

Pink, Brown, and Read All Over: Representation at the 2017 Women's March on Washington

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Rachel E. Presley¹ and Alane L. Presswood²

Abstract

In this dual-autoethnographic narrative, we examine the Women's March on Washington in relation to critical approaches to activism. We draw upon our own unique experiences at the March, coupled with a chronology of the event's origins, its approaches to diversity and inclusion, and media coverage of the movement. We contend that despite initial critiques of whitewashing feminism, the Women's March thoughtfully addresses issues of solidarity and intersectionality from a point of transnational resistance and encourages demonstrators to unite in new formations of protest. Tracing the lineage of feminist scholarship from Gloria Anzaldúa and Audre Lorde to Leela Fernandes and Sara Ahmed, we fold theory into praxis and advocate for reimagined understandings of collective resistance efforts that attend to the postmodern, global contexts of Trumpian politics. We rely on Hardt and Negri's conception of "commoning" within the multitude to explore how the March enters into a larger conversation of intersectional justice, both within and beyond academia.

Keywords

feminism, activism, intersectionality, critical autoethnography

On November 9, 2016, Teresa Shook of Hawaii created a Facebook event inviting friends to march on Washington as an act of protest against the newly elected Donald Trump. Her modest social media status resulted in the largest single-day demonstration in U.S. history, or what *The Washington Post* called a "roaring rejoinder to the inauguration" (Stein, Hendrix, & Hauslohner, 2017). With more than 673 sister marches spanning across the United States and 81 countries from all seven continents, the 2017 Women's March was a collective call-to-action answered by nearly five million feminist allies who stood defiantly against a demonizing, fear-mongering administration.

The organizers of the March declared,

The Women's March on Washington will send a bold message to our new government on their first day in office, and to the world that women's rights are human rights. We stand together, recognizing that defending the most marginalized among us is defending all of us. ("Mission & Vision," n.d.)

More than 500,000 demonstrators were present in DC alone to uphold that mission. Other metropolitan cities, including New York, Chicago, Boston, and Los Angeles, were met with thousands more supporters than expected, resulting in street closures and reconfigured march routes to accommodate the volume of crowds; these numbers become even more impressive compared with the relatively small estimates for Trump's Presidential inauguration on the previous day.

Guided by the principles of Kingian nonviolence and empathy, the Women's March advocated for eight platforms of unity, working toward a social environment free from structural impediments: ending violence, reproductive rights; lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, intersex, and asexual (LGBTQIA) rights; worker's rights; civil rights; disability rights; immigrant rights; and environmental justice ("Unity Principles," n.d.). Recognizing the need for multiple perspectives and advocacy platforms, the March explicitly sought to advance progressive social change in a well-constructed message of rhetorical and embodied solidarity.

Our Journeys

We both attended the Women's March on Washington on January 21, 2017, traveling from our small university town in rural Ohio. Although both authors approach textual, material, and discursive rhetorical artifacts from different lenses of analysis (spanning from Aristotelean logic to decolonial theory), we simultaneously approached the March as a

¹Ohio University, Athens, USA

²Hollins University, Roanoke, VA, USA

Corresponding Author:

Rachel Presley, School of Communication Studies, Ohio University, 400 Schoonover Center, 20 E. Union Street, Athens, OH 45701, USA.
Email: rp144015@ohio.edu

profoundly affective movement with many of the same rewards and hesitations. We describe our experiences by addressing our positionality, our lingering questions, and our initial insights into the day's events. We then offer an overview of the March's media reception and position its advancements within a larger discussion of global intersectional activism and critical intervention.

Rachel

The March is still 4 days away, but adrenaline pulses inside of me. My entire body is overwhelmed, captivated by a visceral anger that boils inside. I sit on the bottom step of my staircase, staring into my phone, waiting for her reply. The words stay suspended on my screen. "You don't have to agree with me but at least respect my decision." Bull. Shit. The carpet beneath me burns as I bear my weight down, my fingers flying across the keyboard in a fury of betrayal. "Bullshit. I don't respect your decision to vote for Donald Trump."

The carpet is now imprinted on the back of my leg, and I glare at the clock ahead. 7:39 p.m. I spring forward, almost leaping from the base of the floor as I grab my keys and brace myself for the cold outside. I feel enveloped with rage, weighed by sadness, and overcome with guilt. How could she? A woman who blushes at PG-13 love scenes voted for a man who boasted about grabbing women by the pussy. A family member who I admire greatly supported a delusional, fascist bully.

I react the only way I know how: Dedicate my every ounce of energy into a checklist. My anger is quickly transformed into anxiety and I drive frantically into town to pick up my remaining supplies for the March before the stores close.

My trip to Jo-Ann Fabrics and Crafts is met with a cashier who steers me toward a water-repellent cardboard spray that she herself is using for the trip. "We can't let the rain wash away our words like everyone else has," she tells me. I buy three cans in preparation for the day ahead, but fully expect to use them in future demonstrations upon my return.

