

JAST, 2022; 57: 71-92

Submitted: 21.02.2022

Accepted: 27.03.2022

ORCID# 0000-0002-7730-6601

**Still Struggling for Equality:
Women Activism in the Trump Era
S. Bilge Mutluay Çetintaş**

Abstract

The beginning of Donald Trump's presidency started with largest single day protest on January 21, 2017 in Washington DC and several other cities. Trump's sexist comments and his stance in reproductive rights had already caused concern. Dreading that their hard-earned rights would be revoked, several women groups organized an annually repeated Women's March. These marches used similar, yet creative new strategies of the 1970s Equal Rights Amendment (ERA) rallies. Protestors wore handcrafted pink pussyhats to present a unified front, composed new songs with critical lyrics, rehearsed online, sang the lyrics together with other well-known protest songs, and carried creative banners that referred to debated policies. In time, the themes and scope of these marches grew to encompass larger domestic and international issues. A Women's Agenda called for federal policies on ending violence against women, reproductive rights, racial justice, immigrant rights, LGBTQIA+ rights, disability rights, labor rights, civil rights and liberties, and environmental justice. Thus, during the Trump era women were reminded of their struggles in the 1970s from which they drew inspiration and motivation while forming innovative strategies to organize and create lasting influences on decision-making processes.

Keywords: Donald Trump, Phyllis Schlafly, Women's March, *Mrs. America*, 1970s

Eşitlik için Mücadeleye Devam: Donald Trump Döneminde Kadın Hareketleri

Öz

20 Ocak 2017 tarihinde, Başkan Donald Trump göreve başladıktan hemen sonra, Washington DC ve diğer iller gün boyunca süren geniş kapsamlı gösterilere sahne oldu. Trump'ın kullandığı cinsiyetçi dil ve kadın sağlığı konusundaki görüşleri zaten endişeyle izleniyordu. Çeşitli zorluklarla kazanılmış olan kadın hakları alanında geriye dönülebileceği endişesiyle, çeşitli kadın grupları her yıl tekrarlanan Kadın Yürüyüşleri düzenlendi. Bu protestolar sırasında 1970'lerde Eşit Haklar Yasası lehine yapılan gösterilere benzeyen ama daha yaratıcı olan stratejiler kullanıldı. Göstericiler birlikteliklerini vurgulamak için el işi pembe “kedi” şapkaları giydiler, eleştirel bakış açısıyla şarkılar bestelediler, şarkı sözlerini çevrimiçi öğrenerek bilinen diğer protesto şarkılarıyla birlikte söylediler ve güncel kaygılarına gönderme yapan yaratıcı pankartlar taşıdılar. İlerleyen yıllarda bu gösteriler diğer ulusal ve uluslararası sorunları kapsayarak genişletildi. Kadına karşı şiddet, kadın sağlığı, ırksal adalet, göçmenlerin durumu, LBGTQIA+, engelli ve işçi hakları, vatandaşlık hakları ve çevreyi koruma konusunda gereken yasaları içeren bir Kadın Ajandası hazırlandı. Böylece, Trump döneminde kadın grupları, 1970'lerdeki mücadelelerinin izinde ve güdümünde, karar verme ve yasal düzenlemelerin oluşturulması süreçlerinde etkili olmak için yaratıcı stratejiler kullandılar.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Donald Trump, Phyllis Schlafly, Kadın Yürüyüşleri, *Mrs. America*, 1970'ler

We are here and around the world for a deep democracy that says we will not be quiet. We will not be controlled. We will work for a world in which all countries are connected. God may be in the details but the goddess is in connections. We are at one with each other. We are looking at each other, not up. ...

When we elect a possible president, we too often go home. We've elected an impossible president. We're never going home. We're staying together and we're taking over.

Gloria Steinem

Women's March on Washington

January 21, 2017

About a month before Donald Trump won the presidential election of 2016, conservative activist Phyllis Schlafly, who had successfully campaigned in defeating the Equal Rights Amendment (ERA) in the 1970s, died on September 5, 2016. Although she never held an official position in the Republican governments, Schlafly had always been an influential supporter of conservative causes. Donald Trump—the presidential candidate she endorsed—attended Schlafly's funeral, addressing her as “a truly great American patriot” and paying homage to her by saying that the “movement has lost its hero. Believe me, Phyllis was there for me when it was not at all fashionable. Trust me” (Morin). Trump's supporting attitude and his expression “her legacy will live on” (Morin) must have reminded her earlier conservative stance to many for whom women causes mattered, suggesting that despite the fact that half a century had passed, debate over basic human rights remained an unfinished business. Phyllis Schlafly's last book entitled *The Conservative Case for Trump* was published the day after her death. Emma Green writes, “Phyllis Schlafly might be dead, but her America is alive and well . . . Trump is proof that Schlafly's political style and conservative values still resonate with a large portion of the American electorate” (Westenfeld). Schlafly's book, which outlines Trump's proposed policies on a number of issues, is also a reminder of the continuing backlash to the feminist movement.

