

The 30th Annual MLK Community Celebration with Charlene Carruthers

CHARLENE

So I'm so happy to be here tonight and I'm very, very happy for this opportunity, particularly in this moment. The moment that we are living in, I'm sure it doesn't escape anyone who's in this room tonight. Right? Yeah, I like that. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Because sometimes I get tired, sometimes we get tired, sometimes this work wears us out, and so that energy that you have, keep it. I need it and I appreciate it.

CARRUTHERS:

And so I want to thank you all for being here tonight. I want to thank the faculty and the staff who have welcomed me here today, everyone from the amazing meeting we had today with a number of the student leaders, the conversation we had the Foley Institute. Maria and Marcela, thank you for your generosity. And Derek, thank you for your hospitality. And thank you so much for the introduction, the gracious introduction.

So I'm here tonight to talk about a man whose name has been shared countless times around the world. We're here to celebrate the 30th anniversary of how you all celebrate his legacy at this institution. And I've been invited to talk specifically about his legacy and the radical King. Because far too often, the story that is told about him and his legacy is quite sanitized. And I actually want to start with some words from two people in my organization. What they wrote on Reclaim MLK Day, which is a day that we participate in across organizations and across movement, to reclaim the radical traditions of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.

And the first is from Asha Rosa who was our national organizing chair at BYP100. She says that Reclaim MLK is a call to connect our contemporary movements to the legacy of anti-capitalism and anti-imperialism within the black radical organizing in the United States. It is a watered down telling of the life and work of King that leaves out the fact that he spoke out against capitalism and US wars waged abroad. And then another one of our members, who is a leader in our New York chapter, Rahel, she says that we draw attention to this mis-remembering-- mis-remembering of the painful irony of police and politicians who every other day of the year fight to destroy us, spending this day performing service.

So many people have chosen-- and I understand, I get it-- to use MLK Day as a day of service. What I want to challenge us at the beginning of this conversation is that it must be in service of our liberation, of our collective liberation. And that means taking up political commitments that are grounded in our collective liberation, political commitments like those of Dr. King. Yes, he had a dream, absolutely. He had a lot more, too. And he did a lot more. The

Poor People's Campaign in 1968 is an example of that.

King was just getting started when his life was taken. Right? And what many might not know is that he was educated and moved farther left by women who were working in welfare rights organizing. They got him together. They're among those who got him together. He didn't always have the understanding of anti-capitalism and what it meant on a practical sense as he did in his later years of organizing. Right?

This is a picture of Dr. King in Chicago. So Dr. King came to Chicago and I bring this up one, because I have some self interest in it, as a Chicagoan, born and raised. And two, because it was one of the most challenging places for him. He didn't do too well. He didn't do too well in Chicago. And of course, we could talk all night or maybe speculate on why that happened, but many of us may have not even ever heard about his organizing in Chicago around housing, around fair housing.

The brutal mobs he met in Chicago we're not unlike the mobs they met in Selma. But there's a misperception that the white folks up north were good white folks and racism only lives in the south-- that's absurd. It's absolutely absurd. White supremacy does not have its sole address in Selma, Alabama. White supremacy doesn't have its PO box in Montgomery or Jackson or Oxford or Greenville. It's right on the south side of Chicago. It's in New York City. It's in Pullman, Washington. All right?

And so Dr. King's legacy is crucial in any study about the long term protracted struggle for black liberation. And it's crucial because he was one central figure in a broader movement in which many people find their entry point into understanding what the black freedom struggle is about. Dr. King may be the first person you hear about. If it's not Harriet Tubman, it's Dr. King. If it's not Sojourner Truth, it's Dr. King. Right? If it's not Frederick Douglass, it's Dr. King. And it's almost never Marsha P. Johnson. I hear some of you all snapping that means you know who she is. Marsha P. Johnson and Sylvia Rivera, two trans women, one black and one Latina, sparked the Stonewall Rebellion in New York City, which is seen as the launch of the modern day LGBT Rights Movement in the United States. But when you go to Christopher Street and you see that little park, you don't see statues of Marsha P. Johnson and Sylvia Rivera, but you should.