This is my first opportunity to embark on a protest of such global magnitude, and I am proud of myself and my community, inspired by the "Pantsuit Nation" I am a part of, and although I didn't know it at the time, humbled by the five million others who marched alongside me and my water-repellent poster board.

I grew up in a southern, rural town of less than 5,000, in what seemed like a place where only three people knew of the word "feminist" and only one dared to use it as a descriptor. I now reside in a rural Appalachian town of less than 25,000, in a place sprinkled with co-ops, farm-to-table initiatives, and troves of "I'm With Her" bumper stickers. Ohio University resides within an eclectically charming

blue dot in an otherwise fairly red state, and I am ecstatic to be surrounded by a group of friends and colleagues who rejoice in political debate as much as I do.

~

We depart for D.C. at 12:58 a.m. the day of the March on one of seven Rally buses that serve the Athens area. The six of us meet early in the evening, for no real reason in particular other than we are too excited to sit at home alone. We watch a Comedy Central special and chat idly about Saturday Night Live, comparing our attire for the March and fastening buttons to each other's shirt collars and pink pussy hats.

#NastyWoman. Black Lives Matter. This is what a feminist looks like. Not My President.

Alane and I take a picture to send to our families, my father texting back "Can't wait to show the guys in the office. Be safe." It is the first time we are all noticeably happy following the election, perhaps even the first time we've had a desire to socialize since then. Even though it was a somber occasion that brought us all together, we are excited, anxious, and admittedly a bit rambunctious.

We ride together to the bus's meet-up point, unanimously agreeing that Beyoncé's "Formation" is the anthem of the night. I am pleased to find our fellow bus-goers are equally restless. Our pink heads bob across the parking lot, eyes locking with appreciative, albeit worn smiles as we form a line to check in. We are a fairly diverse group of (mostly) White women, fully aware that our tiny town is not home to many racial minorities, but we vary in size, age, gender presentation, and sexual orientation. Mothers and daughters, working professionals and farmers, partners, students, and the elderly. We all board the bus with our own personal motives but are united in the quest for social justice.

I *want* to march as a queer ally, as a fierce advocate for indigenous representation, and as a supporter of immigrant rights, but I *need* to march for my aunt and for my grandmother—White women who voted for Trump, who now demand I respect their decision. How do you move beyond the poles of fear and guilt? How do you demonstrate empathetic activism knowing you are part of the problem? How do you practice intersectionality within a feminist movement that appears to be predominantly White? I fall asleep on the bus around 3:00 a.m. with my phone in hand, typing a text back to my aunt that I never do send.

~

We arrive in D.C. amid a sea of buses neatly aligned in the Robert F. Kennedy Memorial Stadium. It is a true organizational feat of Tetris-like maneuvering. We bounce off the bus and join the masses, unsure of where to go at the moment but certain of our purpose. The parking lot itself resembles the largest protest movement I have ever participated in, and the sight of so many pink bodies moving swiftly between patches of fog is enough to trigger any social anxiety. Surprisingly, I find myself falling easily into

formation, just as Beyoncé instructed, as our feet step in rhythm on the walk to the metro station. We are a body politic in motion.

I remembered reading the newspapers prior to departing Athens, quickly glancing over the projected crowd sizes of the major march cities. An estimated 500,000 to be present in Washington, D.C. Despite knowing this number, there is nothing that could have prepared me for the sight of our subway station—a preview of the frenzied day ahead. It is brightly lit and brilliantly packed with thousands of protesters—demonstrators who hoist their signs in the air and yell impromptu call-and-response chants as we shuffle slowly from stop to stop. I weep openly on the train, unembarrassed by the weight that has been immediately lifted from my body. I am surrounded by thousands of allies, many of whom wear my same hat and boast my same stickers, pins, and poster slogans. Trapped underground in a confined space of concrete floors and peeling walls, I feel at peace among the company of my sisters.

As we exit the metro station and begin our walk toward Independence Avenue & 3rd Street, I see groups of protesters joining hands. They are mostly White but sprinkled among them are Native Americans in ceremonial garb, orthodox Jews in tichels and snoods, Latin@s with elaborately decorated banners in Spanish, trans* women bravely disclosing their identities on T-shirts and signs, and hundreds of thousands of excitedly bobbing pink heads.

We are among the early arrivers and easily secure a spot on 5th Avenue, close to a set of speakers and a jumbo television screen. Jasiri X, spoken word poet and radical Black activist, stands on stage, leaning into the microphone and shouts, “When I say people, you say power! People . . .” “Power.” “People . . .” “POWER.” The response is deafening. The topography of the city’s landscape prevents me from seeing how far the crowd stretches, but I hear the voices of the masses speak in unison with mine. Our words echo across the capital, and we immediately fall silent, many of us amazed and frightened by the intensity of our words. I know that this moment will define my experience here today. I cannot see the bodies of those who surround me, but I feel their presence, hear their demands, and together we will march. Power by the people. Power to the people.

