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Constitutional Rights in Post-9/11 America

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Special Section

From the Editor

In the early morning hours of September 24, 2010 agents of the FBI raided the homes of peace and anti-war activists in Minneapolis and Chicago. They seized computers, papers, cell phones, pictures and other property. Subpoenas were issued summoning 23 anti-war and international solidarity activists to appear and testify before a grand jury.

These raids were widely condemned by civil rights organizations, legal groups, peace activists, and many others as an unjustified violation of First Amendment rights to organize and advocate.

As editor of the CTAM Journal, it seemed only natural to me that these events should be of interest to our community. The issue of free speech is of special interest to those of us who teach public speaking, debate, and performance. These raids took place here in Minnesota. But the issue struck even closer to home. Several of the individuals targeted were members of our own speech and debate community among them, Jess Sundin, Tracy Molm, Katrina Plotz, and Meredith Aby.

On September 21, 2011, Meredith Aby accepted an invitation to speak on the subject of freedom of speech and association in ten years after 9/11. Her speech, which was sponsored by the Department of Communication Studies at Minnesota State University, the Kessel Peace Institute, and the Mankato Area Activist Collective, is more than a powerful defense of free speech the right to dissent. It is the personal account of an ordinary person of extraordinary conviction—an activist, a mother, a partner, a teacher, and a debate coach—for whom standing up for right to oppose one's government is more than an abstract principle, more than a theory. For Aby and other activists targeted by the FBI, the defense of free speech, free association, and the freedom to dissent are very real.

Meredith Aby was raised in Worthington, Minnesota where she competed on both her high school speech and debate teams. She went on to debate at Macalester College for three years. Aby continued her passion for forensics through coaching and has coached debate at Coon Rapids High School, St. Paul Academy and Jefferson High School in Bloomington where she has taught since 1999.

In her senior year at Macalester Aby became politically active with the Twin Cities Committee in Solidarity with the People of El Salvador. In 1998 she co-founded the Twin Cities based Anti-War Committee which organizes against U.S. wars and interventions across the globe. In 2008, Aby was one of the principle organizers of the Coalition to March on the RNC and helped organize a protest of tens of thousands against the war in Iraq in St. Paul, MN.

Aby and the other 22 anti-war and international solidarity activists who have been subpoenaed all are refusing to cooperate with the FBI's investigation and risk imprisonment for doing so. They have organized a grassroots pressure campaign against FBI repression of the peace movement through the Committee to Stop FBI Repression (stopfbi.net).

*Constitutional Rights in Post-9/11 America**

Meredith Aby
Anti-War Committee of Minnesota

I'm excited to be here and thank you very much for hosting me. I have a special place in my heart for Mankato. My great grandmother, Martha Wilson, was a settlement house activist and a social worker here at the YWCA in the '30's and so Mankato always has a special place in my family's history and in my heart.

So under the topic of constitutional rights, which is what I've been asked to speak about tonight, sadly enough there are a lot of different ways that we can examine that issue. We could look at the Fifth Amendment right to counsel and the right against self-incrimination and how that's in jeopardy. We could look at our right to privacy under the Fourth Amendment and how that's in jeopardy. Or, for example, today, there's a protest happening in St. Louis Park because former President George W. Bush is speaking in St. Louis Park and they're protesting the fact that the Eighth Amendment is in jeopardy through the use of water boarding.

I want to thank MSU for choosing to sponsor talk focusing on our case and highlighting the precarious situation dissent is in here in the United States, currently. For ten years, the tragic events of September 11, 2001 have been used as a pretext for endless war. Tens of thousands dead in Afghanistan, more than a million killed in Iraq, and a campaign of oppression at home carried out against thousands of Arabs, Muslims, and now even the peace movement. The road from 9/11 led the FBI to my door in the form of an early morning raid on our home almost a year ago today, on September 24, 2011, and a secret grand jury investigating about two dozen peace activists on terrorism charges.

When the Bush Administration used the events of September 11th to justify a war against Afghanistan, I joined the thousands of people to protest that war. I don't think any of us knew that this would be a war that we would still be protesting ten years later. This war has cost tens of thousands of lives, nearly five-hundred billion dollars, and this war has lost the support of the majority of Americans. Even so, unfortunately, the Obama Administration continues Bush's war, making it his own, and under his command the war has expanded into Pakistan and the War on Terror is still offered as a justification for aggressive military policies across the globe.

After 9/11, a war was also launched here at home on civil liberties. In an effort the clear the way for endless war abroad, the government has had to create a 'war within.' I watched in shame as this unfolded first within Arab and Muslim communities. Thousands of immigrants were rounded up and questioned, many detained and deported, and this has become part of a permanent campaign of repression which has now expanded beyond the Arab and Muslim communities.

* The speech was transcribed and edited by Bradford Wakefield and James P. Dimock. The original presentation was a Nadine B. Andreas Lecture, co-sponsored by the Department of Communication Studies at Minnesota State University, Mankato and the Mankato Area Activist Collective on September 21, 2011.

The Patriot Act, with 160 provisions, opened the door for unrestrained spying on American residents and citizens. It authorized the FBI and other agencies to tap our homes, read our e-mails, and comb through our trash. It laid the groundwork for a network of undercover agents hiding within our own communities from mosques to peace groups. At the time, we witnessed racial profiling on a massive scale especially in airports where Muslims, Sikhs, Arabs, and South Asians were questioned and searched and sometimes detained and prevented from boarding flights they had actually paid for. Under the guise of counter terrorism, this domestic spying has mushroomed. There are now more than 164,000 suspicious activity reports maintained by the FBI without criminal cause. These people are being investigated just because they ‘allegedly’ are suspicious. There is, moreover, a mounting list of so-called ‘terror-plots’ which have been manufactured by the FBI ensnaring individuals not suspected of involvement in any other criminal activities. The dangers of collaboration between local, state, federal, and private agencies are highlighted in last month’s shocking reports that the CIA is operating in violation of the law spying on Americans through the New York Police Department. That was reported on both National Public Radio as well as the *New York Times*.

A legal campaign has targeted Arabs and Muslims engaged in political or charity work that runs counter to “official” U.S. foreign policy. Dr. Sami Al-Arian of Tampa, Florida was an outspoken defender of civil liberties for Arabs and Muslims in the United States. He worked for the cause of the Palestinian people. Since his very public arrest in February of 2003, Dr. Al-Arian has spent five and half years in prison, much of that time in solitary confinement. He has now been under house arrest for three years. All of this with the government prosecutors failed to win a single guilty verdict against him for charges stemming from his political organizing. He is, as a matter of fact, serving time for refusing to testify. That’s what he’s being punished for.

In another important case involves the Holy Land Foundation, the biggest Muslim charity in the United States. Its leaders have been brought up on charges of material support of terrorism—which I will talk more about later because those are the same grounds under which we’re being investigated—they were convicted and sentenced to 15 to 65 years each for the crimes of sending money, food, clothing, medical and school supplies to Palestinian charities, some of which were the exact same charities that USAID—which is a branch of the State Department—was sending money to. Even while I was to some degree aware that these things were happening I never imagined that I would actually be next. I’m not oblivious to the fact that these things were happening but I thought that there was some sort of check which would prevent this from getting completely out of control.

But I was wrong.