And this connects to what Ella Baker said. Ella Baker, prolific organizer, leader, several organizations she helped build, including the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee, the

NAACP, the Southern Christian Leadership Conference, said that Martin didn't make the movement, the movement made Martin. He is a central figure and a figure who was human. And the stories we often hear about him, they are a sanitized version. Rahel talks a lot about this in her post on Reclaim MLK Day. The sanitized version of King and why would you dare sanitize someone's legacy? I'll tell you why. Because it is dangerous to believe that a leader with followers and supporters around the world was against the American empire, was against the Vietnam War.

You all know how when Oprah said she didn't like beef and the beef lobby went wild? You know, she said one thing about beef and the beef lobby turned up. It's because she had a certain form of power, power through influence. And even power through influence has its limitations. Oprah, alone, can't impact food legislation or change food legislation in the United States of America, but I guarantee you if Oprah had a couple hundred people with her, a couple of thousand people with her, she could. And that's what Dr. King had. Dr. King was in community with skilled organizers like Fannie Lou Hamer, like Ella Joe Baker, like Diane Nash who was here several years ago. Right

And I intentionally name women, because there's a rhetoric that women didn't lead or women are all of a sudden leading in this moment. Women have always led. Now if women had the power to make strategic decisions, that's another question. Right? Or power to move the course and chart the course of the movement in its most upper echelons of leadership, different question, perhaps. But I wouldn't dare question the impact of a Fannie Lou Hamer on the Black Freedom Movement, who is a sharecropper, one of the agitators and organizers of the Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party. And I wouldn't dare question the importance of Dr. Dorothy Height. There was someone I met earlier who works with the YWCA. So while I don't question these legacies, it's important that in a telling of Dr. King's story and his legacy, we must know that he did not make the movement, that the movement made him.

Dr. King had the ability to ask questions and receive answers due to his level of leadership and influence that others couldn't necessarily do. So here, he said one day, we must ask the question, why are there 40 million poor people in America? And when you begin to ask that question, you are raising questions about the economic system, about a broader distribution of wealth. When you ask that question, you begin to question the capitalistic economy. And I am simply saying that more and more, we've got to begin to ask questions about the whole society.

Is that on your list of quotable favorite quotes of Dr. King? How many of you all have seen that before? But we've heard that a threat to justice anywhere is what? Yes! And indeed that is true. But that doesn't hit you in the gut in the same way. We must also realize that the problems of racial injustice and economic injustice can not be solved without a radical redistribution of political and economic power. He said that.

Now if we didn't have his picture next to this, who may this have come from-- communist, socialist, Trotskyite, Leninist, perhaps? Dr. King said that. And so as we think about-- what I encourage you all to think about and to maybe shifting your seats a little bit is that he said these things a little bit later in his work, and he was assassinated. And these ideas and these words are not a part of the dominant canon of his work, the dominant story. It's not, because it's dangerous. These are also ideas that anyone in this room can organize around. Imagine a redistribution of economic and political wealth in this country-- what it would do, what it could do. How systems of power would automatically change, and I don't mean just replacing the wealthy white people with wealthy black people. I mean it means that there's a fundamental questioning and change and shift around the idea that anyone can be a millionaire or a billionaire, particularly as long as millions of people remain in poverty.

And so today, someone whom I affectionately call 45 who is now taking up residence in 1600 Pennsylvania Avenue in Washington, DC, who-- actually, I just saw on Facebook, Derecka Purnell who is a law student at Harvard University says fighting white supremacy, then the greater sign, is better than fighting a white supremacist. And so for me, I have to preface this with saying that my instincts and my beliefs and my understanding of this current administration, these critiques, they were there before November 9th. They were there the past eight years of the Obama presidency. And they were there before that.