Schlafly's campaigning against the ratification of the ERA is still remembered. Largely due to the backlash organized by her, in 1979

the 35 states out of the necessary 38 states fell short for the ratification of the Amendment designed to guarantee equal legal rights for every citizen, regardless of gender. Her name is often associated with negative connotations in the recent history of the feminist movement. During her campaigns, Schlafly started most of her speeches by thanking her husband for allowing her to attend that particular meeting and explained her reasoning behind these statements as, “I like to say that because it irritates the women’s libbers more than anything” (Kozłowska). She presented a content image of a suburban housewife as if to mock what Betty Friedan called “the feminine mystique.” She played the role of being unaware of the strategies of domestic patriarchal dominance. Betty Friedan had responded to Schlafly’s daring antifeminist remarks, stating that she should have “burned at the stake” for thwarting the amendment under the pretext that women’s role as a mother and wife would be harmed. In fact, feminists in the 1970s viewed Schlafly as hypocritical, since she enjoyed the privileges of a wealthy family and moved freely in political circles, which gave her further freedom to be an active agent in the public arena while emphasizing the virtues of traditional gender roles and ardently preaching to be domestic in her circles (Kozłowska). Schlafly’s active public campaigning through newsletters, meetings, and gatherings, as well as her insistence on pursuing a law degree later in life actually prove that she was performing domesticity rather than living such a life.

Women from all social stratifications undoubtedly recalled the discussions and debates during the ERA protests with Schlafly’s death. Additionally, Trump’s election victory, a few weeks later, must have rekindled the rise of dissenting voices and grassroots activism together with a number of novel media responses. The legacy of the Civil Rights Movements and the ERA campaigns could be observed clearly in the Women’s Marches during the Trump’s era. Trump’s presidency from January 20, 2017 to January 20, 2021 was marked with these Women’s Marches coupled with several other forms of online activism, which were as striking and as enthusiastic as the ones in the 1970s. A number of noteworthy events and benchmarks in terms of the women’s movement happened while Trump was in office and women’s dissenting voices became noticeable, due to the possibility of losing hard-earned rights or dreading the probability of stepping backwards on women related health issues. Phyllis Schlafly’s death was not indicative of the end of an era; just the opposite—as Trump had already voiced—it was the

beginning of a similar ideology, which, once again, required creative activism in the light of what was already lived and learned.

Trump's policies on women's issues became clear during the presidential campaigns and his daring and conservative rhetoric enraged several women groups. In the third and final presidential debate, when Hillary Clinton stated, "I will defend Planned Parenthood. I will defend Roe v. Wade, and I will defend women's rights to make their own health care decisions" (Clinton), he stated that he was in favor of leaving abortion or reproductive medicine support decisions to individual states. Such a decision would endanger abortion rights and would make it difficult for women to reach affordable care in certain states. He also called Hillary Clinton "such a nasty woman" in the same debate when she stated that she would raise taxes to deal with debts rather than cutting benefits for the needy (Berenson). This derogatory expression was later picked and used by women protestors as a chosen remark and depicting catchphrase. Actually, taking a vulgar remark and subverting it into an empowering tool has always been a part of women's protests. In the late 1960s and 1970s, feminist groups embraced the offensive uses of the words "witch" and "bitch" and inverted their meaning by expanding the signified concepts. They even created positive and inspiring liberation manifestoes, such as the WITCH Manifesto or the BITCH Manifesto with these spitefully designated words (Roszak and Roszak 259, 275). Similarly, rather than its surface vindictive connotation, in its later (re)appropriated usage, "Nasty Woman" became a loaded word to designate empowerment and motivation during the Women's Marches.

On several occasions during the debates, Hillary Clinton referred to Trump's backward thinking, especially on women's issues, by statements like "When Donald Trump says, 'Let's make America great again,' that is code for 'let's take America backward... Back to the days when abortion was illegal, women had far fewer options, and life for too many women and girls was limited'" (Alter). Hillary Clinton was the first official woman presidential candidate and despite gaining the popular vote, she lost the electoral votes, much to the dismay of her women supporters. Clinton's loss meant more than just losing an election since the electoral votes also displayed the dissemination of popular conservative ideology. Obviously, this "failure" was going to be interpreted as more than just a shift in the political mood of the voters in the eyes of the feminist voters. Samhita Mukhopadhyay

expresses her disappointment with the loss of the election as follows: “The 2016 election wasn’t just a loss for Clinton, it was a loss for feminism. Not only did the first female candidate from either major party lose, she lost to an open misogynist—someone who called a former Latina beauty queen fat and was caught on the record bragging about grabbing women by the pussy” (8).

Yet, Trump’s negative rhetoric motivated women to start rallying for their rights right after he took the office. Women realized that if they were going to voice their grievances, it was necessary to take action immediately and mobilize large public gatherings to include most disenfranchised and alienated groups. Digital technologies and especially the social media proved to be a fertile ground to initiate and achieve the scale and the kind of action needed. Trump’s conservative stance led to one of the largest single day protests at the beginning of his presidency on January 21, 2017. Women might have been concerned with his sexist language and anxious that their rights would be revoked, but they were also united and determined to face the challenge. The goal of the march was to advocate legislations and policies not only on women’s rights but also on immigration, disability, environment, LGBTQIA+, and other issues of concern. The demand for rights were expanded to include unprivileged groups and neglected issues. The protesters believed that the new administration would fall short in addressing social justice and human rights, and they wanted to have their voices heard on the very first day of Trump’s office.

