

#CANYOUHEARUSNOW: MOVING MUSLIM WOMEN’S VOICES FROM MARGIN TO CENTER IN 2016

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On October 26, 2016, Linda Sarsour delivered the 23rd annual Rose Sheinberg Lecture¹ to an audience of more than 100 N.Y.U. Law students and community members about being a Muslim woman in America today². The N.Y.U. Review of Law & Social Change is deeply committed to empowering marginalized communities and promoting values of diversity and inclusivity in our community and our scholarship. Given the outcome of the November 8, 2016 presidential election and the fear and questions held by many of what the next four to eight years will be like—particularly for Muslims, immigrants, LGBTQ people, and women—Linda’s words have only become more urgent. Her call to move Muslim women’s voices from the margin to the center and to continue to fight to protect and promote the values that we believe in is one that we must all read carefully and heed as we prepare for the realities of the coming years.

I don’t even know what to say. And Vince knows something about me. I don’t get quite speechless ever, but I want to say I am even more humbled and honored to be here in this space with you all this evening. I am grateful for the friendship and fearlessness of Vince and the Center for Constitutional Rights. I actually do this work with the kind of confidence I have because I’m like, “Wherever they’re going to send me, CCR is going to find me, and I’m going to be all right.”

Someone asked me earlier at the lunch. They said, “What does community lawyering look like?” “What are your good experiences? We want to know as young, aspiring lawyers.” And I said, “You want to know what that looks like? Hang out with the Center for Constitutional Rights. They are true advocates of our community. They center the most marginalized voices.”

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1. The Rose Sheinberg Lecture Program invites a scholar working on cutting-edge issues of gender, race, and class to participate in a day of informal discussion, classroom teaching, and formal lecture in order to expose the Law School community to a variety of ideas, insights, and initiatives. The Program is endowed by Jill and Richard Sheinberg, Dale J. and Arthur Galston, and the estate of Joel Dolkart to honor the memory of Rose Sheinberg '50. You can learn more about the Rose Sheinberg Lecture Program at <http://www.law.nyu.edu/sheinbergscholar>.

2. Linda Sarsour, Exec. Dir., Arab Am. Ass’n of N.Y., #CanYouHearUsNow: Moving Muslim Women’s Voices from Margin to Center in 2016 (Oct. 26, 2016), https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=V3HLzae_q9I.

And when they defend the rights of those that are most marginalized, believe it that they had those conversations and that those plaintiffs are proudly sitting in those courtrooms, believing that the lawyers at the Center for Constitutional Rights are sharing their stories, and are defending their rights from a place of values, and convictions, and principles, and I am grateful every single day for the Center for Constitutional Rights, and in particular under the leadership of Vince Warren.

So thank you every day, for everything that you do. I am blessed, just thinking about Ms. Sheinberg and this lecture that has been going on for 23 years. And one interesting thing that Vince didn't tell you about me, that not many people know, is that I was also an aspiring high school teacher. I wanted to be an English teacher. That was my life dream. I'm old, so that, remember that Michelle Pfeiffer movie where she was a high school English teacher, and she was like inner city schools and you were going to get those kids to express themselves, and you were going to help them see their potential. That was me. Literally that was my life dream, but I'm not a teacher. But I felt connected to Ms. Sheinberg, through her kind of progressive leftist. That's exactly who I wanted to be. So it's 2016, and it's been a hell of a year. I can't wait. Anybody else can't wait until this darn year is over? Yeah, man, let me tell you.

So there is a lot of things you probably already know about me. I'm a Muslim. I'm a daughter of immigrants. I am also Palestinian, and I'm a woman. Basically you don't want to be me in 2016. And it's real out here. I want to share - I'm from Brooklyn. I just keep it real. I'm Brooklyn and I'm Palestinian. And I'm known for just keeping it real, and just really allowing myself to speak the truth. And even if there are things that I say that make you feel uncomfortable, I want you to sit with that discomfort a little.

