**Tuck:** Hey, it’s Tuck. Before we get started I just wanna let you know that this week’s episode include mentions of trans death, including murder, as well as the concept of suicidality. Uh, no details are shared, but please take care of yourselves however you need.

[*Gender Reveal* theme music starts]

**Tuck:** Welcome to Gender Reveal, a podcast where we hopefully get a little bit closer to understanding what the hell gender is. I’m your host, and resident gender detective, Tuck Woodstock.

[*Gender Reveal* theme music ends]

Hey everyone, I hope you’re all hanging in there. It has been almost a full calendar year since we launched a new season of Gender Reveal, but here we are. Thank god. So to all of our long-time friends: thank you so much for your unending patience. And to our new friends: welcome, thank you for being here!

For our season 6 premiere, I am thrilled to be sharing my recent conversation with *TransLash* founder Imara Jones. I first met Imara when we both guested on Maria Hinojosa’s *In the Thick* podcast together, and I have been a huge fan of Imara’s podcast, aptly named the *TransLash* podcast, ever since she launched it a few months ago. I think it was a few months ago? What is time.

In this week’s episode, Imara talks about how to be a better ally to Black trans people, why anger is sometimes our best tool for change…

**Imara [voice clip]:** And it is enraging that people don’t hear you unless you are screaming, but then say “Oh we’re afraid of you because you’re screaming.” Well if you listened I wouldn’t have to shout!

**Tuck:** …and why trans people are essential to building better futures.

**Imara [voice clip]:** All of the things that we have had to endure as trans people, make us the right people to lead in these moments.

**Tuck:** But before we get to that, of course, it is announcement time. First and foremost, thanks to the hard work of GG, Xander, Isaura, Brenna, Kara, uh, and our whole team of transcriptionists. We finally have transcripts of every episode of the show available at [genderpodcast.com/listen](http://genderpodcast.com/listen). So, if you have friends who aren’t able to access podcasts by listening to them, or maybe you prefer a transcribed version, or, uh, maybe you want to reference an old podcast for uh, something you’re working on. Anyway, please, uh, let people know that these resources are available.

And, if you would like to join our team of transcriptionists, I run all of that through our Slack, so please join us at the Gender Reveal Slack at [bit.ly/genderslack2](http://bit.ly/genderslack2) and join the #transcription-team channel. Speaking of which, even if you don’t want to transcribe the show, you are more than welcome to join our online community. Again that is at bit.ly/genderslack2.

We also have a really fun round of merch this month, so, if you’re new to the show, you should know that our merch store changes every month, and everything in it is designed by trans listeners of the show, and at the end of the month I take all the proceeds and I split them between the designers and an organization of the designer’s choice. So, for example, our friend Fern currently has this wonderful, rainbow, “Not gay as in happy, queer as in fuck you” design, where half the proceeds are going to Camp Lilac, which is a camp for trans youth — It seems amazing. Uh, our friend Ariana Martinez, who’s one of my favorite artists, has a shirt up that says “Gender is a boundless expanse” that really is one of the most beautiful merch items we’ve ever had. It’s like a piece of art, uh, which makes sense cause they’re an artist, [laughing slightly] and all of the proceeds on that one goes – like *all* of the proceeds on that one, actually – goes to the Transgender Law Center’s Black LGBTQIA Migrant Project.

 Uh, I also got baited by Twitter into posting some shirts that are just like, statements written in Helvetica. Uh, those are super cheap, they’re less than $20 including shipping, and all of the proceeds on that goes to Black Transwomen Inc. So, those and a bunch, a bunch of other stuff, it’s all available at [bit.ly/gendermerch](http://bit.ly/gendermerch). Uh, there’s designs with our newly refreshed logo, there’s some of our old favorites, again that is bit.ly/gendermerch.

Okay finally, if you, again, are new to the show, I have put together a bunch of lists of episodes you might like, sort of – sort of based on interest. So, if you go to [genderpodcast.com/starterpacks](http://genderpodcast.com/starterpacks) you will find, like, a list of authors we love, a list of cartoonists, a list of indigenous guests, a list of trans parents, a list of the advice episodes, even though you should be able to find them anyway. Uh, all sorts of good stuff there, so again that is genderpodcast.com/starterpacks. Uh, maybe share that with your friend when you are trying to get them hooked onto the show.

Uh, speaking of which, a bunch of people start this show from the beginning and listen forward, and if that’s the case I guess maybe you aren’t listening to this episode right now, you’re listening to like episode 2? I just want to acknowledge out loud, uh, that’s terrifying to me because I don’t remember anything about anything that happened between like, episode 4 and episode like, 64. So, I, uh, had a different name and a different voice, [tn: Tuck’s voice is deeper now than it was when the show started] and knew nothing about podcasts or gender, and uh, I’m sorry for whatever I did or said, but I hope that you’re having a good time anyway. So, we’ll have more announcements and reminders at the end of the show, but for now it is time for this week in gender.

[Transition sound effect, with low metallic chimes and hi-hats plays briefly]

[Soft, deep guitar music starts]

**Tuck:** Before we do anything else this season, I wanna take a few moments to remember Monica Roberts, who passed away in October. I am so nervous that I’m not going to do her justice, so I’m going to let her introduce herself via the bio on her website. So it says “Monica Roberts, AKA the TransGriot (Gree-oh) is a native Houstonian, GLAAD award winning blogger, writer, and award winning trans human rights advocate. She's the founding editor of TransGriot, and her writing has appeared at the Bilerico Project, Ebony.com, Huffington Post and the Advocate. She works to foster understanding and acceptance of trans people inside and outside communities of color. Among her many honors are the Virginia Prince Transgender Pioneer Award, the Robert Coles Call of Service Award. the Barbara Jordan Breaking Barriers Award, and the 2020 Susan J Hyde Award for Longevity in The Movement.”

