

Black in White Spaces
By Rev. Adam Lawrence Dyer

Black in White Spaces
So much to say...
As a young black power child
Being shown strong role models
Independent women and noble men
Cicely Tyson, Muhammad Ali
Then being given “the talk”
Do not be alone in a room with a white woman
Do not talk back to police
Do not go into a store with your hands in your pockets
And on...
Yes, it was a reality check
Even at the age of ten
The only one in your grade
The only one in band
The only one to get an A
And the only one the teacher couldn’t believe
“Because your parents did your school work...right?”
Black in white spaces...

Black in white spaces
And the black students gather
At the university Afro-Am center
Where they bond and blend
Rather than bend toward blond
But there the religious fervor
And hetero norms
Are less than welcoming with open arms
So you fall back into the ointment
And weather your fate
The only one in the chorus
The only one in the club.
This sets a pace for a lifetime
Not that you are comfortable as the anomaly
Nor do you invite the exception
But you grow to expect it.
The only becomes the first
The first in the job
The first on the board
“We’re so glad to see one of you in this job”
“We’ve never had one of you in this position”
“We need to hear the voice of someone like you in this place”
It’s a first for them, but every day for you
Black in white spaces

Black in white spaces
And Black History Month comes
Full of MLK quotes
Reminders that Rosa Parks wasn't first
(But the young woman got pregnant
*What was her name?*¹)
We shall overcome...
Grainy black and white images
Of Bayard Rustin
Pointy 1960's eyeglasses and pressed curled hair
Water hoses and dogs
Lift Every Voice and Sing
And some wonder why a Black National Anthem?
Because black has always been a separate and unequal nation
In America.
Then Black History month goes
And women take the stage
But, wait, you have to keep marching
You can't just stop and pick up a new banner
Your body is your banner...every day
Black in white spaces

¹ Claudette Colvin - <https://www.biography.com/people/claurette-colvin-11378>

Black in white spaces
It gives you pause...
#BlackLivesMatter
#MeToo
#IAMTrayvon
#SayHerName
#NoJusticeNoPeace
#HandsUpDontShoot
Abner Louima
Rodney King
The Central Park Five
Emmett Till
Henrietta Lack
Sally Hemming
So much, and so many more...
Black in white spaces

Black in white spaces
One has to wonder
What about when it is turned around?
What does it mean to be *white in black spaces*?
How does it feel? How does it work inside and out?
What is the loss? What is the grief?
Can white in black space even be real?
Or by its nature does it become something else?
With the unearned legacy of centrality soaked into the flesh
The default to power pumping through the veins
Cultural assumptions of superiority surging in the heart
Can white even be in black space fully and still cope.
Is there fear and anxiety
Or defiance and righteous indignation.
Or does white crumble and implode under the weight
Of realizing that without dominant rights
It actually takes up very little space.
Does white in black space
Hope that the concept of race,
Will magically disappear because the table is turned
“We should all just get along
Because we are the same DNA”...right?
I suppose...
I suppose that might work
If in the first place, you wrote the rules to the game.
Black in white spaces

Black in white spaces
Who else is out there
On the edge of The American Dream
That continues to be painted in binary relief?
So much time and so much space
Being occupied by the argument black vs white
The result is often precious little room for
Indigenous in colonized space
Woman in male space
Trans in cisgender space
Disabled in able space.
And I wonder if it isn't because the art of othering
Is taken to a whole new level when black is in white space;
The floodgates are open.
How is it defined,
What makes one space "white"
And another "non-white"
Who decides?
How does one know?
If you have to ask...
So, we 'caucus' and 'affinity'
Not to exclude but to explore
The goal is not to understand what is going on in the other room
But to actually take a look at what happens where you are.
You learn the value of this exercise when you are regularly
Black in white spaces

Black in white spaces
Those days may be numbered
One can only hope.
Young people are already building
On the ruins we adults are leaving behind
They have repurposed sexuality
Redefined communication
Discovered new currencies
And race for them
Is neither limitation nor assimilation
It is aspiration and declaration.
It is increasingly the rocket fuel in the orbit of love.
Their post lunar landing, HIV+, constant global conflict, born with debt, interconnected world
May not have time or space that can be wasted
In simplistic shades of black and white.
As young people are telling us to disarm
Realize that they are not just about guns
They are leading us toward ways of
Neutralizing toxicity
De-legitimizing lethality
Shielding from fatality
Soothing pain
And ending isolation
Black in white spaces

Black in white spaces
Has for me been a painful blessing
A journey of understanding
Of self and surroundings.
I'm sure this equation is shifting
My observations will soon be obsolete
But in the meantime, I am happy to be a guide.
And isn't it ironic that the "black power" child
May be the one holding the candle in the darkness of white spaces.

May it be so.

- *ALD*