At 7:00 a.m. last September 24th—so a year ago this Saturday—eight FBI agents busted through the door of my home and spent hours, almost the entire day, going through every room in my home searching for evidence that I had, quote unquote, “material support for foreign terrorist organizations.” The search warrant entitled them to seize any property associated with my political activism, any organization I’ve worked with, and anything about Colombia or Palestine, evidence of what I believe, what I say, who I know. I would argue that those are things

that should be protected, constitutionally. You know, evidence that I have an opinion—that shouldn't be used as evidence against me. Evidence that I organize and do political work—that should be protected, that shouldn't be used as evidence against me. And evidence that people know me should not be used against myself or against them because we're supposed to have the freedom of association in our own country.

Before my phone was seized, I called my partner to come get our eighteen month old daughter out of our home. I was home alone with our daughter. She called others and soon supporters and a member of the National Lawyers Guild came to my home. I learned that coordinated raids were being carried out at five Minneapolis homes and the office of the Anti-War Committee in Minneapolis which I'm a member of, as well as two homes in Chicago. At the same time, agents from five different FBI offices were trying to question political colleagues of mine across the country in Michigan, North Carolina, Wisconsin, Arizona, and California.

My family was stunned. My daughter was confused as to why these strangers were in our home. I was told that I wasn't being detained yet I couldn't go to my daughter's crib when she woke up without being escorted by the police and I was supervised as I changed her out of her diaper and put her in her own clothes. I, then, wasn't allowed to leave my own living room when my daughter was awake. Meanwhile the FBI took our computers, my phone, boxes and boxes of flyers, petitions with signatures on them, and photos—any photo I had ever taken. So that included protest photos, and the entire record of the eighteen months of my daughter's existence. The warrant said they were looking for "material support of terrorism" and how I "indoctrinate people into joining the Anti-War Committee." The fact of the matter is, you don't need to be indoctrinated to actually question the fact that U.S. foreign policy is wrong. I think that means you're a person of conscience, I don't think it means that you're someone who has actually been indoctrinated. Questioning the fact that people on the other side of the globe who I have never met are my enemy actually just makes me a human being who connects with other human beings. It doesn't make me a terrorist.

Also, they said they wanted evidence of how we finance the Anti-War Committee. Well, some people in this room know. I know that Jim, for example, has come to our annual spaghetti dinner where we charge people a lot of money to come and buy a pasta dinner that we have made in the Walker Church basement. It's the Work a Day for Peace Dinner. We ask people to give a day's wages for our pasta which I'm sure tastes very tasty but not in proportion to the amount of money people give for it. We've also had an annual yard sale where we take your stuff and we sell it to you guys. It's the idea that they're looking for evidence for how the Anti-War Committee finances itself is absolutely ridiculous because the fact is we finance ourselves by someone passing the hat at meetings just to be able to pay our own rent.

It was clear that my anti-war activism was the target of the raid, especially my solidarity work with the people of Colombia and Palestine. The search warrant zeroed in on international travel to these war torn nations as well as on the Anti-War Committee and the Freedom Road Socialist Organizations.

The day of the raid I began the work of defending myself, the organization I work in, and the movements that I have helped to build. On the one hand, my colleagues and I were well known in our communities as leaders of the peace movement. Many of us, actually, were the faces of the Coalition to March on the RNC. We were the public leaders that said, “Look, let’s go protest the Republican Convention and the fact that this is going to be the place to talk about war, right here in our home communities.” And we organized a legal and permitted march which over 30,000 people came to. But on the other hand, local and national news reports pictured me caught up in a high-profile terrorism investigation and my friends, my family, and my students at the high school that I work at saw me being accused of being a terrorist. So early that Friday morning, it was a very rude awakening to find that the War on Terror had, in matter of fact, come to my front door and that it was not something happening to other people somewhere else.

Before the FBI left my home with a vehicle full of my belongings, belongings still not returned a year later, they left me with a subpoena to appear before a grand jury in Chicago about a week later. I wasn’t the only one subpoenaed. Today, a total of 23 activists from Chicago, Grand Rapids, Michigan, and Minneapolis have been issued subpoenas to testify at that grand jury and in May the FBI initiated another raid on a colleague of ours from the Coalition to March on the RNC in Los Angeles. And I think it’s important to take a look at who we are.

We are all anti-war and international solidarity activists. Some of us are communists. Twelve of the 24 are parents, and seven of us have children under the age of seven. Three sets of those parents had both partners subpoenaed and are in danger of having both partners put in jail for contempt of court or in jail for these ridiculous terrorism charges—and then the question arises, who is going to raise their kids? Most of us worked together on the March on the RNC in St. Paul in 2008 and we range in age from twenty to seventy-three. Sixteen of us are women. Ten of us are union members, and four of us are Palestinian. What I think is important for you to take from those statistics is that we’re not a special group of people. As a matter of fact, we represent the types of people that are involved in the peace movement right here in Mankato. All of us are standing up and speaking out for what is happening to us and we’ve decided that we’re not interested in being victims of the War on Terrorism. Instead, we’re interested in making our case an example of what the War on Terrorism has done to our own community.

We have protested every U.S. war and act of aggression. We’ve extended the hand of solidarity to the people targeted in these wars and resisted the criminalization of liberation struggles across the world. It’s important to know that the work that we’ve been doing has put us in the crosshairs of a government investigation that has criminalized international solidarity as a whole. Like the Palestinians that I talked about before, the government will claim that sending a few dollars for kindergarteners in Palestine, which is what the Anti-War Committee was doing, that was a crime. And that the motive for our crimes can be found in our own words when we have spoken for the rights of people, like Palestinians, to resist war and demand justice. Our political work and opposition to the aggression of the U.S. government is what has made us a target. And what has been interesting through this process that I’ve learned that the material support statute—which interestingly enough, wasn’t a part of the Patriot Act...it was augmented

and made tougher by the Patriot Act but it's something that actually happened after the Oklahoma City bombing in the late nineties—but the material support statute has been interpreted by the court as being almost anything. Material support could be speaking in solidarity with someone. It could be communication, coordinated communication, it could be money, and it could be weapons but the fact is none of us were *actually* being investigated for *actually* given weapons to anyone who is on the foreign terrorist organization list. The fact is that the idea we're working with terrorists doesn't take into account that in places like Colombia and Palestine that anyone who works against the Colombian government, anyone who works against the Israeli government is labeled a terrorist by those regimes. The fact is that Colombia is the world's most dangerous place to be a trade unionist. Merely saying, like the people in Wisconsin did, "Hey, we have the right to collectively bargain," saying something like that will get you a bullet in your head. Human Rights Watch, Amnesty International, all sorts of well-known, internationally respected human rights organizations will tell you that Colombia is the world's most dangerous place to be a trade unionist. But in Colombia, it isn't the people who are killing the trade unionists who get called terrorists. It is the trade unionists. In Colombia, if you dare to say things like, "We think we have the right to get paid real money to work here," that means you could be labeled a terrorist because you are challenging the Colombian government's interest in being a free trade Mecca for U.S. corporations.

Similarly, in a place like Palestine, the Israeli's define anybody who challenges their occupation as a terrorist and they use that label to justify demolishing people's homes, even if they don't believe the person who is a quote unquote "terrorist" even lives there. If someone is even just a family member of a person the Israeli's have identified as a terrorist, they will demolish that family member's home to punish them. Collective punishment is definitely a tool that the Israeli's use—they'll cut off the water supply for the community to punish the whole community for the fact that someone in that community resisted the occupation. So saying that we have been working with people who have been labeled "terrorists" doesn't really deal with the political nature of who is labeled "terrorist" in these communities.