I want you to weigh yourself in it, and it's okay. And I want you to know that we live in New York City. We live in one of the most metropolitan, cosmopolitan, liberal, progressive cities in these United States of America, if not in the world. So this is where my words come from. Hate crimes against Muslims have risen exponentially, and I'm not even talking about the rest of the country for a second. I'm going to talk about right here in New York City. Just within the last few weeks two religious leaders, imams, executed on the streets of Ozone Park.

And just a few, maybe 10 days after that, a 60-year-old woman from Bangladesh, Nazma Khanam, was stabbed to death in her own community, in Jamaica Hills, New York. When they found her, she still had her purse. Beautiful gold bracelets were on. She wasn't robbed. She was stabbed in her own community. And just a few weeks after that, two women from Yemen in Brooklyn, broad daylight, pushing babies in strollers, were attacked by a woman who physically assaulted one [woman] in particular, who was pushing a stroller, and the baby fell out of the stroller.

This was here, in New York City. A tourist, a Muslim tourist comes here from Europe because she wants to come. Who doesn't want to come to New York City? She's out here by Valentino's. I can't even afford to buy stuff from Valentino's. And she's walking out, and a man sets her shirt on fire. This is here, in New York City, in our city. And just a few weeks ago we celebrated Eid al-Adha, which is one of the highest holy holidays for Muslims.

As I was preparing my children, and our families were preparing, and our mosques were getting ready, we were doing these outdoor prayers with thousands of people, there was a Muslim community in Fort Pierce, Florida – parents who had to explain to their young kids that actually, no, we can't go tomorrow to our mosque that we always go to because some man decided to set our mosque on fire the day before a high holy holiday.

And just maybe not even 10 days ago, three white men in Garden City, Kansas were arrested on domestic terrorism charges. They had a plan to plant four car bombs around a housing complex and a mosque that housed over 120 Somali Muslim refugees. And the FBI said that if that terror attack would have actually been implemented (which, by the way, was scheduled to happen on November 9th, the day after elections), we would have had 120 dead people, dead Americans, dead sisters and brothers on our watch, here in the United States of America.

I just read yesterday that a guy in Agoura Hills, outside of Los Angeles, was arrested. He was arrested for documented threats against the Islamic Center of Southern California, which I've been to, which is a very beautiful mosque and a beautiful community, actually a very active and actively engaged community, very well loved by their neighbors. And when they went to this man's house, he had dozens of firearms, full magazines, and over 200 pounds of ammunition.

Guess where this white man is? He's out on the streets of Southern California on bail. So you want to tell me how Muslims are supposed to feel safe in Southern California, knowing that man that was threatening them and actually had the ammunition in his house that could have carried out the threats that he was making is walking around on the streets of Southern California?

This is the reality that we live in, in these United States of America, as Muslims. Now when I say hate crimes, and people think that when we talk about Islamophobia and Muslims, we think about racists, and bigots, and individual acts of hate. But not only do we have to deal with that, and fear of walking in our own cities and communities by our fellow Americans that want to harm us, but then we have to deal with systemic Islamophobia and racism that is implemented by the U.S. government against our communities, including in places like New York City, where through secret documents, not through paranoia or because we think it's happening—that's what people used to say before the Associated Press released a blockbuster. At least it was blockbuster for everybody else. For me it was like "thank you for confirming everything that I've been saying for the past 12 years, but okay." But for everyone else in New York it was that this is really horrible, that the New York Police Department was engaging in unwarranted surveillance of 250

mosques, Islamic centers, Islamic schools as young as elementary, to the Muslim student associations, including places like the N.Y.U. campus, and including my organization, the Arab American Association of New York, where we were also in secret documents, where the New York Police Department had a bright idea to create a profile of a confidential informant that they thought would be quite spectacular to serve on the board of directors of my organization.

Now we don't know if that ever happened. How do you know for sure that our board of directors is not infiltrated with police informants? We just don't know for sure, and this is what surveillance does to a community. It's pretty much psychological warfare on a community, many of whom came from police states, right, fleeing the very things that are happening to Muslims in these United States of America.

So when we think about Islamophobia or think about the environment that we live in, who is the most directly impacted and targeted? Women, right? I can't help the way that I look. You don't have to ask me where I'm from. You don't have to ask me what religion I follow. You already knew because of the way that I look.