In a few minutes, we’re gonna hear Imara talk about her relationship with Monica, uh, but first let me tell you a bit about TransGriot. So, to quote from Monica’s New York Times obituary, uh, "In the West African tradition, a griot is a storyteller, and Ms. Roberts set out to tell the stories, and history, and lived experiences of the transgender community. She started her blog in 2006, at a time when coverage of transgender issues by the mainstream media was limited, and often deemed offensive by those being covered.”

So, what they’re hinting at, is that back in 2006, uh, most media outlets knew even less and cared even less about how to respectfully talk about trans people, uh, than they do now. So, Monica created TransGriot as this much needed space for trans storytelling and trans reporting, in which, uh, trans folks wouldn’t be misgendered, or deadnamed, or overlooked, or disrespected. And she became very good at what must’ve been a very awful job, which was counting how many trans people had been murdered, because of course mainstream media outlets would typically misgender and deadname trans people who are killed, which is not only disrespectful and violent in and of itself, but it also prevents our community from having an accurate understanding of the rates of trans violence that’s occurring, and perhaps most importantly, it also prevents friends of the deceased person from even knowing that their friend has been killed, because, like, why would you know all of your friend’s deadnames?

So, in January, I was writing a story about systemic violence against trans women for Portland Monthly Magazine, and I spent a lot of time clicking through the 14 years of TransGriot archives, learning from Monica, and I open the story talking about her and her blog because I consider her to be the preeminent authority, uh trans murder victims, which is again a terrible thing to be an authority on, and I am so grateful to her for doing that work. And I want to make sure to explicitly acknowledge that the vast majority of trans murder victims in the United States are Black trans women, and to clarify that while Monica herself was a Black trans women, she did not die violently, unless you count the violence of a medical system that’s inaccessible to Black, and trans, and lower income people.

Of course, Monica didn’t only write or think about trans violence, she was on all these board and panels and she wrote about all sorts of other things as well. Her most recent blog posts include a piece about judging the 2020 Miss Trans Global pageant, uh, sending well wishes to trans political candidates like Mia Mason and Sarah McBride, and uh, several weeks of official TransGriot NFL picks, which I found really endearing. We’re gonna talk more about Monica today, and a bit later this season, but I just wanted to thank Monica from the bottom of my heart for everything she has done for our communities. We would not be where we are today without her. This has been, this week in gender.

[Guitar music ends]

[Transition sound plays briefly again]

**Tuck:** Hey, we’ve got a quick piece of theymail for you this week. Uh, that’s just a message from someone that I’m gonna read on the show. So, this message comes from Jay, and it says “Hey, I’m a partially-sighted queer artist who draws portraits. My commissions are currently open, so check out my Instagram account at jay.genesis.art. Thanks!” So again, that’s j-a-y-dot-g-e-n-e-s-i-s-dot-a-r-t. Uh, go check out Jay’s work, they look great. And if you’d like to submit your own message for us to read on the show, you can do so-

[*Gender Reveal* theme music excerpt fades in]

 **Tuck:** -via the form in the show notes, uh, or by going to [genderpodcast.com](http://genderpodcast.com) and scrolling down to the footer and clicking on “theymail.”

Imara Jones, whose work has won Emmy and Peabody awards, is the creator of TransLash Media, a cross-platform journalism, personal storytelling, and narrative project, which produces content to shift the current culture of hostility towards transgender people in the United States. She is also the first Journalist in Residence, at WNYC’s *The Green Space*, where she hosts the monthly program *Lives at Stake*, and is the host of the *TransLash* podcast. In 2020, Imara was featured on the cover of Time magazine, as part of its *New American Revolution* special edition. In 2019, she chaired the first level UN high-level meeting on gender diversity, with over 600 participants. Imara’s work as a host, on-air news analyst, and writer, focuses on the full range of social justice and equity issues. Imara has been featured regularly in The Guardian, The Nation, MSNBC, CNBC, NPR, Mike ColorLines, and has been the frequent guest host of the *In the Thick* podcast. Imara has held economic policy positions in the Clinton white house, and communications positions at Viacom. She holds degrees from the London school of economics, and Columbia, and she is a 2019 Soros Equality fellow.

[*Gender Reveal* theme music stops]

**Tuck:** The way we always start the show, in terms of gender, how do you identify?

**Imara:** I identify as a woman, she/hers are my pronouns.

**Tuck:** So, I wanna dive into all sorts of things that you do, I’m so excited to be talking to you, but before that, uh, we actually haven’t released an episode in a while, we’ve been between seasons, so we haven’t released anything since Monica Roberts passed away, and-

**Imara:** Oh wow.

**Tuck:** -celebrating her is one of the first things, like, I wanna do in this season.

**Imara:** Yeah.

**Tuck:** And, so I was actually wondering if you would be willing to tell our listeners, uh, more about Monica’s legacy and like, what she’s meant to you.

**Imara:** Yeah, I think it’s hard to understate the importance of Monica Roberts, and the history of trans people, and specifically the history of how we have come to see ourselves and the way we expect other people to see us. Uh, Monica Roberts was, um, a journalist and an activist. She, in so many ways, helped to craft and lay the groundwork for what trans journalism is. That is to say, how to be a part of our community and covered at the same time.

She was essential in raising up the stories of trans people who were murdered, of discovering those who were being misgendered, of insisting that, um, those who were misgendered be properly gendered, and that people take their lives and their stories and what happened to them seriously. And that didn’t really happen before Monica Roberts began to insist upon that. So for any of us who are trans journalists or storytellers like myself, we owe her so much.

And not only did she tell the stories of death, but she was often the ones who told the stories of trans triumphs. She was a walking library in terms of what trans people had done, what, when, and who those people were. I think for me she was, and is, an inspiration. I said at the time of her death, that she uh, is, and was an essential north star for trans journalists, and I think that that’s absolutely right. And I know that there were so many people who were moved by her passing, from Janet Mock, to Laverne Cox, to, um, Raquel Willis, Alok, the list really goes on. I think that we have to find ways to both preserve her memory and preserve her legacy, and to make sure that we continue to uphold the standards of demanding that people take our lives seriously and that we cover them in a way that honors people’s humanity.