I watch the day unfold in front of me like a blur of chaotic beauty filled with collective anger, sadness, and fear. I am expecting the speeches to be uplifting messages of relentless hope and optimism but soon feel confused by my relief that they are not. The speeches are raw and vulnerable, dynamic and forceful in the call to justice. We hear from Sophie Cruz, a 6-year-old crusader of immigrant rights, and from the mothers of Trayvon Martin, Dontre Hamilton, Eric Garner, and Jordan Davis who demand we do better and “say their names.” Gloria Steinem reminds us that the Constitution does not begin with “I,” but rather with “We, the people,” and in a fierce appeal to solidarity, Janet

Mock affirms that “We are here not merely to gather, but to move. It requires us to defend one another when it is difficult and dangerous. It requires us to truly see ourselves and one another” (Rabideau, 2017).

I reach for my phone on the inside of my coat pocket and from the roar of the crowd send a video to my aunt. “Please listen.”

Alane

It’s 11:50 p.m., and the six of us are spread throughout the aisles of a rural southeastern Ohio Wal-Mart. Fluorescent lights flicker overhead as I toss Pringles and granola bars mindlessly into a basket, stocking up for the 12:58 departure of a charter bus bound for the Women’s March on Washington. I’m half afraid that my knitted pink cat-ear hat (topped with a #BlackLivesMatter pin) will attract unwanted attention, and half hoping it will. It is the result of a liminal emotional space between aggressive, hopeful, despairing, and faithful that has pursued me since November 8th. The atmosphere here is alternately manically chatty and tersely silent, not unlike the vibrant tension of Election Night. We gathered together then, too. We were drinking a vat of tequila punch, colored a violent electric blue in honor of the assured victory of Democrat Hillary Clinton, that seemed to be mocking us as results kept rolling in. Mutual assertions of a changing tide were exchanged often during the first hours. Eventually, these swaggering words of confidence petered into silence, then into wordless tears and an inability to meet each other’s eyes. What we imagined would be a party felt more like a wake; I left before the final word on the subject, unable to bear the tense weight of my fellow Americans’ choices.

The aftermath of that day hit us all differently. I settled into a depressed guilt. After all, White women elected Trump. Those were my people. I grew up in rural central Pennsylvania, in a valley filled to the brim with the kind of pro-military, pro-gun, pro-Bush, I-Bleed-Red-White-and-Blue conservatives that flourish in former coal country. I always thought the solution was to take my liberal self out of the equation, to find a tribe of like-minded liberals and work in our own enclave to make social progress. Trump’s election was a too-real, visceral negation of that opinion that clearly, too many of us had felt. But still I grit my teeth and bit my tongue in the days after Trump’s election victory. The inside of my mouth became an embodiment of my war against Trump and all that he stood for: the telltale clicks and snaps of my jaw were volleys of gunshots and the open pits of canker sores that lined the inside of my lips were the hollowed results of missile impacts. Every morning I woke up tasting blood, another battle lost overnight to my neurotic manifestations of stress.

These were the battles that drove us onto that bus, a \$90 commitment that was deeply felt on a graduate

student budget. I sat on the bus and continued to wrestle with the White Woman question. I had lacked any way to break bread with my ideological opponents when we shared the same school, church, and Main Street. Now, I was one of the enemy—a professor, a card-carrying feminist, a career woman who wanted to keep her maiden name and wrinkled her nose at children. But above all of that, I was a White woman in a straight relationship. What right did I have to cry out when my sisters of color or my visibly queer friends were suddenly putting themselves in an increased line of fire just by existing?

And so, I said nothing. I laced my boots and got on the bus, to find myself behind two women in their sixties. They were cheerfully pouring wine into paper cups. These were battles they had fought before, they casually related to me. The second-wave activism of the 1970s and early 1980s. The girl-power celebrations of the 1990s. And still they boarded the bus, drinking wine, continuing to protest with a smile.

Was that smile to be lauded or condemned? How do I quantify the worth of 45 years of protest if the protestor has never felt danger, has never been turned away or beat down or spat on? How do I condemn them for treating the event like a sleepover if I have never been beat down? I was still wrestling with these questions as the bus pulled into D.C. in the weak, drizzly light of dawn on January 21. Our group joined the throng making its way toward the Mall, passing hustlers making the most of the opportunity to turn an easy profit on hats and T-shirts. Uniformed armed service men and women dotted the route; to my surprise they were almost unanimously shouting approval and pumping fists energetically in the air. “Show him what we think!” a Black woman shouted from the steps of the U.S. Army National Guard Armory, her eyes gleaming with ferocity beneath her camouflage Army cap. Almost unanimously, the workers of Washington (traffic cops, subways employees) nodded their approval and communicated their solidarity.