And what is so unfortunate about that is that in these United States of America, a country supposedly founded on religious freedom, it is actually an act of courage to look like me and walk on these streets in this very country, where many people from other religions actually came here because they thought, "here is the country where we can practice our faith freely, where we don't have to be afraid of who we are."

Now when we think about Muslim women in particular, you think about two things, and I blame a lot of people for this. And this is, by the way, I'm not an academic so I'm giving you what I call an articulate rant for the next like 20 minutes, but there are either two things that we are basically sold or we're consuming about Muslim women. We are either oppressed and victims of violence. That's one story, right? Or we're vulnerable and being recruited as perpetrators of violence because we're being recruited by groups like ISIS, or we're part of that group.

And somehow the majority of Muslim women in between are literally absent, like we don't exist, non-existent. And for me, that's the biggest problem that I face as a Muslim woman, because we're here. We've been here. Not just here in the United States, but we've been *here*. We live in almost every country in this world. Muslim women are flourishing in every country in this world, including in Muslim majority countries.

And we have important stories, both stories here in the United States as Muslim women, but also stories of Muslim women abroad, even in places where we have made up these stereotypes of what Muslim women look like in Pakistan, or in Yemen, or in Palestine, or in North Africa. We are just walking around with

these perceptions—not based on reality—but based on some Hollywood film that we watched, or some article that’s out of context (even in the liberal media or the progressive media, by the way).

The great thing about Islamophobia is it doesn’t matter what part of the political spectrum that you’re on. Everybody is joining in on it. It pays whatever side of the spectrum [you’re] on. So for those of you who think Bill Maher is a liberal, I’m talking to you. Now, a lot of people say to me, “You know, Linda, you are an American Muslim woman and you’re just so damn unapologetic. Where does that come from? I want to be like that. I’m not even Muslim. What is it?”

And what I tell people is that I took it upon myself because of the type of public education that I had. And I’m a New York City public school, or the product of a New York City public school, and I love public school, and I’m grateful for the teachers that I had. But they had little resources to work with and were working from curriculums where I didn’t really get to see myself or understand what my role was, or where did I come up in the trajectory of American history? That was just not the story that I was told.

So I took it upon myself to do my own studying. Where I come from and why I am who I am is because I understand people, heroes. Vince said Dr. Martin Luther King, right? He said a hero, and there’s so many heroes that we can think of. We can think of women, and men, and so many heroes. But I always tell people there were heroes before the heroes, right? We never talk about the heroes before the heroes because you might have not known what their names were.

For me, the heroes before the heroes is that I connect my own lineage as a Muslim in this country, to enslaved people who were forced to come here. About 25% to 30% of those enslaved people were Muslim. I’m reading a book right now, “Servants of Allah,” that tells you the stories of these enslaved Muslims who came here to the United States. And there is a book called “Prince of Slaves.” But my point is, is that here were people—and by the way the Muslim enslaved people in particular, they were, and of course others as well, but in particular the Muslim enslaved people—they were well educated, some of whom were fluent in the Arabic language, some of whom were Islamic scholars, and believe it or not some of whom belonged to the royal family. The slave trade literally didn’t discriminate when they were enslaving the African people.

So 25% to 30% of these enslaved people were Muslim. And what I always think about when I’m feeling down, and I’m like, “I hate this, and I don’t like this, and why is this, and I’m just over this, right?” this is what I think: my mind takes me to these enslaved people who were forced to come to this country, who were Muslim and somehow, I don’t even know how, how did these people figure out how to stay Muslim? How do you figure out how to stay faithful and connected to your religion?

I read stories where, based on the sunset and the sunrise, they knew when to pray. I read stories that, based on the seasons, they knew when the different Islamic months were, so they knew when it was Ramadan. They might have been

off a little bit, but it was all about the intention. So I think to myself, if enslaved people could figure out how to be Muslim under the watch of slave masters, why am I going to be fretting about being Muslim in 2016? Because, I will never understand the sacrifices of those Muslims.