**Tuck:** Yeah, she was so inspirational, I think to any-, any trans journalist it’s really hard to imagine the world of trans journalism without her.

**Imara:** Yeah, and I think- trans storytelling, I mean, y’know she meant a lot to people like Janet and I think that she was really important in terms of a historical memory.

I think- It’s so funny, one of the last…one of the last things she communicated to me in a DM was that I had called Andrea Jenkins the first Black trans women elected in history, and she was like “Well she’s the first known one, and we should say that she was the first known one, because she wasn’t the first.” And in my mind I was, you know, I was like, okay well I understand that, but, if we didn’t know who they were then…it’s hard to judge if even that person was the first, or just the first person that we know about. So we kind of went back in forth, but then she was like “Okay, I really [laughs] respect what you do,” and, you know, “More soon.” That was literally [laughing] the last thing that she said to me.

And that was probably two and a half months ago, and I remember thinking at the time, you know, we really- we really need to have Monica on the podcast, like, I really wanna have her on. And I thought “Oh, our- we’re slated out ‘til the end of the year. We can do it early next year, that’ll be perfect.” And…and next year was too late. And so I, y’know, I’m so sad about that about that. I’m so sad that I had that thought, and thought “Oh we can just do that later.” And we couldn’t. And It’s just a reminder that we really have to, y’know treasure and honor people while they are here, and to just download as much as we can from everything that they’ve learned.

**Tuck:** Yes, absolutely. So, speaking of your show, I do want to talk about *TransLash*. You’re the founder of *TransLash*. The tagline is “*TransLash* tells trans stories to save trans lives during this pivotal moment in history.”

**Imara:** That’s right.

**Tuck:** Can you tell us more about how *TransLash* got started and- and what you mean by “telling trans stories to save trans lives?”

**Imara:** Yeah. Well *TransLash* got started at the tail-end of another project I did, that was also an independent media project which was figuring out ways to reconceptualize the news for marginalized people overall in the United States. As that project wound down, uh, I asked people- it’s called *The Last Sip*- and so I asked our team, I said well what should we do, we have a little bit of money left over what should we do? And everybody said “You should tell the story about what it means to be trans right now.” And the first words out of my mouth, the very first words out of my mouth was “Why would I do that? Nobody’s gonna care about that.”

**Tuck:** Mmm, wow.

**Imara:** That was the first thing that I said, it just rolled out of my tongue, and it was- it’s weird to think of the way in which we can think that our- our stories are not important, or that no one’s gonna care about us, I think that that can be a- a condition of being trans, and I didn’t even realize that I was doing that, or that I even had those thoughts. [takes breath] So, and I also thought there are all these other people that were out there doing things like on YouTube or whatever and I was like, well- you know, why- why do I, why would I- do I need to come alongside that? And then we had- I said, but uh- you know, we’ll- we’ll have one more meeting, and at the last meeting we’ll talk about this again. So we had our very very very last team meeting and I asked the question again. And then everybody said that I should do it.

And, one of the really good things about me is that I know when I should listen to other people. Um, it’s just kind of a- a trick, right? Knowing when you should listen and when you shouldn’t, even if you disagree with people. And I was like “I thought about it.” And I said “Okay, I trust everybody here, and I should do it.” But then I said “If do it, I’m gonna do it in a way in which I not only tell my story but I tell the story of a community, and then within that tell the story of the country, like where it is.”

And, we made the first short doc, and it was received really well, and so then I just began to put more energy, and as I did more I understood the critical nature of what I was doing. And that’s also really interesting to me as well. What I’ve learned from this project is that the things that we create change us as much as we change them. And so, as I began to understand the importance of what I was doing and how I was doing it in a way that was unique and that was resonating, I then understood that what I needed to do was to grow it to have the impact that I saw that it could have, that is to save lives.

Y’know, I think that one of the major reasons why we face so much hostility and so much violence is because people don’t see us as human, and that they essentially devalue us. And I think that a huge part of storytelling, I mean throughout time, we do it right now, is that it allows us to go into the humanity of other people, so that we can understand them, so that we can connect with them, so that we have illumination in terms of who they are and what they’re going through. And it is my belief that, the more we do that, the more that we see, um, the humanity of other people, the more people see our humanity as trans people, the less likely they are to support violent policies against us, to allow people to say or to harm us with their words or with their deeds, and it changes the atmosphere in which our murders take place, which is against this backdrop of dehumanization. And that’s why I think storytelling is really essential.

It’s also important for us as trans people to be able to see possibility, life, a road ahead. And one of the most powerful moments for me was when we released the *The Future of Trans* in June, I got a note in my inbox from a trans person who said that seeing that documentary had prevented them from committing suicide the night before. And that’s why I believe that storytelling can save lives. It helps us save our own lives, and it also helps to change the atmosphere of harm that leads to our death.

**Tuck:** Yeah, that’s really powerful, and I’m so glad that that could be there for that person. So, thank you for everything that you’re doing for our community. I feel like it’s, you know, somewhat self-selecting, like, the people who are going to go out of their way to listen to a podcast about trans people are maybe the people who already are less inclined to murder trans people. How do you make sure that your content reaches like, it’s intended audiences?

**Imara:** So, a couple things. Y’know- we’re- the- to be clear, the content’s not designed for murderers. [laughs]

**Tuck:** No, I know- I know, I know! [laughs]

**Imara:** So, just to be clear, you know, the content as it is, is not designed for murderers. But there’s this enormous grey area of silence and people not knowing or understanding that allows those other people to be able to operate without impunity. I mean, one of the things that strikes me when you look into so many of the murders of trans women, Black trans women especially of course, is that so many of the people who committed the murders don’t think that they’ve done anything wrong.