My shoulders began to relax at this rainbow of approval, and I lessened my obsessive fretting on what my job was at this event. The subway interchange—a cavernous underground room flanked by massive staircases—was packed with people. Hoisting signs in the air, carrying toddlers on shoulders, shouting, chanting, holding hands, all oriented toward a single purpose. The signs that surround me range from a hasty Sharpie scrawl on one foot of cardboard to elaborate, professionally produced contraptions that soar six feet into the air and can be worn like a backpack. Signs bearing signatures of those unable to attend, signs tossing out representative publics ranging from North Carolina to Guatemala. The continuous, oceanic swell of chanting: This is what democracy looks like!

#BlackLivesMatter.

#IStandWithIndigenousPeoples.

#RiseUp.

#Resist.

The signs appropriated popular catchphrases (“Got abortion?”), older activism slogans, and insults (“fight like a girl!”) to serve the cause of the demonstration. Advocates for everything (abortion, women’s health, arts and culture, immigration rights, anti-corporatization of everything) pushed toward the turnstiles. Turns out, people of all shapes and colors can be similarly inept at swiping through the D.C. metro. Despite the crush of the crowd, I hadn’t breathed this easy in weeks. I stop chewing on the inside of my lips and continued taking in the displays of resistance. A beautiful hand-painted banner depicting a hijab-clad Gaia flutters from a pole in front of me.

And then, there’s the hats. Fuchsia. Orchid. Magenta. Bubble gum. Peony. Cadillac. Lavender. Cotton candy. Coral. Plum. Rose. Lipstick. Watermelon. They’re knitted, crocheted, and felted in all shades, ranging from tight little caps to oversized floppy head-pillowcases. I am aware of the backlash against the hats, the cries that associating pink with womanhood is both reductively feminine and white-washing the realities of brown, tan, darker genitalia. But as I look at the thousands of people surging up those stairs in the subway station, the power of the visual message is undeniable: I am here. I do not agree with this election. I will demonstrate this farce with absurdity of my own design.

Together, we are many.

The crowd was largely White, there was no denying it. Protestors wore the undeniable privilege of being able to afford to travel to the March, find care for any young children who couldn’t participate in the event, take time off from work if needed to make the journey. But the longer I stood in the crowd, feeling the occasional raindrop, grimacing through the pain in my knees and ankles that blossomed as the crowd kept individuals from moving, stretching, or changing positions, the more I thought—good. These White women are EXACTLY the people who needed to be here. I watched as older women like the wine drinkers from the bus listened to America Ferrera demand “an end to the systemic murder and incarceration of our Black brothers and sisters” (Chan, 2017). I watched as Millennial girls my own age, some of whom supported Hillary Clinton but many of whom withdrew from a system they deemed exploitative and opportunistic, witnessed the Mothers of the Movement and heard Angela Davis insist that America is “a country anchored in slavery and colonialism . . . Spreading xenophobia, hurling accusations of murder and rape and building walls will not erase history” (Chan, 2017). Together, we witnessed.

“We’re Not Going Away”: Media Coverage and Sustained Momentum

Media’s responses to the March focused on both the exhilarating momentum of the effort and the tension-filled backlash against the effort from those who called it too liberal or too conservative. *The Washington Post* noted that while the causes the March represented—reproductive rights, equal pay, quality affordable health care, attention to and action on climate change—were worthy issues to champion under President Obama or Secretary Clinton’s candidacy, a narrow focus on social issues ignored the reality of a Trump administration (Editorial Board, 2017a). In other words, identity politics is “too small” for a world in which pressing political concerns include “the way technology and globalization are decimating jobs and tearing the social fabric; the way migration is redefining nation-states; the way the post-World War II order is increasingly being rejected as a means to keep the peace” (Brooks, 2017). Social issues that ostensibly should have been a uniting factor for women eager to protest became divisive; women who were eager to protest, yet strongly identified with a pro-life label, felt alienated by the adamant pro-choice stance laid out by the March organizers. The demands of the pro-life crowd (including one out of six women who voted for Hillary Clinton) raised questions about what American feminism would even look like without the abortion divide (Stolberg, 2016). Internal debates aside, complaints that marchers were too focused on a narrow or unrealistic view of the nation’s problems were not the only accusations hurled against the event.

Issues of unequal representation plagued the March from start to finish. The social media groups that sprung up to plan and discuss the March soon became filled with testimonies from women of color regarding their dissatisfaction with the mostly White women running the March effort, asking them to “talk less and listen more” to comprehend how the sense of fear and unease that White women experienced postelection had been a constant state for the people of color community for centuries (Stockman, 2017). White women on the ground split into two camps in response to this: those who heeded the message and those who, like South Carolina minister Jennifer Willis, canceled their plans to participate because they no longer felt welcome. The March’s organizers, however, ran with the message. First they changed the event’s name, recognizing that the original “Million Woman March” label appropriated the historic 1997 event led by and for Black women. But what truly shifted the nature of the March was the inclusion of three national co-chairs: Tamika Mallory, Linda Sarsour, and Carmen Perez, all women of color with extensive experience organizing radical social change efforts. Together with original organizer Bob Bland, the four women worked to foreground inclusivity, building a program on the day of

the March featuring speakers like renowned civil rights activist Angela Davis, Malcolm X’s daughter Ilyasah Shabazz, Latina actress America Ferrera, National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) representatives, trans* advocates, a rabbi, indigenous American activists, criminal justice system reformers, and more. Perez told *The Huffington Post* that White women who continued to withdraw from the March over racial concerns were misplacing their concern: “yes, there have been people making remarks, questioning the lack of diversity, but they’re reassured by our presence—they know our work, our history of movement building” she explained (Ruiz-Grossman, 2016).

