

MARCH CULTURE

by Estelle De Zan

Photography by Daniel Darling





His right hand raised, his left on the bible, the history of the United States was forever changed. The day beforehand was not forgotten, but today, the more important of the two, was the day they fought back. Faces wet, bodies armed with posters, pink hats, and paint, they were ready for battle.

Despite being a republic constructed by and for the people, there is often a disconnect between national politics, government officials, and the needs of American citizens. With months or years between election cycles, whether that be for the next president of the United States or the reelection of members of the House, one method people have turned to time and time again to voice their concerns has been marching on Washington. From Women's Suffrage in 1913, which amassed 500,000 spectators, to the Ku Klux Klan in 1925 and the People's Anti-War Mobilization in 1981, Washington's history of marches is deeply rooted. A pillar of liberties, progressive thought, and freedom of speech, it is a testament to America's ever changing social, cultural, and political sphere.

A co-chairman of the Women's March, Harry Belafonte has described marching as, "One

of the great weapons of a democracy." A performer and civil rights activist, he played a critical role in putting together the 1963 March on Washington. Best remembered for Martin Luther King, Jr.'s "I Have a Dream" speech, this demonstration called for fighting injustice and inequalities against African-Americans and can be said to have spurred the passage of two major civil rights bills—the Voting Rights Act of 1965 and the Civil Rights Act of 1968. Having demonstrated on January 21st, tens of thousands of women's marchers will join this history of marching, hoping to draw attention to crucial causes.

When Donald Trump became president Teresa Shook, a retired attorney and grandmother living in Hawaii felt, well, shook. One of the first people to suggest a march the day after his inauguration, she wasn't alone in feeling victimized. With his campaign trail brimming with negative rhetoric, especially concerning his treatment of women, people of color, disabled individuals, and other minorities, most Americans developed very strong feeling towards him. Namely, a few examples that inspired the Women's March and public outcry included his suggested muslim ban, mocking of a disabled reporter, and

the most infamous, by far, being the leaked Access Hollywood tapes in which he made vulgar comments about his treatment of women.

With many people refusing to repeat the content found on the clip, saying it contained explicit content that was inappropriate for a younger audience, I'm of the belief that it's important to look back at the raw evidence. Words that millions of people heard echo off their TVs and mobile devices worldwide, the transcripts from that day read:

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Trump: *Yeah, that's her. With the gold. I better use some Tic Tacs just in case I start kissing her. You know, I'm automatically attracted to beautiful — I just start kissing them. It's like a magnet. Just kiss. I don't even wait. And when you're a star, they let you do it. You can do anything.*

Bush: *Whatever you want.*

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Trump: *Grab 'em by the pussy. You can do anything.*

For many this was something that could never be excused, something they could never move past, and understandably so.

Scandals aside, to say that

sexism and misogyny didn't have to do with the election is a poorly researched claim. Just look at the number of times Trump referred to his opponent as a "nasty woman." Hillary Clinton is well aware of this. When asked by journalist and Chief International Correspondent for CNN Christiane Amanpour, whether she believes sexism and misogyny still exists in the United States, there was a pause as the crowd started laughing. "Hmm," Clinton played along, feigning deep thought.

Creating a Facebook event page calling for a march on Washington, Shook received around 40 responses the day of, which blew up to more than 10,000 by morning. Bob Bland, a New York-based fashion designer who had amassed a following after creating "Nasty Woman" and "Bad Hombre" T-shirt designs, had a similar idea, proposing it be called the "Million Pussy March." Collaborating with organizers of other Facebook posts, including Shook's, Bland started working

with three longtime activists to be co-chairs of the national march. All living in New York City, these women included Carmen Perez, head of the Gathering for Justice, a criminal-justice reform group; Tamika Mallory, a gun control advocate; and Linda Sarsour, who had recently led a successful campaign to close New York City public schools on two Muslim holidays.

With prior experience in organizing sociopolitical movements, the introduction of these activists, who soon became National Co-Chairs, brought structure to the rapidly growing movement. In addition to this, they also brought diversity to the campaign, which was previously criticized for catering mostly to a white audience.

A title referencing to Trump's selective use of the word, the "Million Pussy March" eventually became the "Women's March on Washington," invoking Martin Luther King Jr.'s 1963 civil rights march. This even got King's daugh-

ter Bernice's seal of approval.

According to its website, the mass movement means to encourage people to "stand together in solidarity with our partners and children for the protection of our rights, our safety, our health, and our families" while "recognizing that our vibrant and diverse communities are the strength of our country." A celebration of differences, the march hopes to honor women, immigrants, Muslims and LGBTQ people, standing for, "rhetoric of the past election cycle [which] has insulted, demonized, and threatened many of us."

A Hillary Clinton victory, according to Forbes, being representative of a, "concerted effort to close the gender pay gap and a push for federally mandated paid leave, among other measures aimed at leveling the playing field for women's advancement in the working world," many took the 2017 election results as a call to action.

With the popularity of the hashtag #WhyIMarch gaining recognition, people were also given the opportunity to share their reasons for participating in the Women's March. These ranged from financial empowerment and the access to safe abortions to affordable birth control.

An overarching issue that the march hopes to tackle is lack of representation. Out of Trump's fifteen cabinet picks, for example, only two of them are women. With women representing 51 percent of the population, a meager 13 percent of his picks being women is reason enough to demand change. In comparison, Obama's cabinet for his second term had 3 women, which was only better by the slightest of margins.





