

## Epilogue: Marching On

Annessa Ann Babic

**ABSTRACT:** A former Riot Grrrl, an activist, an educator, an historian, a cultural creator, and a writer reflects on the power and meaning of the 2017 and 2018 Women's Marches, the evolving interpretations of feminism, and the continual power and perception of change.

**KEYWORDS:** intersectionality; gender; women's march; women's studies; riot grrrl; protests; movement

*Needing approval is a female cultural disease, and often a sign of doing the wrong thing.*

Gloria Steinem



2017 Women's March, NYC. Photo courtesy of Annessa Ann Babic.

The day after Donald Trump's inauguration women, in eighty countries, poured into streets, shops, allies, and parks to show literal and metaphorical signs of their voices. These women—

educated, young, old, undereducated, pregnant, injured, healthy, and in near every stage of life—aligned for a moment of activism, unity, and progress. The scope of their outpouring, in transnationality and numbers, is more than enough to cause a moment of pause. Each group and person held their own reasons and ideals for giving up a Saturday to stand, walk, and assemble for hours. Some were angered over the treatment of women, some were outraged that a political candidate won the US presidency after a long history of degradation and abuse toward women came to light (most famously the "Grab 'em by the pussy" statement), some were angered that women were still coming in second place, and some...The list is long, arduous, and emotional. A year later women did it again. For the first march, 21 January 2017, roughly 653 marches occurred in the United States, with more than 100,000 marchers in Washington DC alone. Though, in rural locales—like Wyoming—nearly 5000 came out statewide. These numbers, examined throughout the United States and globally, show a striking mobilization of voices and grassroots power. In the United States the estimated marchers stand at 318,900,000 marchers. That number is around 1.3 percent of the population, or about 0.7 percent smaller than the combined US military forces. Being more precise about one in one hundred marched, and while that means ninety-nine did not it does not discount the magnitude of this event. The only real competitors to its size, and force, are the 1969–1970 Vietnam War Moratorium days worldwide and the first Earth Day in 1970 (estimating between 10 and 20 million participants globally). The power, and importance, of this cultural awakening shows us the continuing movement of voice and action. Black Lives Matter, Standing Rock, and so forth have ignited a public awakening of sorts (Chenoweth and Pressman). In 2018 New York City saw more than 200,000 women take to the streets, Los Angeles saw 600,000, and Chicago more than 300,000. DC, Philadelphia, Austin, and other cities saw 1000s walk their streets under the banner of women's voices too. Of course, more local marches rose up making the second year easier to access, and as Vanessa Medina—a marcher in NYC—said "I feel like the revolution is now." In 2017 she did not march, but in 2018 she took her eleven-year-old with her as the Times Up movement and revelations about sexual harassment and violence ignited her passion and fury ("Women's March 2018").

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2017 Women's March, NYC. Photo courtesy of Annessa Ann Babic.

The pussyhat movement, which has largely come to symbolize the marches with bright handspun pink hats (and hats of other colors) that form cat ears when worn, gives a nod to history as women of the French Revolution knitted resistor code into socks, caps, and scarves.

Here, again, the masses are using voice and symbol to speak for equality, justice, and reform. Second wave and third wave feminist made a substantial portion of these crowds, with the first wave feminists surprising groups as they came out holding signs and showing the younger generations beacons of hope. Icons of the Women's Movement like Gloria Steinem, mothers of young men killed by police bullets, Cecile Richards the president of Planned Parenthood, actress and humanitarian Ashley Judd, and a hearty list of others led the rally call (Women's March). Riot Grrrls and Gen Xers, like myself, who have essentially grown up and framed our lives once again found ourselves marching, like our second wave feminist sisters did. Though, this time the rise of millennials and Gen Z reminded us—and perhaps the world—that the battle is not won. Women join in combat, and in 2015 the US Army finally graduated female Rangers from the elite school (Thompson). As we learned shortly after the 2018 march, we will see a woman US senator give birth while holding office as Tammy Duckworth has announced the pregnancy of her second child (Neuman). Even more striking, Duckworth is a disabled veteran who is breaking even more boundaries with her gender and race. Inside all of these debates, we are still winning and still paving news roads.

