Racist, Sexist, Anti-Gay, Born Again Bigots Go Away!” Two dozen black-clad anarchists chanted as they stood with arms linked confronting far-right activists who were attempting to shut down an abortion clinic in the New York City suburb of Dobbs Ferry. It was 1990 and the notorious anti-abortion group Operation Rescue was targeting clinics across the country in their “Operation Goliath” summer of action. The recently formed NYC Autonomous Anarchist Action group collaborated with members of ACT UP and Women’s Health Action and Mobilization to protect the clinic, at one point physically



pushing away a concerted assault. Responding to the “Goliath” reference, the anarchists yelled “Better Watch Who You Harass, Operation David’s Gonna Kick Your Ass!” (Kraker 1990a: 3; Carroll 2015). Thanks to the defense team, the abortion clinic completed every scheduled appointment that day.

This action reflected a new direction in the reproductive freedom movement. As the far right escalated its attacks on abortion clinics, feminists across the country drew on a new repertoire of anarchist tactics and strategies to defeat them. Women in the burgeoning Love and Rage anarchist network, including Autonomous Anarchist Action, advocated a confrontational response to Operation Rescue. Although grounded in the 1970s women’s liberation movement, this younger generation of revolutionary feminists was also inspired by militant anti-fascists in Anti-Racist Action and squatters in Western Europe *Autonome* groups who began the use of black bloc tactics in the 1980s—wearing all black and covering their faces to remain anonymous and act collectively at demonstrations (Bray 2017; Dupuis-Déri 2014). Anarchists brought these confrontational tactics to clinic defenses, vowing to do whatever it took to prevent the return of the days of back-alley abortions.

Anarcha-feminists in Love and Rage (1989-98), the foremost revolutionary anarchist organization of the late twentieth century United States, made significant interventions into both the anarchist and feminist movements. This new generation of anarcha-feminists theorized and practiced intersectional revolutionary politics in their struggle against patriarchy, capitalism, the state, and white supremacy.¹ Within the anarchist movement, key figures like Liz Highleyman, Laura Lib, Suzy Subways, and Carolyn Connolly insisted on the importance of feminist analysis and practice. Pushing back against male dominance within Love and Rage, they fought for autonomous women’s spaces, structural changes, and egalitarian interpersonal relationships. Anarcha-feminists also provided a crucial link to earlier feminist practices of the women’s liberation and anti-nuclear movements, including affinity group organizing and consensus-based decision-making.

Anarchists also pushed feminism in more radical directions. After the heady days of the 1970s women’s liberation movement, women suffered a historic defeat at the hands of the Reagan Revolution. Mainstream feminists in groups like the National Organization for Women and the National Women’s Political Caucus professionalized and institutionalized their organizations as they integrated into the reformist world of the

¹ Anarchism is a libertarian socialist movement against both state and capitalism. Anarcha-feminism is a merger of anarchist and feminist politics which emphasizes the interconnection between patriarchy, capitalism, and the state. Intersectional anarcha-feminists explicitly address the interlocking nature of all forms of hierarchy and domination. For a history of anarchism in the United States, see Andrew Cornell’s *Unruly Equality: U.S. Anarchism in the 20th Century* (2016). For an introduction to anarcha-feminism, see the Dark Star Collective’s *Quiet Rumours: An Anarcha-Feminist Reader (Expanded Edition)* (2012).



Democratic Party. Responding to new social and political constraints, these largely middle-class white liberal feminists attempted to advance women's interests without challenging the overall capitalist patriarchal structure (Briggs 2017; Martin 2012). Many women's institutions such as health clinics and rape crisis centers followed a path from grassroots "seedbeds of radical feminism" in the 1970s to becoming formal non-profits in the 1980s (Martin 2012: 162-63). Love and Rage fought against the conservatizing tide of mainstream feminism. They insisted that feminism must combat white supremacy, capitalism, and the state. Perhaps most importantly, anarcha-feminists in Love and Rage helped introduce militant street tactics into the struggle to protect abortion. They employed black bloc tactics and lessons from anti-fascist street action in order to go on the offensive against groups like Operation Rescue. In doing so, they helped revive a feminist movement that had spent a decade playing defense. Beyond a focus on abortion, they also helped promote a broader vision of reproductive freedom that was developed primarily by women of color: the actual ability and social support necessary to freely to choose whether or not to have children. Feminists of color pointed to the racist history of the sterilization of women of color and developed the concepts of reproductive freedom and reproductive justice to encompass the struggle for control over reproduction beyond only abortion.²

After a brief overview of the evolving anarcha-feminist movement of the 1970s-80s, this article explores the theory and practice of anarcha-feminists in Love and Rage. I make three primary historical interventions. First, this history challenges the common portrayal of the 1980s and early '90s as a time of dissolution and retreat on the left. The standard narrative neglects the rise of a strong anarchist movement across the country that pushed social movements in more radical directions.³ Second, against histories that underestimate the organization's significance in the anarchist movement, I emphasize the importance of Love and Rage to the evolution and revitalization of anarchism in the late twentieth century. The group used its widely distributed newspaper and organizational infrastructure to popularize intersectional feminism in the anarchist movement.⁴ Finally, in the field of feminist history, I argue that anarchists picked up the torch of radical feminism and further developed intersectional feminist politics during

² See Dorothy Roberts, *Killing the Black Body: Race, Reproduction, and the Meaning of Liberty* (1998) and Sarah Deer, *The Beginning and End of Rape: Confronting Sexual Violence in Native America* (2015).

³ See for example Bradford Martin's history of oppositional movements in the 1980s, *The Other Eighties*, which presents them as a series of largely disconnected single issue struggles that do not bring to bear an anti-capitalist analysis or embrace revolutionary politics. For a powerful reframing of the history of the left in this period, see L.A. Kauffman's *Direct Action: Protest and the Reinvention of American Radicalism* (2017). The sweeping nature of the book misses the key role of Love and Rage in theorizing and organizing around a new vision of revolutionary anarchism in the 1990s.