**Tuck:** Hmm.

**Imara:** Like they’ll- they will wait for the police calmly, and tell the police “Yeah I killed this person, duhduhduh.” Like, they don’t- in their mind they haven’t done anything wrong! And that’s because there’s- there is a- there is a void in our culture that says that we matter and that this is unacceptable. And that that cultural space, that void is there, because regular people, who- who wouldn’t want to- to do us harm, are not creating the backdrop that says that these people matter and this shouldn’t happen.

And I had had a lot of people, who have said, you know, “I was curious about trans people and I- and I really didn’t know and then I had looked at your- your documentary,” or “I had looked at one of your video projects,” or “I- um, you know, listened to the podcast.” And now I see all these things that I didn’t see before and it makes me want to do more. Those are the people that it’s designed to do, because those are the people that help change the cultural background and background noise that is essential for creating space for us, right? And that is what I think is essential, that’s who the podcast is designed at.

And it’s also designed for us, you know? Like, you know, it’s also for us to understand the breadth and the range of our community, and to draw inspiration from that and possibility from that. Those are who the audience is for, and that’s the way we’re working to shift culture.

**Tuck:** Yeah. That makes so much sense to me. Actually, speaking- speaking of this, I was listening to your post-election, pre-results uh, *TransLash* podcast episode when you spoke to Katelyn Burns. Uh, that episode was also edited by our friend Alexander Charles Adams. So it was so cool to see-

**Imara:** Who is a great editor, yeah.

**Tuck:** Yeah! Who’s wonderful, everyone should hire them. [laughs slightly] But anyway, so it was cool to see, like, a collab with so many like, wonderful people, and as I was listening I was just thinking about, both how comforting that was, but also how almost unprecedented it felt, to me, to hear two news professionals who are both trans women, talking about the news and how it will actually affect communities that like, I and my friends are a part of. Uh, does it feel radical to you to be creating that kind of content?

**Imara:** That is my overall goal. I didn’t specifically think about that in that conversation, but the way that you framed it, it absolutely is radical, and I think that, you know, why can’t two, you know, trans women who are, as you say professionals in the news, professionals in journalism, be naturally and organically talking about what’s happening and the way that it impacts us in the world and on like, *Meet the Press*? Like why, why can’t that exist, you know? Because we do exist, and I think that that’s really important.

That’s why I also had Ana Arriola, who is a major force in artificial intelligence, who is a Latinx trans woman. There’s so many ways and spaces that we are existing and creating possibility for other people, and the world should know about us, right? And they should know about what we’re doing. And we should know about each other. I don’t think that that many people unders- you know- knew, that Ana existed, and that she has major thoughts about how we change algorithms to actually not be harmful to trans people. Like, she has a whole framework for that! And the way in which she’s trying to implement that at- right now at Microsoft.

So, yeah. I think that the entire motivation, the thing that drives my work, is radical, even as it may not always appear radical on the outside. I really do believe that we have to shift the way that people think about us and the way they think about gender identity overall. And um, that in and of itself is a radical notion, so, as I said, I’m so glad that you saw that in the moment because I didn’t think about it with that episode, but it is- it is a huge element in my work, and for what I want to do. So thank you for pointing out that [chuckles] right now, because I didn’t think about it.

**Tuck:** Oh yeah, of course. And yeah, I want to also, just, agree that your guests are incredible and there are so many people on your show that I haven’t heard of, but I am so surprised and like, sad that I hadn’t heard about them before, but so excited to get to know their work, so, yeah, that’s another, like, fun bonus of listening to your show, is just getting to know about all these other incredible trans people in the world doing this really amazing work in all these different fields. It’s really cool.

So, I asked you, you know, what you wanted to talk about on the show, and one of the things you said was that transness is essential to women’s equality.

**Imara:** Yes!

**Tuck:** Can you talk about what you mean by that?

**Imara:** Yeah. One of the things that is essential in discrimination, and in patriarchy, is body essentialism: this attachment of certain characteristics to certain bodies, and the need therefore to then place limitations in custom and in law are based upon body essentialism, right? So, that, because your body, theoretically- right? And we know it’s not universally true for anyb- for all types of bodies, but, for example, because your body is, in this narrative, capable of reproducing children, because it has certain hormones that we associate with varying characteristics that are not related to patriarchy, that women as a whole have to be classified and segregated in a totally different area of society, and therefore then excluded from a whole host of other things, because you and your body, biologically, are not suited for those things, right? That’s the argument in so many areas about cis women.

And so, as long as we are “biologically determined,” in quotes, it will always lay the groundwork for discrimination, exclusion, and oppression. And what we have to do is to decouple gender from bodies, because essentially it is decoupled, because gender as we know is this weird combination of like, social construct, personal definition, and your body. It’s this weird area, like, gender is got all these different thinks going on in it. But it is this kind of, like, artificial construction, or parts of it are artificial, and so, it’s not linked to bodies anyway. It’s linked to these ideas, and customs, and desires, and images, and a whole host of other things. So, it shouldn’t be coupled with bodies anyway, but, as we were able to put it in its appropriate place to separate gender from bodies, then there’s no reason for any type of exclusion. It doesn’t- none of those things actually hold.

And if what I’m saying sounds odd to people, this- the argument that I’m making is actually the reason why the right-wing says that transness is so threatening, that it threatens the social order because we cannot have these divisions that allow us to have patriarchy in a way that we think that patriarchy is appropriate. And they’re obsessed with us for that reason, because they understand that if the way that we understand gender, and gender notions, becomes widespread, then patriarchy itself is a done deal. And that’s fundamentally why cis women and feminists have to embrace us if they ever want full equality, if they ever want the ability to be able to be defined by their capacities, and talents, and motivation, and not by this combination of rules, and customs, and laws.

Um, biological determinism is in so many laws. That’s what made Ruth Bader Ginsburg so powerful is that she committed her whole life to tearing those things down. To- to taking biological determinism out of the law for women. Um, that if we’re able, if they’re able to do that, then we can have the society that we all want. And that’s why- that’s why TERFism is a self- literally a self-defeating exercise. You cannot at the same time say, “We want liberation, and freedom, and equality for cis women only” and support biological determinist views on womanhood. It will not work, and you will never be free.

