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**GRADUATION PAPER**

**WHITE FEMINISTS IN DONALD TRUMP AGE: THE  
CASE OF WOMEN'S MARCH ON WASHINGTON 2017**

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**ĐẠI HỌC QUỐC GIA HÀ NỘI  
TRƯỜNG ĐẠI HỌC NGOẠI NGỮ  
KHOA SƯ PHẠM TIẾNG ANH**

**KHOÁ LUẬN TỐT NGHIỆP**

**CÁC NHÀ HOẠT ĐỘNG NỮ QUYỀN DA TRẮNG TRONG  
THỜI ĐẠI CỦA DONALD TRUMP: TRƯỜNG HỢP TUẦN  
HÀNH PHỤ NỮ TẠI WASHINGTON 2017**

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## ACCEPTANCE

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## ABSTRACT

This thesis is humanities-oriented research that explores the subjective participation of white feminists in Donald Trump age through the case of Women’s March on Washington. As the largest women-driven movement in the contemporary U.S. in Trump’s inauguration day, the march has been subjected to negative feedbacks which questioned the claimed intersectionality of the march regarding the inclusion of people of color. However, white women countered the argument by claiming their own disprivilege and colorblind beliefs, which further angered black feminists, resulting in the tension between white and black feminists in the known historical march. This study will specifically explore how a web of discourses on race and sex determine the participation of white women before, during and after the march as well as what factors contributed to their participation. By giving an insight into the involvement of white feminists in contemporary feminism, the study is hoped to shed a light on the dynamisms of modern feminism which are currently being subjected to change in political climate of Trump and see the way those dynamisms might contribute to future movements. Based on the theoretical perspective that Michel Foucault specifies with the concept “discursive formation” and “power relation”, this thesis examines the network of events and senses that govern the tension between white and black feminists. This is achieved through recording and analyzing a series of historical events that led to formation of white women identity in feminism and white identity politics at the turning point of American politics. The thesis reveals a system of historical legacy as well as unawared beliefs that established and governed white women identity in new-wave feminism, making it possible to argue that white women should also be considered in the strategy of intersectionality in feminism for the sake of successful coalition building.

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## CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION

Since the presidential election in 2016, America has been obsessing over one figure formerly known as a TV personality, a renowned billionaire, a source of inspiration for money-making dreams, a Republican member and now the official American President – Donald Trump. The Trump fever is controversial when a myriad of social movements are wakening up in the opposition with Trump’s election and agenda for its ideologies heavily reflect sexism, racism, neoliberalism and social division.

Upon the wake of social movements among diverse groups, there emerged a “largest single-day protest in U.S. history” (Broomfield, 2017) which is Women’s March on Washington on Donald Trump’s inauguration day. The march was initiated by Teresa Shook in Hawaii by a Facebook event which quickly attracted a tremendous number of would-be participants alongside other similar events. These online events soon merged into one, leading to the establishment of the official leader board aiming to actualize the march. The march designed a mission statement called Unity Principles which centrally revolves around the advocacy for legislation and policies regarding human rights and other issues, including women’s rights, immigration reform, healthcare reform, reproductive rights, the natural environment, LGBTQ rights, racial equality, freedom of religion and workers’ rights. With the diversity of fields, the march aims to include differing groups of various backgrounds and diverse identities. In other words, the march has put the intersectionality at its hearts to promote inclusivity. This is considered to partially assist in the worldwide spread of the march, helping to inspire hundreds of similar movements in other parts of the world.

The march was infused by Donald Trump’s sexism statements such as “grab them [women] by the pussy” and the pending threats that his presidency could bring to human rights, including women’s; thus, it is regarded as anti-Trump protest with all the signs and banners targeting directly at Trump. However, after seeing the potential

of the march to become the largest march in the U.S. for women, the organizers had re-stated the march's purpose to be able to involve more people. The march organizers claimed that they were "not targeting Trump specifically" instead they focused on building "a stand on social justice and human rights issues ranging from race, ethnicity, gender, religion, immigration and healthcare" (Jamieson, 2016) to cater to interests of other women. Although claiming to be "intersectional" as it invited all women to join the march "Black women, indigenous women, poor women, immigrant women disabled women, Muslim women, lesbian, queer and trans women" (Unity Principles of Women's March on Washington, 2016), the march itself has received a myriad of criticisms over its so-called racial division which had begun from the original name "Million Women March" that accidentally was a movement initiated in part to response to the exclusion of black women from feminism in 1997. From this point onwards, the march has become much like a platform for public controversy between black and white women rather than a platform working towards unity and inclusivity (Presley and Presswood, 2017).