⁴ For a representative minimization of the role of Love and Rage, see David Graeber's otherwise excellent piece "The Rebirth of Anarchism in North America, 1957-2007" (2010) in which he dismisses Love and Rage in a single sentence.



the mainstream movement's retreat into liberal reformism.⁵ Love and Rage broke from a previous generation of anarcha-feminism by reclaiming confrontational tactics and incorporating women of color feminists' new analysis of intersectionality.

In this article, I first address anarcha-feminist struggles against male dominance within Love and Rage before turning to their contributions to the fight for reproductive freedom, queer and trans liberation, AIDS activism, and the fight against workfare at the City University of New York. Unlike liberal feminists who sought legal reforms and formal social equality, anarcha-feminists fought to strengthen women's autonomy and self-determination through grassroots organizing. Although their contributions are often overlooked, I ultimately argue that anarcha-feminists in Love and Rage were central to the evolution and revitalization of both feminism and anarchism and shaped the development of revolutionary intersectional politics in the late twentieth century and beyond.

Anarcha-Feminism in the 1970s-80s

Anarchists have long argued for gender equality and sexual liberation, but their theoretical commitments have often given way to male dominance in practice. Although many women and queer radicals have pushed anarchism to live up to its ideals by fighting against all forms of oppression and hierarchy, anarcha-feminism as such was first developed as an explicit political tendency within the women's liberation movement of the 1970s. Anarchists expanded the feminist critique of patriarchy into a radical rejection of all forms of hierarchy and oppression. In addition to critiquing overt male dominance, they argued that capitalism depended on the exploitation of women's labor (both paid and unpaid) and that the state was an inherently patriarchal institution that replicated the paternal rule of the father over society. Capitalism and the state were inherently hierarchical and patriarchal; their destruction was necessary for women's liberation (Tanenbaum 2016). Beyond self-identified anarchists, the women's liberation movement more broadly practiced what Helen Ellenbogen called an "intuitive anarchism" (Ellenbogen 1977). Feminists were suspicious of received social tradition, wary of centralized political power, and opposed to all forms of oppression and hierarchy. In practice, the movement operated through consensus-based decision making in order to break down hierarchies. As Lynne Farrow wrote in the feminist magazine *Aurora* in 1974, "feminism practices what anarchism preaches" (Farrow

⁵ This is primarily responding to Alice Echols's declensionist history of the rise and fall of radical feminism in her seminal book *Daring to Be Bad: Radical Feminism in America 1967-1975 (Thirtieth Anniversary Edition)* (2019), in which she argues that the revolutionary politics of radical feminism were supplanted by the more apolitical separatism of cultural feminism.



1974).⁶ Scholars and activists alike have argued that 1970s feminism provided much of the basis for the development of anarchist praxis in the late twentieth century (Tanenbaum 2016; Graeber 2010). Yet by the end of the 1970s, the counterrevolutionary backlash that would usher in Reagan's attack on women was beginning, and the feminist movement faced a historic defeat that transformed the character of both feminism and the left.

Mainstream feminists professionalized and institutionalized their movement in the 1980s. Even before Reagan, the radical wing of the feminist movement had given way to more apolitical cultural feminism that rejected revolutionary, Marxist-influenced radical feminism in favor of separatist cultural institutions (Echols 2019). Historians have emphasized how feminists shifted to fit the new constraints of the Age of Reagan. For instance, in a groundbreaking history of oppositional movements in the 1980s, Bradford Martin describes how many women turned from the combative oppositional politics of the 1970s towards "subtler and less disruptive" forms of mobilization including electing women to political office, turning grassroots rape crisis centers into non-profits, and working within Fortune 500 companies to craft policies against sexual harassment (Martin 2012: 163). Although liberal feminists managed to win small-scale battles, they lost the broader war and were ultimately co-opted into the system. The defeat of the Equal Rights Amendment in 1982 both reflected and presaged the broader movement defeat. Mainstream feminists constrained their imaginary to fit the times, turning away from attempts to radically restructure society. As feminist historian Laura Briggs describes, the transformative vision of the women's liberation movement was lost; the neoliberal "time/wages/reproductive labor crisis" that came out of the 1980s "represent[ed] the defeat of a particular vision of feminist and racial justice politics" (Briggs 2017: 11). Not all feminists, however, accepted this retreat.

Anarchists fought to keep feminism—and the broader radical left—alive in a counterrevolutionary era. Beginning at the end of the 1970s, many anarcha-feminists joined the anti-nuclear and other ecological movements, including the Clamshell Alliance which formed to oppose the construction of a nuclear power plant in New Hampshire and thus sparked the anti-nuclear movement. Together with anarchist theorist Murray Bookchin, anarcha-feminists spread the decentralized, consensus-based affinity group structures that defined this movement. Anarcha-feminist values and practices were central to a broader nonviolent direct action tendency that, as activist-intellectual L.A. Kauffman documents, stretched from 1970s anti-nuclear activism through the 1980s Central America solidarity movement and AIDS activism, all the way to Occupy Wall Street in 2011 (Kauffman 2017). The post-60s radical left, DSA stalwart Chris Maisano

⁶ See also Cathy Levine's articulation of the anarchist nature of feminist practice in "The Tyranny of Tyranny," *Black Rose* (1974), which was framed as a critique of Jo Freeman's influential essay "The Tyranny of Structurelessness" (1972).



recently lamented, was “dominated by a kind of de facto anarchism” that rejected both Marxism-Leninism and social democracy (Maisano 2021: 5). Anarchist anthropologist David Graeber argues that this de facto anarchism was deeply grounded in feminism, from consensus based decision making to a commitment to prefigurative politics (Graeber 2010). Anarcha-feminists contributed to the diverse leftist struggles of the 1980s, including Central America solidarity work and the movement to end South African apartheid. They continued to volunteer at women’s health clinics, domestic violence shelters, and other women’s institutions. As feminist scholar Barbara Epstein argues, anarcha-feminists formed the cutting edge of the anti-nuclear direct action movement and helped reshape radical politics after the defeat of the New Left (Epstein 1993).