Though, sadly, as a collective whole women are still fighting the same battles our ancestral sisters already fought. Just as we marched on 21 January 2017, and did it again 20 January 2018, the collective reasoning can be asserted that women are not seeking approval. No, instead they are demanding equality, respect, and dignity. In 1995 Hilary Clinton famously said to the UN Women's Council "Women's rights are human rights." Shockingly, in 2018 this argument is still a matter of social debate as sexual harassment claims from Hollywood to the local fast food joint anger and awaken us, a rape culture pervades in the American heartland and in the Indian countryside and Afghani hills, and as women are barred from doing their jobs at religious sites with literal walls of men (i.e., the Wailing Wall).

American women still make less than men. Let that sink in for a minute. The country with the largest army and a long-respected political system continues to pay its women roughly one-third less than men. The pay debate is complicated, but the thrust of it falls into the folds of arguments we all know, have experienced, and even still see. Women are still deemed the

caregivers, taker of less risky jobs, the second seat, and the list is long. Thus, is there a concrete reason why women marched? Certainly not. Are there concrete reasons to march and be angry? Absolutely.



2017 Women's March, NYC. Photo courtesy of Anessa Ann Babic.

As the media outlets found themselves covering the march, a year later, the conversation evolved from why march to why still march. Why? The second year was easier, as more local and grassroots marches allowed women to display their activism at home, between soccer practice and family weekend plans (Wallace). Though, the force and lasting resilience of this moment says more about vitality, need, and strength than what the curious observer could froth. Instead, the anger of the masses stems from the “nightmare year” of Trump’s first year in office. The shock of his affair with adult movie star Stormy Daniels, the public display is his wife refusing to hold his hand (long before and now after the Daniels revelation), Trump’s embarrassing (and aggravating) flub at the annual pro-life rally saying babies should not be born in the ninth month, and then the news that Trump’s administration was toying with the

idea of forcing an abortion reversal procedure on an immigrant teen being held for deportation (McCafee; Sherman). Aside from the last matter being scientifically unfounded and unproven, the assaults on environmental programs, education, and public services has continued to shock the American and global arenas.

Though much like this inaugural issue of *WiN* seeks to explore, the values, status, and public space of women are still under contention. As more women have signed up to run for office, taken office, and serve the public the sheer force of numbers is an alarm that—to be cliché—the future is female. From border crossers, to political adversaries, the voice of the female has long risen above the crowds. Just as the attempts to define, control, and mandate black hair (see Sneddon's apt piece) and the ferocity of the female warrior (discussed by Monnet) that continually pushes narratives of gender, race, and class forward the face and nature of the female, her future, and geopolitical and transnational space remains unknown. Our paths and goals may never be perfectly aligned, but as with any great fight the effort proves out in the end. What we do have to remember is that with as many fights as we have overcome we have to maintain our victories via voice, action, and persistence. Complacency puts our progress—and democracy—in jeopardy. After all, this is not just about the individual. Instead, we are rising up to voice a collective choir that paves the way for those after us.

Andrea Morgan, of Orvando, Montana, captures this essence du jour well.

Now more than ever we need to speak up, show up and be active citizens. My adopted 16-year-old daughter is a biracial Latina, and I am attending the Women's March again, alongside her, in order to show her that our voices matter, and that the power of a strong, intelligent and diverse population is what makes America worth protecting (“Women's Marches Across the Country”).

Just as Susan B. Anthony paved the way for women with her vote and fought for the legalized right, this current moment—with a collective of generations uniting—stands to show the next batch of engineers, designers, writers, and dreamers that we are not lost, cast off, or shadows in the darkness. Instead, we have the ability, reason, and design to work alongside men, women, and children to create a better functioning world, society, and community. Women, now and before us, do not need to seek acceptance. Instead, in the mindset of Gloria Steinem

we must walk, march, and run against the expected and mainstream. We must continue the progress, fight, and journey so that we do not reverse our roles and wake up finding ourselves as shells of what our collective promise once was.

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