And that's where I take my confidence from, my courage from, my resilience from, because someone risked their actual life for me to be Muslim in America in 2016. And for me, those stories give me inspiration. And remember [that] the enslaved people were Black Muslims. Where I take inspiration from is living in 2016 that I'm Muslim; but imagine our Black Muslim sisters and brothers who have to be Black and Muslim in 2016.

Now I've been old enough to be part of many elections, if I wanted to. And I never really decided that that was what I wanted to do. But in 2016, I felt a different way, as a Muslim woman, as a person from a marginalized community, a vilified community, a victimized community. I felt a different way. And what I did this 2016 is that I wanted to get off of the political margins and I wanted to bring my community's voice to the center because I was tired of a conversation that was about us, without us.

And I told this to my community many times before. I said, "Look, when you're not part of the conversation, what happens? The conversation is about you." And I wasn't going to allow there to be a conversation that did not include the voices of people from my community. So during this election, I joined the Bernie Sanders campaign. I'm still heartbroken about that, by the way, but I'll get over it eventually. People were like "Bernie Sanders?" I said, "Look. Let's get something straight. I don't really get inspired by old white guys," and Bernie Sanders wasn't exactly the most charismatic man in America, right? He was definitely no Malcolm X. But what I was intrigued by when it came to the Bernie Sanders campaign – I was intrigued by a few things. One was his authenticity and his genuine-ity. The guy just kept it real, and I'll tell you this. He's from Brooklyn, like he just can't help himself. It's just if you're from Brooklyn, you just say it like it is.

So, I was intrigued by that. But, I was also intrigued by the people that were part of the campaign, and this is where when we talk about the erasure of people and minority communities in particular, and women of color in particular, that was happening across the board, in particular in the Bernie Sanders campaign. I was so tired of people saying that the Bernie Sanders campaign was a campaign of young white folks, because it wasn't. Were they there? Sure. Were they out there? Were they with us? Were they down with Bernie? Were they feeling the Bern? They sure were. But to erase Muslims who, because of our participation in the primaries, gave Bernie Sanders the biggest political upset in U.S. history in a state like Michigan (which Nate Silver, one of the most accurate pollsters, said Hillary had it

99%) and then we showed up on Election Day. And the story was that the Muslim community helped Bernie Sanders ride to victory in the state of Michigan.

When people like Nadya Stevens, who was the New York State director, a powerful political Black woman in the state of New York, was leading the campaign in New York; when our New York State political director for the campaign, Michelle Agelli [phonetic] who is also a Black woman; when Symone Sanders, one of the most powerful political on the national level, who was the national press secretary for Bernie Sanders; when these voices of women of color were being erased, I was a national surrogate for Bernie Sanders.

Rosario Dawson is Puerto Rican. The fact that we were not the focus of a campaign like Bernie Sanders goes back to why we're talking about where are the Muslim women voices? It's not that there aren't Black women who are powerful and active. It's not that there are Muslim women who are silent and are waiting for you to tell them to get up and speak. The question is – why are you not listening? The question is – why are we allowing there to be an erasure of one of the most powerful groups of people in this country? And they are women of color, leading every movement, at every front line, at every arrest line. It is women of color in these United States of America.

Now, a thing that bother me is when people see people like me, they think I'm an anomaly, right? They're like, "Wow, look at her. She is really defying those darn stereotypes. Wow, shattering them. That's just, man. Those men in her community must be up at arms. Darn it. She must be risking her life as a Muslim woman, speaking up and speaking out." And what bothers me about that is that what I do is not *in spite of* my Islam and my community, it is exactly *because of* the fact that I am Muslim that I have courage, and conviction, and principles, and values. That is why I do this work.

I want people to look at me and say, "She is who she is because she is a Muslim woman," and that's not the conversation that we are allowed to have, because somehow, because I live in the United States of America, I have to be grateful. This is where the trolls come in. I have to be grateful, right, because I don't live in Saudi Arabia. The fact that in this country people, basically what they're doing is they are making money off of the propagation of misinformation about Islam.

