



# CHECKMATE

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## Boys and Girls

*"Y'all talk white...Why y'all talk white?!"*

I'm thinking to myself...Are we not **BOTH** in the same English class, learning the **EXACT** same words? I thought I was speaking English? Oh...I get it...you want me to speak BLAACCCKKKK?! So why didn't you just say so in the first place?! *Yo Yo Yo Yo baby pops, yeah u come n' gib me a kiss! Betta make it fas or else I'm gonna get pissed!* Ahhhh...the essence of communication, once you get your edumacation! Check.

## Dear 16,

*"We have good news for you...You have done such a good job...We will give you a **.25 cent raise**. You should be proud."*

The world is not black and white... **only**. Sometimes there's murky shades of gray in between the black and black. Sometimes there is blatant gangrene in between the black and the white. And in between white and white is...well, it's...I think if you look at it closely...there can only be mo' white. Sandwiched. Can't breathe. It's easier to see in the dark than it is to see in the fog. Your eyes adjust better in the dark than they do in the

fog. It's okay to be in the dark. Great place to learn and grow and develop. But if you end up in the fog...then ask yourself: What are the three core values that will be your pillars in the fog? You are young, and if you create core values now, they will keep you grounded. Don't be afraid of what you don't know. But...**DO** know your worth. Your worth is the point right above wherever you **think** your values are. Yeah...right above that. People will see it and want it. They will be attracted to it and maybe try to take advantage of it. But it is up to you to own it and maybe share it...**ONLY** as needed. Wisely. Check.

## Hey 21,

*"You need to learn how to answer the phones correctly."*

*"Well if you would have done your job I wouldn't have to do it for you."*

We've only just begun. Your brain is still developing according to Hertz and the rest of the car rental industry. Actively listen before you speak. Assess who is who before you address who is who. Understand the culture you are about to undertake before you dive in. Now of course you gonna know the down low about this place because you did your homework already...right?...But you

**EIGHT HOURS A DAY—THAT’S 80 FREE  
PRECIOUS MINUTES THAT YOU OWN.  
DO WHATEVER YOU WANT WITH IT. OR  
NOTHING WITH IT. BUT MAKE SURE YOU  
TAKE IT. BEFORE IT TAKES YOU.**

day one! If you don’t like the boss, but he like *likes* you...then it’s okay to subtly let him know that you are spoken for and then kindly remind him that he is *as well*...by asking how his wife and kids are doing. Check!

### **How are you 25?**

*“You are the prettiest colored girl I have ever seen in my life.”*

My, how you’ve grown! All shapely and what not... You working out? Good. It will be one of the things you can *own*. It is your destresser, so own it. Or stress will own you. Take your lunch breaks; they are your destressers. Unplug every hour for ten minutes; that is also your destresser. Eight hours a day—that’s 80 free precious minutes that you *own*. Do whatever you want with it. Or nothing with it. But make sure you *TAKE* it. Before it takes you. Check.

### **Mrs. 28, are you there?**

*“Come on, girl...You know they ain’t never gon’ promote us around here. Look around...They don’t care! Soooo...This is gon’ be the hardest thing I’ve ever had to do...”*

RELAXED: Yes, I am here.

NATURAL: Oh...My bad, girl I couldn’t see you in the dark.

RELAXED: Well next time knock.

NATURAL: Uh...oh. Okay, next time, I will.

(AWKWARD SILENCE) Shoot, girl... Two snaps up...Stop...Can’t touch this!

RELAXED: Can’t touch what.

NATURAL: My Gottdam HAIR!

RELAXED: But it’s so...soo...soooooo BIG and FLUFFY...and Black COTTONY BALLS...

NATURAL: And it’s so so soooo...maybe *not* appropriate.

RELAXED: What do you mean it’s not...appropriate?

NATURAL: Ughem...I meant not to be appropriated. This is how it grows out of MY scalp.

RELAXED: Oh I know, I know, it used to grow out of mine like that, too...until I decided it was time to just blend. I was tired of folks touching my hair and telling me how much they LIKED my hair when it is twisted, or how much they LIKED my hair when it is curled or braided, or—and this one is the kicker—how much they LOOOOVE my hair in an Afro. “You look so...so... different. You should do it more often. It’s really becoming of you.” Thanks...I guess?

NATURAL: Well, in that case... What do you think of my scabs? It’s the latest fad at the hair shows. And what about my scorched edges? It’s all the rave at InStyle mag! And wait until you see my split ends...You will DYE! HA HA HA HAAAAA... (Sigh) So how’s that *blending* thing working out for you?

RELAXED: (AWKWARD SILENCE) Ah...Yeah...Not too good. For some reason, no matter what I do, or what I say, I still seem to stick out. I’m too passionate; I’m too emotional; I’m too sassy—

still gotta grill/ask the person who is grilling/asking you the questions. **They want** to know your credentials; **you want** to know theirs. What are their current challenges? What is their biggest achievement to date? Is it soft or tangible or both? What is the impact? Not the outcome—but the **impact**. How diverse is the environment? Do people work in teams? Are there brainstorming sessions? Are people encouraged to have an entrepreneurial spirit? What reward systems get the most buy-in? What’s the turnover rate? Baby girl, you gon’ have to coordinate to negotiate! Who are the known mentors? Who are the known sponsors?

