

## Adrienne Maree Brown

Good morning! Someone left their water up here. That's not good for the visuals. I'll take it down. So I'm going to sing a little wake-up song for you all real quick. How do you feel about that? [Applause.] Good?

*Woke up this morning with my mind,  
set on freedom.*

*Woke up this morning with my mind,  
Set on freedom.*

*Woke up this morning with my mind,  
set on freedom.*

*Hallelu-*

*Hallelu-*

*Hallelujah.*

All right. [Applause.] So...I wanted to start with that, because I'm kind of an unlikely candidate to be speaking at this conference because I wake up every morning with my mind set on freedom, and a lot of times I don't wake up with my mind set on reform. But I do have a vision for how you all can be a part of this vision I have for freedom, and I'm here to entice you, hopefully, into that vision, so prepare for just blameless and shameless enticement.

Fundamentally, a revolutionary mindset has the ability to see beyond what currently exists, and beyond tweaking what currently exists, to something altogether new – new relationships, new power dynamics, new media, media which exist not only to inform us but to transform us, so that when we hear it, when we see it, we're not just taking in that information, but we actually change the way we behave, change the way we interact with the world.

We want media that is available to everyone, not just as consumers, but as co-creators. Now, I work at an organization called the Ruckus Society, and much of what we do is training people in nonviolent, direct action. But it's actually really about direct communication. And you may have seen us recently, some of our Ruckus Network folks, up on the Golden Gate Bridge with the Students for a Free Tibet. [Applause.] We did a beautiful banner action out there. And it's impacting international opinion and international responses to the Tibetan people, and that's an impact led by the Tibetan people.

That's the kind of work that we do. We work with communities that have very few monetary resources, don't control their airwaves, and we help them to communicate directly between themselves and among themselves, and then also turn that towards the decision-makers. But that means for us not just communicating towards our opposition. Reaction for us is inherently framed by the opposition, so it's never the most powerful

position. In this day and age, we want to be good at reaction, but we need to become a lot better at proaction and at vision. [Applause.] Thank you.

So coming here this morning, I spoke to my community. I reached out to all the folks in the media justice world and I said, "What do I need to talk to this group about?" And I got so many responses back. And this is the five-year anniversary of the term "media justice" being coined at the Highlander Center. Do you all know what the Highlander Center is? [Applause.] Okay. You should definitely go sit up on that hill and do some contemplating if you haven't done it.

But some of my community came back to me and they said, "Okay, Adrienne, you really need to talk about how we produce our media. We need to move from being passive consumers to active creators. We want to be the ones who are telling the stories of our lives. And that's fundamentally about who is producing that media. I speak with a technology expert all the time about, "Can we do this for Ruckus? Can we do this kind of crazy technology for our mobilization?" And he always says to me, "You can do anything you want. Literally everything you could possibly imagine in terms of technology for communication and mobilizing exist. You just can't afford. It's just not accessible to you." Right?

And I feel like that's very much what we deal with with the process of democratizing our media. And I'm involved with an organization called the Allied Media Conference, which is coming up – [applause] – Ow! That's a good sound. So that's coming up in Detroit June 20th through the 22nd, and it's primarily about taking these media skills that seem out of the realm of these young communities of color that we work with, and bringing those skills back to the community.

Some of the folks that I spoke with... And by the way, the skills we're talking about there is young people having their own low-power FM radio stations; being able to do video blogging; creating their own Web zines and physical zines so that they're speaking about themselves, not just being observed as dropouts or as kids in the streets or something along those lines.

And some of the folks I spoke to said that it's really about what we talk about. We have to begin putting our own stories front and center, and focusing on the success and vision instead of just having a slightly better analysis around the mainstream drama, trauma, and scandal circuit. Moving from stories of individuals to stories of community – and I'm going to talk a little bit about Coalition of the Immokalee Workers here. How many of you all have been aware of the recent success that they had? [Applause.] Yes? Okay.

So I don't know if I'm allowed to say this, but I'm going to say it: They're badass. They're completely badass. And the win that they just had is a media justice win. They were able to organize using their radio in their community to bring down Burger King, who had been spying on them and oppressing them, okay? That's the kind of media that we want to see. That's a success story.

And I love being clapped for; I just have a limited time. So that's the only reason I'm talking over the wonderful applause.

This is also the kind of work we've seen when we see group like Detroit Summer, who created an audio documentary about the dropout rate in Detroit, and talk about their vision for community education, then took that project to Palestine, where they worked with young people in Palestine to talk about their dreams behind the wall, and what their visions for their lives are, and a nonviolent way of responding and growing in that space. [Applause.] So that kind of developing a racial analysis from the Middle East to the U.S., that's the kind of visioning and sort of cutting-edge information that we want to be communicating.

Now, some of the folks said, "Adrienne, the only thing you should talk about is fighting for our right to any and all media of our choice." That struggle is fundamentally about understanding policy. The exciting thing right now is that that struggle is finally going local. There are statewide and regional networks developing through the Media Action Grass Roots Network, which is housed at the Center for Media Justice. [Applause.] You all know that? Yay, Center for Media Justice. We love them.

But they're bringing together all of these local hubs of media justice organizers to create a national network that's working on this issue. The reason that matters is because while a lot of people in this room are interested in following every aspect of media policy and fighting for it, most of the people out in the community doing the grass roots work – that's not what they're thinking about day in and day out.

And so fundamentally weaving why access to the Internet and access to media is important to them winning their struggles, that's the frontline of this media reform work; that's where the work and the resources need to go. So I really want to highlight that work. I'm glad that I was told to talk about it.

***Audience member:*** It's all Magnet!

It's all Magnet! All right? Okay, girls. You just jump in any time. [Audience laughter.]

One of the things that really occurred to me is that we really need to give up our fear of defining the trends for the mainstream. We're very comfortable over on the margins holding it down. ...

It is up to us, particularly this year, to stop pretending that voter mobilization behind an exciting candidate and scandal-based media is going to be enough to actually change the direction of this country after years now ...

... I also say that we need to be as comprehensive a movement as possible, so when all of my friends talk to me about, it's this issue, it's that issue, to me it's all of those issues. We need to act like we love our media and that we recognize that media is the fundamental

connective tissue that all communities are built on. It's the way we communicate with each other, and it's the important thing, and we must protect it.

But that means we must be respectful of each other. Over here in the media reform world, we need to have a deep respect for those in the community organizing world and vice-versa. *[Applause.]* And that means that you can't just ask us to come to your media policy struggle. You need to come meet us where we're at and support us on the front lines of our organizing, right? *[Applause.]*

But we're not starting from scratch. There are some amazing projects out there. [Davie D] is breaking down the barriers between entertainment and media with Breakdown FM. Agi Pop is out there and SourceWatch is out there with all these amazing flash videos and wikis that are sharing incredible information. And that gives us access and control over spaces like YouTube and Google, which a lot of times [we're gonna] be like, "Oh, YouTube and Google." But you know what? That's where we go beyond the choir and really reach our audiences.

I already talked about the Coalition of Immokalee Workers. They're amazing. Obviously, I have amazing notes here. As journalists, primarily, I want to talk to you. There are some of you who already recognize this and some of you who don't. But ambivalence and complacency only serve injustice. It is your time right now to move out of the role of observer and into the role of a companion and an ally and a fighter in this struggle. *[Applause.]*

We need media right now that supports those of us who are taking it to the streets and accurately identifies and tells a story and shows a story and inspires more people to join us in fighting against our discontent in this country and having a real vision. I invite you to join me as visionaries. I love you very much, and I hope you have a wonderful time here in Minneapolis.

*[Applause.]*