So my issues and what I will say that our charge is, the charges for us today, are not about a single man. And we must know that this single man has the ability and the power to affect all of our lives in dangerous ways and has already done so. The seat in the West Wing is barely warm and there has been an executive order signed to take away funding from sanctuary cities. There has been a tweet to say that the feds will be sent in in the city of Chicago if the carnage doesn't end.

I've seen no tweets critiquing our democratic mayor, Rahm Emanuel, for closing over 50 public schools. I've seen no tweets critiquing the overflowing jails and prisons in this country. I see no tweets critiquing the lack of health care access that trans people and gender nonconforming

people have in this country. I ain't seen no tweets about that. I ain't seen no tweets about the fact that young people don't have space to play in, that young people don't find school-- many young people don't go to a school that they're excited about. Or the school they had last week may not be there next week. And that might have been the only place where they could depend on a meal. Where are the tweets critiquing that, 45? I'm not seeing that.

What you see now is an image of an action that happened just yesterday, if I have my days correct, where Green Peace and one of our members, Pearl Robinson, was a part of this action. This is a Green Peace action where they did a banner job that says resist, resist, resist, resist, resist. Because I will have no qualms about saying that there is nothing normal about 45 and the regime that has come in with 45. There is nothing normal and there is nothing OK with it. I will not hedge on that. Why? Because this is a matter of life or death for my people and for many of your people who are in this room, and actually, for all of us. Because some of us may be in this room and think, our people don't have anything at stake, but they do. Because if the Affordable Care Act is repealed, guess what? Your people, too, will be impacted.

[APPLAUSE]

It ain't just about-- it is, yes, about our immigrant family. It is about our family that currently sits in prison cells. It's about our family who work in below living wage jobs. And it is about your cousins who rely on public welfare. I did growing up, and the majority of people who are on public aid are still white in this country. So what happens when that's stripped away? Maybe that's not your family, but it's mine and it's millions of white people in America. What happens when that is stripped away? What is going to happen when they cannot feed themselves? When you get sick and you cannot be cared for? What will happen? Those are fundamental things.

You don't have to be worried about the National Guard rolling up in Chicago. Don't worry about that. If it don't impact you, don't worry about that. We'll worry about that. Worry about what will happen in your neighborhood and the place you come from, your family members who you don't speak to anymore because you think they're too conservative for you or they embarrass you. Their lives matter, y'all. And somebody's got to do something about it. It's going to have to be you.

These are more images of Dr. King in Chicago. And I purposely chose color pictures because we usually don't see these images of him. We usually see him at the March on Washington

with his arms stretched out, a beautiful image, and hundreds of thousands of people on the National Mall. That's what we get to see, which is beautiful, but the struggle that he encountered in Chicago is connected to the struggles that we will face in the coming years. And this didn't happen on accident. Where we are today did not happen on accident, it is by design. And because of that, I'm doing it and actually building a society that leaves none of us out, there is a possibility to design that, as well. We can actually do that.

We can create a world-- I believe it, I couldn't do this work if I didn't believe that-- we can create a world where no one is left out, where no one is put on a registry because of their faith. In recognition that terrorism happens right here on this land at our universities, our high schools, our churches, our mosques, are we going to deport those people? No. And I don't think we should. I wouldn't call for that ever. I wouldn't. I don't believe in that. I don't even believe in prisons or policing. You'll never catch me saying that somebody needs to go-- you need to go-- I shouldn't say never, because I'm not perfect. But my aspiration, my aspiration and my commitment is believing that we can live in a world where we deal with conflict and harm in radically different ways.