Who are the known champions? Your support team is crucial from

## ***THERE ARE RULES. EITHER YOU PLAY BY THEM OR YOU DON'T. CROSS YOUR T'S AND DOT YOUR I'S. YOU CAN'T AFFORD TO MESS UP.***

excuse me, I mean...too CREATIVE; sometimes I'm even *very articulate*. And even then, I still stick out! I guess like the hair on my head...

NATURAL: Wow. You are *too* a lot of things. Sounds inclusive...Anyhoo... Well, as for me and mine, I'm TOO legit to quit...but you don't see me going around doing the hammer dance all over the place!

RELAXED: Wait a minute...wait wait wait...Eureka!... I'm TOO legit to quit. That's the answer! My *purpose* makes me legit, and my *drive* won't let me quit.

NATURAL: TWO snaps up! STOP!

RELAXED & NATURAL: Can't touch this!

Buwahahaha finger snaps finger snaps finger snaps

NATURAL: U betta go gurl! Ha!

RELAXED: Go where?

NATURAL: Oh...I don't know...*like* isn't that what you people say *like* when you all agree like with each other? Or something like that? Check.

### **Hey now there 30, you okay?**

*"There ain't but ten of us up in here; it's like picking raisins out of a bowl of oatmeal...I got one question for you: Am I my sister's keeper?...Answer me... AM I MY SISTER'S KEEPER???"*

*"Yes I am. You're fired."*

So much has happened in your life. I'm going to mentor you. That is the only way to climb the ladder. You need a mentor. You also need a sponsor. You also need to network. You also need to build relationships.

*Looks like I got a lot of needs.*

Without these **needs** you will go unnoticed. There are rules. Either you play by them or you don't. Cross your T's and dot your I's. You can't afford to mess up. You have got a huge career in front of you. Document everything.

*Why?*

Because.

*Because what?*

Because you stand out.

*Here we go again. I want to stand out, yes, but I don't want to stand out just for the sake of standing out.*

Why not? I say use it, honey. At least you will get noticed. But you have to be perfect. That's just the way it is.

*But Jamie is making \$20K more than me!*

I know. That's how it is.

*And Johnny is making \$30k more than me!*

I know, chile! That's how it is!

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*...and Jamal is making...*

I know, I know, I know!...But you can't prove it. So what you gon' do? Cry?

*No...I'm going to do something about it.*

Again I ask...What you gon' do?

*I'm gonna prove myself.*

How?

*By working really really really hard.*

Wronk! Wronk! Wronk! Yes I said it with a k at the end...because that is how wrong it is. You need to work really really really *smart*, honey. That's the difference. But hurry before you get bitter.

*I'm tired. What if I don't want to?*

[Silence.]

*I said what if I don't want to?*



**CREATE YOUR OWN. TAKE YOUR NETWORK,  
YOUR CONTACTS, YOUR RELATIONSHIPS,  
YOUR MENTORS, YOUR SPONSORS, YOUR  
VALUES, AND CREATE YOUR OWN.**

**Whew 35, that was easy...NOW think  
about how you will share this.**

Then...

JUNIOR: "I would love for you to mentor me."

Then what?!

SENIOR: "Oh really?...Love is a strong word."

Then...CREATE YOUR OWN. Take your network, your contacts, your relationships, your mentors, your sponsors, your values, and CREATE YOUR OWN.

No no no no no! I meant agape love...I really only meant agape love...Or did I? I really only meant agape love...I swear...I ONLY MEANT...again...agape...too late. How did I let myself get caught out there? How was I so weak, so blind, so stupid!? ...He ain't heavy...He's my brother...Right...Ain't he...Ain't he? He ain't. I mean, he ain't? Fool me once, shame on you...Fool me twice, well then...Stop taking advantage of me!

My own what?

Your own ecosystem, baby! Listen... Ain't no-body gon' give you nothing! No one owes you anything...besides your 40 acres and a mule. (Which, in the event that finally comes through and your number is pulled, I suggest you opt out for a Brooklyn brownstone and a horse...in the form of a Porsche. Okay!)

Senior usually wins the "he say - she say" conversations. Why? Because cognitive dissonance doesn't allow for human mistakes to be made. It is always easier for the newbie to be blamed and/or shamed. Saved email and texts are fail-proof. Practice saving from day one.

Check!

Play victim once, it will follow you like the plague.

Own up to your mistakes; it makes you stronger.

Know your rights; it makes you smarter.

Stand by your values; it keeps you protected.

It ain't personal. Just business. **IF you choose** to work for somebody else, then it is **ALWAYS** business. It ain't easy. It's not 'posed to be.

But hey...you...**Miss 16**: The world is your oyster. Grab your pearls, honey, and don't let 'em go. Keep them, guard them, nurture them, and multiply them... And **ONLY** when needed, share 'em. Name your three most precious values. Assign them names. Those names become your mantra. Your mantra becomes your pillars. Your pillars will give you the support you need **IN THE FOG**.

At the end of the day...B aware, B conscious, B grateful, B smart, B open, B strategic, B creative, B Black & B beautiful. B you. Period.

Check Mate.



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## ABOUT THE AUTHOR / VANESSA SIVERLS

A Brooklyn, New York native, Vanessa Siverls had the rare opportunity to work for the NFL, where she found her passion for people through developing training programs for women. Vanessa recently received her MBA which influenced the launch of BU Period, a lifestyle brand for women focused on empowerment through menstrual health. She was inspired to build this brand after managing a 10-year bout with uterine fibroids, at the end of which 22 were surgically removed. Vanessa is also an advising officer for We Build Black, a non-profit whose sole purpose is to empower technologists of color.

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