

To the Ones Who Can Fly

A Message From the Whirlwind

Nsambu Za Suekama

1 March 2021

Contents

To the Ones Who Can Fly: A Message from the Whirlwind	3
Reading the Message: Study, Solidarity, Spirit, and Struggle	14

New zine release by Nsambu Za Suekama, entitled “To the Ones Who Can Fly: A Message from the Whirlwind”

with a reader’s manual and suggestions for organizing study groups around this pamphlet in your circles, community, and across prison walls.

To the Ones Who Can Fly: A Message from the Whirlwind

*“Now gimme two wings
(two wings)
To veil my face
Now gimme two wings
(two wings)
To veil my feet
Now gimme two wings
(two wings)
To fly away, so the world can’t do me no harm.”*

To the ones who can fly,
the street queers of the future,
If you read this, you will hear things that we also heard.

You will hear that this land of liberty, your ancestors were brought here as slaves. You will hear that we suffered for a long time. You will hear that a civil war happened because white people realized it was evil to own other beings as property. You will hear that a man named Lincoln signed a law to help us get free, but then segregation came and Black people had to fight for freedom again. They will call it the “civil rights movement,” and they will never explain to you why we had to fight for freedom *two* times in the so-called land of the free in the first place. All they will tell you is that, again, white people realized it was wrong to oppress us. They will tell you that a President signed the law so that Black people could finally vote. Then you will look around, and see that we still aren’t free, see that the earth is dying, and that we are very poor, that many of us are in jail or on the streets, and that a lot of cops brutalize us, and see that white people still chase and kill us. And you must ask yourself why that is, in the land of the free?

They will tell you that everything you face is because there’s a lot of criminals in our community. They will tell you not to be a criminal, if you want to be able to get the American Dream and its promise of freedom. But regardless of whether you did a crime, you still don’t have that Dream or promise. Regardless of whether you did a crime or not, there are still things — racism, transphobia, sexism, ableism — that keep you from living the Dream. What, then, is the truth? The truth is we are oppressed, and America is rigged, set up. There is no land of opportunity, “crime” is just what they call the things that oppressed people do to either survive a system of haves and have-nots, or to resist and fight to change it. When our enslaved ancestors tried to escape, that was a crime. When they freed one another by burning plantations down, that was a crime. And even if they didn’t resist, even if they just looked for secret places to pray or have fun, even if they just went to sleep for a little while after being worked so hard — these acts of survival were also crimes. Every Black person who knows what it’s like to struggle at the bottom of the barrel should understand that each of us will eventually be forced to pick one of two paths — survival or resistance — and both are painted as “criminal” by the master. The sooner Black

people understand this, especially Black trans and disabled folks forced to the margins, the better. It helps so much when we have clarity on how we are positioned in society.

“One glad mornin’

When this world is over

(I’ll fly away)

To a home thas

Well beyond the shore

(I’ll fly away)

I’ll fly away

Oh, glory, I’ll fly away.

When I die, hallelujah, by and by I’ll fly away.”

Clarity comes from understanding history. As Black people, the stories we are told about how we got to where we are is only half the picture. This is called miseducation. I didn’t know this as a young child, but over time I did learn that it was not true that we started out as slaves. Who the white Man brought to this land in chains was African people, human beings, who had gifts and talents. We were medicine people, artisans, divers, farmers, storytellers, warriors, childrearsers, craftspeople, builders, musicians, and more. We were and are a people who hold the skills that are necessary to build a healthy society, because we passed those skills down from generation to generation, and we invent new ones and update them as time has gone on since the beginning of our existence. We were stolen because people from Europe needed our skills to build new societies for themselves on stolen land. They wanted to exploit our gifts and talents, to rob us for our labor and make a profit.

But our people fought back. Back in Afrika we fought. On the slave ships we fought. In America we fought too. We fought so bad, the whites realized they couldn’t keep slavery for too long, it was becoming unprofitable each time we fought and fought. And so they had to figure out a new system to build their societies, a new way to steal our labor and skills. The people in the North had this new system already, but the South didn’t. This new system was an industrial system. This new system started in Europe and spread around the world, destroying the environment as Europeans continued to steal land and steal our people to finance it. The Civil War happened because the whites of the South wanted to hold on to the old, plantation-style slavery system, while the whites of the North wanted to expand the newer, industrial-style slavery system. That man Lincoln only signed the emancipation proclamation, the law they say got us free, because he hoped it would stop the war and keep the peace between the whites of the North and the South, not because he cared about Black people.

