



In September, Professor Inderpal Grewal, Professor and Chair of Women's, Gender, and Sexuality Studies at Yale University with joint appointments in American Studies and Anthropology, spoke at the Rapoport Center's Human Rights Happy Hour Speaker Series. Grewal's talk, entitled "Humanitarian Citizenship and Race: Katrina and the Global War on Terror," focused on the creation of the neoliberal citizen, an individual who has come to replace the state as the main provider for others in need.

Grewal began her talk with a discussion on Hurricane Katrina and the United States Government's abject failure to serve those in need. She called Katrina "a global media spectacle of a state unable to care for its citizens." Grewal further contended that in the absence of state support, domestic and international citizens stepped in to provide aid and assistance to the US in its "state of emergency."

While some may see these individuals and organizations as private actors and therefore separate from the state, Grewal argued the opposite. She contended that these so-called private actors are actually becoming increasingly dependent on and influenced by the US government and as a result they become, in many ways, extensions of the state. So while Katrina highlighted the weakness of the United States, it also allowed the US government to reiterate its power and global dominance by enlisting its citizens to rescue others. This intertwined state of affairs, Grewal noted, has profound negative implications on race, gender and deciding who gets 'rescued' (and who does not).

Barbara Harlow, the Louann and Larry Temple Centennial Professor of English Literatures at the University of Texas, offered the official response to Grewal's address. Harlow called Grewal's presentation "provocative and challenging." Harlow also questioned how we as individuals might still be able to act and do "good" without upholding the existing inequalities. In response, Grewal cited Michel Foucault's notion of the ethical individual -- an individual who approaches his or her work with a high level of awareness as to the power dynamics that exist and how he or she might challenge them.