The famous women of color who spoke at the March took up the gauntlet of inclusivity thrown down by the event organizers with seriousness. Ferrera opened the March with an unexpectedly aggressive, passionate message for the newly inaugurated President Trump:

We are gathered here and across the country and around the world today to say . . . We reject the demonization of our Muslim brothers and sisters . . . We demand an end to the systemic murder and incarceration of our Black brothers and sisters. . . . We will not ask our LGBTQ families to go backwards. We will not go from being a nation of immigrants, to a nation of ignorance. (Chan, 2017)

In keeping with her long history in civil rights activism, Angela Davis spoke out to warn listeners against falling into the traps of history:

At a challenging moment in our history, let us remind ourselves that we the hundreds of thousands, the millions of women, trans people, men and youth who are here at the Women’s March, we represent the powerful forces of change that are determined to prevent the dying cultures of racism, heteropatriarchy from rising again. We recognize that we are collective agents of history and that history cannot be deleted like web pages . . . The freedom struggles of Black people that have shaped the very nature of this country’s history cannot be deleted with the sweep of a hand. We cannot be made to forget that Black lives do matter . . . Spreading xenophobia, hurling accusations of murder and rape and building walls will not erase history. No human being is illegal. (Davis, 2017)

However, not all women who participated in the official agenda of the March were met with rallying cries of support and celebration. Madonna’s violent, profanity-laden speech that invoked her dreams of blowing up the White House attracted criticism from everyone from Trump himself to Cyndi Lauper (French, 2017). Ashley Judd’s reinterpretation of a slam poem originally written by a 19-year-old Tennessee resident was hailed as alternately a powerful breakout performance or a profanely provocative one (Kelly, 2017;

Robinson, 2017). Nagging criticisms of speech content added to a growing lists of fractures, caused by supporters and detractors alike.

Amid the internal and external controversies, however, the March remained “a phenomenal success and an important cultural moment. Most everybody came back uplifted and empowered. Many said they felt hopeful for the first time since Election Day” (Brooks, 2017). Perhaps one of the most striking aspects of the Women’s March on Washington was the extent to which it galvanized the youngest generations. Wortham (2017) noted that at the main event in D.C., “there were children everywhere, and their presence was one of the more hopeful notes of the day’s events, suggesting a long future of activism.” The interest and involvement of teenage protestors did not stop with young girls. Plank (2017) wrote for *Vox* that while she was at the March, she saw a group of teenage boys leading a chant in the crowd:

When I asked them if they identified as feminists, they shouted “yes of course . . .” For the young boys of this politically activated generation, being part of a movement led by women isn’t controversial, it’s painfully normal.

Teen Vogue magazine capitalized on the young adult interest and emerged as a surprisingly strong source of reporting on the March, including stories on protest slogans on signs and clothing, the famous speakers at the event, and testimonials from teenage girls and young women on why they attended the event. In a more official capacity, the Women’s March organizers launched the WMW Youth Ambassadors program to create a sponsored space for politically active youth to make their voices heard; the 28 girls who were selected as ambassadors are described as

rock-star youth who are inspiring their communities through advocacy and activism. They are not waiting to grow up to “be the change.” They are the change . . . They have distinct voices and are exemplary leaders in their communities. (“Youth Initiative,” n.d.)

Capturing the energy of the young adults who were fired up about political action was just one part of the Women’s March on Washington’s plan for continuing political resistance. The WMW launched the 10 Actions in 100 Days campaign immediately following the March. The campaign aims to bring the energy of the D.C. and sister Marches home to local communities by providing political actions via email lists in easily digestible 10-day increments (“10 actions 100 days,” n.d.). Similar efforts to continue protest momentum and avoid political fatigue were enacted by Michael Moore and various political websites that created lists of actions (representatives to call, issues to highlight) for citizens to follow along with day-by-day (Tsfaye, 2017). For marchers who want to take even more direct action, pro-choice

Democratic political group Emily’s List has launched training sessions on running for office at the local and state levels (“Run for Office,” n.d.). The success of these efforts will be difficult to determine until the midterm elections play out in 2018.

In response to the calls for greater intersectionality, the Pantsuit Nation Facebook page has emerged as a safe place for women of color, trans* people, immigrants, Muslims, and other historically marginalized individuals to share their stories of oppression and resistance. The invitation-only social media group emerged as a pro-Clinton election space. Now, postelection, the page has almost four million members searching for solidarity (Poloni-Staudinger, 2017).