The main protest was in Washington DC with an attendance of 500,000 but “sister protests” occurred in other states bringing the estimated total of 4,500,000 people in the United States and up to 5,000,000 worldwide. For example, in New York City close to 400,000 people marched in the rally starting in front of Trump Tower. The Washington DC rally was streamed live on YouTube, Facebook, and Twitter. Washington DC organizers created the march and maintained an official page, but the march was made possible by the support of several local groups and other organizations such as Planned Parenthood. Groups and individuals from diverse backgrounds came together with the aim of securing their rights and sending a clear message. The ability to organize protests simultaneously in several places needed prearrangements, organization skills, and enthusiasm achieved not only through skills of organizers but also the willingness of the participants. Political figures attended the march, such as

civil rights activist Jesse Jackson in Washington DC, Senator Bernie Sanders in Vermont, Senator Elizabeth Warren in Boston, as well as celebrities including Cher, Christina Aguilera, Alex Baldwin, Scarlett Johansson, Madonna, Frances McDormand, Katy Perry, Tim Robins, Julia Roberts, Emma Watson in Washington DC, Drew Barrymore, Whoopi Goldberg, Robert De Niro, Rihanna, Naomi Watts in New York City, Jamie Lee Curtis, Miley Cyrus, Jane Fonda, Helen Hunt, Angelica Huston, Julia Louis-Dreyfus in Los Angeles (Hartocollis and Alcindor). The attendance of the number of well-known celebrities alone suggested the scope of concern over Trump's dividing rhetoric and rising conservative ideology.

Trump's general attitude and defiance provoked the participants further and caused the protests to be remembered as anti-Trump protests although the main organizers clearly stated this march did not target Trump personally. Cassady Fendlay, spokesperson for the march, said, "We are not targeting Trump specifically. It is much more about being proactive about women's rights" (Redden). Gloria Steinem who served as one of the honorary co-chairs of the march, referred to Trump's defiance in the following manner: "Constitution does not begin with 'I the president.' It begins with 'We the People'... Do not try to divide us. If you force Muslims to register, we will all register as Muslims." She also called for a united front, asking women to bond and know each other, during the rally: "We are linked. We are not ranked. And this is a day that will change us forever because we are together, each of us individually and collectively will never be the same again... Make sure you introduce yourselves to each other and decide what we're going to do tomorrow, and tomorrow and tomorrow," and added: "We're never turning back!" (Steinem). Steinem also referred to the protests of the 1970s, saying that the deaths of Martin Luther King, Malcolm X, and Robert F. Kennedy paved the way for the Vietnam War and the election of Nixon, but the present situation was not as hopeless, since opposing political figures such as Michel Obama, Hillary Clinton, and Bernie Sanders were still alive and supporting the cause. Steinem's speech in the 2017 Women's March underlines the necessity to remember and learn from mistakes of the past.

A certain fashion statement also marked this first Women's March in Trump's era. The women protestors wore handcrafted pink hats with corners resembling cat ears, called pussyhats, to show their solidarity. Of course, handmade hats do not take the place of direct action

but “it can be a powerful gesture” since such acts are symbolic gestures which “allow the body itself to become the site of protest and symbol of solidarity, to be visible and counted when others perhaps would prefer you not to be” (Judah). In his book, *Subculture: The Meaning of Style*, Dick Hebdige focuses on the meaning of style in Britain in the 1950s and recognizes that style could be used in a powerful manner in defying dominant ideology. Hebdige examines subcultures such as the Teddy Boys, Skinheads, and Punks from historical, economic and social aspects, and examines how styles were used for resisting dominant discourses. In its initial stages the mainstream society views these styles as radical, which in turn empowers the subculture in question, up until the main culture starts to reappropriate and recuperate the contradictory style as commodities to negotiate and contain a possible threat to the status quo. Hebdige also acknowledges the need and the right of the marginalized groups “to embellish, decorate, parody and wherever possible to recognize and rise above a subordinate position which was never of their choosing” (139). Thus, pussyhats could be viewed as an influential tool in presenting the stance and anger of women toward prospective policy changes. This kind of activism has been utilized before in protest gatherings such as dressing up like witches in the 1970s to make statements related to women’s issues. Since the 1990s online activists have been using the Internet for similar purposes. The women shared patterns online for sewing, knitting, or crocheting pussyhats as a form of “culture jamming.” Culture Jamming can be described as “a genre which critiques popular/mainstream culture, particularly corporate capitalism, commercialism, and consumerism. Here, media artists and activists appropriate and “repurpose” elements from popular culture to make new works with an ironic or subversive point—put another way, culture jamming ‘mines’ mainstream culture to critique it” (Lievrouw 22).

Jayna Zweiman and Krista Suh designed and co-founded Pussyhat Project in November 2016. In 2017, Suh planned to attend the Women’s March in Washington DC and needed a cap to keep her head warm in the cold. Zweiman would not be able to attend due to the fact that she was recovering from an illness but she wanted to be there in spirit. Together they conceived the idea of offering a chance to those who could not attend the march physically. Handmade pussyhats would demonstrate their support and would be a visual statement of solidarity (Pussyhat Project). Thus, both women created the patterns

for sewing, knitting, or crocheting a cap with cat ears in response to Trump's vulgar remarks in 2005. Trump had been recorded saying, "I just start kissing [beautiful women]. It's like a magnet. Just kiss. I don't even wait," and continued, "And when you're a star they let you do it;" according to him, "You can do anything. ... Grab them by the pussy. You can do anything" (Arrowood). These repugnant comments of expressing his entitlement to women's bodies obviously enraged many and became the motive behind the creation of the now iconized pussyhats during the women's marches. Although it lasted for a short while, countless moving pink pussy heads offered visually striking images in the media and became the symbol of women's discontent toward Trump's biased remarks. Through this simple fashion statement, the meaning of Trump's words associated with sexism was weakened, and the misogynic understanding of the term was subverted to encompass empowerment.