Black people used the opportunities created by this fight between the whites of the North and whites of the South to get free. Eventually we remade life for ourselves by our own authority. We took back land in the South and began to redefine how democracy could look on our terms, based on our values and our interests. We used our gifts and talents to develop society in a more healthy, egalitarian way. They tell you about segregation right after the civil war but they leave this part out. They leave it out so you don’t understand *why* segregation came along. Segregation happened because Black people had gotten so free by ourselves in the South that whites got scared we would take revenge. They feared vengeance, because all over the world people were getting free, from slavery and other systems of oppression, like the industrial one, which we call “capitalism.” It scared the Man to see so many Black people beginning to join up in solidarity with these worldwide struggles, to see us building a powerful and global movement for freedom. The

master sees a planetary movement for liberation as a threat (this movement is called many names btw, “communism,” “socialism,” “anarchism,”). So the oppressor started jim crow segregation to keep us down.

But Black people never backed down. We fought jim crow segregation too, just like when we fought slavery. We made things so unprofitable for the Man that it caused such a division in America once again, so the President had to figure out how to preserve peace and ultimately protect the master’s profit in this nation a second time. He did not sign the law because he cared about Black people. White America does not truly care for us, and that is why Black people had to keep fighting anyway, even after segregation was over. Just like before, though, we pushed to remake life, for us and by us, using our gifts and talents to fight for a healthier society. And just like last time, we connected our movements here to the revolutionary activism that happened worldwide. This scared the oppressor once again. A global movement for freedom is not something the Man wants to see, as it threatens white power and capitalism.

Instead of jim crow, though, they had to find a new way to neutralize our struggle. They found ways to poison us with lead and landfills and they burnt our communities down. Then, they started to put drugs in our community so they can say it’s a lot of crime and use cops and prisons to suppress us. The cops and prisons are like Jim Crow part two.

But again, like before, Black people keep fighting still, fighting in the prisons — and now in the streets, we are fighting cops. You will hear about this, and they will tell you it’s because we just wanna do illegal things. But, no we are fighting cops because we are still fighting slavery, still fighting to get free. And we are fighting so hard, soon we will cause a new division, we will threaten their profits a third time, and the President will try to sign a law to help keep the peace again. They will tell you that this law was signed because white people finally wanted to respect Black people. Do not believe them. Understand that Black people have had to keep fighting to remake life by us and for us for one reason and one reason only: this country is built on our destruction. And we will start joining up with global movements for freedom too, just like twice before, because the entire world system is exploitative and destructive to all people and to the environment. When that worldwide struggle comes, the oppressor will get real scared all over again, and try to bring in a Jim Crow 3.0 — something we haven’t seen before.

I write this hoping that by that time, you, street queers of the future, are conscious enough to notice the pattern of history. That you will say, “*hey, this is familiar, it happened two times already, why does it keep happening*” and you will say “*nah, I don’t want this to go the same way it did before.*” I am hopeful that you will continue the struggle, but in a more insightful way, in order to keep the next versions of jim crow from happening.

Our ancestors used to tell stories about the people who could fly. I remember learning about that from this tiny picture book my mother had for us when I was real small. The people had forgotten what powers they had, so the story went, cuz they were enslaved. But ever so often, there was the ones who still remembered, cuz they knew the old ways we had brought from our homeland, and so they could mount up in the air like as if they had eagle’s wings. They would swoop down over the plantation, the story said, and whisper deep knowledge, knowledge of self, knowledge of spirit, knowledge of solidarity and of struggle, right on into the ears of those Black people who had forgot, and get them climbin on up into the sky right along with them. And there was nothing the slavemaster could do about it. Nothing at all.

Those stories were about us. You might hear that the stories were metaphors about the brave folk at Igbo Landing who chose to drown in the ocean and join the ancestors rather than be slaves,

or you might hear that the stories were symbols for the brave souls who escaped the plantation but then came back to free other slaves. But, I want you to remember that those stories were about us too. See, all through Afrikan history, the ones holding onto our traditions, the ones who lived outside certain hierarchies and binaries of today, the ones taking leadership as shamans or warriors, were often queer or trans. Many of the first Afrikans that Europeans encountered when they invaded our homeland were what today would be considered queer or trans. This fact is why Europeans could use religion and then science to paint all African people as savage, animals, crazy, inferior, predatory. They would throw us under the bus and make us a scapegoat in their quest to subjugate all our people and take our lands.

