

January 21st, 2017 - RALLY Speech by Julia Feliz

Still in disbelief after the morning of November 8th, I stand before you under all the labels that define me in our society. As a woman, a mother, a person of color, as a Hispanic American, a scientist, and as an ethical vegan, I have gone through several emotions since the results of the election.

First, it was despair and sorrow. I had never experienced such a heartbreaking feeling of rejection and hatred like an avalanche from millions of people from my own home country – my own country men and women – because of who I am, the color I wear on my skin, and the language that I was raised speaking. I felt my country had very publicly let me down and rejected me openly once and for all. It was suddenly all out on the table the morning that I heard the newscaster say the next President's name.

In the days that followed, heartbreak turned into anger. Then, my anger finally turned to empowerment, and here I am. I am here for myself, my children, my family and friends on the mainland, as well as every single person and living being that needs my voice because they have been targeted, oppressed, abused, and marginalized by the platform of a man and a chosen administration that represents every single thing that is wrong with society.

As a woman and mother, how do I explain to my sons that even though our society claims to admire humility, kindness, respect towards all, and giving, they have chosen to elect a man that stands for the complete opposite?

As a Hispanic American and person of color, I am horrified that a large population would choose to ignore the messages that Trump sent loud and clear against minorities during his platform. Instead of working towards unification, Trump chose to further the divide and further promote our status as "Others that don't belong". He made us scapegoats and empowered hatred.

"Go back to your country! Speak English; this is America!" are not uncommon statements directed at Hispanics despite their being born in the US or having naturalized as citizens. This sentimentality ignores that a large part of US citizens speak more than one language. I am a born and raised Puerto Rican. Puerto Rico is a country that has been part of the USA since 1898. We have been born US citizens since 1917 – that's 100 years this year! This means that for at least FIVE generations, my family members have been born US citizens. We pay taxes and our men and women serve and die in US wars. We are people of color, and we are raised speaking Spanish and English. As such, Spanish IS an American language. We ARE in our country and we do speak a US language. We are not going anywhere, and we are very proud of who we are. We are not others that don't belong and neither are any other Latinos and Hispanic Americans that were denigrated throughout the election by being called rapists and murderers by Trump or being told their presence is of no benefit to the US by Sessions. We matter! Our voices matter! I want my family, friends, and all my Latino brothers and sisters to know that I stand with you, and I will speak on your behalf in the same way that I will speak for all targeted groups regardless of gender, ethnicity, or skin color. I hope you will too.

As a scientist, I fear what this new administration means for truth and facts. Science is based on evidence gathered through unbiased and specific methodology. It is NOT based on ideology, opinion, anecdotes, or beliefs. Climate change is real! The environmental degradation that our planet is facing is happening, and it matters greatly. Truth, facts, and evidence matter. I will take the call to speak when the opposite attempt to further replace science with ignorance. I hope you will too.

As a vegan for ethics, I choose to live my life in a way that has the least impact on all living beings by consciously rejecting to partake in any form of exploitation that I can control. There are billions upon billions of nonhuman animals killed, exploited, or threatened every year, and sadly, they live this all without a voice to stand up for themselves. I fear for them as well under the new administration. I fear for the progress that has been made on their behalf. And while we have a long way to go to abolish their suffering and senseless exploitation, things won't get better for them if we don't stay vigilant on their behalf as well. What will happen to the wildlife that lives in our beautiful national and state parks? What about the cows, pigs, or chickens that exist and then die with little to no protection for food? What about any of the other dozens of species exploited and killed for clothing, entertainment, or sport that have yet to garner protections or rights? Will progress on the Ivory Trade and puppy mills be reverted? The new administration has shown they are certainly no friends to nonhuman animals. Therefore, if we don't speak or choose to act on their behalf as well, who will? I know I will. I hope you will too.

Today, I want us to remember that no one is free from responsibility while others are oppressed.

In solidarity, I hope that we can continue to work together and support one another as we strive to protect the advances that our country has made for all and as we stand up for one another when targeted by the person that is supposed to act in the best interest of ALL Americans.