The massive success of the Women’s March in terms of simply bringing bodies to the national capital naturally inspired similar protest efforts. A “March for Science” is hoping to sue similar social media mobilization tactics to bring supporters to Washington, D.C., on April 22, 2017, to protest the current administration’s devaluing of scientific evidence, as well as the proposed travel bans that severely impact researchers from Middle Eastern nations who work and research at American universities (Achenbach, 2017). Some scientists remain unconvinced that the grassroots protest approach is appropriate for the defense of science; some, displaying a degree of recalcitrant self-assuredness, posit that the concerns over the current administration’s choices and policies are merely overblown examples of “Trump derangement syndrome” (Khazan, 2017). Detractors and skeptics notwithstanding, the proposed March for Science has 397,131 supporters on its official Facebook page.

In one additional attempt to capitalize on the popularity of the March, the WMW organizers proposed a strike, called A Day Without a Woman, on March 8 (International Women’s Day). They urged women to participate in three ways:

1. Women take the day off, from paid and unpaid labor.
2. Avoid shopping for one day (with exceptions for small, women- and minority-owned businesses).
3. Wear RED in solidarity with A Day Without a Woman (“A Day Without a Woman,” n.d.).

While the intention behind the event was to demonstrate the value of women in terms of their economic contributions and their domestic labor, the effort was widely criticized. Detractors pointed out that without a clear goal for the strike, it would simply encourage G.O.P. opponents to label it a liberal “hissy fit,” drawing attention away from more targeted efforts of resistance; the day was also criticized as an explicitly upper-class idea, and one that failed to take into consideration the material needs of working mothers who could not afford to miss a day of employment and possibly lose their jobs entirely (Carpenter, 2017; Chira, Abrams, & Rogers, 2017). Yet despite the economic assumptions of A Day

Without a Woman and varied accusations of purposelessness that continue to be levied against liberal Trump administration detractors, the success of the March and its encompassing movement cannot be overstated.

Theorizing and Politicizing the Women's March as a Transnational Movement

We are huddled shoulder-to-shoulder, hip-to-hip as we stand on our tiptoes to see the television screens stationed on the corners of each block. Our bodies are exhausted; knees are aching, hips are popping, and foot arches scream in protest of the protest. But these temporary physical pains remind us of the larger, deeper ache that brought us here—a pain that reflects an imbedded fear and insecurity with the current administration. Despite the discomfort and its attendant frustration, here, in this moment, we are united and protective of each other and the affective burdens we bear. We pass along tissues for those who weep alongside the Mothers of the Movement; we hold hands in moments of silence for trans* individuals who have fallen victim to acts of violence and suicide; we smile knowingly at Angela Davis's challenge for our movement to "do more"; and we yell and scream and chant and cry in a space that has been organized specifically for our bodies—a celebrated reminder of our diversity in appearance and experience. The galvanization of support from millions of women around the world was not simply a logistical achievement but a testament to a larger message of solidarity, punctuated by a revitalized understanding of intersectionality.

Kimberlé Crenshaw's (1989) original use of the term "intersectional" invited new ways to consider identity and its relationship to power as minorities worked to undo a veil of invisibility and exclusion. Similarly, Patricia Hill Collins and Sirma Bilge's (2016) foundational work, *Intersectionality*, defined the term as related to the construction and formation of social identities, examining the ways in which gender, race, class, sexuality, and so forth, can transect to create "interlocking systems of oppression," "matrixes of domination," and "vectors of oppression and privilege."

In line with this theoretical framework, co-founder/co-chair Bob Bland released an official statement of diversity regarding the origins of the March and its collective attitude toward inclusivity, with her calling upon White women to "understand their privilege, and acknowledge the struggle that women of color face" (Tolentino, 2017). In an interview with Rahel Gebreyes of *The Huffington Post*, Mallory explained that she

wanted to ensure that there was no way that I would allow a convening to happen in this country, where women of color were not just a part of the conversation but rather helping to set the tone for what the conversation would be. (Gebreyes, 2017)

Sarsour added that "We were directing this March. We were helping to set the agenda. And we made sure our sisters our native sisters, our Mexican sisters, our undocumented sisters, trans women of color, that we were the March" (Gebreyes, 2017). Such statements from the co-chairs of the March were directly aimed at critics of the movement who were skeptical that such a large happening could truly meet the demands of a diverse public.

As Audre Lorde (1984) explored in *Sister Outsider*, recognizing difference is inherent to tackling the complexities of intersectional identity. As a fierce advocate for collaborative engagement across genders, races, ethnicities, religions, and disciplines, Lorde argued that

We sharpen self-definition by exposing the self in work and struggle together with those whom we define as different from ourselves, although sharing the same goals. For Black and white, old and young, lesbian and heterosexual women alike, this can mean new paths to our survival. (p. 123)

For the Women's March, leveraging the movement for women and communities of color became a grounding priority and was consistently addressed throughout the day's events. Sarsour praised the courageous conversations between White and minority women as a mutual learning opportunity that placed women of color at the center of the discussion. Reflecting upon the organization and themes of speeches she stated, "It was women of color and they were the majority. We made sure that we talked about the very issues impacting us, and guess what? White women were right behind us" (Gebreyes, 2017).

