



## **Asbury Park Women's March**

**January 21, 2017**

Good afternoon! I am humbled and honored to join you today. Thank you, my dear friend Carolyn, for giving me an opportunity to include my mom in this historic moment. I can think of no one better to channel the connection between mother and child, than you, my beautiful friend! And thank you, Mom – for encouraging me to dream big and swing for the fences.

Thank you to my son Lincoln and husband Jason for joining me here today and supporting me every day, and thank you to the organizers for giving me this opportunity. Thank you, too, to Joe Grillo for connecting me to these amazingly kick-ass women, and mostly, thank you to ALL OF YOU for joining us, for elevating the public discourse about issues that matter, and for helping us write the first pages of this pivotal chapter in global history.

Listening to my mom's remarks – it's overwhelming really. Because I was just following her example.

I mean, when I was six years old, my parents gave me a mug that read, on one side, "A woman's place is in the house..." on the other side, it read, "Senate and Supreme Court". I've had this mug for over 30 years. It's now chipped and cracked from years of use....and love. When I need a boost... when I need to be reminded of my own capabilities, I drink from this mug – both literally and figuratively – appreciating the potential that lies within all of us.

And that is why I am here today. Because, like for so many of you, the events of our times impact me deeply. This is personal.

I have friends that have made their home here... they are legal residents who have birthed their babies within our borders. They work here. They contribute to our economy and our community. Our children are good friends. They love this country. They believe in our potential and want to amplify their voice. They didn't come today – out of fear.

My parents, both managing serious and chronic health conditions, depend on the health benefits they receive through the Affordable Care Act. What happens to them when they are unable to pay for the care that literally keep them alive?

My son goes to a school that has been the target of dozens of "hoax" swatting calls over the last two years. What happens when the next call is not a hoax? What happens when the next school shooting is here? What if the next family to mourn the loss of innocent life is mine?

What about my friends, whose sons and daughters have darker skin than that of my son? What fear must they know each time their child leaves the home? Don't wear the hood on your sweatshirt. Don't play with shiny toys. Don't put your hands up. Do put your hands up. For some of my friends and their children, just *being* carries daily risks.



So, yes, this is personal. There will be a public narrative that makes this political, and for some, it may be. But, TODAY, here in Asbury Park, we are here because we care about PEOPLE.

I am fortunate that I've managed to create a life that seamlessly blends the three "P's" – personal, political, and professional - but at the foundation of all of it is my love for *people*. That is why we march today and that is why I am doubling-down on my commitment to use my voice, my privilege, and my position to create a better, more just society.

For today is just the beginning of the revolution.

Embrace these words: Vulva. Vagina. Labia. Clitoris. Breast.

Speaking publicly and accurately about women's bodies isn't revolutionary.

Equal pay for equal work. Proportionate representation at leadership tables.

Speaking publicly about equality for women isn't revolutionary.

The pill. The patch. IUD. The ring. Abstinence. Plan B. Abortion. IVF. IUI. Child birth.

Speaking publicly about women's full range of reproductive choices isn't revolutionary.

Sexual harassment. Sexual exploitation. Assault. Rape.

Speaking publicly about sexual violence isn't revolutionary.

What is revolutionary is the ways in which our voices are being heard. The ways in which we, as activists, are organizing and using technology to create communities, share ideas, cultivate the next generation of feminists, and create a world that harnesses the power of women, rather than suppresses it.

What is revolutionary is that while some members of the media, an abundance of elected officials, and some prominent policy makers still struggle to facilitate meaningful discussions about sexual violence and the ways in which "locker room talk" perpetuates rape culture. We, through our organizing, our blogging, our posting and sharing – our meaningful– WE have the opportunity to counter ignorance in real time. With facts. With statistics. With personal testimonies.

What I ask is this: Strengthen your debates with facts.

- Sexual assault is the most under-reported crime
- 80% of survivors know their perpetrators
- The FBI recognizes rape as the second most violent crime – the first of which is murder

Find an issue about which you care deeply and study it. Global warming. Public education. LGBTQ rights. Environmental conservation. The arts. Animal rescue. Reproductive justice. The prison industrial complex. Gun safety.