Trump's offensive words against women's private body parts and transforming that image to pink sewn or knitted cat ears, echoes other cat images related to the history of suffrage. As Corey Wren points out, cats and dogs have been conceived as gendered animals in a stereotypical manner. Since cats represent the domestic sphere, "anti-suffrage postcards often used them to reference female activists. The intent was to portray suffragettes as silly, infantile, incompetent and ill-suited to political engagement" (Wren). In cartoons, often a distraught father was left behind to fend for household duties while the wife was busy campaigning for voting rights. An unhappy cat was often used to portray this chaotic domestic sphere that supposedly needed the attention of an absent female figure. Thus, cat images had already been used in women's equality struggles since the nineteenth century. Starting with the 2017 Women's March, Trump's inappropriate message was appropriated through pussyhats with the pun intended.

Banners carried by protesters during the marches were also inspired by Trump's comments or were related to his possible policy changes. Shepard Fairey, the graphic artist known for his Hope poster for Barack Obama's 2008 presidential campaign, designed a new series of posters titled "We the People" which consisted of drawn portraits of Muslims, Latinas, African Americans, and Natives to be used at inauguration demonstrations and the following Women's March. Titled by the initial words of the United States Constitution, and the creative use of the flag colors—red, white, and blue—these posters

intended to support and address those who felt left out and powerless during Trump's presidency. To facilitate easy access to these images, full-page newspaper ads were provided through online Kickstarter funds and free downloads were offered (Gelt). Fairy posters are now recognized among the iconic banners of these protest marches. Other banners by the protesters featured satirical and ironical remarks and exhibited signs of witty and dark humor while projecting women's concerns over the future of Trump's policies. For example, as stated before, "Nasty Women" banners were carried as a way of adopting his denigrating words and transforming the expression into an authoritative label. Some others were warning signs for his possible policies such as, "Keep Your Laws Out of My Drawers," "Build the Wall around Trump," "Make America Kind Again," and "Our Bodies, Our Minds, Our Power." Most banners were related to solidarity and protesting rights such as, "No More Silence," "We Stand Together Against Hate," "Resist Fear," "Malice Toward None," "The Future Is Still Female," "Dissent Is Patriotic," "They Tried to Burry Us, They Didn't Know We Were Seeds," and "We Will Fight to Protect Reproductive Rights Our Mother's Won (Support Protective Parenthood)." This last banner is a direct reminder and allusion to the 1970s demonstrations, and there were more which echoed the protests that took place almost fifty years ago, such as, "I Will Not Go Quietly Back to the 1950s," "I Don't Believe I Still Have to Protest This Shit," "Still Fighting for Equality. Can You Believe It?" or "I'm tired of Holding This Sign Since the 1970s." In a way, such statements were proof that the women were frustrated to repeat what they had gone through in the 1960s and the 1970s they were conjure the legacy of their predecessors whenever necessary. Some protestors even dressed as suffragettes to refer to a more distant yet significant past in the women's movement (Tavernor).

Another similarity to the marches of the 1970s was the role of music in strengthening the arguments and bringing the protestors together. During the 1960s Civil Rights demonstrations and the 1970s Vietnam War protests, music was used to give messages, encourage camaraderie, and lift up collective mood in gatherings. As the language of emotions, voiced the grievances of the era and offered solidarity and solace. Resistance the songs of Pete Seeger, Joan Baez, Bob Dylan, and Phil Ochs, lyrics of the Civil Rights Era, such as "We Shall Overcome" and "We Shall Not Be Moved," have been included in most solidarity gatherings since then. This tradition was also repeated

in the Women's Marches. In San Francisco, activist musician Joan Baez sang "We Shall Not Be Moved," in Spanish, to include those who were marginalized by Trump's statements (Baez). Several other songs of the Civil Rights movement were also sung during the marches including "We Shall Overcome," which testified to the timelessness of protest songs in displaying dissenting voices. Meanwhile, some preexisting songs were modified to represent the current situation; for example, Rocky Mountain Mike reworded "Mr. Tamburine Man"—Bob Dylan's 1965 song—to "Mr. Tangerine Man." Speaking from the viewpoint of a racist narrator who supports Trump, the narrator exclaims, "Hey Mr. Tangerine Man, build a wall for me / I'm not that bright and don't know that you are going to / Hey Mr. Tangerine Man, keep Muslims away from me / With my jingoistic worldview, I'll come following you" (Rocky Mountain Mike). Many other reworded songs and parodies from different music genres would be adopted over the period of Trump's presidency.

Yet, a new song by a Los Angeles based Asian American singer Connie, Lim, aka MILCK, went viral on social media. "I Can't Keep Quiet" became one of the unofficial anthems of the initial Women's March. It was rehearsed online, garnering more than 14 million Facebook hits, and it was communally voiced several times on the day of the march. It also started the #ICanttKeepQuiet movement on social media platforms. In the 2018 Women's March, MILCK sang the song alongside Yoko Ono. The song was actually written a year before the marches but it was never released (Balingit). The lyrics reveal the trauma the narrator suffered when she was told by the society to keep quiet and "put on your face / know your place / shut up and smile / don't spread your legs." The narrator decides that this is not ethical, and she needs to publicly acknowledge her pain because many women endure violence silently, thus, she exclaims, "I can't keep quiet, no oh oh oh oh oh oh / A one woman riot, oh oh oh oh oh oh oh / I can't keep quiet / For anyone / Anymore." The song ends with a chanting of "Let it out / Let it out / Let it out now / There'll be someone who understands" (MILCK). On a larger scale, Trump's rhetoric on women was also targeted since his prospective policies were promising to silence women. Plus, his personal remarks about women had already proven to be degrading. Fiona Apple's song, "Tiny Hands" was also released a few days before the Women's March and was considered another unofficial anthem. In this very short yet effective chanting, the songwriter refers to Trump's

earlier remarks of grabbing women's body parts and says, "We don't want your hands / anywhere near our underpants" (Apple). This chant was repeatedly used during the following marches. The song was recorded and released through the social media channels and in these recordings Trump's offensive comments are overheard from his own voice in the background.