**Tuck:** You also, uh, wrote recently in *Time* magazine, uh, that the future is trans because the ways we’ve gone about organizing human life have changed in really fundamental ways. Is that similar to what you were talking about, or is that different?

**Imara:** It’s- it’s similar to what I’m talking about. I mean, I- I really think that we are essential to the future for so many different reasons, but I think that we are essential to the future because, I think all of the things that we have had to endure as trans people makes us the right people to lead in these moments, right? We understand that society has to fundamentally change, the way in which we relate to the environment has to fundamentally change, the way in which we relate to other people has to change.

And this- this- this journey of transformation, this journey of thinking outside the binary, this journey of knowing what rules to break, and how to break them, and how when we do it in the right way that we can actually lead to better lives. Those are things that we all have as trans people, every single one of us, and those are the skills that our society needs but is so badly lacking right now. And that if we’re going to have a future, collectively as human beings, then trans people have to be in the vanguard, have to be at the center of that, need to be a part of every part of society helping people to manage these transformations that- that the whole world is gonna have to go through.

And that’s one of my- my essential messages as well, that like, we are essential to the future. The future cannot happen without us. It will not. It will not be.

**Tuck:** Yeah, you also write in that article that trans women are essential to creating the future because when everything fails, you- you’re more clearly able to reimagine what it would look like if things worked. Which is what you just said, but I just- I love that as a quote.

**Imara:** I think that that’s right, I mean, I think that like, when things aren’t work- you know, you don’t question things when they’re working for you, you just don’t. You know what I mean? Like, when the lights work all the time, you don’t- you don’t give a whit, like, where the electricity come- you don’t think about any of that, right? It’s when the lights don’t work that you suddenly freak out. “Oh my god,” whatever and, “How did the ligh- how did… the lights not work, what?” “We have this aging equipment…” whatev-, you know, you then question everything.

And so I think that, like, in thinking about why the opportunities were different for me as a trans person in journalism versus other people, and why we don’t see ourselves represented, why we don’t see our stories covered in the right way, why the healthcare system is so- such a landmine for us. Why do I have to go to court to change my name? Why is the state so interested in what I call myself, right? And why do I have to go to the state to ask for permission, you know?

The way in which, um, so many of systems fail Black trans people. And, from education, to employment, to housing, you name it. There’s just not anything that is working for Black trans women, which is why there’s such high levels of marginalization, but when those things aren’t working you can then look at the gaps and see then really clearly. And you can see the failures really clearly. And then you can begin to imagine and think about ways to address those that people who never question things, um, never do. And that’s why I’ll often have this saying where, if you center Black trans people in policymaking and job recruitment and all these other things, that you’ll actually shift the way those things are done for everybody and create new possibilities for everybody, that- that, you know, one of the things that we’re- we understand intuitively is how it’s not win or lose, right? It’s how to expand. Our whole lives are about expansion and growth. And so, I think that that’s one of the reasons why we have to include Black trans women in everything, is that it’s not about this tradeoff, it’s about the definitions of creating more.

**Tuck:** Yeah, so, speaking of this, speaking of Black trans people specifically, I think we’ve seen in the last few months, a lot of people who, frankly have never thought about Black trans people, uh, thinking about how to show up for them for the first time, and because it is new to them, they don’t really know how to do it in a way that is not tokenizing,-

**Imara:** Mhmm.

**Tuck:** or performative,-

**Imara:** Mmm.

**Tuck:** or, like, counterproductive. Uh-

**Imara:** Mhm.

**Tuck:** do you have suggestions for people like that, who are trying to figure out how to actually, like, materially, uh, support Black trans communities?

**Imara:** Well, I think read, [laughs] that’s the first thing. Y’know, that’s a very personally reflective activity. Read Janet’s book, which is a great read. Read and watch documentaries about Marsha P. Johnson, which you can do. Follow Black trans people on social media. There’s so many people that tell their stories and that have perspectives to say, like, Hope Giselle, she has, like, she does a ca-trillion, gazillion videos all the time that she’s making, people can watch and engage. Um, and read what people have written, you know? Read what Raquel has written, um, you can read what I’ve written, you can read- there’s so many things out there in terms of articles, and books, and videos, and people to follow. Tons. So get to know people as people, even if they’re not in your immediate world.

One other thing that I think, is bring Black trans people into your orbit. And I don’t mean this in terms of like, tokenizing like, “Let me go get a Black trans friend.” But I mean, to the extent that you are in groups or associations, try to get Black trans people to join them. Try to get your workplace if you can to hire Black trans people. Put Black-trans-positive posts on your social media. Um, there’re all these things that people can do just in terms of like, including us into their daily lives and consciousness, which will lead to other things, because, for example, if you follow Black trans people on social media, eventually they will tell you what you can do to help. They will tell you things that are important. They will post events that they will be at that you can watch virtually and learn more.

What I mean is that, like, when you include people in- or, into your routines and orbits, then the flow can become natural. And I guess that’s- that’s what I would suggest. It’s not only, you know, contribute to Black trans organizations and, you know, all those things. But it is starting to put Black trans people into your consciousness. And I think that that’s what then leads to change.

**Tuck:** Well, I think speaking again sort of to, like, genuine representation and equity, uh, in August you published a letter to the president of the BET, which was signed by a wide array of… Black trans icons, frankly. It’s an incredible list! Um, can you talk about what brought you to write that letter? And I’m also curious, like, if you received any kind of response to it.

**Imara:** [takes deep breath] Aye aye aye…um…the- you know, one of the great struggles of- of the last few months, aside from everything else that’s breaking in the world.