Since last September, we have learned more about how the quote unquote "War on Terror" has extended its reach to our own doorsteps. Just as had been the case as those who have been targeted earlier on the home front of this war, we were spied upon, infiltrated, and now we're being pursued for what we believe in and who we know. Like many of them, many of us who have been subpoenaed have been placed on an air travel watch list, myself included. It is now impossible for me to travel across the country and not be subjected to a series of humiliating pat-downs, having all of my belongings rifled through, and frequently being the last person allowed onto a plane. Two of us, not me, have actually had our passports seized and are not being allowed to travel internationally even though none of us has been formally accused of anything. We've only been subpoenaed to testify for a grand jury and we've only had evidence taken from us. But the fact is, in the context of the War on Terror, it doesn't matter whether or not you've been accused of a crime, you get treated like you're a criminal.

All of us have refused to help the government make its case against us and I think it's important to check in here in this moment and talk about what grand juries are because I think it's important for you to understand why we would refuse to testify in one.

So there is a grand jury that has been convened in Chicago to investigate material support for terrorism. I believe, based on the information my lawyers have—which is tenuous at best—that this investigation began in August or September of 2009. And so this grand jury has been proceeding for about three years. In a grand jury, everything that happens is secret. Unlike a trial where everything happens in public and is a matter of public record and media can come and spectators can come, what happens in a grand jury is secret. It really reminds me more of a military tribunal in Peru than something you think would be happening in the United States. Overwhelmingly the people who are selected to be on a grand jury are white, wealthy, and senior citizens because the fact is, when you agree to be on a grand jury you're agreeing to be on it indefinitely. Think about it, who has time to be on a grand jury to serve one or two days a month for three years? Most people have to go to their jobs, would be able to plead some sort of economic hardship and say, "Look, I can't be on call to keep coming to this grand jury for three years." Also, unlike a normal jury where both sides are represented with legal representation and you get to screen for juror bias, the grand jury is handpicked by the prosecutor. Also, there is only a prosecutor in the room with these jurors and they develop a relationship over the years and they're spending time with each other where the grand jury believes the version of events that the prosecutor is telling them because those are the only version of events that they get to hear, because there's no judge, no legal referee, there's no supervision. It's just the prosecutor and the grand jury. If you were called before a grand jury, anything you say or do will be held against you in a court of law, you could plead the fifth but the fact is that you can't actually have a lawyer there with you to help you navigate what you do or don't want to answer. You can have a lawyer outside of the room but there's no lawyer actually allowed in the room.

Also, what we're concerned about is not only do we think these grand juries are set up to produce indictments that are very undemocratic but we're concerned about what they've actually indicated to us what they would like to ask us about. One of the things that they indicated in the legal documents that I have received is they want to know the names of who I've met with on political delegations to places like Colombia and Palestine and they would like to know the nature of what people have told me. The fact of the matter is, I can't give that information. For example, in Colombia people had to go through military and paramilitary checkpoints just to come meet with me. People already risked their lives *once* in order to talk to me so I can take their stories and bring them back to the United States and talk about what's really going on. What the impact of U.S. military aid to Colombia really is. But they ask me, "Please don't use my name. Please don't say the city that I am from. Please don't take a picture of me." And so I can't betray that trust and give information that could potentially put these people in harm's way. The fact of the matter is, I've never killed anybody. I've never held a gun and I'm certainly not interested in actually causing the death or any imprisonment or harm to another human being.

And so I can't go and give this information that I know could be used in these very political situations to harm people.

At this point, almost a year after our homes have been raided, we're still waiting to hear what the government has planned for us. None of us have spoken to that secret grand jury in Chicago and the prosecution has not yet brought charges against us. But they have sent a clear message that we remain in the crosshairs. The prosecutors have told our attorneys that they are seeking multiple indictments, so twenty-three of us have been subpoenaed. Some of us they're looking at as witnesses and some of us they're looking at as defendants in a trial and we don't understand who falls into which category and they won't say who is being pursued in what way. They refuse to return the majority of our property and their plan is to obviously hold it and use this as evidence against us.

This September we have had a number of opportunities to reflect on and remember the tragedy that took place on September 11, 2001 and to think about what has taken place in the ten years since then. And I think that our case should be a wakeup call for everyone. The casualties are mounting. People are dying in Afghanistan every day. People are still dying in Iraq every day and people are having their rights trampled upon in this country every day. So we think it's important to fight back and say, "No, we want a world of peace. No, we want a world of justice." So out of the raids that happened on our homes last September, we have been a part of building a national movement to try to raise awareness around our case. We have been very successful. If you go to our website—it's StopFBI.net—you can see the letters from members of Congress that have been written on our behalf, letters that have been made public wherein members of Congress have written letters to Attorney General Holder, the person in charge of the Department of Justice, and to President Obama demanding an end to the FBI's investigation of peace activists and questioning whether or not this is an appropriate use of law enforcement. Should law enforcement really be investigating members of the peace movement as opposed to dealing with actual issues of crime in our community? We have developed an emergency response plan and a list serve of supporters who are prepared to be able to move if people are indicted to be able to demand that there not be a trial.

We feel very strongly that the reason why none of the 23 of us are serving time in jail for contempt of court is because we weren't quiet on September 24, or 25, or 26, or any of the days since then. We've been very loud in our opposition to the investigation against us and we feel like this has been really essential in keeping us out of jail. We feel like the national movement we've developed has been very good. We've also received a lot of really good press coverage, particularly at the national level this summer. The *New York Times*, the *Washington Post*, and the *Boston Globe* have all written about our case. A large write up specifically about our case appeared on the front page of the *Washington Post* this summer. Progressive media has also been repeatedly talking about our case and the reauthorization of the Patriot Act as well as the debate over who should be the next director of the FBI. Our case has been repeatedly used by these media sources as examples of how the FBI has run amok and how President Obama, despite his credentials as someone who used to be a professor of constitutional law, has not been

paying attention to how constitutional rights have been trampled upon under his own administration.

There are things you can do if you are interested in our case or in standing up for civil liberties. You can and you should speak out. One of the things that I have for you to take home with you this evening is this flyer which presents you with a short synopsis of our case. On the back it gives you information like how you can call President Obama or how you can call Attorney General Holder and say, “What are you doing? You should call off this investigation, it’s a waste of resources, these people are not criminals, these people are not terrorists, these people are the ones who actually denounce terrorism.” Additionally, you can sign up on our list serve and we can keep you up to date about our case. Finally, I passed around some flyers about some upcoming actions. We are recognizing the year anniversary of the raids this Saturday and you’re invited to come to one of the homes that was raided and protest and do a community march. It is important to note too that we are approaching the ten-year anniversary of the start of the war in Afghanistan and we think it’s important that people not cower and say, “Oh well, I’m afraid I might get into trouble,” or “Oh well, I might not want to raise my voice.” We actually think it’s more important than ever for people to raise their voices and say, “I’m a person of conscience and I have the right to speak out in honor of not seeing people as my enemy and instead questioning foreign policy that demonizes others.” So I’ll pass these out and then I’m going to turn it over for questions.

Thank you very much for coming.

Question and Answer

ABY: I don’t bite I promise and you’re far away from me, I couldn’t hurt you. Go ahead.

AUDIENCE: Did they charge you specifically in detail what you were accused of being accused of?