Sarsour's framing here is of the utmost import. Many feminist practices, especially in the Second Wave movements of 1960s-1980s, solely privileged the narratives of White women, to the detriment of universal equality efforts (Cobble, Gordon, & Henry, 2014). Therefore, the success of the Women's March became contingent on the organizers' ability to reorient the dominant script toward woman of color or those whose struggles are often ignored by the whitewashing of feminism. In this sense, the Women's March is perhaps the first large-scale movement that pushes beyond notions of allies to that of accomplices. *Indigenous Action Media* explained that "Ally has become an identity, disembodied from any real mutual understanding of support . . . [but] when we fight back or forward, together, becoming complicit in a struggle towards liberation, we are accomplices." Most important, though, is that as accomplices, we are "compelled to become accountable and responsible to each other, that is the nature of trust" (Editorial Board, 2014). Accompliceship additionally requires a commitment to dismantling the colonial structures and ideals that all too often frame mass protest contexts. We proudly witnessed the convergence of so many "nasty women" who stood alongside their queer, colored, and differently-abled sisters

and promised the “defense of one another when it is difficult and dangerous” (Rabideau, 2017).

Recognizing these strengths and struggles of individual identities, the Women’s March leaned heavily on Lorde’s (1984) proclamation to “allow each other our differences at the same time as we recognize our sameness” (p. 142). In fact, many of Lorde’s essays were referenced prominently throughout the day, among speech messages, chant phrases, and poster signage. Proclamations of “Your silence will not protect you” echoed throughout metro stations with banners held high that “I am not free while any woman is unfree, even when her shackles are very different from my own” (p. 41, pp. 134-135). This rallying movement of intersectionality challenges many of our political assumptions and shifts our understanding of collective protest, reminding us that identities and groups are always constructed in connection (and constricted) in relation to others.

As such, the exercise of protest and the plural performance of intersectional solidarity quite literally makes the body present in a viewable space of public appearance. Women protest their disenfranchisement, harkening to Moraga and Anzaldúa’s (1981) pivotal reminder that “Nobody’s going to save you . . . There is no one who will feed the yearning. Face it. You will have to do, do it yourself” (p. 200). With strength in numbers, the Women’s March did just that—an exercise of rights in which the body (both of the individual and of the collective) re/claimed its power, declaring

Mujeres, a no dejar que el peligro del viaje y la inmensidad del territorio nos asuste—a mirar hacia adelante y a abrir paso en el monte. (Women, let’s not let the danger of the journey and the vastness of the territory scare us—let’s look forward and open paths in these woods. (Moraga & Anzaldúa, 1981, p. v)

Interestingly, Anzaldúa’s writings on borders and homes translate quite well into a space of unbounded activist and resistance efforts. Intersectional protest renders the body politic a fluid entity and one that ebbs and flows while marching for collective recognition and representation. This frontier of feminism knows no walls or nations but rather encourages a recognition of difference and a subsequent movement toward collaboration—a perspective that advocates for an intersectional set of understandings, tools, and practices that attend to the logics of patriarchy. Of course, feminist theory in and of itself can be wrought with tension and fraught in its strands of practice, but the March demonstrated a much-needed moment of repair—a thoughtful move toward intersectional solidarity and accompliceship.

Here we turn to Inderpal Grewal and Caren Kaplan’s (1994) work on transnational feminism in *Scattered*

Hegemonies: Postmodernity and Transnational Feminist Practices and the subsequent writings of Chandra Mohanty (e.g., Mohanty, Russo, & Torres, 1991; Mohanty & Alexander, 1996; Mohanty, 2003). Working toward a more robust understanding of feminist activism in global contexts, transnational feminism addresses intersectionality from the lens of postmodernity. Focusing on the global processes of colonialism, transnational feminism reorients its focus toward exploitation on a global scale and works toward solidarity as its own political act. Leele Fernandes’ (2013) *Transnational Feminism in the United States* provides an exemplary model to follow as she argues for the unsettling of nationalization in the transnational paradigm and establishes the need for interdisciplinary reflection in knowledge production, particularly from an American lens of analysis regarding othered bodies. As she navigates between themes of visual knowledge, new forms of disciplinary regimes, and the relationship and contradictions between power, knowledge, and ethics, Fernandes works to disrupt the “beliefs that often circulate among transnational and postcolonial academic feminists that a transnational feminist perspective marks a break from older regressive approaches that take the nation-state as their primary unit of analysis” (p. 23). As such, the book aims to challenge the “disciplining of the discipline” by de/constructing the trajectory of transnational feminism in the U.S. academy.