Now, the labels “queer” and “trans” were not used by the ancestors to describe people like us. There was no need for such terminology because the marginalization and demonization of those who today would be called queer or trans is not universal across the Motherland. Africa was very diverse in ancient times, and is still very diverse to this very day. So, some cultures were similar to the modern/white world, where certain people (such as men) were put at the center. Africa was not a utopia, a place completely lacking hierarchy and anyone who tells you that our ancestors were perfect is idealizing our precolonial past. But many African societies were and are pretty fluid, equalitarian, communalistic, honoring nature and autonomy, in such a way that women and other marginalized genders could enjoy social and political power and material access, or at least have cultural affirmation to a more considerable degree than we experience today under colonialism/capitalism. Because of this openness, you can learn the names of people like the *Sekhet* in Kemet, the *jimbadaa* of the Kongo, the *Mangaiko* among the Mbo people of Zaire, the *Mashoga* in Kenya, the *chibados* of Angola, the *Ashtime* in Ethiopia, the *lagredis* in Dahomey, the *uzeze* and *kitesha* of West Central Africa, the *ikihundu* and *ikimaze* of Burundi, the *yan daudu* of Nigeria, the *ngor-jigeen* of Senegal, the *esenge* among the Ambo people, the *mwaami* among the Ila people, the *inzili* of Tanzania, the *mugawe* of the Meru people, the *wandarwarad* and *wandawande* among the Amhara, and others.

There are more names, and there are other words, to describe the identities of those who would today be called “queer” or “trans,” or the relationships they formed, the skills and labor they provided. Even in the Biblical days, the people called “eunuchs” in English, but considered saris in ancient Middle East/North African cultures, held respected positions. Also, if you ever heard about some Black women being called “Amazons” or “warrior women,” well actually these people called themselves *Mino* and there is documented evidence that some of them were recognized as men. If you ever heard of Black nationalism, the idea that Black people deserve to control our destinies as a separate, autonomous community, well the first Black nationalist was a prophetess in the Congo who claimed to be possessed by a male spirit. If you ever heard about the Haitian Revolution, the world’s first successful slave revolt, which established the first Black led republic in the Americas, a central figure in the revolution was a prophet who claimed to be possessed by a female spirit. If you ever heard about enslaved people running away from the plantation along the underground railroad, many of them chose to subvert gender norms, to change their clothes, including Harriet Tubman, who many considered to have been walking in the spirit and power of Moses (a male prophet). If you ever heard of women’s movements against sexual violence and oppression, well these began in the anti-slavery and antiracist struggles led by Black women, and it was a Black trans woman who first testified before a US congressional committee about the gender violence she and her town had faced at the hands of white people and the police.

If you ever heard that it is not okay to call everyone a “he” or a “she” that you meet, and that you should try a “gender neutral” pronoun to refer to people, well remember that many West African cultures already do not recognize gender in their languages, and even among the Gullah nation in the South, the Geechee language they speak is very gender expansive and does not rely on “he” or “she” for every human being. We are the ones who can fly, ascending to freedom. And when I say that, I am saying that in the history of African survival and resistance, a rigid gender binary was not the only thing our ancestors practiced. We street queers understand this the best.

*“I’ll fly away
(fly away)
Fly away
(I’ll fly away)
Fly away, Lawd
(fly away)
Fly away
(I’ll fly away)
In the whirlwind
(Fly away)
I’ll be gone
(Fly away)
In the evening
(fly away)
To the stars
(I’ll fly away).”*

It is hard to find research about our queer and trans ancestors because the Man erased it. White people killed us off, or they categorized us as mentally ill, devil worshippers, or predators. Once this happened, people who held power in Africa before the Europeans came started to look down on themselves, seeing white people’s rigid gender standards as a more “civilized” update to African standards. These folk ran after the master’s standards in place of ours, hoping to secure some degree of power for themselves. Many African people would then hide or deny the existence of gender/sexual variance in their lives, to help everyone look more civilized and holy. Soon the secrecy turned into forgetting about these lifeways, and eventually the forgetting turned into denial, and then the denial turned into what happens now where folk pattern the white man’s religion or white man’s science by saying that “transness is unnatural.” As a result, Black people continue to internalize hate filled narratives about their own people.

They deny their own spiritual and militant African histories, neglect the priests and warriors, they spit on the sex workers, and they appropriate our language and fashion, they use us for pleasure or finances or other skills and labor, they force us into a Closet, and they try to reduce us to a resource for everyone else’s sense of psychological, sexual, financial, emotional, or cultural benefit. Ultimately they replicate onto us what the master is doing to all Black people. This puts us on the front lines of violence from the police. If you do the research, the first documented Black queer or trans people in US historical record were folk in trouble with the law for either fighting to survive or resist. You have probably heard of a “Pride Parade” and a “gay agenda.” Well these phrases are actually a complete misunderstanding of the revolutions that Black, working class queer/trans people started: revolutions that began as a riot against the cops. Our movement was led by trans women who were fighting for civil rights, fighting against the US’ wars on

global freedom, fighting for housing and for those in prisons, fighting for self determination and people's governance rather than profits.