Um, right, so what happened is that I was asked by an ad agency to make a video that was set to run during the BET awards. I had been told it had been scheduled and was gonna run during the awards. I watched the awards, it didn’t run. The next day I said “BET, why didn’t my ad run, who pulled it?” And then I just got total radio silence. And I then started this Twitter campaign and continued to get radio silence, like totally ignoring me. And, um, then eventually I wrote a op-ed for the Griot, because I wanted it to run in a Black publication, where I essentially call them out and said “What’s going on?”

And then of course the minute you do that, it- they- they responded, right? So, then we had some exchanges. I thought that those exchanges- [microphone cuts out a word] conversations with them. Um, I was continuing to get contradictory information, I was being stonewalled, quite frankly they said some things a couple times that I knew that weren’t true about the entire circumstance. And so, that then led me to demand more answers, and then it was radio silent again. They just totally ignored.

I then began to think about the way in which what happened to me was not in isolation, but It was part of a larger pattern at BET that we could document at least almost a decade in the making. And that’s when I realized that it’s not personal, it’s institutional. This is about a culture, it’s not about a person.

So then I got the idea to write this letter, saying that we as Black trans people demand change at BET, and the reason why is because of some of the things that we address in the very beginning of this, which is the essentialness of cultural change. And we know that the United States has the largest number of murders of Black t- uh, I’m sorry- of trans people in any other country on the planet except for Brazil and Mexico, and that the overwhelming majority of those are Black and brown trans women, so therefore in this case we- I- we felt, and I feel, that BET has a unique responsibility to not be transphobic, but it has a transphobic culture, and that that transphobic culture then translates into what’s on air, and the way in which they- they navigate the world.

And so, I put that down in a letter. And I worked for weeks to circulate it amongst a wide community of people. Uh, I think 48 signed the letter, I think we’re up to 53 now. And, quite clearly it’s not just me who thinks this, it’s- it’s a broad spectrum of our community, and we wrote that letter, and it was because we wanted to demand change at BET. And, of course, it’s the same pattern the minute the conversation becomes public, or is in print, BET responds in scramble.

So they responded, and essentially what’s been happening since August if you can believe it, since August we’ve been trying to come up with a way to have a conversation about what happened. So far we’ve not been able to figure that out. I think, y’know, we’ll have to just see how it unfolds and then what our response will be, but at some point we have to let, I have to let people know what’s going on, and I’m hoping that we’ll be able to say we met with them, they heard our concerns, we- here are the things that we asked for, here are the things that they said, and, you know, we either are in a good place, or we’re not in a good place, or we’re still trying to work it out. That’s what I hope I can tell people. But right now I can’t say that. And we’ll see what happens.

But again, it’s this- it’s in a cultural morass there, to be quite frank about it. And I am hoping that we can get past that, to actually get in a room together, us and them, and have a frank conversation and see where we land. We have not been able to do that. We have spent the time since August talking about talking.

**Tuck:** [laughs]

**Imara:** [laughs slightly] We’ll see how that go- literally that’s what we’ve been doing.

**Tuck:** [sighs] Yeah…

**Imara:** And so, we’ll see. I want to- Everybody has a process to get to where they need to be, you know? And hoping that we can- they can get there, but, y’know, if they can’t then we have to think about what that means as well. It’s excruciating, and I- and, and, and it inv- and also by the way, it’s all unpaid labor, right? [laughs slightly] Like, it’s all unpaid. Nobody, this is- y’know, this is a huuuuge time sink, y’know? And it’s emotional labor, ‘cause this is very triggering, and traumatizing, and- y’know it’s- it’s a lot that goes into this. So, it’s- it’s excruciating.

**Tuck:** Yeah. Do you have a Venmo? [laughing] Can- can we Venmo you for all of this labor?

**Imara:** Sure! Um, uh, what’s my Venmo? It’s- it’s just my name, Imara Jones. [laughs]

**Tuck:** Perfect. Well, I’ll pressure people at the end. Oh, but, what you were just saying actually reminded me of something that I think about quite a lot, which is that so often when we’re trying to call out or call in media institutions, or other sort of corporate entities, uh, the only way-

**Imara:** Mmm!

**Tuck:** -that we can really get them to respond is by putting pressure on them publicly,-

**Imara:** Mhm.

**Tuck:** -and then I think, like, in my case I feel like I have this, you know, brand now, of- of being really fiery and always like calling people out and, like, stirring the shit up, and I’m just like, well they won’t listen to me otherwise. Is that something that you feel like you have to confront as well? Like, that kind of balance?

**Imara:** I- yeah, and I hate- I hate it, because it- I- by the time I’m doing that I’m incredible angry, so.

**Tuck:** Right!

**Imara:** Y’know, I’m incredibly angry, and so- that- y’know, it takes a lot- I know it takes a lot of energy to do that, but it is- it is, it’s the only way that they listen, and it’s, um, it’s enraging. And, it’s- if you were doing the right thing from the beginning we wouldn’t be here. It’s a real simple…

**Tuck:** Right.

**Imara:** …Y’know what I mean?

**Tuck:** Yeah.

**Imara:** And like, and if what happened to me was an isolated incident, and you actually were- you know were really pro-LGBT, you wouldn’t have, like, 53 people from across our community, from academics, to people that work in technology, to actors, to politicians, calling you on your transphobia, right? Um, and so that means that the problem is widespread, and it is enraging. And it is enraging that people don’t hear you unless you are screaming, but then say, “Oh, we’re afraid of you because you’re screaming.” Well if you listened I wouldn’t have to shout!

**Tuck:** I’m wearing a sweatshirt right now that I love, that says “Fight everyone, never make it easy.” And I’m like,-

**Imara:** [laughs]

**Tuck:** -I don’t wanna live this way! It’s just, the way we gotta do it.

**Imara:** No! Right, right. No, no one wants to do this. Like, this is not fun, and it’s not what anybody wants to do, but it’s necessary, and your behavior, like, mandates it!

