

From the Editor.

Black women are often accused of being angry when we are actually being clear. We are accused of having an attitude when we are actually exercising authority. We are called aggressive when we are simply speaking with conviction. And when that conviction challenges power, the response is often intimidation, isolation, or institutional scrutiny.

In too many spaces, the mere sound of a Black woman's voice is treated as something to fear, manage, or contain. We know this because the labels are familiar: the *angry Black woman*, the Black woman with an *attitude*, the Black woman who is *too loud, too aggressive, too direct, or too much*. But when you ask those same Black women what actually happened, many will tell you they were not trying to intimidate anyone. They were expressing frustration. They were naming harm. They were standing up for themselves. They were speaking truth in rooms where truth had become inconvenient. The self-assured, unapologetic, informed voice of a Black woman has always been treated as a problem.

There is often an authority in the way Black women speak. Not because every Black woman sounds the same, but because many of us have learned to speak from experience, survival, observation, and truth. That authority is not only heard. It is felt. When a Black woman steps into a space, history has shown that the atmosphere can change. Her presence can shift things. It can shed light on injustice. It can speak for those who have been ignored. It can demand accountability from people who have grown comfortable avoiding it. And, unfortunately, some people find those characteristics problematic, especially those in authority who are deeply invested in preserving the establishment.

Earlier today, I read news reports that Senator Louise Lucas's office was raided by the FBI amid allegations of corruption. When I read that, I could not help but think of the long history of Black leaders and Black women who have been targeted, scrutinized, surveilled, or politically attacked by institutions of power: Angela Davis, Betty Shabazz, Audley Moore, Aretha Franklin, and, more recently, Fani Willis and New York Attorney General Letitia James. Though their roles, politics, and circumstances differ, each



The self-assured, unapologetic, informed voice of a Black woman has always been treated as a problem.

woman in her own way represents a familiar pattern: Black women who speak, organize, challenge, investigate, lead, or refuse to shrink are often met with suspicion before they are met with respect. History has taught us to pay attention to how power responds when Black women challenge the establishment, who gets investigated, how loudly, how publicly, and with what presumption of guilt.

That is why we cannot discuss moments like this in isolation. We have to see the broader pattern. Surveilled by the FBI, Black Panther Party leader Ericka Huggins transformed personal pain into disciplined public service, becoming a teacher, organizer, and advocate whose voice has consistently centered dignity, healing, and liberation. Before she was exiled, Claudia Jones used journalism, organizing, and political analysis to expose injustice across race, gender, and class, reminding the world that Black women have always been architects of movements, not simply participants in them. Senator Louise Lucas has consistently called leadership into accountability and demanded that those entrusted with power do the work they pledged to do for the Commonwealth.

On a much smaller, but no less significant scale, I, too, know what it feels like when institutional leadership attempts to narrow the space available for a Black woman's voice. Currently, I am dealing with an issue within the Fairfax County Democratic Committee, where leadership has attempted to silence me in my role and in my responsibility to speak out on issues affecting its members, especially its Black members.

So what do we do? We get louder. We call out intimidation tactics when we see them. We urge our political committees, civic organizations, and community leaders to express outrage equally and consistently. We write the statement. We submit the op-ed. We attend the meeting. We ask the question on the record. We show up at local town halls and make our discontent known. Black women are not feared because we are angry. Black women are feared because we are often right, prepared, unwilling to shrink, and unwilling to let institutions confuse silence with unity.

So add your voice to the collective tone of solidarity with Black women leaders. Because when they come for one of us, they are testing whether the rest of us will be quiet. And we must make it clear: when they mess with one Black woman, they mess with us all.

In Black,

Alpha Woolen