From this perspective, the Women’s March hinges between a national, U.S. framework and a mass, global scale. Interestingly, the movement does not focus attention on the U.S. woman as a unit of analysis but rather on the varying cross-cultural experiences of global womanhood. The March’s critique of the Trump presidency is not bound by the borders of the United States. Rather, it flattens the nation-state to examine how feminist struggles emerge and multiply around the world, particularly with regard to the projected Muslim travel ban, the destruction of sacred burial sites at Standing Rock, and the proposed Mexico border wall. As such, the March’s continual push toward intersectional solidarity attends well to the tangled identities of women on a mass scale, advocating for protest as a deterritorialized movement.

Situating the March as a type of diversely decentered activism is perhaps the first productive step toward recognizing the potential of what Hardt and Negri (2000) describe as the multitude. *Empire* details the ongoing globalization of economic and cultural spheres in a now postmodern era, contending that a new global order has emerged with a reimagined logic and structure of rule. *Empire* indicates the declining sovereignty of nation-states and the rise of a Foucauldian-like network of decentered, expanding, all-englobing power. Though the practice of *Empire* is driven by violence and control, its holistic concept remains dedicated to a perpetual and universal peace, encouraging the creative

forces of the multitude to work toward interdisciplinary counter-movements that reimagine and invert traditional democratic forms. Hardt and Negri (2000) explain the multitude as not being

posed merely against the imperial system—they are not simply negative forces. They also express, nourish, and develop positively their own constituent projects . . . This constituent aspect of the movement of the multitude, in its myriad faces, is really the positive terrain of the historical construction of Empire. (p. 61)

This invocation of the activist multitude or resistive body politic is an oft-cited thread among many postmodern, post-structuralist feminist writings. Hardt and Negri's (2012) *Declaration* employs the multitude as effective resisters in the Occupy Wall Street Movement, forming what they term a new enactment of “commoning” or resistive creative processes. The fruitful contributions of bell hooks, Judith Butler, and Adrienne Rich offer similar insights, reminding audiences that feminism is not simply a theoretical, analytic lens but an active practice dedicated to exposing and transforming hegemonic power structures. The March's continued investment in intersectional approaches to feminism best explains its success in rallying global support. The organizers made visible the struggles of representation without essentializing or speaking for the minority as one mass. The March's act of commoning is one that carefully attends to the nuances of solidarity through the platform of accessible activism. Applying concepts from bell hooks's (2014) *Feminism Is for Everybody: Passionate Politics* and, more recently, Sara Ahmed's (2017) *Living a Feminist Life*, the March addresses the neocolonial forces of Trump's administration in a thoughtful reminder that “the soul of our politics is the commitment to ending domination” (hooks, 2014, p. 103).

The Women's March does not just attend to, but makes central, an inclusive approach to feminism that demonstrates the need to sustain a vision of intersectional justice. Three decades after Crenshaw first coined the concept, she reminds us why intersectionality can't wait: “We simply do not have the luxury of building social movements that are not intersectional, nor can we believe we are doing intersectional work just by saying words” (Crenshaw, 2015). At around 5:00 p.m., the mob of protestors thronging the streets around the mall began to dissipate. Our small band picked up signs and fanny packs and straggled back toward the lineup of buses. We refueled our bodies with hamburgers and coffee and discussed our similarly-renewed political desires and hopes. Back on the bus, our fellow riders were eager to compare experiences, sharing favorite speeches and memorable signs. The anxiety that had hovered over the morning hours was replaced by cautious optimism and pride in our fellow protestors, and a tacit acknowledgment that while things were not magically perfect now, today we

had at least taken concrete action toward reforming the social and political landscape of the nation.

Final Reflections and Reimagined Futures

We left D.C. feeling invigorated, profoundly affected, and driven by reshaped imaginings of this activist movement. In addition to an ontological shift within ground-level protests, there has also been a turn in academia, and one that we believe remains crucial to the ongoing success of feminist efforts—a turn toward critical self-reflection and the fluid folding of theory into praxis. We are moved by the recent theory-building of Sara Ahmed, Leela Fernandes, and Trinh Minh-ha, among many others, and remain cautiously optimistic that the global scale of the Women's March will continue to sustain its momentum and produce actionable change across social, political, and interdisciplinary platforms.

For academics, this is of particular import. Our curricula and teachings must reflect a sincere commitment to intersectional understanding and critical resistance, encouraging civic participation, and democratic reform. Carmen Perez affirmed that “we will not adjust to hatred and bigotry. We will resist” (Przybyla & Schouten, 2017). Or, as protestors across the nation and the world in January repeated, louder and louder: This is what democracy looks like.

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Author Biographies

Rachel Presley is a doctoral student of Rhetoric & Public Culture at Ohio University where she studies concepts of citizenship, social change, and protest movements through the lens of postcolonial and decolonial theory. Her ongoing scholarship is guided by an overarching interest in critical theory and resistance rhetorics within marginalized and peripheral communities, particularly regarding Native American activism and transnational feminist movements.

Alane Presswood is a Visiting Assistant Professor and Director of Oral Communication at Hollins University. Her research focuses on the intersections of feminism, digital media, and public address.