**Tuck:** Right. I was actually just thinking about this, I was listening to your show this morning, there was one episode I hadn’t listened to yet. And, I was thinking about, uh, how wonderful it is to hear you interview people about things that aren’t always only about gender, and how wonderful it would be, uh, if my job as like a consultant, or like as someone who’s just talking about trans people, like, could become almost obsolete? And like, how wonderful it would be if I didn’t have to do, like, consulting and workshops anymore ‘cause everyone already knew how to treat trans people with basic respect, and I could interview people about other things. Do you feel like this will be your work for the rest of your life, or are you sort of aiming to make yourself obsolete as well?

**Imara:** Ooo. I don’t- I don’t know. It will always be a huge part of my work, because I think that one of the things that I realize, and I’m just looking at the arc of American history when I say this, is that, these fights are long. Y’know, they go a long time.

And I remember having this conversation with an activist- Black trans woman activist, was in her twenties at the time, not in her twenties now, and she was like “I have to do everything right now, I have to do this, and I have to get this, and we have to win that, and we have to do that,” and whatever whatever. And at the same time, she was burning out, and I said to her, I said “These fights are long. The trick is to figure out how to sustain yourself through the longevity, not how to somehow make the process go faster than it’s gonna go, because that’s just not America. It’s just not the way that the system is designed.” Right?

So, for example, we are go- we are on the cusp of having an- a new administration enter office, thank god. And they’ll probably reverse a lot of the bad shit that Donald Trump did, which is essential for us to live, right? We’re not even talking about, like, improving our lives, we’re talking about the ability to live, like, the ability to walk into a hospital and not have someone say “Oh, that person had a- has had a heart attack, but I’m not gonna treat them because they’re trans and I’m uncomfortable.” Like, Donald Trump says that they can do that- should do that. But, next year we’re gonna face a fight of almost half the states of the country, 23 states, with anti-trans bills. And that’s gonna be in the state level, it’s gonna have nothing to do with the federal government, you know what I mean? This process is long, and I try to think about how to sustain myself through it.

I don’t know, there may be times in my life where I dial it up, and when I dial it down in terms of like, I’m gonna go work on another project, but- but I can’t ever imagine that there’s not gonna be a time when this work is necessary. If I am wrong I will be so thrilled, but I can’t imagine a time when we’re not gonna have to do this work. I just hope that it becomes easier, that there’s more space for us, that there- that there’s more respect for us, and that there’s less violence against us. Those are the things that I think that we can expect, and should expect, y’know, during the time that we’re doing this work, but if you look at the right for example, for- for women to get the vote in this United States, it took 80 years! 80 years! The people that started that movement in their thirties lived until their seventies and eighties, some of them, they died and they didn’t live to see what they worked for. There’s still no equal rights amendment to the US constitution. The people that started that fight, some of them have past, some of them are still alive, um, some of them, like, Gloria Steinem is where she’s in her eighties! She may not live to see a movement of- for an equal rights, uh, um, amendment to the constitution that she helped start.

**Tuck:** Oof. Yeah.

**Imara:** Isn’t that heavy?

**Tuck:** Yeah, it is, but…

**Imara:** It’s a- it’s a heavy thought.

**Tuck:** It is, but I’m so grateful and so inspired by all of the work you do, and I’m so excited that you’ll be continuing to do it.

You start every episode of *TransLash* with a moment of trans joy, and you end it with something that you’re looking forward to, and I think, completely separately unless I did this subconsciously, I’ve also been trying to ask our guests what they’re looking forward to, specifically this season because it’s so hard to look forward to anything in these times when we’re, you know, trapped indefinitely in a quarantine during a pandemic and all these other things. Uh, so, I’m curious, you know, what you’re looking forward to, or what’s bringing you trans joy lately.

**Imara:** Ooo, what’s bringing me trans joy…Well, you know what I am loving are all of the trans awareness week posts. I love seeing all of the people who are living their lives, going to school, raising kids, doing all of the normal stuff of life, posting about being proud of being trans, and posting about their journeys, um, I love those posts, and I love looking at those posts of, y’know, people in all parts of the country doing all sorts of things, celebrating their lives. I- I am- I am super inspired by that. So that brings me trans joy. And then there’s so many beautiful things that were- that w- that’re- had’ve been done this year in terms of shooting trans people, and, I mean, uh, through film, [laughs slightly] and uh, photographs, not with-

**Tuck:** [laughing] I was- I was like “What’s happening here!?”

**Imara:** -not with firearms! Not with firearms, but shooting as in photoshoot.

**Tuck:** [humored sigh] Uh-huh.

**Imara:** Um, you know, so many really interesting and beautiful things that are also being done around this week that’re more stylized, and all of those things give me life because it’s like living in a trans world for a week [laughs] like- you know, like- umm, which I- which I really find inspirational. So that’s my trans joy, like, other trans people are my trans joy. For real.

And my thing that I’m looking forward to is, I am on the edge of burning out, like I am right at the limit, and I am taking all of next week off, and I don’t have anything on the schedule, and I won’t be doing anything but what I want, and that’s what I’m looking forward to. And I’m gonna do that again in December for a couple of weeks, because, again, practicing what I preach, like… if I can’t function, I’m not- I can’t do what I wanna do, I can’t do my job, I can’t fulfill my purpose, um, and if I burn out, all the other stuff doesn’t matter. And so I literally have to take the time, and, like so many people, I am traumatized from this year, I am grieving, we have had, um, demands upon us all, upon demands, upon demands, that we never expected, and at the same time, those of us that are so fortunate enough to be in work, there’s too many people that cannot, but for those of us who are still lucky enough to be in work, um, the- the demands upon us in our jobs, in this crisis moment, are even more. And to me, those two things are unsustainable, like living in cross- crisis, being traumatized, and elevated demands upon us as people, that’s not sustainable. And I can’t make the world stop like I want the world to stop, like, to take a breath, and to just kind of get centered, but I- so I have to do that for myself. And that’s what I’m looking forward to. And what I find is totally necessary in this moment is that we all got to find ways to take a breath, and that’s what I’m looking forward to doing.