Yet anarcha-feminists in the direct action movement held an at times dogmatic commitment to nonviolence that limited their revolutionary capacity. Many argued that violence was inherently masculine and associated militancy with the worst excesses of the movements of the 1960s. Their critique of violence was understandable given the historical context, but in practice it sometimes verged on the absurd. For instance, in the Clamshell Alliance’s official nonviolence guidelines for the occupation of a nuclear power plant site in 1978, they not only include “3. No damage or destruction of PSCo or Seabrook property” but even “4. No running at any time” and “5. No strategic or tactical movement after dark” (Epstein 1993: 70). They even assumed responsibility for the violent response of other people to their actions. Many Clams objected to the possibility of cutting the fence surrounding the construction zone not only because it was property destruction but also because “to do so was contrary to their principles, because it was more or less guaranteed to provoke police violence for which the Clamshell could be regarded as responsible” (Epstein 1993: 70). This was a far cry from both Gandhian mass civil disobedience and the more immediate reference point of the US Civil Rights Movement, both of which sought to expose the violence of the system through confrontational nonviolent action. As we will see, Love and Rage broke with this current of anarcha-feminism by seeking to reclaim confrontational politics and build a fighting feminist movement.

Despite its crucial theoretical and practical contributions, anarcha-feminism as such remained relatively marginal within the anarchist movement until the mid-1980s-90s. The anarchist milieu did not yet have the common-sense feminist presumptions of today’s movement. Bob Black, known for his anarchist critique of work, wrote an essay in 1983 called “Feminism as Fascism” in which he argued that feminism was in fact a fascist movement. Feminism, he claimed, followed fascist rhetoric by positioning women as simultaneously both oppressed by and superior to men. Further, the movement was “ludicrous, hate-filled, authoritarian, *sexist* [against both men and women], dogmatic,” etc. (B. Black 1985: 137). This position became increasingly marginal in the years to



come as feminist analysis and practice spread throughout the movement. Love and Rage played no small part in this transformation. Women and their allies in the organization helped to develop and propagate intersectional anarcha-feminist theory and practice beyond the non-violent direct action movement and small feminist collectives. In doing so, they indelibly shaped the evolution of both the anarchist and feminist movements.

Love and Rage's Intersectional Anarcha-Feminism

With major bases in New York City, Minneapolis, and Mexico City as well as small collectives across North America, Love and Rage (1989-98) was the lodestone of the US anarchist movement in the late twentieth century. Although it never claimed more than a few hundred members, the organization had an outsized influence due to its international reach, sustained coalition work, and widely distributed newspaper. Love and Rage operated as a network that published a newspaper and coordinated between local groups until 1993, when members voted at a contentious conference to reorganize as a membership-based federation. The federation distinguished itself from the loosely organized anarchist milieu through its commitment to strong organization, coalition-building, and intervention into social movements. Members identified politically as “revolutionary anarchists” who sought to reimagine anarchism for the new era. The struggle against patriarchy was central to Love and Rage’s political vision from the beginning. The group’s initial political statement, published in its 1988 pilot newspaper, included a section titled “Overthrow All Forms of Domination” that articulated an analysis of interlocking forms of oppression including patriarchy, racism, and imperialism. “Rape and incest,” they argue, “are guns to the head of half the people of the world. Guns that enforce the most brutal exploitation. We stand with every woman who fights back against male violence. We see the overthrow of patriarchy, the systematic domination of women by men, as integral to any vision of a free society” (MAYDAY 1988: 4). Patriarchy was not a secondary concern to be addressed after the overthrow of capitalism. Instead, women’s liberation was indispensable to revolutionary struggle.

Feminism provided a path into intersectional anarchism for many women in Love and Rage. In her 1991 article “An Introduction to Anarcha-Feminism,” Laura Lib shares her own experience of discovering anarchism through feminism in order to explore how various systems of domination interconnect. She explains that:

through feminism we gained an understanding of one system of domination— patriarchy, and its working through public (the state) and private (capitalism) social institutions. From this developed a recognition of the interlacing of all forms of domination and a realization that an end to patriarchy meant an end to all power relations. (1991: 6)



Laura Lib's language of the "interlacing of all forms of domination" is reminiscent of the Combahee River Collective's framing of "interlocking oppression" in their influential 1977 statement (Combahee River Collective 1977). Despite her reference to interlacing forms of domination, however, Lib does not directly address (anti-)racism as a component of her introduction to anarcha-feminism and only mentions homophobia in passing. This is typical of Love and Rage's early anarcha-feminist analysis. Different forms of oppression were understood to work together, but the young organization was unable to transcend a predominantly white vision of anarcha-feminism.

Over the course of the 1990s, Love and Rage developed a more nuanced analysis of the intersection of race, class, gender, and sexuality in the US and on a global scale. In a major 1997 newspaper editorial written by Suzy Subways (though unattributed at the time), Subways analyzed the global structure of the exploitation and domination of women, particularly women of color. "Patriarchal exploitation has fed the expansion of capitalism for hundreds of years," she argues, through the unpaid and underpaid labor of women at home and in factories alike (Subways 1997: 3). Neoliberal globalization intensified this process in the late twentieth century as more women in Asia, Africa, and Latin America were super-exploited in low-paying factory jobs that extracted value to the "overdeveloped countries" of the imperialist core, or even forced into sex tourism for wealthy men. Meanwhile, the social safety net in the United States was dismantled and women were "the first to be pushed out of well-paid, secure jobs and pushed into low-wage, low-security jobs." Neoliberalism depended on the "sexist backlash against women" to justify dismantling the welfare state, including replacing welfare with "workfare." Thus, in different ways but following similar patriarchal logic, "women all over the world bear the brunt of cutbacks and austerity measures" (Subways 1997: 3). Subways ends her sophisticated analysis of the global exploitation and oppression of women by arguing that "in order to build a feminist movement that will fight for better lives for women all over the world, feminists with relative privilege must have a clear picture of the global system of capitalist patriarchy that exploits us all. When women organize, we break down the isolation between us" (Subways 1997: 3). Love and Rage embraced this perspective and sought to unite struggles against patriarchy, capitalism, and white supremacy.