Our movement strove to fulfill the legacy of Black freedom struggle because we are the ones who can fly, because we have spiritual and militant history to reclaim. From multiple angles, both at the hands of the enemy and some of our own people, we got attacked. We were shut down and are still being shut down, forced to realize that the American Dream is a lie real quick, that this system is still slavery real quick. Gender exploitation, ableist domination, class war, racist/national oppression – it all converges and forces us on the fringes of survival, with no homes or jobs or safety. We continue to be hyperexploited and superexploited, to sit at the bottom of a lowerarchy, with a thousand hierarchies stacked against us. While those who fit the mainstream gender/sexual codes of this society, on the other hand, cisgender (not trans) and straight (heterosexual) folk could be somewhat validated.

As I said before, survival or resistance is the final options for our people due to oppression. But if you are straight or cisgender, you will have bourgeois institutions to somewhat protect from colonial/capitalist violence, such as the nuclear family structure, the formal church and other organized religions, the legitimized workforce, the medical industry and more. Colonialism and capitalism has taught the straights that these systems are all “civilized” versions of African traditions/life to replicate. Therefore, the straights, and even some cisgender gays have less reasons than we do to try and survive or resist against them.

This is all called cisheteronormativity, by the way. The master forced it onto Africans purposefully, to divide the enslaved. Back on the plantations, for example, the ones who could fly would be demonized: the white preachers always condemn the rebels and the shamans. Anyone who patterned our spiritually, politically, and sexually/gender variant “lifestyles” was punished in the name of their God. Christianized, straight or cis slaves would listen to these messages, and repeat them, to help themselves feel more worthy as oppressed people. Now, the enslaved blames any suffering and mistreatment from the master on the “sinfulness” of queer/trans folk rather than looking at the material facts: white capitalism, and choosing to fight it in solidarity with us. They will go so far as to not only tell you that we are not free because there is alot of crime in our community, but also to say that the reason why so many Black people are criminal is because our women don't properly follow Christian gender/sexual norms, or that too many of us are queer, and that this hinders our economic advancement and our development of social intelligence. This is all respectability politics, all idealistic foolishness, racist, sexist, ableist, transphobic nonsense. Dont believe the hype. Black people are oppressed because Europeans want to steal our labor (skills) and lands (earth's resources), period. This uneven set up means Black people as a whole are forced to be like crabs in a barrel, where we cant get out because we are trapped by an enemy who wants to eat us. Instead of fighting together to destroy the barrel, we keep fighting among ourselves, because gender has taught some people that they can choose to crush everyone else beneath them while tryna clamber to the top of the barrel and leave everyone else behind.

We as street queers should know better. We should know that none of us is free til all of us is free. This is why I am hopeful that it is the street queers who will shape the consciousness of Black radical struggle for the future. The unique contours of our struggle should force us to become aware of the patterns in how the oppressor responds to us as Black people and how we as a collective have been responding to them. Again, from this standpoint, the history of the US is a story of oppression and Upheaval: slave revolts against white capitalist domination. Each Upheaval threatens the peace in this nation, and so the government does something to “restore

the peace.” They first try to show fake love for Black people, and when that strategy doesn’t work (because our people keep fighting anyway), they violently suppress us. The oppression always leads right back to square one, to more revolts, because the people will never not resist — and the resistance will always be criminalized. They get criminalized because rebellions are the testing ground for more revolutionary propositions. And it is a revolution that will shake the master’s house to its very root and core.

The first Upheaval was the Civil War, and the master tried to show fake love through Abraham Lincoln, but our people kept fighting through the Reconstruction era. They sought to widen the opposition to a revolutionary proposition, to get to that more global struggle that threatens master’s house. From there you get socialists like Hubert Harrison or anarchists like Lucy Parsons. During that time, we got queer and trans radicals like Frances Thompson and William Dorsey Swann. Both were criminalized, by the way, because they were the wild things Man could not house. Jim crow came along after their time. The second Upheaval was the Civil Rights movement, and the master tried to show fake love through Lyndon B Johnson, but our people kept fighting through the Black Power era. They sought to widen the opposition to a revolutionary proposition, to get to that more global struggle that threatens master’s house. From there you get Pan Africanists like Malcolm X and socialist feminists like Assata Shakur. During that time, we got queer and trans radicals like Marsha P Johnson and Kuwasi Balagoon. Both were criminalized as well, because they were the wild things Man could not house. The new jim crow came along right after their time.