Despite the creative use of social media, the organizers were aware that that the protests would not lead to the change of policies unless the messages were followed through. In March 2017, the organizers posted a resolution entitled "10 Actions for the first 100 Days." By voicing a new issue every ten days, the organizers wanted to remind their demands to the administration from the very beginning. Their first action was to send postcards to the senators about their various concerns (Shamus). The actions were posted on the Women's March official Twitter and web accounts. Trump also used his Twitter account extensively to talk back to the demonstrators. Partially because it attracted more crowds than his inauguration speech two days before, on January 22, 2017, his Twitter response to the first Women's March was: "Watched protests yesterday but was under the impression that we just had an election! Why didn't these people vote? Celebs hurt cause badly." Yet, he posted a following statement in which he recognized the need for protests, and wrote, "Peaceful protests are a hallmark of our democracy. Even if I don't always agree, I recognize the rights of people to express their views" (Staff, "The Associated Press"). Thus social media was used in following the arguments, suggesting solutions, answering back and repeating social concerns for interested parties.

In 2018, celebrities started revealing the sexual abuse and harassment cases they endured through social media accounts and well-known names—such as film producer, Harvey Weinstein—came under scrutiny. These disclosing and exposing remarks and criticisms expanded the scope of the #MeToo Movement. As the founder of the movement, Tarana Burke originally proposed "MeToo" in 2006 to develop self-worth in young women who had been sexually harassed. By exposing the perpetrator, the sufferer would turn into an influencer rather than a victim. She spoke about the power and the therapeutic effect of acknowledging misconduct and said "#MeToo is essentially about survivors supporting survivors. And it's really about community healing and community action ... legitimate things like policies and

laws that change that support survivors” (Synder and Lopez). Although the movement started earlier, 2018 became the year of criticism and backlash as well-known celebrities started to talk about their experiences and what happened to them through media platforms. As an expected backlash, President Trump declared that the #MeToo Movement was dangerous because it conflicted with the “innocent before proven guilty” principle (Olson and Daniel).

The Women’s Marches continued as an annual event in 2018, 2019, and 2020 with expanded themes and participation from countries around the world. The Women’s March on January 21, 2018 was held right after the shutdown of the government offices on immigration and the day after Trump attempted to block funds for Planned Parenthood. Meanwhile, Democrats and several Republicans declined to support a border wall and rejected to approve the deportation policies proposed by the Trump administration (Short). On January 19, 2019, the third Women’s March was held with declining numbers due to a controversy over four of the organizers attending an earlier event hosted by Louis Farrakhan, the leader of the Nation of Islam, and supposedly not condemning his anti-Semitic remarks (Youn). A Women’s Agenda on drafting federal policies was created and posted. Policies included ending violence against women, reproductive rights, racial justice, immigrant rights, LGBTQIA+’s rights, disability rights, workers’ rights, civil rights and liberties, and environmental justice. The included universal health care, Equal Rights Amendment to the Constitution, and ending war (Women’s March Agenda 2019). By including the ERA as one of the policy priorities, once again the women were trying to revive and hopefully remedy the unfinished business of the 1970s.

The fourth Women’s March was held in January 18, 2020 in a similar manner to earlier marches with three themes: reproductive rights, immigration, and climate change. Although the turnout was the lowest compared to earlier marches, a noteworthy performance included the protesters chanting the Chilean feminist anthem, *A Rapist in Your Path (The Rapist Is You)* and performing the Las Tesis dance moves, which aimed at denouncing violence against women and promoting solidarity among all women around the world (Las Tesis). Las Tesis is a collective performance with a simple choreography involving synchronous moves and the lyrics are chanted in a captivating tune. Since the video of the initial performance went viral in Chile in November 2019, the lyrics

were translated and tweaked to include local matters in other countries. These forms of resistance are called “art activism” where the meaning oscillates between the politics and the poetics of the performance. The matter of interest is in the forefront but the art or performance is employed for transforming the situation and/or finding remedies. In other words, the balance between the “political intervention” and the aesthetic quality of such acts needs to move the discussion forward towards the desired aim. (Serafini 293). Paula Serafini explains *Las Tesis* in the following manner:

Art activism thus becomes an aesthetic–political practice through which we can build specific ways of relating to each other and acting collectively towards achieving social and political transformations. Because of the understanding of art and activism it puts forward, and the forms of agency and action it facilitates, *Un violador en tu camino* can be read as a case of figurative art activism. (293)

Las Tesis continued to develop and shift as different countries adopted it. The Women’s March also understood that such “performance actions can open up spaces of communication, of transnational movement building, of empowerment, of resistance, of solidarity, of organizing and of creative embodied expression” (Serafini 294). In the United States, the performance was in Spanish and English simultaneously, to embrace a larger participation and to raise awareness on domestic and state violence as well as ongoing immigration issues.