I stood next to Dante Servin as he walked out of the courthouse in Chicago, the police officer who killed Rekia Boyd. We know he killed him, it's not hearsay. But all the charges were dropped. And I know that him spending time in prison will not bring Rekia back. It will not. Her family should have never had to experience that. It will not bring Rekia back. What I believe in my heart of all hearts is that we have to build a society where that doesn't even happen. And if it does, that people are actually held accountable to their actions. Because he doesn't have to admit to a thing. Dante Servin didn't have to admit to a thing. He didn't have to apologize to her family. He didn't have to repair the community that was broken, the family that was broken. He didn't have to do anything. And if he went to prison, he wouldn't have had to do anything.

So I have to say that as I continue on this talk, I want to be really clear about my values and where I'm coming from on this. I wouldn't even call for 45 to go to prison. That wouldn't help, because guess what, he is one person and there is a much broader society that supports his ideas. That's what I'm concerned about. That's what I'm concerned about. Because President Obama's administration deported more immigrants than any US president in the history of this country. I protested him, too. I've organized against him, too, and you better be damn sure I'll be at that wall, that site where they want to build that wall.

You can change the presidents, you can change the presidents, but many of the same fights

that we have to take up against this empire, remain. Not all the same fights. I didn't have to fight for my ability to access an abortion under the Obama administration. I didn't have to fight for that, but I damn sure had to fight against the deportation of immigrants, damn sure had to fight about the occupation of Palestine, damn sure I had to fight about how that administration dealt with policing. How it called for increased funding for policing. I had to fight for that and I'm sure as hell going to fight for it in the next four years. Because that's important to me.

Earlier today, we had a conversation at the Foley Institute. And I appreciated the exchange, because it was a tough exchange. It was a tough exchange with a student. I appreciated it because I believe that we have to know thy enemy in order to equip ourselves with the tools and the tactics to dismantle them, to disarm them. And for some of our people, they've literally lost their lives because of the arming of people who believe in similar things.

And so I'm down for the difficult conversations. That is what this moment requires of us. As students at this university, you have all likely engaged in some type of uncomfortable conversation. If not, you should. We all need to be unsettled a little bit. We all need to be agitated. And that's the role of an organizer is to agitate. You think about the washing machine when it goes on the spin cycle, it moves a little bit. It gets rid of the water. Right? It gets rid of the water. And in our agitation, we can get rid of, hopefully, some of the stuff that we don't need. And there's not in-service of our people. And that's what I get to do every single day in BYP100.

And our organization is a national organization. We have seven chapters across the country. We organize young black activists around issues of racial justice, economic justice, gender and LGBTQ justice, and we do it for the sake of our collective liberation. And in this particular moment, I've been told time and time again by white folks who want to do something, who are like what's happening ain't right. It ain't right. And to them, I lift up Dr. King's quote. The Negroes great stumbling block in the stride toward freedom is not the White Citizens' Council or the Ku Klux Klan, but the white moderate who is more toward it devoted to order than to justice, who prefers a negative peace, which is the absence of tension, to a positive peace, which is the presence of justice.

It is not the White Citizens' Council or the Ku Klux Klan, but the white moderate. Dr. King said that. And as much as I hate to boil him down into pithy quotes, his words are so important, especially, for white folks who want to do something. Now is not the time to be moderate or

take the middle road. It ain't the time to do it. If you need to lean into Susan B. Anthony, women's suffrages, they got beat in the streets. If that's what you need to lean in to think about radicalism as a white person, lean into Susan B. Anthony, lean into John Brown, who was literally killed and an abolitionist. If that's who you need to lean into to think about within their context, always within their context was not a moderate. Do that. Do that.

But now is not the time for us to be moderate when people's lives are on the line. And I'm not saying that in order to not be moderate or to be radical, to be left is that you have to be out on the streets on the front line. First of all, not everybody is able to do that. I'm not saying you have to go to a protest. What I'm saying is that if you have a racist or a sexist or a homophobic or transphobic cousin, to collect them. And that's for everybody in this room. That is what I'm saying. I'm not saying that you have to go start an organization. There are organizations that exist. Join one. Join one and if it's not exactly what you need it to be, make it so. Make it so because we hold very little material power on our own. We hold very little material power on our own.