ABY: None of us have been charged with anything. What we’ve been is on the search warrant it describes the things that they’re looking for and so I can get some ideas of what the charges would look like, does that make sense? It’s on those search warrants and the types of language on the search warrant was that they were looking quote unquote “material support of terrorism.” They were looking for evidence of how the Anti-War Committee finances itself and they were looking for evidence for how I indoctrinate people into joining the Anti-War Committee. And the types of things they took from my house were definitely very political. They were flyers, they were sign-up sheets for meetings, they were notes, they were petitions people had signed, protest photos from my travels so those types of things give me an idea of what the charges would look like but definitely the material support statute is what I think, for example...they would be...the charges would go around material support for terrorism, or conspiracy for material support for terrorism, or something of that nature but no one has been officially charged with anything.

Go ahead.

AUDIENCE: Thank you. I don't know if he made it tonight but I was just talking with one of my students who is very progressive but is also, like many is in a very, very tough spot financially and is thinking about the military because, you know, the benefits and so on...supposedly look good and I have urged him to try to speak with veterans who have been there who can tell what it's like from the inside so he can make an informed decision. I know that this is a little bit off of your immediate topic but I think many young people are in similar positions with this young gentleman. So I'm wondering if you can give us some counsel if somebody in this room is debating signing up with the military because they think that's the only way they're going to be able to keep going with their education and get a job and so on and so forth. Where can they hear other perspectives from people who know?

ABY: I think that's a particularly interesting question considering the recent change from the Department of Defense with the removal of the Don't Ask Don't Tell policy. As someone who's gay and has been out for a long time, I'm in part excited about the fact that this is one less legal example of how people who are gay are treated as second class citizens in this society. But on the other hand it makes me sad because the fact is I've always liked the fact that people could always claim they were gay as a way to get out of a military draft and now that avenue has been removed from people. So I don't actually believe in legalized segregation but there was always a silver lining in my opinion about it.

It's been really challenging for me as a teacher. I've had a lot of students enlist and go. I had several students enlist in 2003 and come and ask for my blessing because they knew about the work that I did and those are some really tearful and heartfelt conversations because the fact is I would tell them, "I love you but I hope that you are incredible unsuccessful as a soldier. I hope that you kill no one. And I hope that you don't get shot either. I hope you come back and you're one piece. But the fact is, I can't give you my blessing. Those people are not my enemy and I'm not interested in any way, shape, or form sacrificing you or anyone else's child to that war." The students that I've had who have come back...they're not functional. They're living in their parent's basements, they're alcoholics, they do drugs, they can't get work. And the fact is you can't send young people across the country, I mean across the world and ask them to do some of the horrible things that our young people have been ordered to do and have them come home and then be functional members of society. You can't do that...and if you need evidence of that, I mean...one of the things I think that the Wikileaks has done for us is given us some of that actual footage and some of the people have been speaking out publicly like Bradley Manning and others who are able to say, "Yes! I was at that massacre and I was the person who was actually dragging the bodies away and trying to save people while the very people in my unit were shooting at people like they were in a video game." It's just this very dehumanizing process and I would say to someone, "You can't sell your soul." And the things that people are being asked to do are really very disturbing because the fact is even if you don't do it, being in a

daily situation watching other people do it. It's just really hard on people and they come back broken.

We have an activist who I work with in the Minnesota Peace Action Coalition and there are two with Military Families Speak Out...one is a woman and her son died last summer from cancer that's related to his serving in Iraq and another person in Military Families Speak Out...His son is basically not functional with the post-traumatic stress that he has. So I just feel like I've heard so many stories that challenge the belief that people can go and serve in that...in this conflict...in this time and come back and get things like, "Here's your discount college education." Just...it concerns me. Also I know that Veterans for Peace in the Twin Cities does counseling...does peace counseling to try to talk people through what it's like to go to war and hope to see what it would really mean. Veteran's for Peace Chapter 27 is the group in the Twin Cities. I would just encourage anyone to go meet with someone who's served and these are very beautiful people who have had a real change of heart and I think that you should hear what they have to say.

AUDIENCE: I was just wondering, what some of your credentials were...because you had brought up international foreign policy and also the U.S. military in other countries.

ABY: I've been an anti-war activist since about 1994. I traveled to Central America when I was a student at McAllister for a program that Augsburg organizes. They have a study abroad program and it really opened my eyes to seeing the impacts of U.S. Military Aid first hand and those people who had survived the civil war in El Salvador and they had very moving stories where they talked about the fact that, "Look, your country did this to me. Your country is the reason that I am now homeless. Your country is the reason," for example, "that my community is ravaged." And I in some ways wasn't responsible for that. I was a junior high student living in Worthington, MN. It's not like there was any anti-war movement that I could be a part of in a town of 10,000 people or I even knew that these things were going on. But it really changed me. It really made me feel a sense of responsibility for the money that my government sends to finance right wing governments who then use that money to go and kill people. That really changed me. During the El Salvador solidarity movement in the 1980's there was this bumper sticker that I think really encapsulates my political philosophy which was, "El Salvador: Let the People Decide." You know...the idea that the people of *El Salvador* should get to decide their political future, independent of who the U.S. wanted to win...and I feel like that pretty much sums up how I feel about things. It's not our place. I'm sure that a lot of people in the world wanted us to pick somebody other than George W. Bush for eight years but you know what? That was what we did. We don't get to choose the leaders of other countries similar to how they don't get to choose the leader of our country.

So that experience around El Salvador really motivated me to do El Salvador solidarity work and then in 1988 I had a Committee member, Jess Sundin, who's also been subpoenaed, who went to Iraq and took humanitarian aid to people in Iraq who were suffering from the

devastation of sanctions—the sanctions of Iraq killed more people than the bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki combined—and just got to meet first-hand these children and these senior citizens who were dying and getting diseases. They were completely preventable! And the stories and the pictures she brought back really tore my heart. As a teacher hearing these stories of these children having to do their lessons in the dirt because the U.S. wouldn't allow pencils because they had lead in them which could be used for weapons of mass destruction. Wouldn't allow pencils into their country! It really just changed me and so Jess and I formed the Anti-War Committee in 1998 to work on solidarity with the Iraqi people. What's sad is we're still working on solidarity with the Iraqi people because we haven't changed that.

But I've been an anti-war activist in the Anti-War Committee since 1998 and have done work nationally around the topic of Colombia through the Colombia Action Network and I've led two solidarity delegations to Colombia, one in 2004 and one in 2006. And in 2002 I traveled on a human rights delegation to the West Bank and to Gaza and I am one of a very small group of people that I know that have been to Gaza as recently as 2002. Soon after that, the Israelis made it very, very difficult to get in to Gaza. So, it's still difficult to get into the West Bank but particularly difficult to get into Gaza. And so that is a topic that I feel I like that information was particularly valuable because it is in [short supply]. But those are some and then but my main work nationally has been around the Coalition march on the RNC. I was one of the principle leaders in that Coalition which is a national group. Does that help?

AUDIENCE: It does. I was just wondering because I am a veteran and I was wondering how your opinions were formed and just knowing that background gives more credit to what you were saying.

ABY: Jim?

AUDIENCE: I was wondering, there are lots of high profile antiwar activists in the United States. Can you give us a sense as to why you and your group were targeted?

