

Reading the Message: Study, Solidarity, Spirit, & 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 homegorls/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 trueleappress@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.



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