There is an Islamophobia industry in this country, and it's not a conspiracy. I'm Arab. I know. Conspiracy theorists, that's what we do. But at this time, I'm serious. There is an Islamophobia. There are actual entire organizations in this country—Act for America, the Center for Security Policy—by the way who are—these people are actually advisors to presidential candidates. This is where the hot mess comes in, and many of whom are registered hate groups by the Southern

Poverty Law Center and other groups who track basically white supremacists and nativist groups.

And these people get paid. They wake up every morning and they are propagating this idea that Islam is an oppressive religion. They propagate that the support of violence, and extremism, and terrorism in Islam, and all of this other stuff that you watch on national television when you click on your TV every single day. And one of the reasons why someone wrote in my bio that I'm every Islamophobe's worst nightmare is because people like me come up and they're just like, "Damn, she just messes up the whole thing. Like she is the opposite of everything that we're saying."

And oftentimes what they're saying is that my religion oppresses me, that my religion intimidates and silences me, when in fact the irony of the situation is that the people who silence me, and intimidate me, and send me death threats are not other Muslims. They're not extremist Muslims. They are mostly white supremacists, the alt right, and right-wing Zionists. These are the people who are telling me that I should go back to Saudi Arabia, when in fact in this country I am oppressed by white supremacy and right-wing Zionism.

This is the irony of the whole situation. I live in the United States of America, in the land of democracy and freedom, the land of free speech, and I am attacked for engaging in democracy and free speech by those who say that I don't deserve or should be grateful to live in these United States of America. Now oftentimes you know people say that Islam is a religion of peace. I don't know. I'm not moved by that. Are people moved? I don't know. I don't get moved, even when my own people say that. That's not why I am proud to be Muslim. I'm proud to be Muslim because what is more important about Islam is not that it is a religion of peace (which it is). It's a religion of justice. So when people see me, and they say, "What is this light skinned Palestinian girl doing working on Black Lives Matter?" People ask. Believe it or not, I get asked that.

And I say to people, "Well you've got a lot to learn." I say, "First of all, I'm Muslim." That doesn't do anything for them. And I say to them that Islam or Muslims—and let's talk specifically about Muslims in the United States of America—one-third of my community is black. One out of every three Muslims is African American. So when you see people like me, women in hijab or people who tell you they are Muslim, like I'm out here fighting for my own sisters and brothers first.

For me, I don't like people to look at me and say, "Oh, Linda is an ally or a light-skinned ally" because I'm not white, so let's not just get in that. So for me to project my religion, and the way that I do that is, I don't want to tell people what Islam is. I don't want to sit you down and tell you, "Here is the five pillars of Islam." I want you to feel my Islam. And the way that I show you what my Islam is, I want you to see me when you need me.

I want you to know that when you see Muslim women on the frontlines of the social justice movement, it's not because we think it is the right thing to do—which

it is—or we think it’s the cool thing to do. It is what our religion tells us to do. And oftentimes one of the biggest, the trolls are just outrageous, but there is a lot of misinformation about the Prophet Mohamed, may peace be upon him. And what I always tell people—I don’t really care what the Islamophobes think about my beloved prophet.

I just care what I think about him, that our Prophet was in himself a racial justice activist. And if people study the life of the Prophet, which I have, he himself was a racial justice activist. And one of the first people that he had appointed to do the call to prayer in Mecca was a Black man. That was a deliberate choice, to show that there is no hierarchy of race or skin color. Our beloved Prophet was an environmental justice activist; this idea that this earth was given to us by our God and our responsibility to take care of it.

When we think about human rights: I remember one time being at a labor rally for a living wage, and I heard this imam, and it was so profound. Even people were like, “Wow.” There is a hadith that was narrated by our Prophet that said, “Pay the worker before the sweat on his forehead dries.” This is the principle of justice in our religion. Immigration, when people talk about, “We don’t want the refugees, maybe we’ll take the Christian ones,” I want them to think about that when they’re doing their little nativity thing that they do in front of their houses, when that Palestinian Jewish refugee...

It just boggles my mind, the logic of those that hate. That, in fact, if they actually went back and just got into—because most of them, by the way, are the religious people, right? That’s what Christ said. I say, “I don’t know what Christ you’re talking about,” because he was a Palestinian Jew. That’s what I know. And he was not White and he did not have blonde hair, either, but that’s a lecture for next year.