Love and Rage's anti-racist feminism drew heavily on women of color feminism of the post-1960s period. Their draft political statement, collectively written in the late 1990s but never officially adopted, includes a major section on patriarchy and anti-racist feminism. It celebrates the feminist movement's gains in the 1960s-70s but acknowledges that second wave feminism was dominated by middle-class white women. The statement quotes bell hooks's call for women of color to "re-appropriate" feminism to provide "women a feminist ideology uncorrupted by racism" (Love and Rage 1997). Love and Rage draws on a broad array of women of color feminists including Audre



Lorde, Barbara Smith, and Gloria Anzaldúa who argue that feminists must “acknowledge the differences between women” that are shaped by racial oppression, class exploitation, and homophobia. The political statement concludes that “the influence of these ideas on the feminist movement and other social movements has laid the foundation for a powerful new kind of coalition work that doesn’t ask people to prove their loyalty to one struggle or another, but to fight together for the liberation of humanity” (Love and Rage 1997). Love and Rage typically used the language of “anti-racist feminism,” but their analysis of interlocking forms of oppression and exploitation was deeply intersectional.

Combatting Anarchist Patriarchy

Despite Love and Rage’s formal commitment to feminist principles, the organization was still shaped by patriarchy. Men often perpetuated male dominance in leadership structures and interpersonal relationships. Women and their allies in the organization critiqued the perpetuation of patriarchy and sought to push the organization in more feminist directions. Some men in Love and Rage took the initiative to critique their own male privilege and fight sexist tendencies in other men. These internal struggles shaped the broader development of anarcha-feminist theory and practice, with important lessons for anarchists and feminists today.

Women criticized both structural and interpersonal patriarchy in Love and Rage. Although they made up around 40% of the organization, women often felt blocked out of leadership positions and tokenized in the newspaper. As a group calling themselves “Pissed Off Women, NYC” put it, “speaking for our ovaries we are disturbed and enraged at the lack of participation by women in the *Love and Rage* project. After almost two years in print the participants are still mostly white, middle class men.” Women were officially encouraged to participate and contribute articles, but in practice they were usually relegated to writing about “women’s issues” while men wrote the broader, more “universal” pieces (Pissed Off Women 1992: 2). This was replicated in the structure of the organization itself, which was dominated by men despite the presence of a few token women in leadership positions. Some women also critiqued the macho masculinity of the organization and its newspaper. For instance, Samantha Stevens called out men who were “completely willing to fight the cops in the streets” but “who are not willing to work on their sexism, racism, and homophobia” (Stevens 1990: 2). This problem was reflected in the newspaper, which Stevens argued fetishized violence in its imagery and article focus. This criticism was not shared by all Love and Rage women; as we will see, many anarcha-feminists attempted to reclaim violence and confrontational politics. Organizational critique paralleled interpersonal problems. Despite their professed feminist commitments, anarchist men often failed to apply their politics to their own relationships, whether by insisting on non-monogamy to avoid intimacy or receiving



social credit for their feminist stances while relying on their female partners to perform what we would now call emotional labor (Zelda 1990: 8-9).

Women advocated for the creation of autonomous women's groups within the broader organization as well as more women in leadership positions. Some promising changes were implemented. In 1992, two women (Ms. Tommy Lawless and Dema Crassy) were elected as co-facilitators for both the organization and the newspaper (Lawless and Crassy 1993: 13). Yet despite continued efforts to build women's power and transform the organization, many women continued to feel shut out from real organizational power. In 1995, Joel Olson published a reflection on the latest Love and Rage conference in which he writes that "the biggest problem at the conference was an old one: male domination" (Olson 1995: 12). Olson references a recent piece by Rebecca H. in the January 1995 Federation Bulletin in which she argues (as he paraphrases) that:

good gender politics for Love and Rage boil down to being nicer to women and opening up spaces for them to speak. This is fine, but what is lacking is a commitment to making women's liberation a political priority of the federation. None of the three working groups' proposals, she points out, have any explicit strategies for women's liberation, nor is there anything necessarily feminist about them. (1995: 12)

Women needed structural change, an autonomous power base, and an organizational priority on feminist politics. Efforts to make these changes reappeared over the years, but Love and Rage was never able to solve the problem of organizational patriarchy. A number of key women, including Liz Highleyman and Ms. Tommy Lawless, left the organization after it restructured as a membership-based federation in 1993 at a meeting that was only one-quarter women (M. Black 1993: 12-13). It is notable that men were the most vocal advocates for this change, which Ms. Tommy Lawless called "a classic leftist coup," and it did not include any structural changes to increase the power and autonomy of women within the organization (Highleyman 1993b: 15). When Love and Rage later devolved into factional infighting, some women expressed frustration that men dominated the debates and drove the organization to its dissolution in 1998.

Some men in Love and Rage responded to the feminist call to interrogate their own male privilege and sexist tendencies. In a 1990 front-page article, Paul Toupe discusses how men need to "unlearn [male dominance] and overthrow male supremacy" (Toupe 1990: 1). Echoing calls for white people to become "race traitors," Toupe argues that "to give up [the] constant vigilance" of male superiority "is to become a traitor to the sex-male class" (Toupe 1990: 6). The influence of feminism spread as men began to interrogate their own sexism and position within the system of male dominance. Men like Toupe also began to recognize how patriarchy hurt even those men who supposedly benefited from it: patriarchy constrains the possibilities of male existence by disparaging "nonmale" behaviors." Ultimately, struggles against patriarchy required



men to develop a feminist consciousness and address their own role in sexist domination. Toupe ends with a call to action: “Are we the men of conscience who will do little or nothing about sexism (our own and others)? Or are we the men who are engaged in a revolt encompassing our total being against the authoritarian patriarchal definition of maleness?” (Toupe 1990: 6). The answer was to find more effective, intersectional ways to revolt against every aspect of the authoritarian system while prefiguring the liberated social relations and structures of the new world.