As I write this letter, I am living through what will become the Third Upheaval. And you, street queers of the future, you will come up in that phase where it is time to widen the opposition to a revolutionary proposition, and shake the master’s house to its core through global struggle. You will have to be the wild things that Man cannot house, like Frances Thompson, William Dorsey Swann did after the First Upheaval, and Marsha P Johnson, Kuwasi Balagoon did after the Second Upheaval. The master will try to show fake love, then try to suppress you through the next Jim Crow. And you will struggle your way out of that system. And you will be criminalized, too. This will happen not simply because history repeats itself, however. This will happen because history is a process: it is a result of cumulative choices.

There has been an accumulation of choices made by the master to preserve the system of organized, protected robbery that produces wealth for him; there has been an accumulation of choices made by the enslaved to establish abolitionist, nationalist, communist, anarchist systems for the health of our people and our planet. At some point, these accumulated frequencies of domination and accumulated frequencies of liberation will be forced to collide. They will negate each other; it will be a contradiction, an antagonism, and these wavelengths will not become harmonized because the source of their power and radiation are completely at odds. It will be either anarchy (no more hierarchy) or annihilation (no more life on this planet). It will feel like the end of the world, a battle between dark and light forces, and on the other side of the confrontation: a new flow to the universe, where either we been washed away or they have been.

We must choose the shadowy forces, the forces of those who are at the lowest. We know the nighttime is when slaves were able to hide and escape and plan and pray and have fun. We must choose the shrouds. We know that the fullness of light energy is in the very hues we wear on our skin. We must choose the black colored Deep. We know that all life and light started there, way at the bottom. We must choose power from below because the liberation of Black folk, especially

the disabled street queers, will only come when we abolish the world capitalist/colonial system and replace it with a society structured around our needs and our autonomy.

*"I'll fly away,
oh glory, I'll fly away
When I die, hallelujah,
by and by, I'll fly away.
So look for me, Lawd
(in the whirlwind)
With the bow in the cloud
(in the whirlwind)
My light will appear, Lawd
(in the whirlwind)
In ribbons all around
(in the whirlwind).
I'll fly away,
oh glory, I'll fly away
When I die, hallelujah,
by and by, I'll fly away."*

Understanding this, we will be armed to put an end to all the current oppression we see, at last, as our people have kept trying. No longer will this historical process of oppression and Upheaval and back again keep going on and on and on, because in understanding the contradiction at its root, this leads to a knowledge of self — where we are from, what destiny we have been sent by this universe to fulfill; leads to a knowledge of struggle — how we have had to fight and why we fight in the first place; leads to knowledge of what solidarity is — what it means to fight for intersectional freedom, centering those most vulnerable and overlooked; and leads to knowledge of spirit — appreciating the fact that we are the people who could fly, who hold African lifeways afloat, and the master only demonizes us and condemns us to hell to scare our people into adopting their values and betraying the movement. We understand contradictions: so this enables our people to properly fulfill our role in the cumulative process of Black radical history that we have inherited from our ancestors.

We understand contradictions: so we know ourselves to be slaves trying to burn the plantation at last. But there will be some telling us we must not go in that direction. These are the ones working real hard to mask the contradiction, who say it's too extreme to be thinking about this as a life and death situation. So they say it's "a reach" to see us as slaves, a "reach" to see the civil war or civil rights movement as led by rebelling slaves. They say that all we need to do is find the right leaders to help us out, just like with Lincoln or Lyndon B Johnson. They truly believe we have a shared humanity with those who run the Game, who benefit off this rigged set up. And it's easy for them to say that, too, because many of them share the same gender/sexual beliefs as our oppressors.

Unsurprisingly, they gon tell us to vote for better rulers, to support either the conservatives who snarl like wolves tryna consume us or to support the liberals who smile at us like foxes but wanna eat us too. They gon act like there is no other option but to try and get a piece of the Amerikkkan pie, if we truly want rights or truly want economic security. But stay woke, my sibs. This is all part of that fake love that precedes Jim Crow 3.0. It is a dead end, a distraction.