ABY: That's a really interesting question because I still wake up in these moments where I feel like I've been cast in a really bad made for TV movie that I would've shut off eight hours ago. I'm like, "This story kinda sucks." Moments when I'm like, "Really! I'm a very small fish in this very big pond in the universe" and I think the answer comes down to this...It's not that I'm some super evil bad ass terrorist supporter or even a very exiting person. I think what it comes down to is the fact that in the lead up to the RNC, law enforcement infiltrated a *lot* of peace and justice groups in the Twin Cities and the City of Saint Paul, the State of Minnesota and the federal government has spent millions of dollars on the riot gear, the weapons, on the surveillance. All these different types of things but *millions* of dollars and they were not able to produce a lot despite all of these millions of dollars. So there wasn't actually some big terrorist plot to destroy the Republican National Convention. There were eight activists in the Twin Cities—the RNC

8—who were charged by the State [of Minnesota] for conspiracy riot and other types of charges like that, and only actually four of those people ended up accepting some sort of plea deal. But at least half of them the state actually ended up saying, “We don’t have enough to prosecute you people.” And they had several infiltrators, they were infiltrators as part of that. What is interesting is that our mole spent another two years investigating us, and I feel like what quote unquote “Karen Sullivan” ...I think that what she did, she was pressured...that she had to show *something* for the work she had. And I think she sold them a particular bill of goods to try and make us particularly sexy and interesting. And I...to be honest I think she made a lot of stuff up. And I don’t know if that was for her own job promotion or if that was to keep earning lots of money from this gig.

I have no idea but that fact is that this is that, absent the RNC, I think that I would still be doing peace activism and would not be receiving attention from the federal government. I think it really has everything to do with the fact that there was this level of surveillance and infiltration that happened in the lead-up to the RNC and that makes me concerned about what’s going to happen to the peace community of Chicago. Chicago is going to host the first joint summit between the G8 and NATO in May which isn’t only a national security venue but an internationally security venue. What types of civil liberties and lives are going to be destroyed in that type of surveillance type project. What is going to happen to the people who are hosting the RNC in Tampa next year or the DNC in Charlotte? I think that the cases for ten years after the DNC in L.A., you know what I’m saying... the people suing about their civil liberties being violated and we just keep having more casualties after these national securities events. And I think it’s more important for us as a community to say, at the point where your national security makes us less secure, maybe you shouldn’t hold your national security event.

Yes.

Yes,

you.

AUDIENCE: You keep saying that you worked at school and you were a teacher, has this whole situation affected your job all or anything?

ABY: Well I think it’s very complicated because the fact that I am a union member—really happy about that!—they can’t fire me because the fact is that I’m really good at my job. I’m not saying that to brag. I am. I love teaching, I love working with my students. I have the highest AP scores in my building probably. I’m good at what I do. But the fact is that, obviously, it’s really super unpopular to be investigated for material support for terrorism when working with young people, right? So that’s the opposite of what you want to have if you’re a teacher... having done...But there isn’t any evidence that I tried to recruit people to be a part of some secret group against the United States or something like that in my classroom. So I haven’t lost my job and my school district said their going to stand by me in the case of an indictment. They said I would only be at the risk of losing my job if I am found guilty and at that point I would argue I have much bigger problems weather I keep my job. At that point I became a parent. You can’t be a parent from prison. Then you’re a pen pal not a parent, you know? And I obviously would like to

be a parent to my daughter. So they claim that I get to keep working there in light not being guilty of anything.

But I have been ordered by the school district that I'm not allowed to talk about my case to my students and I think that's been very confusing for them. I understand that my school district has ordered me to do that because of the fact that they want to cover their own ass too, obviously. They said it's for my own protection...students say things, then it turns into a big game of telephone...But I see the debates happening on YouTube where different students are arguing about whether or not I'm a terrorist...you know in the little comment section. And really they are arguing whether or not they like me as a human being. And whether or not I'm accused of being a terrorist supporter...it justifies whether they got a D on last week's quiz. Or they got an A so obviously I'm not a terrorist supporter...I'm totally an awesome teacher and it just turns into things that are not about me but whether they agree with the grade I'm giving.

I did have a homeroom student last year who told me she was scared of me for half of the year because she saw my picture on the face of the *Star Tribune* the day after the raids happened by my home and she didn't know whether or not I was a terrorist and she said, "Then I got to know you and I know you're not a terrorist. You're the nicest teacher in the school and really care about me." And I think that's great but it also hurt my heart because here is this young person and I'm her home room teacher, the person she is supposed to come to if she's having problems navigating this large suburban high school but instead she thought I was terrifying. They are another example of some of the collateral damage of this investigation.

I think it's even harder on the children of the parents who have been subpoenaed. My daughter, fortunately, doesn't understand what's happening. If the FBI comes for me and I'm indicted and held in jail for several days as they decide whether to let me out on bail or if I'm jailed for contempt of court my daughter will understand that. She's old enough now, two and a half. She will know that her mom is not there and that something is wrong. But the kids who are five, six, and seven, they totally understand. We have one girl who can use the word subpoena in a sentence—you know...when your seven you shouldn't really use the word subpoena in a sentence—but she cried every day last year at school. They had a mental health team there at the school that they developed trying to figure out how to help her deal with the stress, the fact that she was worried that the FBI would come for her parents, that she would be left home by herself, that was her fear. She doesn't understand that that's not what would happen...We had another girl that was five, she's now six and every time someone knocks on the door she jumps because she's worried that they have come back for her dad. So I feel like the worst collateral damage that's done here has been the stress put on these little people who have had their lives in flux now...not knowing for a year now...not knowing where things are going to be at with their families.

AUDIENCE: I just have one more question. As an activist and somebody who had communication with Palestine and Colombia, weren't you almost expecting possible...repercussions?

ABY: It's not against the law to travel to Colombia or to the Palestine. And I wasn't traveling to some place that has a ban on. I mean you can buy an airplane ticket on the internet. You can go to Minneapolis airport and buy a ticket to Bogotá tomorrow. It's not against the law to travel to these places. Also it's not against the law to go and talk to people and have conversations with them. The problem is the way this material support statute that has been interpreted...the Supreme Court in *Holder vs. Humanitarian Law Project* last spring interpreted material support as being basically *anything*. And the problem is that the material...I believe when Congress passed the material support provision in the late 90's after the Oklahoma City bombing...I think they intended *weapons*. I don't think they intended *coordinated communication*. I don't think they intended on things like *having a conversation*. I don't think they intended things like *money to a kindergartner* who goes to a school that maybe someone who is related to a rebel fighter happens to send their kid to. I don't really think that this is how it was intended to be but it how it has been abstracted to be. But the fact is that, no I think that organizing for peace is legal and protected activity and I'm upset that my government thinks that organizing for peace should be considered illegal and unprotected activity.

AUDIENCE: These laws, you know, the names of them like "material support for terrorism" and the Patriot Act. I feel like they are misleading. Do you feel like the government is in a way false advertising in the names of these laws to pretty much confuse the general public as to what they're actually supposed to do?

ABY: Well unfortunately it's not these types of laws. I don't know how many people have heard of or are familiar with this joke "Clear Skies Initiative"...actually giving companies grounds to do more pollution. You can put the title, whatever you want, at the top of the bill and pass it and that doesn't necessarily mean that is what the bill is actually about.

But no, I agree that calling the material support statute for terrorism...it makes people think that I am being investigated for giving guns but the fact is that there will never be any evidence of me giving guns or training...I have never even held a gun! I don't even know the names of guns. I don't even know the names of bullets. I would be useless. We were the one family in Worthington that didn't hunt. I'm just saying, I grew up in rural Minnesota where everyone knew how to use guns and we were the one family that didn't. And so I would be useless in that type of arena.