Abortion Defense and the Fight for Reproductive Freedom

The Christian Right waged war on abortion in the 1980s-90s. Anti-abortion activists in Operation Rescue (founded in 1985) took to the streets to shut down clinics, advancing the slogan “if you believe abortion is murder, act like it’s murder.” Operation Rescue was met by a new generation of anarcha-feminists across the country who drew on an evolving repertoire of anarchist tactics. Anarchists in Love and Rage established grassroots women’s infrastructure and dual power institutions while defending existing abortion clinics from the far right. They promoted direct action and dual power as alternatives to mainstream feminism’s legalistic, state-centered approach. While they often focused on abortion access, they framed it within a broader struggle for reproductive freedom and women’s liberation.



Figure 2. Liz A. Highleyman (Highleyman 1992)



Anarcha-feminist women fought to take control of their bodies and communities. Feminists in the women's liberation movement had already begun to do this in the 1970s, as cultural feminists in particular established counter-institutions like health clinics, rape crisis centers, and women's bookstores (Echols 2019; Boston Women's Health Book Collective 1970). Anarcha-feminists in *Love and Rage* believed that women needed to learn their own bodies and how to take care of themselves and each other. In an article titled "Laws and Outlaws," two anonymous *Love and Ragers* present a succinct history of women taking their health into their own hands. The state, capitalism, and the male medical establishment, they argue, have attempted throughout the ages to break the autonomous power of women by attacking their control over health and reproduction. The authors link this history to the present-day medical industry, which denies women their autonomy. As the authors say, "the medical industry is motivated by profit and, like all institutions, is founded on social inequalities: racism, sexism, homophobia. Medicine is something we must take into our own hands. Because how can you smash the state if you're still walking funny from a visit to the gynecologist's?" (Anonymous 1991: 8). Against the oppressive medical system, the authors urge women to take control over their health. They highlight the example of midwifery, which "puts power back in the hands of women giving birth; takes away the doctors' authority, anyone's authority which isn't her own" (Anonymous 1991: 9). This approach to women's health is emblematic of the intersection between feminism and anarchism, and it provided the foundation for an anarcha-feminist approach to reproductive justice.

Love and Ragers saw abortion as a question of women's freedom and autonomy over their own bodies. Even if abortion were legal, women would not have true autonomy and self-determination if they could not control their own reproduction. Thus, anarchists worked with existing women's health clinics, but they also spread the knowledge of how to care for their bodies. Sunshine Smith explains in 1990 how anarchist women formed self-help groups in San Francisco in which "women learn the basics of self-cervical exams, do pelvics on each other, and learn how to do menstrual extraction" (Smith 1990: 11). This was crucial in developing autonomy and community. It also demonstrated a commitment to reproductive freedom in its fullest sense, rather than a narrow focus on abortion. Smith reflects that:

Being in a self-help group has had a very strong effect on my relationship to my own body, as well as my understanding of women's bodies in general. Women who go through this process together develop a very strong bond. We are truly taking control of our own bodies: learning our cycles of change, learning what a uterus feels like inside another woman, and becoming intimately familiar with the look and feel of the inside of a woman's vagina. (1990: 11)



This is a quintessentially anarchist approach to women's health: not relying on trained clinicians, but rather taking one's body into one's own hands—and doing it with friends and comrades.

Reproductive freedom necessitated knowing how to perform home abortions. In the event that it was outlawed, women needed to already have the skills and knowledge to perform their own abortions. Smith argues that learning to do this in self-help groups strengthened women's approach to reproductive justice struggle:

This has, in very concrete ways, made our struggle against the anti-abortion group Operation 'Rescue' and the 'Supreme' Court stronger and more effective. We have learned that if the time comes, we can and will do home abortions. ... We are now able to repulse the state from our uteri because we are gaining the knowledge that enables us to control our own bodies. (1990: 11)

Anarcha-feminists sought to spread this beyond local organizations. In 1993, Love and Ragers went on a "Wimmin's Health Tour" across the country to encourage women to form their own groups.⁷ They were committed to rebuilding the network of underground abortion providers and other women's infrastructure that an earlier generation had established. As Liz Highleyman put it, the possibility of abortion being outlawed meant that "we must be ready to take our bodies and our lives into our own hands" (Highleyman 1992: 6). This focus on women's infrastructure and self-determination was not unique to anarchists, but they drew out the anarchist implications of a commitment to women's liberation and bodily autonomy.

Love and Rage advocated building feminist dual power institutions and directly attacking the structures of the state, capitalism, and patriarchy. The organization was clear that "our freedom will not come through the passage of yet more laws but through the building of communities strong enough to defend themselves against anti-choice and anti-queer terror, rape, battery, child abuse and police harassment." Thus, instead of petitioning the state to protect abortion, "we need to follow the example of projects like the Jane Collective and develop strategies to provide women-controlled health care and abortions" (Love and Rage 1997). This anarcha-feminist infrastructure, they argued, is key to women's autonomy and lays the foundation for building revolutionary dual power—radical institutions that challenge the hegemony of the state and capitalism. If women controlled their own bodies and institutions, this could provide the basis for a new world in which they did not depend on the patriarchal state to "defend" them.

⁷ Love and Ragers generally employed the alternative spellings of "woman" that were popular in the feminist movement at the time. By using "womyn" and "wimmin" instead of "woman," they attempted to escape the male-dominant characteristics of the English language. For more on the context of these linguistic choices, see Agatha Beins, *Liberation in Print: Feminist Periodicals and Social Movement Identity* (2017: 104). Although these spellings came to have trans-exclusionary connotations, they did not at the time. As I note later, Love and Rage was vocal in support of trans liberation.



Anarchists advocated an anti-state perspective within the broader feminist movement. They argued that petitioning the state for reforms was a dead end because, as their draft political statement put it, patriarchy “operates as a foundation of state power, used to justify a paternalistic relationship between the rulers and the ruled.” The state reproduces at a higher scale the father’s rule over the family, which is “disguised as protection and support” but “often enforced through violence and sexual terrorism” (Love and Rage 1997). Anything it gives—including abortion rights—can be taken away, for it is ultimately a tool of sexual and class violence in the hands of the patriarchal, capitalist ruling class. Anarchists believed that legalistic strategies would only co-opt the radical feminist movement, as had happened to a large chunk of mainstream feminism in the 1980s.

