

Lumumba moved to Jackson from Detroit in 1971 with the Provisional Government of the Republic of New Afrika (PGRNA), “a movement for Black self-determination that envisioned the South as the site for establishing an independent Black nation.”⁴⁰ PGRNA bought land in Jackson, established cooperative farms, and freedom-dreamed a new vision of democracy grounded in the ideas of abolition democracy. Their vision is the foundation of Jackson’s racial vision today. A year after being elected mayor, Chokwe Lumumba died, but his ideas did not. His son, Chokwe Antar Lumumba, ran for mayor and won in 2017. Of course, White rage is raging. The state government is trying to take local control away from the Black city council by introducing legislation that would relinquish control of the city’s airport and commerce from the mayor’s office and city council. The state also re-allocated funds from the city’s 1 percent sales tax aimed at infrastructure stability.⁴¹ There will always be setbacks, missteps, pushback, and losses in the fight for justice. Whiteness is resisting too. Whiteness will counterpunch and try to knock you out because Whiteness is consumed by its self-interest. However, activism, no matter how big or how small, grounded in the teachings and dreams of abolitionist and participatory democracy, will win.

The ideas of Jackson, VMA, the New York Collective of Radical Teachers, the Dream Defenders, “Black Lives Matter Week of Action in Our Schools,” the students of Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School, Marley Dias, King Johnson, the community that fought for the Tucson Unified School District’s ethnic studies classes, United We Dream, and all the parents, teachers, students, artists, and activists—their struggles make freedom dreaming possible and abolitionist teaching a reality.

SOLIDARITY

On June 27, 2015, Bree Newsome strapped on her climbing gear, climbed a flagpole over South Carolina’s State House, and removed its Confederate flag. It seemed liked a spontaneous act of rebellion, but it was calculated, well timed, and done in solidarity with others so

that a Black woman would be the one who took down the flag. Nine days before Newsome's climb, White supremacist Dylann Roof entered the oldest African Methodist Episcopal Church in the South, affectionately called Mother Emanuel, sat with churchgoers during Bible study, then shot and killed nine people while yelling racial epithets at his victims. Days later, it was revealed that Roof had posted hateful, racist, and anti-Semitic messages online, including a picture of himself holding a handgun and a Confederate flag.

Newsome's removal of the Confederate flag was not just about protesting the flag and the hate and racism it incites. It was also about the victims and the survivors of the church shooting and racial injustice everywhere. As Newsome scaled the flagpole, authorities waited below to arrest her. However, they also had another plan to get her down: to tase the pole with their taser gun, which could have killed Newsome. Her coconspirator, James Tyson, a White man, also waited at the bottom, tightly hugging the pole so that if they tased the pole, they would tase him too. The two had met just days before they took down the flag. Both Newsome and Tyson were from Charlotte, North Carolina; both were seasoned activists; and both had been arrested during separate civil disobedience acts in Raleigh at an event called Moral Monday. Their paths crossed at a meeting in Charlotte at which local activists were planning to take down a Confederate flag. Newsome volunteered to climb a flagpole at South Carolina's State House, but she was not an experienced climber. She had to train. Newsome, Tyson, and another activist practiced climbing poles around Charlotte leading up to the South Carolina flag removal. The day of the removal, Newsome and Tyson waited in an IHOP parking lot in the wee hours of the morning for the signal to scale the pole. In an interview after the event, Tyson said, "We did have some support from deep-pocketed allies who bought the climbing gear and promised to cover bail."⁴² At 6:15 a.m., they got the go-ahead text.

Newsome and Tyson made history that day and showed the world what is possible. These two strangers put their lives on the line for

each other; they were willing to risk it all to symbolically remove racism. Beyond the symbolism of their efforts is an example of solidarity, trust, and the deliberate centering of a Black woman to be the face of justice. Tyson was more than her ally; he was her coconspirator.