Think about it: there were probably slaves who found it worthwhile to negotiate with the master back in the day. They might have said “We should ask the Man to give us our drums back,” once the drums were taken. And I imagine it might have been a good use of political energy too, if you could use that demand for drums to expose to fellow slaves why drums were taken away in the first place. But that’s the only reason a negotiation should happen: expose contradictions and use that to build for revolution. In this case, tactical slaves could say “the master took drums to prevent communication among us that would be used to plan rebellions” (which is the historical truth). In seeing that master snatched away drums in order to suppress an opportunity for resistance, then we could clearly understand that the colonizer is invested in our domination at all costs and that that is why Man suppresses our liberties (whether it is drum use or voting rights). Negotiation is futile here, we should move as rebels instead and burn down the master’s house (this is what the slave who is truly tactical will use a demand or petition to reveal and achieve).

But some slaves probably never took it that far, and to this day, many Black people in some sphere of political activation will not — as much as they claim to be playing “chess, not checkers.” Some just decided that when master said no to our demand, or beat us for even asking about our drums, this was simply because Massa was confused. Massa don’t know better. Massa’s heart needs to be fixed. The reformists and assimilationists say we just have to keep asking and praying for drums til we get them. And once we got them, then we could all have fun on the plantation, because God honored us and master finally heard us. Meanwhile God had nothing to do with it (just like God would not have softened Pharoah’s heart because God *wanted* Moses to rebel). The only reason the master gives us our drums is so he could placate us and keep us from getting angry enough to resist. But more importantly it is so he could bring his fellows on to watch us play and dance and shout, so they could enjoy us performing for them, even gamble and make money off this performance. This is how it is with any of the crumbs we try to lick off Massa’s table.

I pray that you street queers of the future do not listen to the negotiators. I pray that you understand that the only solution is to ensure that all power is to all our people, and not our proxies. The destiny of your generation is to get it to a point where nobody will be stolen and nobody’s skills will be forcibly robbed of them to build societies for people in power. What you must achieve is a global system where we will be able to finally build our culture and communities freely and safely, healthily, holistically, from the margins, and by our own authority. We must work to replenish the earth, too, and the way we use its resources must be structured according to the consensus and involvement of all, not the ruling few. And we must guard the lane: make sure our planet and its resources and any person or their labor and gifts is not held captive or stolen. We must do this by any means necessary. We must establish a love of freedom. And we must center those on the bottom, so that we take charge of our destinies at last, and have full participation in the liberation of us all.

It will not be an easy journey, though, coming out of the Upheaval (rebellions) of today. You will be criminalized, by other street queers even, especially those trying to help the master show us fake love through negotiations. It will be a spiritual war too, where the straights will demonize you and invoke hellfire upon you, because you keep the struggle alive, and it helps the master when Black people forget their own lifeways just to spite us. The enemy will keep acting up, and we will keep being attacked. At the same time, we gon keep making a way out of no way. We gon still pop. We gon still finesse. We gon still stunt. We gon still live our friendly, fabulous, fierce,

frenetic lives. We gon ride for each other, house each other, clothe eachother, feed each other; we gon take care each other, protect each other, affirm and nurture each other; we making medicine or stealing medicine for each other; we looting for each other, scamming and hustling the Man to run resources back toward each other.

We gon teach each other and challenge each other to grow and do better by each other. We gon raise kids in a spirit of autonomy rather than control. We gon sow literal seeds and metaphoric seeds for the sake of our earth's health. We gonna build new institutions so we can guide and conduct ourselves in a principled, revolutionary fashion, a way that is anti-hierarchy, Pan African, and not ableist or transphobic. We gon shut our enemies down, including traitors in the community, and develop our own structures and frameworks to make decisions about our affairs and needs that do not lead to exploitation or domination of any kind, period. We gonna define ourselves, by us, for us, abandoning our deadnames just like the revolutionaries of old abandoned their slave names. We will find in our deep legacy of cultural and political maneuver and innovation a thousand doorways toward new genres of what it means to be in this universe, widening the possibilities of love and labor and land stewardship and liberation beyond even just the sacred roles our ancestors passed down, and certainly beyond the limitations the colonizers forced onto us. Yes, we gon keep pressing toward the stars before us, we gon keep on flying to freedom, with the winds of Black radical tradition blowing beneath our wings til the Man cant hold us down ever again.