Rather than seeking reforms within the state, anarchists attacked its structures. Love and Rage brought this analysis to the broader feminist movement. Liz Highleyman argued in 1992 that anarchists should take part in counter-demonstrations against Operation Rescue in NYC during the Democratic National Convention in part because “this is another opportunity for anarchists to take part in pro-choice activism, and the Democratic political circus is a perfect opportunity to make our arguments in favor of grassroots, non-governmental, non-legislative strategies” (Highleyman 1992: 6). Instead of the liberal feminist slogan “we’re pro-choice and we vote,” anarcha-feminists often marched behind a banner reading “we’re pro-choice and we riot!” Disruptive action challenging patriarchal state power, combined with the establishment of autonomous women’s infrastructure, formed the building blocks of a revolutionary feminist movement. Ultimately, women would only gain freedom by overthrowing the state and constructing a libertarian socialist society.

Love and Rage also confronted anti-abortion militants in the streets. Although mainstream feminists took action to oppose Operation Rescue’s attacks on abortion clinics, their legalistic approach was unsuited for street confrontations and clinic defense. A younger generation of feminists in Women’s Health Action and Mobilization (WHAM!) and ACT UP organized to ensure abortion access by defending clinics. Anarcha-feminists took what had been learned in the militant demonstrations of the 1980s—particularly the use of black bloc tactics developed in West Germany and anti-fascist street fighting practiced by Anti-Racist Action—and applied it to combatting Operation Rescue. Activists in the West German anti-nuclear and squatter’s movements had begun dressing in all black and marching together to protect their anonymity and enable more militant collective action (Katsiaficas 2006). Black bloc tactics spread to the United States, including at abortion clinic defenses, and later came to public attention in the 1999 anti-WTO demonstrations in Seattle. Anti-Racist Action, which was formed in Minneapolis in the late 1980s and quickly spread across the country, expelled Neo-Nazis from punk scenes and fought them in the streets. They argued that anti-abortion



militants formed a key component of contemporary fascism and resolved to bring anti-fascist street tactics to bear on Operation Rescue. The course was set when Love and Rage helped defend an abortion clinic from Operation Rescue in the NYC suburb of Dobbs Ferry in 1990. As described at the beginning of this article, anarchists collaborated with members of WHAM! and ACT UP to prevent Operation Rescue from disrupting the clinic. Anarchists had been involved in the planning meetings and had worked out a tactical understanding with other elements of the coalition (Kraker 1990a: 3). Their more militant approach to confronting the anti-abortion radicals was vindicated by the successful defense of the abortion clinic.

Victory was won on a larger scale in 1993 when Operation Rescue tried to host a training camp in Minneapolis. While multiple feminist groups mobilized to protest Operation Rescue, a Love and Rager named Liza describes how

as radicals and anti-authoritarians, we wanted a response that would go beyond the standard clinic defense where we are herded like cattle, with decisions being made by the elite few of the mainstream pro-choice movement and often carried out by the police. We also wanted to set a precedent by illustrating that these largely-white right-wingers, whose leaders are all men, are not welcome in our city, or anywhere. (Liza 1993: 1)

Multiple anarchist groups including Love and Rage, the Twin Cities Anarchist Federation, and Profane Existence created an ad-hoc organization with other leftists and feminists called the “Action Coalition for Reproductive Freedom” to confront Operation Rescue. The Profane Existence collective set the tone when they vowed in a widely distributed poster that if Operation Rescue came to town, anarchists would “lock [them] in a church and burn the fucker down” (Profane Existence 1993). While things did not go quite this far, anarchists physically confronted Operation Rescue, blocked them in their church, vandalized their materials, and ultimately ran them out of town.

Although some liberals opposed these tactics, anarchists prevented Operation Rescue from shutting down clinics or even holding meetings in peace. As Liza notes, “there were very few ‘pro-lifers’ in Minneapolis who were willing to block clinics, possibly because of the intimidation radicals caused by being aggressively, and uncompromisingly confrontational” (Liza 1993: 3). Reflecting on the experience, Liza writes that “it seems like no matter how hard activists fight, we rarely win. Except this time we were victorious. We fought against these fascists ... We saw the demise of Operation Rescue in the Twin Cities, partly due to our unprecedented aggressiveness and opposition, and partly because their movement is losing, big time” (Liza 1993: 19). Operation Rescue soon suffered a split and major demobilization through a combination of defeat in the streets and legal action taken by President Bill Clinton’s administration (Carroll 2015: 180-81). Militant confrontation of Operation Rescue was a turning point in the development of a new anarchist feminism: feminists went on the attack in order



to defend women's autonomy and build a new world. In their uncompromising struggle for reproductive freedom, anarchists helped build a fighting, revolutionary feminist movement.

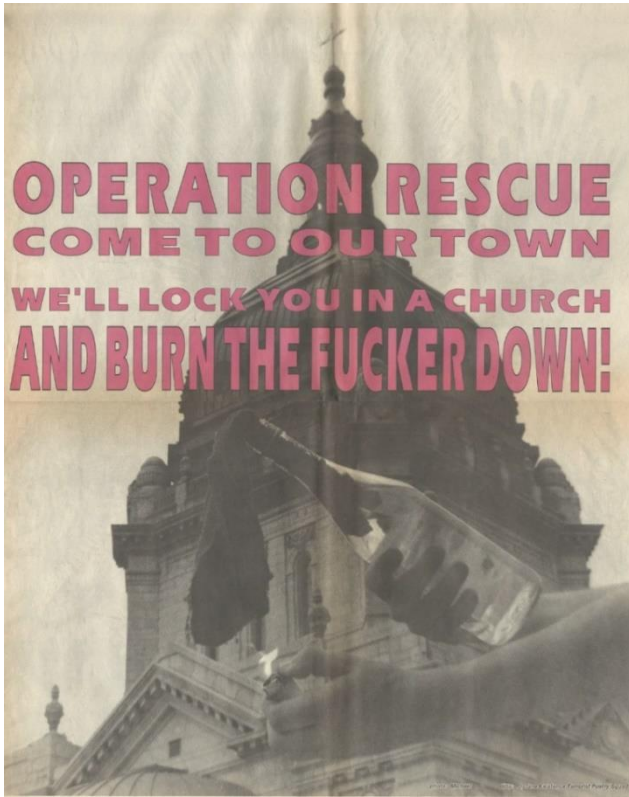


Figure 3. Poster distributed by anarchists attacking an Operation Rescue “training camp” (Profane Existence 1993)