COCONSPIRATORS, NOT ALLIES

In many intersectional social justice groups, the language is shifting from needing allies to coconspirators. Ally-ship is working toward something that is mutually beneficial and supportive to all parties involved. Allies do not have to love dark people, question their privilege, decenter their voice, build meaningful relationships with folx working in the struggle, take risks, or be in solidarity with others. They just have to show up and mark the box present; thus, ally-ship is performative or self-glorifying. This type of ally-ship still centers Whiteness in dark spaces. Too often, though not always, our allies are eager White folx who have not questioned their Whiteness, White supremacy, White emotions of guilt and shame, the craving for admiration, or the structures that maintain White power. Also, how can allies work from the mindset of mutuality if they are the dominant group? I have personally witnessed allies take over the conversation and make the meeting about their singular issue; they act as an authority on a community they have never lived in, and they stop freedom dreams because they are not interested in tearing down systems that benefit them and their loved ones but not the rest of us. They also do not know how to work their privilege for dark lives.

Tyson put his body on the line for Newsome understanding that his White skin and his gender were her protection. He knew the chances of the police killing a White man on camera in broad daylight would be far less than those of killing a Black woman by herself. His Whiteness was her protection. Tyson was not an ally; he was a coconspirator who understood how Whiteness works in our society. He was willing to use his intersections of privilege, leverage his power, and support Newsome to stand in solidarity and confront anti-Blackness. A coconspirator functions as a verb, not a noun.

Coconspirators can also be men who understand their privilege and work to challenge and undo patriarchy.

The backbone of abolitionist teaching is solidarity with courageous coconspirators. Coconspirators work toward and understand the following, according to Allies for Change, a network of educators and activists committed to sustained “life-giving ally relationship”:

- Understanding where we stand in relation to systems of privilege and oppression, and unlearning the habits and practices that protect those systems, which is lifelong work for all of us, without exception
- Authentic relationships of solidarity and mutuality, which are not possible when we try to avoid or transcend power imbalances
- Honestly acknowledging and confronting those imbalances to create authentic relationships
- Social change work is always rooted in collaboration, humility, and accountability
- The interior journey into silence, mediation, inner wisdom, and deep joy is inextricably linked to the outer work of social change⁴³

These steps are the internal work that needs to happen before the outside work can start. One cannot enter freedom-dreaming spaces holding on to dark people’s nightmares. We cannot have conversations about racism without talking about Whiteness. The time-consuming and serious critique and reflection of one’s sociocultural heritage—which includes identities related to race, ethnicity, family structure, sexuality, class, abilities, and religion—taken side by side with a critical analysis of racism, sexism, White supremacy, and Whiteness is the groundwork of coconspirators. It also presents time to challenge what you think about your own educational experiences and resources in relation to the issues your students and their communities face. It is time to reflect on your educational history that

either enabled or prevented you from achieving. How do resources such as your family, school structure, curriculum, materials, school funding, and community support help you thrive in education? This type of deep personal reflection is a must before taking up space in spaces that are trying to build, heal, and tear down all at the same time while never forgetting that joy is central to the work of freedom.

Whitney Dow, creator of the Whiteness Project, captured the work best when he said, “Until you can recognize that you are living a racialized life and you’re having racialized experiences every moment of every day, you can’t actually engage people of other races around the idea of justice.”⁴⁴ When speaking about White guilt, Dow adds, “I could do something inside and that would change things. It kind of eliminated guilt for me. It made me feel incredibly empowered and really enriched my world.” Dow is describing the inner work that is needed when you are White and fighting for justice in solidarity with dark folx. Molly Tansey, coauthor of *Teaching While White* and a former student of mine, says that early on in her teaching career she was “driven by the self-satisfaction” of making it visible to her peers that she was not racist.⁴⁵ But the real work for Molly began when she started having conversations acknowledging her White privilege with other White people; when she began to name Whiteness and its privileges with her White friends, family members, and colleagues. This is the work of challenging Whiteness in your community so you can challenge it at school. The work is not a onetime conversation; it is who you must become in and outside the classroom.

BLACK JOY

The hashtags #BlackGirlMagic, #BlackBoyJoy, #BlackGirlsRock, #CareFreeBlackKids, #BlackManJoy, and #BlackJoyProject are not just social media gimmicks or trends; they are what is needed for resistance, freedom, healing, and joy. Joy is crucial for social change; joy is crucial for teaching. Finding joy in the midst of pain and trauma is the fight to be fully human. A revolutionary spirit that embraces