Now, I think people know me, too. I want to work. And Vince said this about me and it’s something that we all have to check ourselves and check our intentions, why we do what we do, and for me this is just my “who I am.” I will never ask you to do something that I myself would not do. And I tell this all the time, in particular to those I organize with, most of whom are people of color and most of whom are Black.

I say to people, “Look, like I’m ready to die for what I believe in. Like I have no fear. I accept whatever destiny that is for me.” But what I will say is, when I say things like ‘never again’ and ‘not on my watch,’ I mean it, because it’s not going to happen on my watch. And while it may continue to happen, I’m not going to be around to see it, because I know I’m going to risk my life to make sure it doesn’t happen where I get to witness it.

And it reminds me of a story. I went to lecture at a university in Ohio, and a young Muslim boy stood up, who was 19 years old, and he had a question. In the

question and answer part, he said, "You know, Sister Linda, I want to know who lived in this country at the time of Japanese internment camps." I was standing on that stage and I was thinking to myself like, "What is this kid trying to ask me?" And he kept on, and he was really passionate about it; he thought about it, like it's been lingering in his mind, in his heart, like he's been thinking about it. He said, "I want to know who those Americans were who allowed for their Japanese neighbors and for their kids to be picked up and put on camps on this U.S. soil. Who were those people?" He was so outraged, and he just sat down. And I didn't have an answer to his question.

Then, a couple of days later, I'm sitting in my office in New York City, in Brooklyn. And all of a sudden, his voice started haunting me. I heard the question again. And I said to myself, "I know who those people were. They were good people, but they were the silent majority. That's who they were. They were people that allowed this to happen on their watch."

And the reason why I tell you that story is because one of the most important things to me right now, when we think about this idea of intersectionality, is that Islamophobia is just the branch on a larger tree of racism in this country. And when people say, "Oh, we want to end Islamophobia," there isn't anybody ending anything, because I'm not going to end Islamophobia when we still have had centuries of racism in this country, when we just keep doing the same thing, just naming it new things; like when we went from slavery and now we just call it mass incarceration. I know that.

When I understand that we have people in this country, corporations in these United States of America, who profit off of the incarceration of mostly people of color, I understand that. When people say (and I've heard this during the elections, too) "Oh, we've got to register those Muslims in databases." And what was the response? "Nope, not on our watch. That sounds like Nazi Germany."

I'm sitting in my office being like, "People, we did that in 2003." From 2003 to 2011, we were registering Muslim men from 29 majority countries, and we have a whole database of them, with their fingerprints and their pictures. And guess what happened? 10% of those 180,000 men were deported from this country. And probably God knows how many more who were afraid of just the process in itself were like, "Let me pack my family up and I'm going back to Pakistan and Bangladesh," which happened for folks that I know out here in Coney Island, one of the largest Pakistani communities outside of Pakistan.

That already happened, and when did it happen? On our watch, from 2003 to 2011. People were outraged when Ted Cruz was like, "Oh, we've got to patrol the Muslim neighborhoods." Everybody is like, "What do you mean? Muslims live in every community. That's really outrageous. We've got to go on CNN and hold that man accountable to his words." I was like, "Really, people? We already patrol Muslim neighborhoods. We already have entire Muslim communities under unwarranted surveillance simply based on the faith that we follow."

There is a lot of righteous indignation, where people are really good at being, “No, it’s 2016. We don’t go backwards. We go forwards.” No, we’ve been going backwards. In this post 9/11 America, we’ve created a true police state, and people of color are at the center of that police state, political activism in this country. So my call to action for you is not to hear things and say, “Oh, no, we’re not going to let that happen.” I want you to hear from communities where it directly impacted; that it is already happening. Our kids are already being incarcerated. People say, “Guantanamo Bay, we’ve got to close Guantanamo Bay.” And where [is] President Obama? He lied to us, he didn’t close Guantanamo Bay. Sisters and brothers, we have something called Guantanamo north, on the soil of these United States of America, in places like Indiana, called communication management units that were created in 2006.