With love, for the God who makes the ocean roar,
who created the sun that gives us light,
who whispers "freedom" in our hearts,
and for the ancestors, the nomads, the ungoverned,
the refugees, the lil friends, for the kinfolk,
the pirates, the runaways, the maroons,
the insurgents, the gworls, the peasants,
the guerrilla warriors, the maGes, the street queens,
for the rioters, the single moms, the hood niggas, and all the wild
things Man cannot house,

And for all those who are forgotten and unprotected.
All those who aren't allowed to love or live as themselves freely
All those who fought and died for our freedom
For all our people wherever they are, and for our homeland, and for our planet
For all beings, even those who are not human,
and for all the people everyone says are less than human
And for all people whose brains work different or whose bodies work different
And for all those in prison or on the street
For all power to all the people. *Asé.*

"Im an angel of grace, Lawd
(in the whirlwind)

Not greed nor guile
(in the whirlwind)

I come to bring life, Lawd
(in the whirlwind)

*As fire rains down
(in the whirlwind).
Dese bones gon rise, Lawd
(in the whirlwind)
Dese bones gon rise, Lawd
(in the whirlwind)
Dese bones gon rise, Lawd
(in the whirlwind)
Dese bones gon rise, Lawd
(in the whirlwind).
Two wings
(In the whirlwind)
Two wings
(In the whirlwind)
Two wings
(In the whirlwind)
Two wings
(In the whirlwind)
Oh, I'm gonna fly away
(In the whirlwind)
I'm gonna fly away
(In the whirlwind)
I'm gonna fly away
(In the whirlwind)
I'm gonna fly away
(In the whirlwind)
So the world caint do me no harm
So the world caint do me no harm
So the world caint do me no harm
So the world caint do me no harm."*

*#WildThings
#Anarkata
#BlackAnarchicRadical
#MessageFromTheWhirlwind
#Anarcunt
#ToTheOnesWhoCanFly
#GiveMeTwoWings
#ManCaintHouseUs
#WordToNine
#December21*

Shoutouts to all the Black trans, nonbinary, and gender variant folk who taught me these things.

Reading the Message: Study, Solidarity, Spirit, and Struggle

To the Ones Who Can Fly: A Message from the Whirlwind aims to foster a culture of Black revolutionary learning, healing and movement building that advances the liberation of the most marginal.

We have four guidelines for the correct use of this document: **study, solidarity, spirit, and struggle.**

1. Study

Get some homegirls/homies. Two to five other Kats. More if you're cool with that. Form a political education circle.

At the end of the text are some resources you can learn from while you read the *Message*. Dive into everything.

Ask each other who the author is. What is their community and environment? How do they relate to their context? What is the conflict and antagonism being addressed by the text? What does the author and their movement want to achieve? How are they trying to get to those goals? Why is what is being said important to them or to us?

These questions can help you go over the different historical, cultural, political ideas raised by all of them, together.

Strive to use your study to arrive at a cohesive ideological, theoretical, material, and historical understanding of the conditions that Black people, especially Black trans people are facing.

Take your time. Don't rush and don't pressure yourself.

Finally, look up the Flying African myths. Try to create artwork like visuals, performances, music, poetry, rap based off the flying African myths. Use this to help you remember and communicate what you have learned from your studies of *Message from the Whirlwind*. Have fun.

2. Solidarity

The Message from the Whirlwind is to be distributed into the prisons and on the streets, for no cost.

Anyone reading it from the outside should get a crew and start writing letters to our incarcerated kinfolk, especially Black trans and queer folk.

How to send this zine into prison and jails?

Mailing the *Message* to someone in prison takes only a few items: one medium sized booklet envelope (5 1/2 x 8 1/2) and two to three stamps. Most facilities accept white envelopes with black ink, and if you write a letter enclosed with the zine please be sure to use white paper (no stationary) with black ink as well. This is to minimize the chance of rejection, as mailroom censors are often strict.

Unfortunately, the price of supplies is unrealistic for many. So if you are unable to obtain your own materials, True Leap Press has offered to mail the zine to an imprisoned contact for you, at no charge. Requests to mail this zine to a prisoner you already know can be sent to trueleap-press@gmail.com. If you are Black and do not already have contact with someone incarcerated, reach out to this email address as well, and our friends can match you with someone.

What does collective study with an imprisoned pen-pal look like?

When engaging study across bars, there are a few simple things to keep in mind when you are exchanging words and ideas.

First, be sure you are operating through a consensus-model of decision making with your incarcerated contact. Moving from consensus is key to not overstepping your comrade's boundaries. This also includes finding out what things your comrade likes to hear, write, talk about.

Second, avoid writing in a way that may provoke retaliation by guards. This could happen regardless of what words you choose. This also might not even be a concern for your comrade on the other side of the wall. However, it is important to consult your contact and ask them for their comfort level with regards to language and materials shared. Staying mindful of censors **does not** mean water down your analysis, nor does it mean share less revolutionary content. It simply means at times you will be forced to use less obvious language to describe a given point. This means working together with your pen-pal/contact to ensure their safety through the course of study, coming to consensus around best practices to beat the censor's odds.