The march's organizers themselves released a comprehensive platform of principles online including LGBT equality, reproductive freedom, and rights for immigrants and refugees. With no mention of Trump in these guidelines, some took this as a suggestion that the demonstration was attempting to be bipartisan. Cory Booker, the Senator of New Jersey, agreed with this stance. "This is about responding to misogyny, bigotry, racism — all of those things that are undermining who we are," he said in Washington, D.C. "This is not a Democrat or Republican thing. This is actually something we can all unify around." But is this feasible?

With such a heated political sphere, the march couldn't possibly not be anti-Trump. And this proved to be right. "I support women's rights bigly" marked one sign, a surefire reference to Trump's extensive use of the word. "This is not normal," read another. "Threats to the press, climate change denial,

muslim registry, conversion therapy, stealing healthcare..." In addition to this, one of the most prominent chants in the San Francisco march was "Not my president." You can't get more blatant than that. Because women's rights are so layered, another controversy that arose was whether or not pro-lifers were welcome to participate in the Women's March. This was a heavy concern because although it was meant to be a peaceful demonstration, a large number of marchers were there to vocally support the continued funding of Planned Parenthood. Although the final consensus was that yes, they are welcome, the question remains, can someone be pro-women and forcefully pro-life at the same time?

With an estimated 470,000 people showing up to the Women's March in Washington D.C. alone, comparisons quickly being drawn to the estimated 160,000 people present during Donald Trump's inaugural speech, it was easily stated the march was a success. On top of this, over 600 "sister marches" were held worldwide, millions of people uniting against oppression and marginalization. But can that conclusion be reached with numbers alone? With our voting system in dire

need of reconstruction, according to the Pew Research Center, U.S. voter turnout trails most developed countries. In the 2012 presidential election, for example, turnout was only 53.6%, compared to the highest turnout rate in Belgium being 87.2%. And looking further into these statistics, millennials, despite being center to activism, are some of the least likely to vote. With many young liberals vocally supporting Senator Bernie Sanders in the primaries, low voter turnout for those aged 18 to 30 is one of the reasons he lost the way he did.

According to Marian B. Collin, a Virginia Tech associate professor who studies the history of social movements, champion marches profit from symbolism and street theater, appealing to an expansive coalition and pushing distinct policy goals. The final testament of success though is determining a march's long-term efficacy. This has everything to do with whether its advocates and participants are still energized once they've returned home and the initial thrill of activism has subsided.

Going by this logic, you can't just march, make a protest sign, and expect your work to be done. S.N.L.'s skit by the name of "Thank You, Scott," tears into that, following Louis C.K.'s character as he shares politically earnest items on social media without any subsequent action. This holds a mirror up to reality, poking fun at what has now



Casey Casias
@thebravengineer

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I'm marching because the freedom to decide what to do with one's body is the most basic and profound human right.

#WomensMarch #whyIMarch

8:01 AM · 10 Jan 2017

5 14



Grant Wahl
@GrantWahl

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I'm joining the @womensmarch in Washington on Saturday to support everyone who feels threatened by what's happening in America #WhyIMarch

6:51 PM · 19 Jan 2017

252 2,473



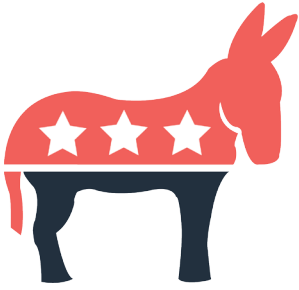
Allison Banks
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It is unfathomable that equal rights don't exist & my 21 yr old daughter has to deal w/ sexual, financial & social oppression #whyIMarch

8:50 PM · 9 Jan 2017

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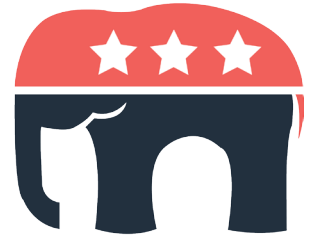
become known as meaningless liberal slacktivism.

Luckily the Women's March's first signs of long term change have been the organization of several other marches all held within the span of Trump's first hundred days in office. These have included the Tax Day March, demanding that Trump release his tax returns, and the March for Science, defending the role of science in policy and society. Parallels between these movements have been the involvement of people of all ages, that they are all largely anti-Trump, and that symbols are wildly prominent. For the Women's March this was the vast popularisation of the Pussy-

hat and for the March for Science, it was labcoats and brain hats. In addition to this, these marches have been described as peaceful protests because of the oftentimes negative connotations relating to public demonstrations and the sole use of the word "protest."

So now what? First off is remaining politically aware, but more importantly, politically active. For one, you could call your representatives. Yes, this sounds tedious and wouldn't make for an Instagram-worthy post, but your representatives are there to represent you and they can't know what they're constituents want (that's you) unless you tell them. Another option? Becoming a member or volunteering for organizations that need support. These can include Planned Parenthood, The Trevor Project, and the Human Rights Campaign. Most apparent, and I'm going to bring it up anyways, vote. And for those who don't know, although presidential elections are every four years, it's two years for the house.

Although we're quick to



criticize, the occurrence of the Women's March itself was a sign of change. If someone were to describe the atmosphere of that fateful day, despite the rain pounding down on its participants, the overall sentiment was one of unity. With many, including myself, feeling depleted after this election cycle, much needed hope was reinstilled. An anchor, a reminder that voices are loud and meant to be heard, those feelings, that realization cannot be taken away.



MARCH FOR ME

Photography by Estelle De Zan