A second Women’s March was held in the same year on October 17, due to the passing of Justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg a few months before the presidential election. The organization held a vigil to honor Ginsburg and voiced their concern over the appointment of conservative judge, Amy Coney Barrett. Barrett’s appointment was confirmed a week before the election and meant that Supreme Court would have a conservative advantage. Women organizations were concerned that *Roe vs. Wade* would be overturned and feminist and life-affirming agendas brought to the Supreme Court would be annulled. Ruth Ginsburg’s dying wish was not to have her seat filled until the new president was elected, as she reportedly told her granddaughter (Lozano). Due to the pandemic, lower turnouts were expected and the coalition of organizers asked people to observe social distancing, wear masks, and prefer local events instead of travelling (Heyward and

Ellis).

2020 was a noteworthy year because it was also the centennial of the 19th Amendment to the Constitution, which guaranteed all American women the right to vote. Women had kept organizing, writing, rallying, lobbying, and protesting against sanctions to reach this milestone for more than a century before the Amendment was drafted and ratified. Thus, the centennial deserved to be acknowledged and celebrated, despite the pandemic. Women groups formed the 2020 Women's Vote Centennial Initiative online as well as creating a Facebook account, which provided information on women's suffrage movements and ways to get involved in planning events and building conversation groups in local communities.

The last year of Trump's presidency witnessed another media event; the premiering of the TV drama series *Mrs. America* in April 2020. Since Trump's rhetoric or policies did not show signs of improvement on behalf of the disenfranchised groups, the subject matter of the series proved to be timely in terms of remembering the dissenting voices from the recent past. The nine episodes dramatized the incidents surrounding the conservative backlash to the ERA led by Schlafly, and reiterated the era of active campaigning and details of women's struggle to gain equal rights in the 1970s. The series, produced by Canadian Dahvi Waller, demonstrated the lives of women activists Gloria Steinem (Rose Byrne), Betty Friedan (Tracy Ullman), Shirley Chisholm (Uzo Aduba), Jill Ruckelshaus (Elizabeth Banks), Brenda Feigen-Fasteau (Ari Graynor), and Bella Abzug (Margo Martindale), as well as their response to Phyllis Schlafly (Cate Blanchett) (IMDB). Less than a year before Trump's presidency ended, conjuring Schlafly's name and stance was ironically emblematic. Trump's election had started with the news of her death and now, during the last year of his presidency, he and his supporters were reminded of campaigns led by Phyllis Schlafly against the ERA through a television series.

In the partly fictionalized series, Schlafly is portrayed as a successful campaigner, but her endeavors do not pay off at the end and she does not receive the favorable position she had hoped for in the Reagan administration except for a simple telephone call of appreciation. The series does not vilify her but portrays her as a woman who wants to prove herself in a patriarchal society. In one striking scene, she is placed among men in an elevator, on her way to attend a political

meeting. Her prim and proper turquois suit, her neck scarf, and string of pearls stand in a stark contrast to the men-in-dark-suit surrounding her. Her indistinct smile shows contentment and confidence in the presence of these politically powerful men. Yet, although she was asked to join the meeting, the men in the room reduce her to taking notes as if she is just fit for a secretarial job, instead of listening to her in the decision making process. While presenting the misogyny of the men, the scene also shows Schlafly's unrealistic expectations of being treated as an equal in the public offices where conservative ideology is the norm of the era. This section also foreshadows the ending of the series where Schlafly enters her kitchen after the disappointing appreciation call for her contributions to the conservative cause, puts on her apron and starts to peel apples in preparation of baking an apple pie; symbolic of being trapped in the domesticity she had fervently defended to gain a favorable office position in the government. In the scene, Schlafly has been forced to return to the housewife role she preached, ironically demonstrated through her apron and cooking. In the patriarchal world of politics, Schlafly's devotion to conservative causes eventually fails to bring her the acknowledgment she desires. According to the series, Schlafly's opposition to the ERA stems from her self-indulgence, her wish to manipulate, and her aim to gain personal social status, not because of her real convictions. Her seeming acceptance and pride in her domestic role and her ambition in presenting the ERA as harmful to the existing rights of women is indefensible in the eyes of those who struggled hard to ratify the amendment.

The plot of *Mrs. America* tried to keep true to the main historical facts although for purposes of storytelling, some characters and dialogues were fictionalized. Schlafly's motives are presented without glorifying her position as a mother of six children with her eldest son as a closeted gay man. She tries hard to cover personal and social shortcomings with an upright posture, a calm but determined voice, and a pleasant expression during her campaigns. Phyllis Schlafly's son, Andrew Schlafly denounced the series by saying that the plot was nothing more than left wing propaganda. Gloria Steinem, on the other hand, also refused to give credit to Phyllis Schlafly's role in defeating the ERA, stating that corporate lobbying was at fault in slowing the ratification (IMDB). The series while dramatizing the recent past is noteworthy in drawing an unstated connection between the positions of Schlafly and Trump. Like Schlafly's portrayal in the series (and real

life), Trump's position and likeminded policies to exert authority before and during his presidency and his eventual loss of power is viewed as deserved conclusions for undermining liberal women causes and activism. Adrienne Westenfeld also believes that *Mrs. America* tries to