And I said after election day, I was very unsettled, very anxious about the work that was ahead of us. And to be clear, I was also not a Hillary Clinton supporter and I didn't tell people not to vote for her. I didn't go on a campaign, don't vote for Hillary Clinton. I didn't do that. I also live in Chicago. There's lots of reasons, lots of reasons. Maybe if I lived in another state, see what would happen. I don't know. I'm just being honest with you all. Just being honest.

And so that day, I felt the weight of what was before us and the work that we would have to take up in a different way than I expected I would have had to. And I said that what needs to happen is that all the white folks who are organizing in black and brown and indigenous communities, you need to go back and organize your people. It has to happen. And I'm saying this because I'm in Washington. And I'm saying it because some of your classmates might not feel safe enough to say it or comfortable saying it. But you all need to hear it. You ain't got to agree with me now, maybe at 3 AM in three years, you'll be like, oh, damn, she said something that made sense. That's cool. I'm OK with that. I'm OK with that.

But I say these things because discomfort is necessary. It is a part of being human. It is a part of being human and you can disagree with me. That's cool. I'll tell you, you should have seen the conversation earlier today. I'm fine. You can disagree with me. But I know that I have grown in moments where I have felt the most uncomfortable. Those are the moments in which I've grown the most. Right? Unfortunately, we have the internet that is endless resources.

There are endless resources about how do I be an ally? How do I be in solidarity? You can look up standing up for racial justice, I don't think they are perfect, but there are things to learn. And that's a white organization, a white anti-racist organization.

And for your fellow classmates here, like from Crimson, the Black Student Union-- turn up. All right. Follow their lead. They have a vision for what they want. Follow their lead. Ask them what is needed. Don't overwhelm them with teaching you everything. Don't ask them what it feels like to be undocumented. Please, Lord, don't ask them to do that. But follow their lead and maybe they don't have an answer for you right now for what you should do. In that time, go educate yourself. And educate yourself with each other because what's at stake for us, the people on the planet if this planet is destroyed, we all going down, all of us. And so there are student groups here that you all can take wisdom from. Take that.

So Dr. King-- I want to make sure to really double down on his work around economic justice. So when we're talking about the Poor People's Campaign and I showed you all that picture of resist earlier that just happened this week. And thankfully, Pearl is out of jail, thank goodness. I saw that on Facebook, too. I'm very happy. She's one of the people who did the banner job. He said, now when we come to Washington in this campaign, we're coming to get our check. And did he mean a literal check? Hell, yes. And he meant structural changes. Right? Structural changes to our economy, to our education system, to our political system, to how we treat people who are economically or cash poor, how we treat our neighbor or our neighbor's neighbor. He meant all of those things. And that campaign, the Poor People's Campaign, was a radical idea.

He came from a people who spent centuries tilling this land. That's where he came from, under forced labor. He came from that. We are all on, as noted earlier, on occupied territory. Right? And I'll say it very plainly that this nation was built on the genocide of indigenous people and the enslavement of Africans. Yeah? And then cheap exploited immigrant labor-- yes? And today, we see how prisons and other sites of policing generate money for the economy. This country has been built on the exploitation and oppression of people since the beginning of its time. And it has been built on the resilience and resistance of those same people. Right?

We wouldn't have jazz if black people didn't believe in imagination. We wouldn't have rock and roll if it were not for the blues. Right? We wouldn't have those things were it not for a people who said, you know what? We're going to imagine and we're going to build and we're going to dream, even though you have your foot on our backs. OK? The story of how we've been

oppressed is important and what has been produced within that oppression is also important, because in it, it shares the scope of our humanity. It shares the scope of our humanity.