I think, just to give an example of how the material support statute has been used, last summer when the flotilla was trying to return to Gaza—and this flotilla was an act of solidarity with a group of people who are under siege, this group of people were not allowed to get food, water, building supplies et cetera to rebuild this community after this devastating war with the Israelis—they were threatened by Hillary Clinton, the Secretary of State of the United States, that they would be prosecuted under the material support statute and serve *decades in jail* because they would be giving material support to the government of Hamas. And the problem is that our

government doesn't see the distinction between people who are suffering under war and governments or groups of people that they don't like. What I find fascinating is when I travel to the Palestine and when I travel to Colombia, people never saw me as an agent of country at war with them. People are always able to distinguish between me and my government which I find very fascinating because my government can't give the same act of distinction the other way.

I met with people in rural Colombia who told me I was the only person they had ever met from the United States that wasn't there as a contractor, a member of the CIA, or special-ops military person. They said you are the only person we have really ever met who is from the United States who has come to our community who isn't trying to kill us or help our government try to kill us. They could see that I was not my government. We were distinguished from our government but our government won't see the people that are suffering are different from a government or a group of people whose in proximity and are related to those people.

I found it interesting in Somalia they had this horrible famine and the United States government, this summer actually, had to say publically that they were going to suspend the material support statute because no one was sending aid to the Somali people because the people were worried this law would be used to prosecute them. The Somali community in Minnesota has been very much under attack using this statute. Two women who are going start a trial this Fall, who are Somali, are being charged with material support for terrorism and their alleged crime is sending used clothes to a refugee camp in Somalia because those clothes can somehow directly help Al-Shabab which is a group the United States has labeled the terrorist organization.

I would argue that things like humanitarian aid, like clothes, food, playground equipment et cetera should be *not* politicized. I think those people should just have them because they breathe oxygen. I think people should just get to have clothes and I don't care what the political beliefs are of the children or whoever. People should just get clothes and food but that's not the way it is. What I found interesting was that the United States had to admit that they caused so much fear in the Somali community that no one was sending aid to people who were literally starving to death. I think that it shows the way this law has been targeted against solidarity and peace.

AUDIENCE: Do you think it would make any difference...I find it incredible because international human rights law is being absolutely flouted here. Completely flouted. If people will just go to the web and read the most basic human rights covenants. Does it make any difference...say...can Amnesty International or Human Rights Watch...Can other recognized human rights groups, can they do some of the same things and not be brought under the gun as you have been? Or do you think the government has become so flagrant that, even, 'you gave water to Palestinians so you're going down'?

ABY: I think that our case—and the National Lawyers' Guild would argue—that our case is being used as a test case to see how broadly this material support statute can be used and to see to what degree. So far this law has been used almost exclusively on Arab and Muslim people in

this country and while four of us are Palestinian primarily we are not Palestinians. Some of us are people who have been in solidarity with Palestine although not all of us. I think that this is being used as a test case to see if other sectors of society can have this broad sweeping law be used against them.

I do think the fact that the flotilla was threatened with this law demonstrates the fact that they are getting bolder with how they're going to use this law. But they didn't, for example, charge anyone and I don't...no one's been raided or openly investigated in that regard but the fact is that they are also expanding this idea of how the material support statute can be used.

There's currently another secret grand jury that's investigating Wikileaks and Bradley Manning and one of the things that Congress has talked about doing is declaring Wikileaks as a foreign terrorist organization because then, if you gave money to Wikileaks or you were in support of Wikileaks, then that would make you providing support for terrorism. And so I think that these cases demonstrate the way that the government is trying to take these powers for a test drive and see to what degree they can expand the scope of power and executive power that they have...to define what is or isn't legal even if that historically, under a peace time situation, would not have been legitimate. And that's, unfortunately, been normal in American history. During World War I, during Vietnam, etc. there are lots of examples where the Bill of Rights has gone through the shredder during periods of war, this is just, unfortunately, the most recent manifestation of something that has happened several times in American history. But I don't think that means history has to repeat itself. I think it's important to fight back and demand that we don't want to see this escalate or snowball or go anywhere. It's not too late. Nobody's actually been charged. Nobody's actually been sent to jail. So the fact is we do have an opportunity to try to turn this around and hold the government accountable and the fact of the matter is, at the end of the day, these people are all politicians.

President Obama, if you look at the public opinion polls, has lost his base. He is realizing, "Uh oh!" there's all sorts of people, like Bronson in the previous panel who said he didn't vote for him...He said he voted for him, he's not voting for him again. I, too, am not voting for the president and did the last time. And the fact is that we, as the peace movement have the opportunity to say, "You can't come to us every four years and ask us to door knock for you and flyer for you and give money to you and watch you put the people who have devoted their lives to peace and justice in jail or in harm's way because you politically think it's possible." So I think we have an opportunity to try and stop this because the fact is Eric Holder is a very political person. Obama is a very political person and I think fundamentally it's political why nobody is serving for contempt of court right now. So I do think we have an opportunity to try to change the headway and, for example, not let other people go through the stuff that my family has gone through.

AUDIENCE: When you think of all the comparisons with...are we becoming a place like Colombia?

ABY: Well I think that's one of the ironies of this whole process, right? In places like Colombia you are in danger of being called a terrorist because you dare to critically think and openly express opposition to the government's policies. Likewise, in our country, we are being demonized and called terrorists because we dare to question who our government is at war with and who our government defines as its allies. Right? And so I think that it is scary because the fact is we aren't in the situation—nowhere near the situation—that people are in in Colombia. I'm not actually in danger of being picked up at a military check point and carted away in a van and never heard from again. That's not the situation we're in and I think it would be disrespectful to the people's stories that I got in Colombia to say that we are a Colombia version 2.0.

But the fact is that I do have a lot of moments where I think about that poem from World War II...First they came for the communists and I didn't say anything because I wasn't a communist. And then they came for the socialists and I didn't say anything because I wasn't a socialist. And then they came for the Jews but I didn't say anything because I wasn't a Jew. And then they came for me and there was no one left to say anything.

I do feel like we are an opportunity because many people on the anti-war movement have been really shocked that these things are happening. But the fact is that these things have been happening since September 11th, they've just been mostly happening to Arab and Muslim people. I think it's time for the rest of America to realize that you can't stand by and watch some people's civil liberties be shredded and then not think that at a certain point it's going to bleed over and affect your civil liberties. Our rights are all interconnected.

AUDIENCE: I think the real mistake on September 11th is really...it should have been treated as a law enforcement problem rather than as it was treated because if it was treated as a law enforcement item then you'd have the world on your side but then the way it was handled—going to war with Iraq which doesn't make any sense—it shows that the government, I think, is committing treason against our country in a way.

ABY: I think it's sad that a senseless tragedy—three thousand people dying—has been used to justify the deaths of millions of people and to justify taking rights away from thousands of people in our own country. I just think that's sad because I don't think it had to turn out like that. I don't think that death has to lead to more death. I don't think that having our trust and safety as a nation, having it be violated, has mean that we have to do that to other countries or we have to do that to our own people, our own country.

Yes?

AUDIENCE: Do you think that there is any opportunity or any chance that in any point in the near future that we as a country can get the material support act interpreted in a way that's more constitutional?