... draw parallels between Trump and Schlafly, both of whom share an affinity for "alternative facts" when reporting crowd sizes and describing the outcomes of proposed legislation. Like Trump, Schlafly stoked conservative resentment through anti-establishment politics, arguing that the party was increasingly puppeted by "secret kingmakers." (Westenfeld)

Although the television series does not try to condemn the conservative viewpoint, the episodes eventually present a moral stance on the side of the ERA causes and feminist activism and attempts to boost the confidence of those who were feeling defeated by Trump's policies. Trump would eventually lose the elections and his executive power at the end of 2020. Yet, his presidency would end with a provocative attack right after the possible election results were announced. Trump supporters would storm and attack the Capitol, temporarily halting the tallying of the votes that declared Joe Biden the next president. The retreat to violence and the siege of the Capitol was unexpected and showed the degree of divide in opinion in the United States. This incident also demonstrated how statements from public leaders could initiate possible harmful consequences. Trump's conviction that the election was stolen moved his supporters to breach the police lines and storm the Capitol Building without questioning Trump's personal motives. The rioters' visceral anger was directed towards Democrats and several offices were ransacked much to the disbelief of many citizens who followed the incident through media channels.

The United States experienced the expression of divided ideologies in the Trump era, leading the citizens to contemplate on the fragility of democratic principles. Dissenting as well as supporting rallies on women's issues, immigration, race, and later pandemic-related matters were in abundance. The focus of this article was on women's marches and other noteworthy markers in the feminist cause, organized as a reaction to Trump's rhetoric and policies. This period witnessed multiple benchmarks; the first official woman candidate for Presidency, the largest protests since the 1970s, the #MeToo movement, the death of prominent opponents and advocates of women's movement,

extensive social media coverage on women’s issues, as well as a record number of women being elected to the Congress in 2020 elections—which is the highest percentage in the United States history—and finally the election of the first woman vice president, Kamala Harris. Thus, all these and the Women Marches during the Trump era were effective in mobilizing women and opening up debates on the recent past. The revival banners and the use of music in the of women’s protest movements recall the non-violent nature and manner of earlier Civil Rights rallies, Vietnam War protests, and ERA campaigns yet, the use of social media and digital communication tools in spreading the news and organizing activities have redefined the borders of grassroots activism in the present.

Works Cited

- 2020 Women’s Vote Centennial Initiative. Facebook, www.facebook.com/2020Centennial/
- Alter, Charlotte. “Hillary Clinton’s First Speech as Presumptive Nominee Puts ‘Women’s Issues’ Front and Center.” *Time*, June 10, 2016, time.com/4364304/hillary-clinton-planned-parenthood-womens-issues/
- Apple, Fiona. “Tiny Hands: Chant for the Women’s March.” *You Tube*, uploaded by Luke Whisnant, January 20, 2017, www.youtube.com/watch?v=MVvPs3zZj6w
- Arrowood, Emily. “The Very Definition of Sexual Assault.” *US News*, Oct. 7, 2016. www.usnews.com/opinion/articles/2016-10-07/hot-mic-catches-donald-trump-bragging-about-sexual-assault
- Baez, Joan. “Joan Baez performing at the San Francisco Women’s March 2017.” *You Tube*, uploaded by John Khoo, Jan 22, 2017, www.youtube.com/watch?v=8WsFgGKnZ9o
- Balingit, Moraya. “‘I Can’t Keep Quiet.’” *The Washington Post*, January 24, 2017. www.washingtonpost.com/news/inspired-life/wp/2017/01/24/i-cant-keep-quiet-watch-this-stirring-performance-of-what-some-call-the-womens-march-anthem/
- Berenson, Tessa. “Watch Donald Trump Call Hillary Clinton a ‘Nasty

Woman.” *Time*, October 19, 2016, time.com/4537960/donald-trump-hillary-clinton-nasty-woman-debate/

Clinton, Hillary. “I will Defend Planned Parenthood.” *YouTube*, uploaded by Hindustan Times, Oct. 20, 2016, www.youtube.com/watch?v=ePnOFW_V2vA

Diaz, Daniele. “Trump Calls Clinton ‘a Nasty Women.’” *CNN Politics*, October 20, 2016, edition.cnn.com/2016/10/19/politics/donald-trump-hillary-clinton-nasty-woman/index.html

Gelt, Jessica. “Shepard Fairy Explains His ‘We the People’ Inauguration Protest Posters.” *Los Angeles Times*, Jan 20, 2017, www.latimes.com/entertainment/arts/la-et-cm-shepard-fairey-inauguration-20170119-story.html

Hartocollis, Anemona, and Yamiche Alcindor. “Women’s March Highlights as Huge Crowds Protest Trump: ‘We’re Not Going Away.’” *New York Times*, Jan. 21, 2017, www.nytimes.com/2017/01/21/us/womens-march.html

Hebdige, Dick. *Subculture: The Meaning of Style*. Routledge, 1979.