Queer and Trans Liberation

Many of the most active Love and Ragers were themselves queer and advocated revolutionary politics within the queer liberation movement. Jan Kraker from NYC Autonomous Anarchist Action describes how they brought a militant edge to a 1990 rally commemorating the Stonewall uprising. They dressed in black bloc and brought a banner to the rally that provided direction for an otherwise disorganized crowd. Kraker relates how “what had been a[n] unorganized mass of people outside a bar ... turned into a spirited march behind a ‘Queer Without Fear—Autonomous Anarchist Action’ banner” (Kraker 1990b: 4-5). This exemplifies how Love and Rage encouraged social movements to take a more radical and confrontational approach. Members did not always try to convince other activists to become anarchists or join the organization, but rather spread new tactics and values that had been developed within the anarchist movement. In this vein, Liz Highleyman advocated collective participation in the queer march on Washington in 1993, arguing that “it is important that anarchists have a presence in the march to let people know that we cannot rely on laws and the government to guarantee



queer liberation.” (Highleyman 1993c: 3). Anarchist chants at this march included “We’re fucking anarchists, we’ll fuck whoever we want!” and “We’re here, we’re Queer, and we hate the government!” (Highleyman 1993a: 1). A group of Red & Anarchist Skinheads marched with a banner reading “Anti-Racist Skinheads and Punx Against Homophobia” and chanted “Oi! Oi! Oi! We fuck boys!” (Highleyman 1993a: 6).



Figure 4. Anarchists at the 1993 queer march on Washington (Highleyman 1993a: 1)

Beyond activism in the streets, anarcha-feminists argued that there was something inherently queer about anarchism’s rejection of all structures of social domination. Highleyman notes about the anarchist contingent at the 1993 march that “Gay, Lesbian, Bi, hetero or undefined, all the anarchists were queer in their own way” (Highleyman 1993a: 6). Lin L. Elliot goes further, arguing in an article linking queer and indigenous resistance that the “new activism of the 80s and 90s has already shown us the way. ACT UP and, more recently, Queer Nation, embody an unmistakably Queer perspective; non-hierarchical, even anarchical, they combine seriousness with humor, politics with play” (Elliot 1992: 2). This perspective prefigured later developments in queer anarchist theory. The Mary Nardini Gang argues in “Toward the Queerest Insurrection” that queer is not simply a sexual identity but rather “the qualitative position of opposition to presentations of stability ... Queer is the cohesion of everything in conflict with the heterosexual capitalist world. ... By ‘queer’, we mean ‘social war.’ And when we speak of queer as a conflict with all domination, we mean it” (Mary Nardini Gang 2014). In this view, anarchism is inherently queer because it rejects the “normalcy” of capitalist



patriarchy and struggles against all forms of hierarchy and oppression. Political theorist AK Thompson argues that this is also expressed in a practical abolition of gender within black blocs. As traditional gender markers are consciously obscured, each body becomes, he quotes one activist saying, “nothing less and nothing more than one entity moving in the whole” (Thompson 2010: 116). For these activists there is something queer in the bloc, something that produces a future beyond gender.

Love and Rage was also vocal in support for trans liberation at a time when much of the feminist and socialist movements rejected trans struggles. A transgender woman named Carolyn Connolly wrote a letter to Love and Rage in 1993 thanking them for their “emphasis on issues of queer identity” and sharing that she has “been heartened and empowered by an anarchist publication that creates a safe space for me” ([Connolly] 1993: 19). Carolyn soon joined the organization and became a leader in the New York chapter. She wrote a key article defining Love and Rage’s pro-trans feminism in 1994 titled “Politicizing Gender: Moving Towards Revolutionary Gender Politics.” In it, Carolyn examines the history of second wave feminism and critiques the “reactionary” gender essentialism of cultural feminists who accept the biological determinism of gender categories that in reality only “serve to limit freedom” ([Connolly] 1994: 4). “Gender outlaws” and anarchists are natural allies because “we both want to overthrow authoritarian constructs” ([Connolly] 1994: 13). But Carolyn identifies tension between some anarchists who want to immediately “‘smash gender’ or ‘destroy gender roles’” and many trans people who find liberation and safety through embracing and/or performing gender roles. Although they were far from what we would now call TERFs (Trans Exclusionary Radical Feminists), some leading members of Love and Rage argued for immediate “gender abolition” on the basis that *any* system of gender is inherently oppressive. While this should not be conflated with today’s “Gender Critical” anti-trans positions, Carolyn argues that it still undermined trans identity and the immediate needs of trans people. She thus ends by calling for a new revolutionary gender politics based in “real people’s experiences” and needs ([Connolly] 1994: 13).