Another word of advice is *DO NOT OVERTHINK THE PROCESS*. After all, you are building consciousness together with comrades trapped in the belly of a colonial settler state. The very act of maintaining a relationship of solidarity with someone locked up is defiance, especially in the instance of sustaining care and political community with Black trans prisoners. If you are feeling stuck here, maybe you can write poems, rhymes, stories based off the flying African myths to your pen pal, something entertaining or relaxing that might ease the pressure of the letter writing experience. Writing in group settings can also be a great source of encouragement.

Final things to keep in mind:

For the most part, you are not going to be able to send things with stickers, markers, crayons, glue, construction paper, etc. inside. This does not mean, however that you can't create such materials with other Kats, especially with kids and young folk, as part of keeping engaged in prisoners' struggles. Plenty of comrades create graphics for use offline and online, including with inspirational slogans, to raise awareness about the things Black folk, especially Black trans folk go through behind bars. Of course, never share information or the likeness/image of your pen pal unless they give consent to it. Even then, be mindful of what information should not be made public (such as your trans comrade's deadname, certain details of their legal experience, etc.).

With that in mind, understand that some prisons will require you to include your pen pal's deadname ON THE ADDRESS of the envelope. This may not be true in all cases, but it is an unfortunate part of prisoner solidarity work at times with trans comrades. Never use someone's deadname (government name/given name/slave name) in your direct correspondence with them, or when talking about them to others. Respecting our comrades' right to self-determination by honoring their chosen names and pronouns (if they use pronouns) is essential to the work of this Message. The address of the envelope will be the only place you use their deadname (government name. Legal name, given name, slave name) and simply as a way to navigate delivering materials.

Additionally, always include a return address on the envelope. If there is no return address on the envelope, it may get disposed of or sent back to you, and therefore never reach your comrade(s) on the inside. If you yourself do not have an address to include, perhaps coordinate with one of your study partners or a family member or some other Kat you know and ask to use their address.

3. Spirit

The Message talks about some heavy subjects. Sometimes radical work can be exhausting. We want people to find time to rest and reflect.

The text is broken up with negro spirituals about flight, because the flying African myth comes from Black religious traditions. Use them to invoke a sense of escape, relaxation.

If this is not for you, take time to honor our transcestors in ritual. You can pour a libation and recite the words at the end of the *Message* (ex. “for those forgotten and unprotected”).

But one does not have to use the songs or ritual to reflect on the themes of the *Message*, especially if you are someone who doesn’t hold any beliefs. You can also just take time to yourself, to do some breathing exercises, and meditate on the idea of a “Whirlwind” that many Black radicals, from Marcus Garvey to the BLA have discussed. Think about how this whirlwind (or your breath) allows Black trans folk to fly.

Some people might combine the spirituals with ancestor reverence and the breathing meditation on the whirlwind.

Do what allows you to be able get in touch with your inner self and nurture that feeling of escape. Imagine what it’s like to fly and go beyond.

4. Struggle

Form networks or join organizations so that you can be accountable to a community of folk applying what you learn to practical forms of resistance.

We must oppose the carceral state, racial capitalism, and military/imperial domination of African people worldwide, and specifically destroy the ways that Black/Trans Autonomy is blocked by queerphobic and ableist institutions and practices both from within and outside Black life.

The politics of the *Message* is an approach that:

1) integrates anti-hierarchy politics with 2) an understanding of how all forms of domination are interlocking oppressions, and 3) emphasizes the need for a class conscious struggle against the colonial forces imperiling African people (and which made transphobia and ableism global in the first place). Build accordingly. Look to the history of Marsha P Johnson in STAR and Kuwasi Balagoon of the BLA for contemporary Black revolutionary QTGNC thought and practice to implement.

Academics and all others placed in bourgeois institutions should be leery of trying to engage in the praxis of Study, Solidarity, Spirit, and Struggle in relationship to *Message From the Whirlwind*. We do not want to see any co-option, or any links drawn between the *Message* and an individual career-track. Before hastening to bring/reference the *Message* + its praxis in these settings, put material support to working class and incarcerated Black trans folk and organizations.

Follow the leadership of the most vulnerable engaging with the *Message* in Study, Solidarity, Spirit, Struggle—by passing your access, resources, the mic, etc over to them. Help them develop cultures of learning and movement building on their terms, that are outside of the dictates of the academy and other industrial complexes.

The Anarchist Library
Anti-Copyright



Nsambu Za Suekama
To the Ones Who Can Fly
A Message From the Whirlwind
1 March 2021

Retrieved on 13 December 2022 from
trueleapress.com/2021/03/01/reading-the-message-study-solidarity-spirit-and-struggle

theanarchistlibrary.org