Muslims, we’re maybe (because I just want to exaggerate) maybe we’re 1.7% of the U.S. population. People say we’re 1%, but I just added that .7% because I think we’re under counted. But let’s say we’re 1% of the U.S. population. We make up over 80% of the communication management units which are 23 hours a day solitary confinement. We have no access to the media. We have no access to newspapers. We have limited access to our immediate family. We have to pick one family member only, limited access to lawyers, and even with the family member that we *do* have access to, we are only allowed to talk about certain things, so even our limitations to being able to speak freely with our loved ones –that *is* Guantanamo, but it’s here on this U.S. soil.

So there are things that are happening already on our watch. When we think oh Donald Trump, we can’t let that White man be president, white supremacy. There are a lot of bad things happening and Donald Trump is not really the president yet. So when we think about deportation, oh, deportation, he wants to deport all undocumented immigrants. Well that’s horrible. We’ve been deporting 1,000 immigrants every single day.

Actually, President Obama has deported more immigrants that any other administration prior to him. So my call to action for you – and this is not for people in this room, because you are all politically inclined people. You are here because you care about something. You are here because you have a genuine sense of interest, or even many of you who I know are already engaged in a lot of movement work and social justice work, but really calling on people to say, “There are things happening on our watch now.” And there are things happening right here in New York City. When we had to wait for two years for the Department of Justice to tell me that they are filing charges against Officer Pantaleo, who killed Eric Garner on video, for all of you to watch. And I needed two years for some guy in Washington D.C. to tell me that he did the wrong thing, and he violated someone’s rights. *This* is the country that we live in, and it is absolutely outrageous that we stand back and allow these things to happen.

I tell people all the time that one of the biggest attacks that I get from the alt-right in particular is they say to me, “You’re unpatriotic. You are un-American,” because I criticize the government or I criticize the status of communities in this country. And I tell people all the time, I say if anything, if there was a picture next to the word “patriot” or “patriotic” in the dictionary, it would have my face next to it.

I’ll tell you why, because for me, a patriot [is] someone who is American and loves their country. I love my country so much that I know that my country had the potential to be better. When people say the greatest nation – I don’t like people who say we live in the greatest nation on earth. It really bothers me because it makes it seem like we already hit where we need to be and it doesn’t allow us to think, “What is the potential? How much farther can we be so we can truly be the greatest nation on earth?” When we will be the greatest nation on earth is when a Muslim woman like me can walk down the streets of New York City and feel safe at any time of night; when a young Black boy with a book bag can walk in to a train station and not be held suspect for something he didn’t do, just for being Black and walking in the streets; when an undocumented person could walk home and actually, in their heart, know that they’re going to get home to their children and not be stopped by CDP before they get there and snatched from their families.

We’ll be the greatest nation on earth when we’re not the holders of the largest prison population in the world, in these United States. That’s when we’ll be the greatest nation on earth. So I ask all of you in this room that we not be distracted by this current circus of an election, this mortifying public display of democracy to the rest of the world, when we have basically a rapist, misogynist, xenophobic, racist, white supremacist that thinks he could lead the free world.

And on the other side, and I know that there is a big comparison there, but let’s be real, people. We are projecting war mongering, a war hawk on the other side. And I know that we have a choice to make in this election. I am a person with strategy. And the way that I’m working this election is I’m working it from the premises of, who do I want my opponent in the White House to be? Who do I want to be a social justice activist under?

Do I want to be a social justice activist under a law and order regime, under white supremacists, those supported by the Ku Klux Klan? Because the Ku Klux Klan has always been around but the interesting thing, what I fear about them more—and I’m not afraid of them, but fearing the climate that we’re in—is that they used to wear hoods because they wanted to be anonymous. They did not want you to know who they were.

Guess what they’re doing now? They’re just outwardly racist, and they took their hoods off. And they’re standing armed in front of mosques, intimidating worshippers. They’re coming to counter-protest Black Lives Matter. They started the Blue Lives Matter movement. It’s not beyond me where we are and where

we're going as a nation. So I understand the risks, and if there is anyone that understands, it's a Palestinian Muslim woman from Brooklyn, so I know.

