

Hugh Hefner speech
Tuesday, September 29th

Good morning, it is an honor to be here with you today, I'm nervous even though I do this all the time, so bear with me on that.

First of all, let me say that I really appreciate receiving this award, but the award really doesn't go to me. As it was said before, it's not about me and takes more than me. It took more than me to pass Net Neutrality rules that would actually protect the Internet. What it took was a national coalition. MAG-Net the Media Action Grassroots Network, was apart of that coalition, but the coalition was far greater than us as well. It included Internet companies, it included policy wonks, it included technologist and some of the people who helped win that are here today and I'd like to ask them to stand up.

This brother who's right here and videotaping me, his name is Steven Renderos. Critically important in that fight organizing state to state community to community to make sure that every day people who you would not see in front of this podium today actually had a voice in that process. So it's an honor. Also I want to recognize Helen Burner of the Media and Democracy Fund, who is not here today but actually seeded quite a bit of the work that happened over the years fighting for Net Neutrality. So, the Media and Democracy Fund is a shining example of what I think foundations and philanthropy can do to seed social movements and they've won, and I appreciate them as well.

So, on behalf of what we like to call team #MeidaJustice and the National Media Grassroots Network I thank you.

Last year, as it was said before, a very small movement went up against some of the wealthiest and most powerful companies in the world, and we won. Despite the billions of dollars spent the telecom industry spent in D.C. to defeat us and to defeat the cause of an Open Internet; despite opposition from elite civil rights insiders with financial ties to the industry. Despite the GOP, on February 27th, 2015 the Federal Communications Commission passed the strongest network neutrality rules to date.

For too long, civil rights and free speech have been considered separate issues. For too long, Telecom companies have bought their ability to put a ceiling on civil rights, but no more.

I like to think that on that day, the day that those rules were passed, I carried forward my mother's legacy. My mother was a member of the Black Panther Party in NYC. She ran the Party's Breakfast Program and was editor of their national newspaper, but she was my first teacher. I sat on my mother's shoulders at rallies for undocumented migrants, queer youth rights, women's reproductive freedom. And I sit on her shoulders today.

It is in honor of my mother, who died in 2005 and on behalf of the more than 175 organizations of the Media Action Grassroots Network, that I gratefully accept this award.

My mom taught me that knowledge is not power, contrary to many people's opinion. What she told me is that only power is power, but knowledge is power's prerequisite, it is power's driver. As such an open, affordable and democratic Internet is a requisite driver for powerful social justice movements and for democracy.

The grassroots organizations of the Media Action Grassroots Network knew that. I'm talking about the Media Mobilizing Project, Media Alliance, Ella Baker Center, Media Literacy Project, Generation Justice and so on. They used the Open Internet to pressure the FCC, Congress, and the civil rights community to stand against attempts by AT&T, Comcast, and Verizon to turn the Internet into a corporate playground.

The women who co-founded Black Lives Matter and the protesters who sparked the Movement for Black Lives, to build a power national movement against anti-Black policing, also they knew it. This movement has driven an alienated generation into the streets, smartphones in hand, using the Open Internet as civilian journalists documenting and exposing the long-held but hidden truth: Black bodies are indeed brutalized and murdered by government officials at a gruesome rate and because Net Neutrality was extended to wireless, we will continue to have the video to prove it.

From domestic to fast food workers, emerging labor leaders know about the power of the Open Internet, and they are using it to draw hundreds of thousands of people into the street to demand fair wages and work. The demand -fight for 15- has seen the minimum wage raised state by state by state. Activism online has been a significant part of that fight.

Undocumented migrants are organizing on and offline to raise the call -NOT ONE MORE- and show the world the weight of their bodies against busses bent on deporting their parents and detaining their children. And although it was too little, too late, executive action on immigration was the direct result of impacted people speaking for themselves. That was the power of the Open Internet.

These are the movements that helped to win Net Neutrality. What Senator Al Franken, called the most significant first amendment free speech issue of the digital age, the 21st century. —But the war isn't won. As I accept this award, cities across the country are arming local law enforcement agencies with body worn cameras, stingray cell phone interceptors, drones, license plate readers and other surveillance technologies that increase the scale, speed, and secrecy of policing. Across the country millions of people who are terrified want body worn cameras but they do not want body worn cameras without civil rights protections and constitutional protections that protect their privacy.

Here's the truth, right now we live in a country where 60% of the 2 million incarcerated people are racial and ethnic minorities, with racial disparities at every stage of the judicial process. In this context, arming police departments with unproven technology without constitutional limits and civil rights protections is not only insidious, it is not only immoral and it is illegal and it needs to stop.

The denial of fourth amendment rights, actually restricts the enforcement of first amendment rights. So you are called to action today. The Internet is, without question, the most powerful communications platform the world has ever known. But the Internet can only serve democracy to the degree it is itself democratized. Today, the right of free speech and press is hoarded by the powerful. Its lack alienates the rest of us. That is not the America I want to live in, and I don't think it's the America you want either. But it doesn't have to be this way.

We launched the Center for Media Justice and the Media Action Grassroots Network to build a powerful cross-sector movement that ensures underrepresented communities a seat at the table and a voice in debates on the future of the Internet. What I like to call team #MediaJustice, organizes racial justice strategies, not only to win the right to connect but also to secure the power to communicate for those most disadvantaged by media policies that serve the status quo, because when the least of us is represented, the most of are too.

If you want more than the biases of 20th century broadcast media, more than the misrepresentation of mainstream cable news. Let me hear you say YES! Let me hear you say YES like you mean it. YES! I agree you. I agree with myself.

I too, want to thwart invisibility, untie democracy's hands and bind the hands of those who would prey on our disconnection, on our fear, on our dismay, on our disillusionment. My mom spent her short lifetime fighting for my voice so I could spend the rest of my life fighting for yours.

Help me out, I want to share with you what we say, in the Movement for Black Lives. Let me hear you say I, I believe, I believe that, I believe that we will win, I believe that we will win, I believe that we will win. Thank you.