Heyward, Giulia, and Ralph Ellis. “What You Need to Know about This Year’s Second Women’s March.” *CNN*, October 17, 2020, edition.cnn.com/2020/10/17/us/womens-march-2020-trnd/index.html

IMDB. *Mrs. America*. Created by Dahvi Waller, performance by Cate Blanchett, Rose Byrne, Elizabeth Banks. FX on Hulu, 2020. www.imdb.com/title/tt9244556/

Judah, Hettie. “After the Year of the Pussy Hat, Can Fashion Activism Effect Change?” *Artnet*, January 3, 2018, news.artnet.com/art-world/looking-back-year-pussyhat-can-fashion-activism-effect-change-1184834

Kozłowska, Hanna. “Phyllis Schlafly, arch-enemy of American Feminists, Died at 92.” *Quartz*, September 6, 2016, qz.com/774527/phyllis-schlafly-conservative-activist-and-equal-rights-amendment-opponent-dies-at-92/

Las Tesis en EE.UU. *YouTube*, uploaded by Francisco Aguirre A., January 18, 2020, www.youtube.com/watch?v=-E49BKMgYuM

- Lievrouw, Leah A. *Alternative and Activist New Media*. Polity Press, 2011.
- Lozano, Alicia Victoria. "Ruth Bader Ginsburg's Dying Wish: Not to Have Donald Trump Choose Replacement." *CBS News*, September 19, 2020, www.nbcnews.com/politics/supreme-court/ruth-bader-ginsburg-s-dying-wish-not-have-donald-trump-n1240507
- MILCK. "I Can't Keep Quiet." *YouTube*, uploaded by MILK, January 17, 2017, www.youtube.com/watch?v=JCnexOFOxCo
- Morin, Rebecca. "Trump Honors 'True Patriot' Phyllis Schlafly at Her Funeral." *Politico*, September 10, 2016, www.politico.com/story/2016/09/donald-trump-phyllis-schlafly-funeral-227994
- Mukhopadhyay, Samhita, and Kate Harding, editors. *Nasty Women: Feminism, Resistance, and Revolution in Trump's America*. Picador, 2017.
- Olson, Emily, and Zoe Daniel. "How Two Years of Donald Trump Have Shaped Women's Right in the US." *ABC News*, January 19, 2019, www.abc.net.au/news/2019-01-19/donald-trumps-presidency-two-years-shaped-womens-rights-us/10728882
- Redden, Molly. "Women's March on Washington: A Guide to the Post-Inaugural Social Justice Event." *The Guardian*, 27 December 2016, www.theguardian.com/us-news/2016/dec/27/womens-march-on-washington-dc-guide
- Rocky Mountain Mike. "Mr. Tangerine Man." *YouTube*, uploaded by Rocky Mountain Mike, www.youtube.com/watch?v=CAIvBMwN_7U
- Roszak, Betty, and Theodore Roszak, eds. *Masculine/Feminine: Readings in Sexual Mythology and the Liberation of Women*. Harper & Row Publishers, 1969.
- Pussyhat Project. <https://www.pussyhatproject.com/>
- Schlafly, Phyllis. *The Conservative Case for Trump*. Regnery Publishing, 2016.
- Serafini, Paula. "'A Rapist in Your Path:' Transnational Feminist

- Protest and Why (and How) Performance Matters.” *European Journal of Cultural Studies*, 2020, Vol. 23 (2), pp. 290-295.
- Shamus, Kristen Jordan. “Women’s March Launches 10 Actions for First 100 Days.” *Detroit Free Press*, January 22, 2017, www.freep.com/story/news/2017/01/22/10-actions-womens-march/96935642/
- Short, April M. “Second Women’s March Draws Huge Anti-Trump Crowds as the Government Shuts Down.” *Salon*, January 22, 2018, www.salon.com/2018/01/22/second-womens-march-draws-huge-anti-trump-crowds-as-the-government-shuts-down_partner/
- Snyder, Chris, and Linette Lopez. “Tarana Burke on Why She Created the #MeToo Movement and Where It’s Headed.” *Insider*, December 13, 2017, www.businessinsider.com/how-the-metoo-movement-started-where-its-headed-tarana-burke-time-person-of-year-women-2017-12
- Staff. “Donald Trump Scoffs at Protesters on Twitter: ‘Why Didn’t These People Vote?’” *The Associated Press*, January 22, 2017, globalnews.ca/news/3197716/donald-trump-scoffs-at-protesters-on-twitter-why-didnt-these-people-vote/
- Steinem, Gloria. “Women’s March on Washington.” Iowa State University: Archives of Women’s Political Communication, January 21, 2017, awpc.cattcenter.iastate.edu/2018/10/05/womens-march-on-washington-jan-21-2017/
- Tavernor, Rachel. “Women’s Marches Echo Suffragette Struggles: Campaigns, Cats and Collections.” *Social Science Blog*, March 1, 2017, blogs.bl.uk/socialscience/2017/03/womens-marches-echo-suffragette-struggles-campaigns-cats-and-collections.html
- Westenfeld, Adrienne. “Phyllis Schlafly’s Despicable Battle Against the ERA is the True Story at the Heart of *Mrs. America*,” *Esquire*. April 15, 2020. www.esquire.com/entertainment/tv/a32145997/who-was-phyllis-schlafly-mrs-america-true-story/
- Women’s March Agenda 2019. static1.squarespace.com/static/5c3feb79fcf7fdce5a3c790b/t/5df275481257e772df8b6cd8/1576170878086/WM_WomensAgendaFinal_Lo_Res.pdf

Wren, Corey. “Women-As-Cat in Anti-Suffrage Propaganda.” *Sociological Images*, December 4, 2013, thesocietypages.org/socimages/2013/12/04/the-feminization-of-the-cat-in-anti-suffrage-propaganda/

Youn, Soo. “Women’s March 2019: Thousands of protesters across US rally amid controversy over anti-Semitism.” *ABC News*, January 20, 2019, abcnews.go.com/US/annual-womens-march-ascends-us-cities-amid-controversy/story?id=60465176