Anarchists also participated in AIDS activism, although they critiqued state-centric aspects of the movement. ACT UP drew upon anarchistic values and practices in its grassroots direct action. It operated outside of the state in many ways: members formed alternative health networks, squatted buildings, provided safer-sex education and volunteer service organizations, and more. Despite this, ACT UP was best known for its spectacular actions meant to pressure the government to act on AIDS, which many anarchists rejected on principle. Liz Highleyman criticizes ACT UP in her article “Anarchism and AIDS Activism,” in which she argues that “the government does not represent our best interests [so] it would be foolish to rely on it as a source of solutions ... we would be better off putting the time, money (including taxes), and effort that we currently devote to petitioning, supporting, and evading the government into alternative



activities that meet our needs directly” (Highleyman 1991: 10). It is unclear from Highleyman’s piece, however, what she sees as concrete alternatives beyond a call to “develop solutions that do not rely on the state” (Highleyman 1991: 11). Indeed, her critique of ACT UP did not go unchallenged. In the next issue of the newspaper, a letter from Eric L. Sambach argued that

ACT UP was not set up as an anarchist ideal, but to develop an effective response to the AIDS crisis ... In an emergency we do whatever works to enhance and save lives. Whether that action fits an anarchist or other model of social organization is another, and in these terms, theoretical question. (1991: 2)

For many queer Love and Ragers, the extent to which ACT UP conformed to anarchist theory and practice was beside the point; AIDS activists took whatever opportunity they could to respond to an existential crisis. There may be value in criticizing overly state-centered AIDS activism, but to apply a “pure” anarchist standard to ACT UP prioritized anarchist theory over the lives and immediate needs of people with AIDS.

Feminist Struggles Against Workfare

The New York chapter of Love and Rage also applied intersectional anarcha-feminist principles to their involvement in the City University of New York (CUNY) student movement. CUNY was a battleground for working class and anti-racist struggle in the late twentieth century. The university system first started charging tuition in the 1970s after protests forced it to desegregate. The city government then launched a wave of brutal austerity measures in response to the 1980s budget crisis. Further increases in tuition and fees in the 1990s significantly raised costs for CUNY students. Several key Love and Ragers, including Chris Day, Suzy Subways, Brad Sigal, and Carolyn Connolly, were active in the Student Liberation Action Movement, in which they advocated an anti-police and anti-government orientation. Love and Rage helped to organize a series of major demonstrations, including a militant 25,000-person march in 1995 as well as numerous city-wide meetings and networks (Subways 2015).

Love and Rage put their anti-racist feminist commitments into practice by organizing with working class women of color. Suzy Subways—herself white, but with experience growing up on food stamps with a single mother—helped organize a campaign against workfare led by the Welfare Action Committee at Brooklyn College in 1997-98 (Okechuwu 2020). In one of the waves of austerity measures, the city government attempted to impose workfare restrictions on welfare recipients. Hundreds of single mothers on welfare (primarily women of color) were students at Brooklyn College; workfare would force them to drop out to work low-paying jobs. Love and Rage saw this as a racist, sexist, and anti-working class attack on poor women of color. Even



though it was nominally a fight for welfare—which some anarchists hesitated to join because it meant making demands on the state—the campaign fought for dignity and autonomy for poor women of color struggling against the government. Subways helped to organize a series of meeting and demonstrations, including a public speakout on campus in which women spoke of their experience with the welfare system. Although they were not able to reverse New York City’s broader workfare policies, the Welfare Action Committee was able to prevent some mothers from losing their benefits. More broadly, the CUNY movement claimed a number of small victories in the 1990s and built a culture of resistance that made it more difficult for the government to implement further austerity measures.

Conclusion

Anarcha-feminists in Love and Rage significantly shaped the evolution of both the anarchist and feminist movements in the late twentieth century. They brought an anarchist analysis and set of militant tactics and practices to the feminist movement, helping to revitalize it after a decade of rearguard battles against the wave of counterrevolution. They broke with the nonviolence of previous anarcha-feminists and developed a revolutionary intersectional anarcha-feminism through engagement with women of color feminism, which influenced their activism in the CUNY student movement. Love and Rage helped revive the earlier approach of the women’s liberation movement to building autonomous infrastructure and a world outside the reach of the state. This was particularly important in the context of the struggle to preserve abortion access, as Love and Rage helped develop women’s self-help groups and abortion infrastructure. Anarchists also defended abortion from far-right “pro-lifers” like Operation Rescue. Their use of confrontational black bloc tactics spread across the country as it proved effective in repulsing attacks on abortion clinics. Anarcha-feminists also injected radical tactics and critiques into the movement for queer and trans liberation and contributed to AIDS activism. Anarchists pushed the feminist movement in radical directions and helped build the foundation for women’s autonomy and self-determination as part of a revolutionary project to overthrow patriarchy, capitalism, and the state.

Feminists also transformed the anarchist movement by bringing feminist practices and analysis to the male-dominated milieu. Outside of certain sectors, like the non-violent direct action movement, anarchism in the 1980s had largely been dominated by men who at best paid lip-service to women’s liberation. Women and their allies in Love and Rage fought against patriarchy and sexism within the movement. They critiqued male dominance and sought to build women’s power within Love and Rage as well as promote personal and interpersonal transformation. Love and Rage also transformed



the theory and practice of anarcha-feminism itself, breaking with the previous generation's dogmatic commitment to non-violence in favor of building a revolutionary anarcha-feminist movement that could both defend itself and go on the attack. In no small way, contemporary anarchism is the product of the feminist movement, and anarcha-feminists in Love and Rage played a key role in this evolution. Ultimately, anarcha-feminists deepened both the feminist and anarchist critiques of all forms of hierarchy and oppression and helped develop a revolutionary intersectional anarcha-feminism.

There are important lessons to be learned from Love and Rage's shortcomings as well as its successes. Despite their commitment to intersectionality, anarcha-feminists in the organization often only paid lip service to the intersection of gender with race and their constituency remained largely white. Love and Rage also sometimes perpetuated a form of anarchist patriarchy, even as leading men in the organization identified as feminists. This, along with its restructuring in 1993 that failed to address women's concerns, led to the departure of multiple leading women. This history demonstrates that formal commitments to equality must be backed with structural changes and anti-racist feminist principles must be actively cultivated. The recent exodus in 2020 of many women, queer people, and people of color from the Black Rose/Rosa Negra Anarchist Federation (which situates itself within the legacy of Love and Rage) in response to similar issues underscores the enduring relevance of this history (Thistle Writing Collective 2021). Love and Rage helped build a fighting anarcha-feminist movement; today's task is to move beyond their example in order to theorize and practice a revolutionary intersectional politics fit for the twenty-first century.

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