ABY: Well, there is an opportunity but the problem is that the Supreme Court would say that this is constitutional because that's what they decided in *Holder vs. Humanitarian Law Project*. The deal is that when the Patriot Act came up for debate in the spring... There's a group called the Bill of Rights Defense Committee—and several civil rights organizations but the Bill of Rights Defense Committee is the one I've spent the most time investigating—are proposing alternative language for the material support statute. There is a movement of people in Congress who would like to have it defined so it doesn't go after charity work, so it doesn't go after acts of solidarity and there is a growing debate about the Patriot Act about whether or not it is being used to actually protect us or hurt us. And I think that the Patriot Act has provided a really interesting opportunity for coalition building because the fact is there are people on the really left and the really right who are working together because it's not a Democrat vs. Republican issue. It's not. People who are textbook libertarians and the people who are really liberal are concerned about giving the federal government this much power to basically do whatever they want. And it's the moderates in the middle who are like, "Oh, it's about terrorism so we have to let them do whatever because terrorism is so scary!" So, it really becomes... there's starting to be an actual debate, right? And I believe that debate is actually happening in Congress because we the public are demanding that there be a debate. Because the fact is, at the end of the day, politicians only do what we let them do.

I used to have this bumper sticker that said "The Labor Movement: The Folks Who Brought You the weekend" and my dad said, "Well that was an act of Congress. They passed the 40-hour work week." And it's like yea, they just did that because they were like "Yea! Let's help people!" [AUDIENCE LAUGHS] I said, "No dad that's not what happened. We got the 40-hour work week because people demanded it and then the people made Congress make that happen.

The fact of this is that at the end of the day we need to make this an issue that people are willing to stand up for, that we *should* have a right to privacy. You *shouldn't* be able to get a warrantless tap. You should actually have to have a probable cause to go and investigate someone. It should be—the fact that they went to a meeting to organize a protest should not mean that the FBI gets to investigate you and start following you around! There has been some really great coverage in the past year in the *Washington Post* and they have had a whole focus on what's been happening in terms of our rights in America and they really got some great coverage... talking about the fact that literally before there had to be some sort of evidence that you were committing some sort of illegal act in order to be investigated and now—literally coming to this meeting! You know... if the FBI wanted to... that could use this as grounds.

I don't know. I don't want you to take from this that the FBI is following you home. I don't actually think that there are enough agents for that. I'm just saying that they don't actually need any good reason to start investigating people. *New York Times* covered this year that they don't actually need a good reason to go and do thing like search through all your garbage. My students say things like, "Well if you haven't done anything wrong it doesn't matter"—which I think is *totally* funny because all of them would feel violated if anyone ever read any of their text messages even though their text messages are about thing like "dude" and "yeah" [AUDIENCE

LAUGHS] Still, that's something they want to have *totally* protected and I get that...but I think it's just funny that they don't really see the connection. The fact that if your life is put under a microscope, the fact that they may start investigating because you came to a peace meeting that you end up getting busted for something else. Or somebody else that you are connecting with—does that make sense?—Someone gets busted for something else they were doing...So the idea is that the standard went from “probable cause” to “you had an opinion.” And that's a fundamental aspect of the American justice system. It's not supposed to be that “you had an opinion” is the same as a probable cause.

AUDIENCE: You had said earlier that you [met with people in Palestine and] in Colombia that you had never carried a gun and you didn't want to hurt people...but aren't you risking their lives every day in your communication with them? Are you prepared to accept their blood on your hands when they get killed for being in cooperation with an American?

ABY: I—first of all, you're making assumptions about what I do. I mean the fact is that I've met with people on the ground when I went on these peace delegations but I haven't had any communication with anyone from Palestine ever since I left. First, because I don't speak Arabic. I can't have any communication with anyone from Palestine even if I wanted to because I don't have any skills.

Regarding the people from Colombia...I've had very limited communication with absent my trips there because the fact is all of their e-mails are already being read. You know what I'm saying? And their phones were probably already tapped so we weren't having open and honest communication outside of our visits and I certainly now—I'm never going to get to travel to Colombia again. I mean, there's no way...which saddens me. It's probably the place that I love most in the world absent my own home. I'm never going to get to see the people I care about and I can never even tell them that I'm being investigated or that this has happened in my life because I would literally be putting them at risk...because *they* can't be associated with someone who's being investigated for material support for terrorism. And I don't know if having that with me ever...do you know what I'm saying? If that is being held against me but we have a wall of separation and I have not had any communication with people from Colombia nor will I for the rest of my life because I know what that could do to them. Also, before I was being investigated, I wasn't willy-nilly about my communication with people and these war torn countries, nor were they. They were very much, very thoughtful about who they called, where they called from, if they ever e-mailed people, et cetera because they were operating under the conditions of war under very repressive governments.

Jim?

AUDIENCE: I think that one of the really important things that the peace movement has done is not just with current conflict but in decades before, if you go all the way back, is they were one of the leading forces to bring to light a lot of things that our government has done—you brought

up El Salvador I think? Throughout the 1980's there was...horrific crimes were being committed with the backing of the United States government. The peace movement was—before the newspapers, before there was a movie being made about it—peace activists were trying to get that information out there. Is there a sense in which these kinds of prosecutions and subpoenas are having a chilling effect on people joining the peace movement now? I mean I can't help but feel like that people think twice when they see what's happening to your organization before they think, "Well, I'll join on the Mankato campus." We saw that in 2002, when I first came here. We had students who at that time—especially students who were international students...particularly if they came from Muslim countries—who would not attend various rallies and speeches and activities like this because they were afraid that they would end up on a list for showing up to this kind of thing. Is this now an extension of that?

ABY: One of the things I'm concerned about is I do feel like by targeting us the government is trying to criminalize international travel and solidarity. And I do think that it is important to have our own relationships with activists on the ground that are like us, that are struggling for peace and justice because the fact is, if I'm limited to getting information about what's happening in places like Colombia, Afghanistan, Iraq, and Palestine that was covered in the *Star Tribune* or the *Washington Post*, I'm screwed! Because they print...they act like what the Department of Defense says is *true* and they aren't interviewing people who are actually—for example, one side of what's happening in Gaza is not reported. The Israeli's won't even let reporters in Gaza and the fact is that if we, the peace movement, can't go and be with people and say, "Look, I know that this community's water was cut off from this day to this day and water is a human right. I know that, in this community, X amount of these children are suffering from malnutrition because they aren't able to get any *food* in their community and that is a human right. Children have to be fed." Having these stories is important.

I saw what happened when Jess went to Iraq—that the work we are doing totally transformed itself because we did have someone at the rallies, talking to the media saying "No, this isn't what's really happening in Iraq. These sanctions are not about preventing weapons of mass destruction from getting into Iraq!" Jessica talked about that story about pencils and lead but the U.S. government wasn't talking about not letting pencils into Iraq...But if you could just hear that you would just be like, "Wow! That is ridiculous! There is no way that a pencil being used by a second grader is going to be transformed into a weapon of mass destruction." And as my partner would say, it would be used as a weapon of math instruction because she's a math teacher. [AUDIENCE LAUGHS] But the fact is, you need those types of stories to be able to challenge that one-sided narrative of what's happening in this country and the Department of Defense has an enormous ability to unleash this propaganda machine, to beat the drums of war...

