

Women's March On Washington: Origins and Inclusion

"It is not our differences that divide us. It is our inability to recognize, accept, and celebrate those differences."

-Audre Lorde

We have heard concerns voiced that some do not feel adequately represented in the Women's March on Washington (WMW). We want to state to you clearly: we see you, we hear you, and we understand. As witnessed by the recent election, there has been a profound deepening of the divisions in our country. Etched in history, these divisions cleave us from one another across the lines of racial, ethnic, religious, and sexual identity.

We seek to address these divisions and stand together in the face of injustice. Together, we will raise our voices in the service of all people.

The WMW began organically on November 9, the day after the election, after Teresa Shook a.k.a. Maui, a grandmother residing in Hawaii, proposed a call to action to forty of her friends to march in Washington, D.C. Her friends invited their friends, and by the time the idea hit the Facebook group *Pantsuit Nation*, there were a number of women administering pages generating thousands of sign-ups by the hour.

Bob Bland was one of those women. Working with Evvie Harmon, Fontaine Pearson, and Breanne Butler among others, they consolidated the pages into one united effort. The reality is that the women who initially started organizing were almost all white. As the movement grew, they sought ways to address this crucial issue. One of those who signed on early, Vanessa Wruble, took the initiative not just to include women of other backgrounds, but to make sure that their voices were centered in the convening and the decision making process. It was, and is, clear that the Women's March on Washington cannot be a success unless it represents women of all backgrounds.

The first step was to engage Tamika D. Mallory, Carmen Perez and Linda Sarsour as National Co-Chairs to work alongside Bob and her team. In 2015, they led a march from New York City to Washington, D.C, traveling an impressive two hundred and fifty miles on foot to demand changes in America's criminal justice system. These women are not tokens; they are dynamic and powerful leaders who have been organizing intersectional mobilizations for their entire careers. Together with the original team, they brought on an incredible group of women to set the agenda and handle the coordination of the WMW, including Janaye Ingram, Tabitha St. Bernard, Karen Waltuch, and Cassady Fendlay. The first week was a heavy lift to ensure a solid structure, but the organizers continue to work hard to engage people from diverse communities. Now voices including Asian and Pacific Islanders, Trans Women, Native Americans, disabled women, men, children, and many others, can be centered in the evolving expression of this grassroots movement.

It is important to all of us that the white women engaged in this effort understand their privilege, and acknowledge the struggle that women of color face. We have and will continue to encourage our state organizers to reach out to women from all communities. This means not only asking them to join the WMW, but also challenging our new community to show up in support of the efforts of other activists and fighters for justice.

The work of this march is not only to stand together in sisterhood and solidarity for the protection of our rights, our safety, our families and our environment -- but it is also to build relationships and mend the divides between our communities. It's hard work, and it will be ongoing. It's an ambitious goal -- one that reaches far beyond January 21st -- but we believe that there is no other way forward. Only together can we march towards freedom.

The Women's March on Washington is just the first step; what comes after is up to us all.