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A Hopeful Fight Against Oppression: The Women's March on Washington

*We stand together in solidarity with our partners and children for the protection of our rights, our safety, our health, and our families - recognizing that our vibrant and diverse communities are the strength of our country.* - Women's March Mission Statement

On January 21st, I got two hours of sleep. I went to bed at midnight and woke myself and seven of my friends up at 2:30 am. We were all half-asleep, exhausted, and hungry, but I could not remember another time in my life when I was more excited to be awake. I needed to find and rekindle the hope that had slowly lessened over the last months until it was lost on Inauguration Day.

*What's your name? Can we take a picture with you?* - Alex Oittinen, American University student

We arrived at the Women's March main stage at 3:30 am. The crew was still setting up and all we had to do was wait. There was another group of approximately ten people there before us, but besides that, the only other individuals around were TV crews and volunteers. We grabbed a spot against the cold metal fences and started talking to the older, African American man guiding the volunteers. We asked him questions about the event: who we would see, how long he was up for, what he ate for breakfast. We cracked jokes with him while he dealt with the

growing crowd behind us. We all had to back away towards the sidewalk when a truck came and, worried we would lose our spot, we jokingly asked him if he had our backs. He assured us he did. When the crowd was allowed back towards the barrier and main stage, there was an even closer spot right next to the entrance with him waiting for us. We took a picture with him. His name was Chris. He was the first person I met that day and he began repairing the lack of trust and hope I felt from the day and months before.

*Was there anything about the Inauguration any of you were happy with?* - Matt Gutman, ABC News Correspondent

At the march, when Matt Gutman asked us about the day before, a lot of images flashed through my head. If you asked me how I thought Inauguration Day would go in August, I would have had a much different answer than the reality of January 20th. I did not expect to see so many red hats and hear so much “booing.” For me, it was not a day filled with hope and excitement like I imagined it would be three months prior. There were not diverse crowds. We saw few children if any at all. It did not feel like the United States was accurately represented. It felt divisive. If someone in the crowd or on the stage was not for Donald Trump, they were immediately ostracized and bullied. It did not matter who they were or what their political positions were. The crowd became frenzied when President Obama or Hillary Clinton were shown on the big screen. Yelling. Screaming. Cursing. People saw public officials who spent years doing all they could for the sake of their country and their initial reaction was to openly swear and mock their losses. Public officials who sacrificed time that could have been spent watching their children grow up, but instead sat in the Situation Room making life or death

decisions for the nation. It confused me how people could claim they love their country so much, but yell at the people who sacrificed for their country so others would not have to. I felt out of place; this was not the country I thought I knew.

*Hey Jason! I like your shoes. You watching Aziz tonight?* - Britt Jacovich, American University student

The speakers were about to begin when I saw Olivia Wilde and Jason Sudeikis walk towards us. As a huge Saturday Night Live fan, my entire focus shifted to meeting Jason Sudeikis. I drew his attention and complimented his shoes. He and Olivia Wilde, another successful entertainer, could not have been kinder. They took a picture with us, and Jason talked to me about his Saturday Night Live career, assured me he was going to watch Aziz Ansari's episode of SNL that night, showed Lou the security guard their credentials, and joined Katy Perry in the VIP section. They spent the entire time dancing, smiling, and cheering the speakers on, just like the rest of us.

*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, hetero-patriarchy from rising again. – Angela Davis*

All the speakers at the Women's March from America Ferrera to Gloria Steinem were inspiring. Every speech echoed the idea of embracing rather than resisting all the diverse communities that make America stronger. But something changed once I heard Angela Davis speak. The second I heard her name I started cheering. I've read excerpts of her books, seen her

in documentaries, and once she finished her speech, the hope I had lost over time was finally restored. I looked around and saw all these different people with completely different life stories and struggles. I saw my friends whom I came here with when it was still pitch black out. I saw Lou the security guard next to celebrities with enough means to pay my entire college tuition. I saw every ethnicity you can think of and I saw a whole lot of smiling despite the events that took place the months and day prior. We will get through this together. Each of us has our own struggles with society and ourselves, but if we unify and find the sources of our problems, there are no reasons why we cannot fix them. If Angela Davis can stand up there, after all the times this society has failed her, and preach about driving change and showing determination to all these diverse people... why should I not believe her?