They use words like collateral damage. They don't talk about who is really affected by these drone attacks, how many civilians are really injured and the make it sound like the people in Iraq and Afghanistan are happy that we were there. And I think it's important to be able to say, "No! We are not welcome! These people don't want us. They see us as the committers of

terrorism, not protecting them from terrorism.” You need to be able to provide that counter-narrative and if you can’t talk to people from those countries, it becomes very hard to make that case. Similarly, it’s very hard for people from these countries to actually get to the U.S. to tell us their story. One, because of the war that is happening in their country. Two, because it’s very expensive to travel to the United States. And three, because sometimes their own countries or our country won’t let them in because they are labeled as terrorists because—oh my gosh!—they decided to question the dominant order. So I do think that’s an important role. And the peace movement, even if you look back as far as, even if you just look to Vietnam, that was a huge part of the peace movement.

One of my favorite and most moving stories that deals with the history of that conflict was when Howard Zinn and other peace activists actually traveled in North Vietnam to get POW’s and met with people who were North Vietnamese and say, “Look, we are not at war with you.” Do you know what I’m saying? They could actually meet with people from North Vietnam, they could communicate with people back in the United States, like these people—the United States was claiming these people eat babies for breakfast, practically. They were trying to be a part of *not* demonizing of other people and I think that is important.

I studied Russian when I was in high school and I think part of my love for this work really comes from that. I studied Russian during the Cold War, meeting the people from the Soviet Union, seeing that they weren’t all excited in the morning at the thought of nuking us and really countering this narrative that they were out to get us and we were out to get them.

You need to be able to build relationships so that you can see...The US likes to make it seem like the only person living in Libya right now is Muammar Gaddafi. The only person who lives in Iraq is Saddam Hussein. So thus when we were dropping bombs willy-nilly we couldn’t accidentally kill civilians because only one person lives there we’re just trying to kill him. So it’s okay if we bomb schools, and hospitals, and roads, and bridges because we’re not hurting anybody because nobody else lives there. And I just think it’s important to be like, “No actually these *are* people.” And Jess knew—when she’d read in the news reports she would be, like, “I’ve *been* to that city...I know that that city has literally the hanging gardens of Babylon that city has, actually has some of the world’s most ancient history. Please don’t carpet-bomb that part of the country.” Those places had connection to her more because she’d been there.

We need more Americans to have connections with these places that the US is bombing so they don’t seem like wacko places. Just the other day I saw a piece on—I’ve seen it on Facebook because they’re a super awesome source—but where a person had put up a picture from a major newspaper where they had Libya in the Middle East instead of northern Africa. Where the hell did that even come from? But the fact is that we need people connected with these people that we’re at war with so they can’t be so easily dehumanized. And I think international solidarity is a vital piece of that. I think we need to defend that right to be in solidarity with other people as opposed to having it be just another [casualty] of this work.

AUDIENCE: I just want to say to you—because I know you talked about whether or not people are turned off about joining and stuff—I was talking to some people in Student for a Democratic Society up at the U of M and they were telling me even after—because there was one girl at the U who was even part of the raids—and they were telling me that after that happened...it was like the school year just started and they has just got a bunch of people to join and they were really afraid that everybody would get scared and leave. But actually they got way more involved. And they're like, "Oh shit! People who are in this are getting targeted by the government this is terrible, we really need to get involved now!"

But also I remember last year when we were doing an occupation on the lawn here [at Minnesota State University, Mankato] there was one Muslim girl who...her family is from Michigan and she was really interested in what we were doing but she was like, "No I can't get involved." In Michigan she knew another family who just overnight disappeared and weren't there anymore. And she told me that and I was like, "Wow that's really terrible." And she's like, "I really wish I could join but I don't want that to happen to me."

And so...yeah.

ABY: Well, I think that gives us an obligation, right? As people who, for example, are experiencing that reality...to do that type of protesting because other people have already had that right taken away from them. And I do think it's an example of the rights you don't use you forfeit. I do think it's important for people to use the rights they would like to keep because if you won't, you don't necessarily get to have them.

I know you have asked a lot of questions and I know we are running short on time. I just want to make sure that everyone who wants to ask a question gets to, OK?

MODERATOR: We are coming up on about 8:30 so we have time for one more question. If anyone wants to ask something, if you have been holding back, now is the time.

AUDIENCE: You mentioned throughout the talk about how there is this opportunity to make changes. Is that opportunity more of a like, *philosophically* this is a time to make changes, or is there way we can actually take that you can take that ideological thought into an actual reality?

ABY: I don't totally understand the question.

AUDIENCE: You know you mentioned that this is the time we actually start to change a lot of these things that are happening. You know...is that just like an ideological "this is the time we have to" or is there a plan that you have or people you know have that will make these changes?

ABY: Well I think that if you look at American history that the fact is they can't do things...the government can't do things like disappear Palestine families if the people respond. You can't

have—you can *only* have people locked up for their ideas if the majority of people in our country thinks that's wrong.

Part of our problem is breaking through this general, pervasive feeling of people in this country who yell at their television sets and think that that's actually doing something[AUDIENCE LAUGHS] because it's not. The television can't actually hear you and it doesn't convey messages to our elected leaders. The fact is we need to challenge that idea where people *get upset* about things and actually *do* things. We need to educate people in our society because there are a lot of people who don't know that there are people in Minnesota—not somewhere else—who are being investigated for crimes relating to the material support of terrorism and being peace activist. There people in Minnesota who don't know that there were two Somali women who are up on charges for material support of terrorism for sending used clothes to a refugee camp. And part of the problem is we need to change this level of ignorance because the fact is I believe that these things can only happen if we let them. I think that society shows that.

Historically, at the end of the day, politicians care about saving their own jobs more than they do about anything. And if they honestly thought this was a deal breaker they would be like, "You know what? I think that's a bad idea. I don't think I like that." So far the people who have been the most vocal members of the government about our case already ideologically agree with us but there have been many people who have told us I think this is probably a bad idea who haven't done anything about it. I think it's because their constituents haven't made them. They're not ideologically apposed for taking a stand for civil liberties but at the end of the day they don't want to alienate themselves from their supporters by standing with people who are accused of terrorism and so what I think we need to do is really push back on this idea that people can just be demonized and called terrorists.

I really believe terrorists have become the way communists was in the 1950s...that all you have to say is someone is terrorist and "Okay! You don't need a warrant to tap their phone...Okay! You don't need a warrant to do sneak-and-peek" where you get to go into their house and investigate stuff and leave. These types of things have been made legal in the Patriot Act. And feel like we need a movement of people in society to say, "Look, this not acceptable!" Absent that things will continue along the same course that they are. And I think it starts today. People could make a phone call, people could write an email, people could go to stopfbi.net website and sign up to get information or sign a national petition. I think it starts smaller with a phone call and then it gets bigger by educating people, taking action, and organizing other events—we've done a lot of speaking events! We've done them at churches, we've done them at union meetings, we've done them at schools, at house parties. I mean whatever people want to do...but I think the key thing is if people are moved by these examples then people should do something as opposed to hoping that we don't end up with internment camps version 2.0 or something like that. I think that would be a bad idea. I don't think there's any historical evidence that thinking something was wrong and not doing anything about it has ever worked whereas I do think there is a lot of historical evidence to the contrary, that doing something when you think something is wrong can actually produce results.

Well, as Jim said, I think we are at time and so I wanted to say thank you very much for coming out tonight and if you wanted any more information I'd be happy to share it with you, and thank you for coming.

[AUDIENCE APPLAUDS]