But I want people to keep the administration and hold their feet to the fire, and that starts on November 9th. Because what we did with Obama is, we were like, "Okay, got this. We've got a Black president. He's a community organizer. He's from Chicago. We got this. He knows what he needs to do when he gets in there. We can all go back to what we were doing." And we trusted in that process. And it's not that President Obama didn't know what he needed to do. But we didn't continue to create the political will and the political environment on the outside, so President Obama could be like, "Look, I got to do this because these folks outside are not going to let me hear the last of it if I don't do it." So we didn't help him in the way that we should have and we would have gotten a lot more done in the past eight years.

And we also wouldn't have lost in 2010 to the Tea Party, which was the first wave of white supremacists flexing their muscles because they did it and they did it politically. So what I'm saying to you is that I am committed—and I will say this here for the record—that I am committed to November 9th. I am committed to January 21st to hold the feet of the next President of the United States of America, and a woman, as a social justice activist, as a Muslim—yeah, I'm hoping it's Hillary because if it's not, I might not be out in the streets. I might be somewhere else, where the CCR is going to have to come look for me, #FreeLinda. I'm just saying. You all better have my back with that one. So I just want to say that I'm praying that we all find the moral courage to stand up for what is right and not worry about the consequences; that there were people before us who also did that. And sometimes we've got to be the ones, and we really can't be waiting for anybody else.

The questions I ask to myself all the time, and you may think I'm crazy, is sometimes I sit in my office and I think about people 100 years from now. I'll be dead by then. Basically we're all not going to be here, just so you know. I always think about Muslims in particular. I always say Muslims 100 years from, now and I always think about what kind of conversations are they going to be having? And I always have this nightmare that there are going to be some Muslims somewhere sitting in a basement, and they're going to be real quiet. And they're going to be whispering to each other, they're going to say you know, "Why are we so afraid to be Muslim? Why are our women not wearing Hijab? Why are we not naming our kids Muslim names? Like what happened? Like what's going on? What were those Muslims doing? What were people doing 100 years ago that we're so afraid to be who we are? Why didn't they stand up for us? Why didn't they defend our rights to be Muslim in this country?"

And that really is a nightmare for me; and what I hope that you want is you want people 100 years from now to say, “Man, those people in 2016-2017, they were some courageous people. Those people were not having that. Those people were consistent, and they stood up for the rights of all people. And it is because of those that lived in 2016, and 2017, and 2018 that we could be proud to be Muslim in this country.”

We could be free and Black in America. I want people to say about us, I want people to say I was a hero. That’s what I’m going for here. I want people to say, “Yeah, there were a lot of Lindas and Alicias and Opals.” Those were our heroes. And I will say for you folks in this room, and I’ll end by saying this. Where I get inspiration from, believe it or not, in the movement work that I’ve been doing is from Black women.

I have learned something that I never thought that I could experience, and I can’t explain to you the feeling because you have to engage in it to know it, is this idea of radical love, that you love your people so much, so deep, that, that’s where your activism comes from, this revolutionary radical love.

And Black women with all that they have seen—and none of us can say we’ve seen anything near what Black women have seen in this country and continue to see and experience—that they could still find a way to have radical love for the communities that they come from, that they can still sacrifice and risk to live in a country that upholds not only their dignity and humanity but the dignity and humanity of all people. I am moved by that every single day. And I do this work with them in mind because they are leading this movement. And if you aren’t following a Black woman, then I don’t know what movement you’re a part of, but you’re in the wrong movement. We will win. I will tell you this right now. And the reason why I am an activist is that I have hope. And if I didn’t have hope, I would be sitting in corporate America right now.

The reason why I do this work is I have hope, and I have hope because I believe that we all will be liberated at the hands of Black women in this country. And when Black people are free, I will tell you this, you are all going to be free. And even if you are White in this room, I am telling you that you are not sitting in your full humanity in this room because you cannot be in your full humanity if your fellow Americans are also not living in their full humanity.

And we will all live in our full humanity when all of us are treated with dignity and respect in these United States of America. Thank you very much.