So what we want today? What do we want? What is it that we're after? What is this whole thing about? Well, one thing that we developed a BYP100-- and when I say we, I mean our membership. I didn't sit down in a room and developed this on my own. There wasn't a small group of people who said, these are going to be our policy priorities for the next however many years. We literally started from the big and narrowed down and we develop what we call the agenda to build black futures where we call for reparations for chattel slavery, for the economic and physical segregation of the Jim Crow era, the housing segregation and mass incarceration of our people today. As King said, we coming to get our check.

One of the things that we also call for is a free college education, free public college education for all. You all think that's just for black people? A living wage in our honor worker's rights, Black Work Matters. You think that's just for black people? No. Divest and eliminate profit from punishment, value the worth of women's work, support trans wealth and health, stabilize and revitalize black communities. All of these things come from our location as black people, my location as a black, queer, lesbian woman, location of our members in our organization who are black men, black cisgender men, black trans men, black young people who are across the gender spectrum, the sexuality, faith, no faith. All types of people in our organization came up with this and articulated this is our vision for what economic justice can look like.

And we fundamentally believe that if these things were to happen, they would absolutely improve the lives of black people and the lives of all of us. Right? And because it comes from our location as black people, many people will shut their ears off and close their eyes and say, this is racist, this is black supremacy, this is reverse racism, all things that don't actually exist. But we are furthering an idea from our place in the world. Capitalists do it all the time. 45 does it. He's a billionaire. His ideas are coming from his location in the world, not the Appalachia, not the coal country, because he ain't from the coal country, not the rural towns of Ohio or Michigan-- he ain't from there. That's not his location. People articulate things from their social locations where they are and where they come from. And so just because a black person or a Latina person or an indigenous person articulates what they want for the world, doesn't mean it ain't for you. It just means it's coming from their location-- that's all.

So in 2015, BYP100 along with multiple organizations in Chicago-- Assata's Daughters, the Organized Communities Against Deportations, Not One More Campaign, Lifted Voices-- we all

organize a direct action nonviolent civil disobedience-- and I say nonviolent because it's the tactic that we use-- in which the International Association of the Chiefs of Police Conference was held in Chicago. They were so foolish for doing that. I don't know why you would hold anything around the police in Chicago. We have an amazing organizing community there. There are over 100 people involved in this action. 66 people took arrest. And I am surprised to this day that it happened. And you'll see on our lockboxes, the little green thing that's on our arm, it says divest from policing.

You see on our shirts Fund Black Futures. Our basic message for that day is that we needed to divest from policing and invest in our communities. Because in a city like Chicago, we spend about \$4 million a day on policing. You can look it up. They take up about 40% of a public service budget in the city of Chicago. And I'm sure you all have heard about what 45 has called the carnage in Chicago. It is unconscionable that so many people's lives are being taken. It should not happen. I live on the south side of Chicago. It should not be this way.

But if we're going to address what is happening, we need to get to the root cause of the problem. Right? We need to get to the root cause. We need to look at poverty, decades of divestment, poor priorities by our democratic mayors. We have given Rahm Emanuel hell, our mayor, and we intend to continue to do that. We intend to continue to do that and he's a Democrat. And so this action was about putting our bodies on the line and saying that actually our communities deserve more and they deserve better. And if we wanted to get real about safety, we have to be clear that we are the ones who have the potential to keep each other safe. We are the ones who can keep each other safe and their systems of punishment do not. Our prisons are filled. Do you feel safer? Do you feel safe? I don't.

And I was in Ireland on Thursday-- and I actually flew here Thursday and got here, thank goodness-- from Dublin. And there's an activist, longtime activist. Her name is Bernadette. And Bernadette comes out of the Irish resistance, the peace movement in Northern Ireland. And this woman has been through so many things. My God, she's an amazing organizer. Told me all types of things that I did not know about struggle in Ireland at all. And if you don't know, you should totally look it up about what's happening in Ireland. It's complicated, for sure, and I'm still learning, but it's fascinating.

