

The Power at the Polls – Michelle Mbekeani-Wiley

WOMEN WILL WE BE IN THE ROOM WHERE IT HAPPENS?!

Because for far too long we have been wronged by this political system. Since our country's founding, our voices have been silenced, our opinions have been marginalized, and we have often been the ones who face the harshest of inequities and injustice.

Civil rights activist and journalist Ida B. Wells once stated that the way to right wrongs in society is to turn the light of truth upon them. But today, as we shine truth on the inequities of this nation through our signs, our chants, and our hashtags, we must remember that to truly right these wrongs, we must do more than just reflect on society's ills. Instead, we must also turn the light on ourselves to see what *power* we have to alter the trajectory of our nation into an arc that bends towards justice for all.

Before me now is a sea of souls that have the power, real power, to change the tide of our country's turbulent and unjust policies. But after this ceremonious event, after the adrenaline subsides, we cannot leave our power here today. No! we cannot leave our power abandoned on this street pavement. We cannot leave our time here cemented as a mere memory of the time when women had the audacity to tap into their own power. No! We must take this momentum and motivation and march on to the polls. because there is power at the polls, *real* power

The power at the polls can cure the ills of a racially segregated city whose symptoms plague black and brown communities

The power at the polls can protect our reproductive rights from those who try to invade the constitutional ground made by Roe v. Wade

The power at the polls can bring a flow of economic resources to communities in this city that have experienced a systematic drought of development and economic opportunity. So that *all sides* of this city can flourish.

But the power of our March doesn't stop at the polls. No, our battlefield extends beyond the polling place. This pressure must persist, it must be resilient. If we want our solutions to be sustainable, our pressure and action must go beyond March, beyond November, beyond 2019, and even beyond 2020. It is not enough to just cast our own vote, we must mobilize the entire vote!

We must mobilize it by registering people to vote. Like the League of Women Voters is today.

We must mobilize it by protecting the vote from racially fueled voter ID laws.

We must mobilize it by ensuring that our polling places are accessible to those with disabilities.

We must mobilize it by educating people with criminal convictions of their right to vote in this state regardless if they are on parole or probation.

We must mobilize the vote by pushing every population to the polls because our ballots can bring change.

Our ballots can bring female leadership, generating a government that actually reflects its people.

Our ballots can create a just, equitable, and welcoming society to communities that have been systematically marginalized into the corners of inequity and injustice.

Our ballots can bring humanity and compassion back into our political systems, cultivating a culture that recognizes the value of all people.

But most, importantly our ballots can bring a life of dignity for *all* people

Because that is what it is all about! *Dignity!* It does not have a political party. It does not belong to one side of the political aisle. Instead *it is the aisle*, the space in between that we share! Dignity is the common ground that is worthy of our collective fight. SO Today, we have the power—power in our own hands, power in our ballots, and power in our own communities—to right the wrongs transcribed into this nation's inequitable policies and secure dignity for all.