

Handout 1: The Women's March, January 2017

The notion of intersectional feminism received increased attention early in 2017, as energy around the Women's March on Washington picked up. The march, which began organically as a grassroots effort on Facebook, was criticized almost immediately for failing to include women of color among its organizers.

This changed as a more diverse team of women stepped up to help coordinate the effort. After the initial criticism, organizers took care to highlight the experiences of women of color and undocumented immigrant women.

But all this opened up discussions about race, racism, and the often unexamined privileges that white women enjoy. What would true solidarity and unity in the women's movement really mean?

The march, which took place just one day after Donald Trump's inauguration, brought up strong feelings, especially among women of color, about the fact that 53% of the white women who voted, had voted for Trump. A vocal segment of black feminists questioned the march organizers' call for solidarity across racial lines, when white women hadn't made enough of an effort to even win over a majority of their own ranks in the election. And where was the solidarity when, in the words of Black Lives Matter co-founder Alicia Garcia, "our people are being killed in the streets, jobless, homeless, over-incarcerated, undereducated"?

The discussion and debate caused some white women to voice discomfort. But the march's national organizers saw the conversation as an important one that needed to be had.

"This was an opportunity to take the conversation to the deep places," said Linda Sarsour, a march organizer who is Muslim and who heads the Arab American Association of New York. "Sometimes you are going to upset people."

Said Anne Valk, the author of *Radical Sisters*, a book about racial and class differences in the women's movement: "If your short-term goal is to get as many people as possible at the march, maybe you don't want to alienate people... But if your longer-term goal is to use the march as a catalyst for progressive social and political change, then that has to include thinking about race and class privilege."

Despite the changes in the march's leadership and stated focus, the 2017 march was still seen by many as centering mostly on cisgender, straight, white, middle-class women and their issues. These issues include breaking the glass ceiling in corporate America (that is, getting more women promoted to executive positions), and getting a woman elected President. (Note: the word "cisgender" or "cis" refers to people who exclusively identify with their sex assigned at birth. The term is used to call attention to the privilege of people who are not transgender.)

Said Juliet Williams, a professor of gender studies at UCLA: "In times like this, there is a real danger that feminism itself can function in an exclusionary manner by marginalizing less powerful and less privileged women and allies – the very people who most need feminism today."

That said, the 2017 women's march on Washington, and sister marches around the country, packed a massive punch of resistance. Along the way, there were opportunities for learning, for growth, and for harnessing the power of that punch in the run up to the 2018 women's rallies and marches that followed.