One of the things I took away from what she said was that she got to a point-- and this woman has been shot multiple times. She was a member of the British parliament. So I'm not talking about some random person off the street. She helped build a movement in Northern Ireland

and is continuing to do it and work locally. If anyone who is in their minds and I hate white people, if you're thinking that, that I hate white people, Bernadette is a white woman, if anybody is wondering about that. And her story is amazing. It's amazing because one of the things she said, one of the many jewels that she dropped, was that after Bloody Sunday, it was a day in which they had a march-- I don't remember the city exactly, one of you may know-- in which over a dozen people who were attending the march were shot and killed. And that was their Bloody Sunday. We've had a Bloody Sunday here in the US during the Civil Rights Movement, as well. Their people were killed.

She said after that day, she decided that she would no longer have a conversation about nonviolence unless it started with a conversation about state violence. She said that she would not talk about nonviolence. And this woman helped build the peace movement, so she did not engage in violent tactics, she didn't. She was very clear that she would not have any conversation about nonviolence, unless it started with the violence inflicted on people by the state. Because the type of violence that is in play-- and when I say the state, I mean the government, it's actors. The police are not the state. The police take orders from the state and from the elite. They are there to protect property and the interests of the wealthy. They actually don't even control themselves-- it's sad.

The type of violence that the state is not only capable of but that it inflicts upon everyday people in hospitals, in schools, on the streets, in their workplace is at such a level that until we have to deal with that, and until we deal with that, we cannot be surprised when people react with violence. Somebody has their heel on your back, will you be surprised if they push it off? Would you be surprised that if your community is patrolled every single day by multiple police cars, would you be surprised that you're not trusted? Would you be surprised? I wouldn't. I wouldn't.

And so I encourage everyone to look within themselves Grace Lee Boggs, who's a Chinese-American longtime organizer and activist based out of Detroit. She lived until she was 99 I believe. She died not too long ago. She talked about how the revolution that is necessary begins within us. When people think about revolution, they have all types of visions of-- all types of visions. What do you think of when you think of revolution? Just shout out a word.

Violence, guns, change, all right. All types of visions pop into our mind. But Grace Lee Boggs furthered that it starts with us. And so this is a picture of Kush Thompson who's now the co-chair of our Chicago chapter. And she's holding the black liberation, the red, black, and green

flag. And this is right before they took her off of the ladder. Literally, that's a truck that they're standing on top of like the SWAT or I don't know their official roles. And they took her off of the ladder. This was an action outside of Homan Square on the west side of Chicago in a North Lawndale community. Homan Square is what is called a black site where The Guardian-- you all can check this out after this-- The Guardian, the online website newspaper, not even in the US, did an entire expose in which they found at least 7,000 people had been disappeared into Homan Square. And many of those people were tortured and some of them died. And this is not in the '50s, we're talking about in our lifetimes. And this happened right on the west side of Chicago. Right?

And I have met people who have been in Homan Square. They're like, yeah, that happened. I've been in there. So please, I implore you, I really encourage you to look that up. And I show this picture because it is not only a picture of resistance, but is an embodiment of what our movement is about. Kush didn't swing the flag and knock one of them upside the head, that would have been funny. We would have laughed or whatever. But what she understands and what I understand is that the problems we face are structural and systemic, and that in four years, they will not only remain or be worse, but they will not change unless all of us take up a commitment to change it.

Unless all of us take up a commitment to create the type of society where none of us are left out, where all of your assumptions about who owns this country are ripped away, where all of our sense of entitlement to other people's bodies, to land, to an education are taken away, and where what's most important and at the core of all that we do is believing that every single person should have the ability to live within their full human dignity, and that every person should be able to live in a planet where we don't just take from it, but we help to regenerate it. And that is something that we can all take up. And I believe in my heart of all hearts, that it is something that we must all take up. Thank you.

[APPLAUSE]