*I might be wonderful, but I know I got chosen up here as the resident homosexual, or one of them anyway. So what do you need with a big old queer like me? I think it is to talk about radical love.*

– J. Bob Alotta

As successful as the Women's March seemed to be, there was still a group of marginalized Americans missing their own representation and hope. When J. Bob Alotta went on stage, I remember thinking she was the first and only LGBTQ+ speaker so far. I remember looking around and seeing all the pink hats and meeting individuals who identified in the LGBTQ+ community, but were struggling to find representation in the event itself. In retrospect, I was so caught up in the moment that I did not think beyond the obvious groups represented. I did not see the problems or put myself in another individual's perspective. I saw all the pink "pussy hats" and cheered, rather than thinking of the transgender community and how

misrepresented they felt. There were multiple speakers on behalf of women of color and white women, but only one openly speaking for the LGBTQ+ community. The Women's March promised inclusive and diverse speakers and I began questioning if they succeeded as well as I previously thought. I still felt hopeful there would be improvements for the LGBTQ+ community, but disappointed that a day I found so inspiring, may not have felt the same for those who needed it most. There was, and is, way more work that needs to be done.

*Everybody stares, as she goes by 'cause they can see the flame that's in her eyes watch her when she's lighting up the night. - Alicia Keys*

I have hope the future generations can fix the mistakes that have been and will continue to be made. I'm screaming for Alicia Keys when in the corner of my eye I spot someone who will be the change. It was not anyone famous, or even a clever sign, it was just a kid. I saw a little boy, around two years old, in a tiny "FEMINIST" t-shirt. He was with someone I would assume was his dad, dancing away to lyrics he could not understand, but trusting his father to lead him in the right direction. Halfway through the song, his dad put him on his shoulders, and they kept singing and swaying to "Girl on Fire." Two generations of one family, no woman in sight, standing up with women not because they feel obligated and forced to, but because it is the right thing to do. The little boy may not completely understand what was happening around him, but he will one day. And he'll look back and remember the historical day that was so close to becoming a true representation of this country.

*I have learned that oppression and the intolerance of difference come in all shapes and sizes and colors and sexualities; and that among those of us who share the goals of liberation and a*

*workable future for our children, there can be no hierarchies of oppression.* – “There is no Hierarchy of Oppressions” by Audre Lorde

The Women’s March made me feel like I belonged again. From Chris, to Lou the security guard, and to millionaires who had no obligation to fly to Washington, D.C and spend the day marching with strangers, my hope was rewoven piece-by-piece. For me, The Women’s March was a beautiful day that followed an awful one, but for others, the Women’s March was just another day filled with broken expectations. There were people who still felt failed by their country. Celebrity, trans-person, immigrant, Trump voter, security guard, college student, or a little kid confused on what they are cheering for, America should be for everyone. As their Mission Statement emphasizes, the Women’s March was made up of completely different races, sexual orientations, ages, occupations and more, but we all had the same hopeful goal of fixing the country we love. We need to fight for each other, even for those who may seem like they are fighting against us. Most importantly, this country cannot afford to ignore the daily occurrences of oppression and intolerance; we must always remember that one unified country battling against hatred is stronger than a divided one.

*She got both feet on the ground and she’s burning it down. She got her head in the clouds and she’s not backing down. This girl is on fire...* - Alicia Keys

When people ask me about The Women’s March I always find myself telling them the story of the little boy and his dad. I met and saw a lot of amazing people that day, but I do not start with meeting Jason Sudeikis or Angela Davis’ speech. I start with the child. At the end of the day, we need to show little children and future generations what is worth fighting for. We

need to show them bigotry and intolerance cannot take over. We need to show them that in the United States of America when we make mistakes we act on them, and when communities are misrepresented or threatened we do not give in, we just fight harder. And hopefully, one day, regardless of who we are, we will all get our chance to confidently dance to Alicia Keys with no fear in sight.

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