# njcoalition

## against sexual assault

Spend time thoroughly researching the “other side’s” perspective. Anticipate their arguments. Appreciate their perspective, even if it’s illogical and nauseating. Then... ambush them. With respect and intelligence. With a voice that speaks truth to power. Be transparent and be kind. But **engage** in the debate and stand by your factually-supported position.

And remember – this is a marathon – not a sprint. We will get pissed off, frustrated, and exhausted. And at those moments, we will need to know that our sisters and allies are there – to keep the momentum going while we rest. Self-care will be important during the resistance.

But always remember that Alice Paul said, “When you put your hand to the plow, you can't put it down until you get to the end of the row”.

Her words still guide us today. We are not yet at the end of the row.

The economic realities for women, who make 77 cents on the dollar.

A society that has over-sexualized women, and our bodies, to the extent that the freedom to nurse our babies in public is contentiously debated, while the Victoria’s Secret Fashion show boasts an incredible 9.7 million viewers.

A capitalist market that begins gender norming our children upon conception. Pink for girls. Blue for boys. A market that makes money by oppressing both our sons and our daughters by limiting their options in play, which sets the stage for their perceived options in life.

And the impact of a media that perpetuates a distorted narrative against survivors of domestic violence by continuing to repeat the question, “Why do women stay?” rather than challenging social norms by asking “why do some men abuse?”

Our current political and social discourse would lead us to believe that we are more different than we are alike. But this is not true. In this park, on this day, we are surrounded by close to 3,000 people dedicated to a Safer Garden State. We are business owners. Writers. Lawyers. Social workers. Doctors. Teachers. Athletes. Moms. Aunts. Cousins. Sisters. Daughters. Wives. Nesties. Feminists. Humanists. Advocates. We are non-profit executives. **We are WOMEN and we are revolutionaries.**

We want the same thing. We want the children we love to grow up in a safer, less violent society.

I believe we all want Brock Turner to serve more than 30 days in jail. We want him to be banned from opportunities to speak on college campuses spilling his poison and perpetuating the victim-blaming narrative that allows young, white, privileged men like him to drown out the authentic voice of survivors.

We want justice.

But working towards a more just society requires that we commit to sifting through the thick, overwhelming weight of oppression. In order to live in a more just society, we need to let go of our egos, recognize our privilege, and acknowledge that there is no ONE reality in this country.



That our realities are shaped by our sex, our gender identity, our sexuality, our zip code, our race, our ethnicity, our religion, our marital status, etc.

And because of these realities, we must resist easy answers. We will need to engage in challenging conversations that allow TRUTH to rise to the surface – we must resist a POST FACTUAL reality. And we must hold our elected officials accountable – we must demand the truth even when it is hard to accept – even when it’s unpopular.

And here’s a piece of that hard-to-digest truth...WE must do the work, too. Policies alone cannot end rape culture. WE can. When we call-out sexist jokes, when we boycott misogynistic entertainers, when we intentionally influence the lives of the young people we love by modeling positive relationships and holding them to high standards about how they treat their friends, classmates, and future partners. We have to BE the change.

But I know that we can handle all of this because we stand here today on the shoulders of greatness – not just the high-profile historical leaders who have managed to slip onto the pages of the white, heteronormative history books that grace the school shelves.

But also on the shoulders of everyday women who nurtured the kind of people that would react to the current state of affairs by participating in a global movement such as the one we’re participating in today. I know that we can do this because we have each other.

So let this not serve as our final act, but rather our first steps. Remember that participation in the revolution will look and feel different for each of us – some of us will organize, some will run for office, some will write, some will donate to worthy causes, and maybe even some of you will join us back here in Asbury Park on May 6<sup>th</sup> for NJCASA’s *Safer Garden State 5k*.

No matter what you do – do something. Stay engaged. Do not despair.

Remember the words of President Obama, during his final White House Press Conference, “The only thing that’s the end of the world, is the end of the world”

We need each other now more than ever.

Thank you for being here today and thank you, in advance, for all you’re about to do.

*Patricia Teffenhart, MPA*

*Executive Director, New Jersey Coalition Against Sexual Assault*

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