



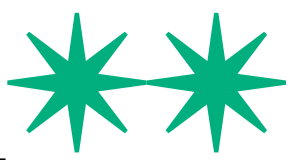
POWER-HUNGRY

FREEDOM DEFICIENT

BLACKITY BLACK

VIRAL

RE-ENACTMENT



# DEAR FRIEND,

You good sis??!!

I hope you're up on your stretching game, finding ways to keep sane, finding ways to escape, finding other ways to express whatever you feel while staying hydrated. While talking to a friend today, I was reminded of how I can be restricted by an ideal of freedom. It's the kind of life lesson that I keep having to relearn. And each time it comes crashing down on me like a ton of bricks or another Kanye tweet. In the last few months, Black freedom seems to be conveniently nested into popular headlines or company messaging dominating our feeds. This recent flare of attention given to generations-old call for Black liberation has been all-encompassing and sudden, yet familiar in other ways. But I was reminded by my friend today that freedom is not the same as power.

Wanting freedom is an ancestral tick steeped in Black folk's DNA. It's the constant asking of Black people to speak out and speak up, to make public declarations of wanting freedom that's new—for me at least. As if me trying to do more than nail the perfect twist out method and survive in a world with skin as dark as the sweetest of berries isn't already enough? Recently regulated to my small Brooklyn apartment, much of my idle time was filled with the trauma of trying to remember all of the names of those who lost their freedom because of the color of their skin. I also reflected on how white empathy seems only to be sparked by gruesome images of Black pain as the video of George Floyd's murder went "viral."

Many took to the streets and co-opted the only public spaces available to demonstrate against white supremacy. Even more took to their keyboards to root for Black liberation. There were beautifully crafted ads in support of... who knows?, lengthy "do better" posts about humanity, and abstract black squares. There were also thoughtful think pieces, courageous self-reflections, and incredibly moving art. I didn't *do* any of this. I couldn't even bring myself to do the smallest act of hitting the like button for much of what I saw. I used the "stay at home" order as a veil to disappear, not committing to investing in the energy of the moment. I felt paralyzed by consumption. And as the streets swelled with people across the US, I grew skeptical of the scores of young white faces I saw in these crowds. Then came the messages.

wf\*: "How are you doing?"

Me: "It has been overwhelming and rough."

*wf\* = random white friend I met the week before the pandemic shut down*

This response was all the honesty and energy I was willing to muster up. But in my head, that energy was on a whole other level...

*\*\*Alicia's brain re-enactment of a conversation that never happened...*

wf: "How are you doing?"

Me: "It has been overwhelming and rough. But it has been overwhelming and rough for a while. I recently learned how slave and free states regulated the movement of enslaved AND freed Blacks during the antebellum period. I was shocked at my ignorance of this history, but I was also shocked at all the ways that policies and laws have evolved to be less detected and only in service to guarantee Black freedom never means Black power. So my question back to you is, "How are you doing with all of this? Have you figured out your part in this yet? What is it about Black power that is so unsettling? What power are you willing to give up so that Black power can have a fighting chance? How are you ok with your part in this?"

But I never go that far because I dread the answer, and part of me already knows it, and the other part could care less. The next few weeks were met with a different yet more thoughtful question as the streets grew louder.

wf: "How can I dismantle white supremacist systems of oppression? What can I do about it?"

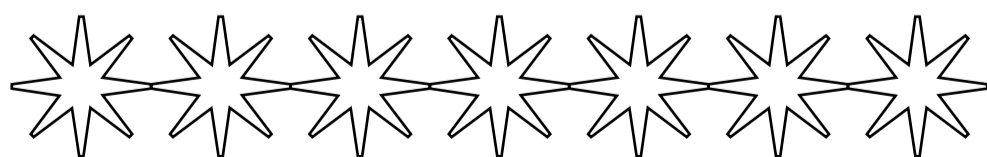
Me: *silence*

*\*\*another re-enactment*

wf: "How can I dismantle white supremacist systems of oppression? What can I do about it?"

Me: "How the fuck should I know??!! I didn't make this shit. FIGURE IT OUT for your own humanity's sake. Please don't ask me to do any more work on tearing down what you and yours have spent generations fortifying!"

Again I don't have the energy, or perhaps it is the courage that I lack. Either way, my silence sits there in awkward text exchanges and Zoom calls. It's easy to get lost in all the ways I wish to be free as a young, ambitious, self-indulgent, angry, joyous, generous, hurt, loving, spirited, analytical, determined Black woman. But what would it look like if I exchanged the desire for freedom for the lust of power? We have a strange idea of the concept of power. It's almost always tied to control, oppression, capitalism, whiteness, penises, etc. And there have been so many times when I have been conditioned not to demand power. But like many concepts and theories, Blacks have to redefine it for themselves. What does it mean to desire power from a place of love? What would it feel like to let the words leave my lips? What would it look like to carry that energy with me wherever I went? Freedom is the bare minimum, and I want more for my life and my community. I want power.



# WITH ALL MY HEART, ALICIA