**Tuck:** Yeah. I’m genuinely so happy for you. And like so proud of you for taking that time, because it’s definitely, I see so often, especially in like, left-leaning circles, of folks who are telling everyone else to take a break, but they’re not taking a break, and I’m one of those people, and it’s like the spiderman pointing at spiderman .gif, you know? So, uh, I’m so happy that you’re being a positive role-model by taking some time for yourself.

**Imara:** Yeah, and I hope that you are able to do that, because, you know, we need everyone and, um, this year’s been a lot, and there’s no way that we can just keep going going going going going, and responding responding responding responding, within the context of- of what we’re living through right now. And, I mean so many tragedies, right? Not only for us, for me, not only that of coronavirus, and wildfires, and you name it. Um, mad man in the white house who wanted to nuke Iran last week-

**Tuck:** [laughs]

**Imara:** [laughing] -who was talked out of it at the last minute. Like, that, but also, you know, for- as trans people, we’ve had the most number of trans murders this year than any other year on record, y’know? It’s- It’s- It’s a really- It’s kind of a lot, and we have to take breaks, so I hope you’re able to do that and that you just do it.

**Tuck:** Hm, thank you. I wanna ask, uh, if there’s anything else that we haven’t talked about that you wanna make sure that we talk about, or just anything on your mind right now?

**Imara:** Yeah! Since this is, um, a conversation in a podcast about gender, I think, for me, the thing that is essential is that…we have to work really hard as trans people to not replicate the binary that we found oppressive.

**Tuck:** Mhmm.

**Imara:** That we don’t let the idea of fulfilling our, if you define yourself, manhood or womanhood, or however you define yourself, even if as it’s nonbinary as well, to not replicate, in the process of becoming ourselves, the oppression of the gender binary. I think it’s an essential part of our work, that we work really hard to not do that, that we don’t police each other, that we provide space for each other to really be ourselves outside of that, and for us to not allow the fulfillment of other people’s ideas of who you should be if- if you define your gender in traditional terms, define, uh, your ability to figure out what you want to do, how you want to dress, how you want to move through the world, who you want to love, how you want to love, um, in all aspects, I think it’s a huge- it’s a huge trap that we’ve gotta avoid.

**Tuck:** Yeah, I completely agree, and that actually leads us to our last question, which is, in your ideal world, what would the future of gender look like?

**Imara:** The future of gender, for me, is about possibility. It is a future without patriarchy, and part of that future is that we get tell the world who we are. The world doesn’t get to impose itself on us. And that when we tell the world who we are, there’s not a negative consequence in terms of like, chances, opportunities, and happiness, when we do that. And it is a future, therefore, of unimaginable possibility, because we haven’t lived that future without restrictions, and that when we do there will be new combinations, ideas, ways of being that we can’t even imagine right now, and that for me is what I want to be the future of gender. It is wide open, and it is free, and we are defined by so many other things than who the world tells us who were are, and consequently therefore what we can and cannot do. It is a future that is limitless.

**Tuck:** Mmm. Imara, it was such a privilege, and a pleasure, and a joy to speak to you today, thank you so much for taking the time. I know you’re so busy, and this was just really, really, incredible, I really appreciate you.

**Imara:** Thank you so much, and I really appreciate you. Keep doing that excruciating, in-the-weeds work of one group at a time, one company at a time, getting them to act right, because those things stacked up over time are change. So thank you so much.

**Tuck:** Aww, thank you. Well, I will do my best, um, while also-

**Imara:** [laughs]

**Tuck:** -taking a break at some point.

**Imara:** [laughing] Yes, take a break! That’s an order!

**Tuck:** [laughs]

[*Gender Reveal* theme music starts]

**Tuck:** That’s gonna do it for this week’s show. You can find Imara’s work at translash.org and imarajones.com. Find her on social media @translashmedia, and Venmo her for her time and labor at ImaraJones.

We are also on social media, you can find us on Twitter and Instagram at G-E-N-D-E-R-E-V-E-A-L [tn: @gendereveal]. I am also on Twitter @tuckwoodstock.

You can visit genderpodcast.com to find our starter packs of episodes sorted by theme, our transcripts of the show, our contact form, much more. And you can support the work we do at [patreon.com/gender](http://patreon.com/gender), where just $1 gets you access to our weekly newsletter, and $5 or more gets you stickers and other fun prizes. We’re also on Venmo, and Cash App, and PayPal if you’d like to donate that way. Links are in the show notes.

Join our online community at [bit.ly/genderslack2](http://bit.ly/genderslack2), and browse our truly excellent selection of merch at [bit.ly/gendermerch](http://bit.ly/gendermerch). There really is something in there for everyone. All proceeds go to really great causes, and everything in that store will disappear by December 31st, so get in there if you want something.

This show was produced and edited by me, Tuck Woodstock. We have another producer joining us this season, Isaura Aceves. Thank you Isaura for everything you have done and will continue to do for us. And thank you to Oliver-Ash Kleine and Montana Thomas for your help in making this episode happen as well.

Our logo, which I am obsessed with, is by the talented Ira M. Leigh. Our theme song is by the legendary Breakmaster Cylinder. Additional music this week by Blue Dot Sessions. We’ll be back next week with more feelings about gender.

[*Gender Reveal* theme music ends]

**Tuck:** Uhh, that’s not true, my favorite thing is to turn people trans.

**Imara:** [laughs] ‘Cause that’s what we’re doing, we have an agenda, apparently, according to the right-wing.

**Tuck:** I- you know, the thing is, the amount of messages I receive on like a weekly basis telling them that my show made me realize that they’re trans, I’m just like, I mean maybe it’s true. [laughs heartily] Don’t tell them, uhh.

**Imara:** I won’t, I won’t, I won’t. The- the people like the Heritage Foundation, they would be gagging right now. They’d be dying…. Poor things.