There have been numerous discourses of race surrounding the march's criticism, mostly deriving from women and men of color. ShiShi Rose, a 27-year-old blogger and a well-known black feminist, wrote in a post dedicated to white women in the march that "Now is the time for you to be listening more, talking less. You should be reading our books and understanding the roots of racism and white supremacy. Listening to our speeches. You should be drowning yourselves in our poetry" (Stockman, 2017). This kind of statement in which racial division is intentionally made clear echoed in multiple other online and offline discussion. For example, Ms. Rose said in an interview that "I needed them [white women] to understand that they don't just get to join the march and not check their privilege constantly" or in a post on ColorLines, Jamilah Lemieux – vice-editor of Color Lines - stated that "Many of the white women who will attend the march are committed activists, sure. But for those new-to-it white women who just decided that they are about social issues? I'm



not invested in sharing space with them at this point in history.” These clear-cut categorization of women marchers stated before and during the march prevented a number of white women from joining the march since they felt “alienated” from it and opined that “the event had turned from a march for all women into a march for black women” (Stockman, 2018).

It is acknowledged that these statements have been generated based on the history of exclusion of women of color in feminist movements and the long-lasting legacy of racism in the U.S. (Tolentino, 2017), especially in this case where almost all organizers are white. However, the more vigorous debate has been revolving around the success of the march where many women of color, after much observation and post-march statistics, were irritated that the march was organized in peace without brutal police intervention like in black people’s recent movements. Such argument was reflected in the statement of Luvvie Ajaii, a black blogger and author, in a Facebook post that “White women and white bodies can hold space on streets and shut down cities “peacefully” because they are allowed to. Black and brown people who march are assaulted by cops.” (Romanathan, 2017). This counter-burst was particularly popularized after the march with the fact that nobody got arrested during Women’s March on Washington, which was used by organizers to claim that the march was a success. As recorded by Romanathan (2017), by putting a viral image of Ieshia Evans, a young black nurse and mother photographed during protest in Louisiana over the death of Alton Sterling, as she stood, alone and stoci, facing two officers in riot gear barreling toward her besides images of gleeful, pin-hatted white protesters, black women let the image speak for their anger. According to Ajayi (2017), “this march, the fact that it could go off peacefully and cops are wearing pink hats, and no one felt like they were in danger, and militarized police did not show up, that’s white privilege at its core”. This intensified the tension and turned the argument over the representation of white or black women in feminist movements into a broader question of white over black privileges. Another factor of vitality is that by

exerting the claim on racial and identity, arguments from both sides of white and black women over Women's March on Washington provoked a sense of identity politics, a kind of politics that deploys the category of identity as a tool to orientate social and political action in a context of inequality or injustice and "with the aim of asserting group distinctiveness and belonging and gaining power and recognition" (Neofotistos, 2013). Using this definition to look at events and arguments in Women's March on Washington, it is obvious that both white and black women in aforementioned arguments had resorted to this kind of politics or in the words of Walters (2017) "most social change and political activism happens in and through identity politics". However, as Jacobson (2017) commented, "when identity politics is the motivation for social action, identities will collide". As black identity politics has been central theme for decades as black racism has been the American issue since first days of development. However, white identity politics that the aforementioned group of white women exerted is a controversial phenomenon. White identity politics that is established from a distinct position of race and class promotes "the sentiment among white Americans that they are a structurally oppressed racial group" (King, 2017), which, I argue, is subconsciously integrated in the beliefs of white women joining arguments over Women's March on Washington and made clear through their discourse. This politics is also closely associated with Trump since white identity politics is identified as "the major theme of his 2016 presidential campaign" (Sides et al., 2017) spread widely via media and communications. As social movement actors, indeed, act in the "media master forum" to which political actors ascribe great influence (Ferree et al., 2002), I argue that arguments of white women in opposition with black feminists in the march resonate partially white identity politics exerted by Trump. Thus, to study about the formation of this politics in American society and among white women, it is needed to be embedded in the political climate of contemporary America. White identity politics originates from the belief that the white has been turned into ethnic group and given less benefits than other groups in

the community by the political system. Eight years of racialized politics [favoring black communities] under President Obama means that racial attitudes are now more closely aligned with white Americans' partisan preferences than they have been at any time in the history (Tesler, 2016). This kind of belief has been strongly encouraged and promoted by Trump himself by a myriad of racist and sexist claims; thus, playing a notable part in both the participation of white women and the provoked tension represented in the march because social movements, in its nature, are "mostly informal networks of interaction based on shared beliefs and solidarity among a social group" (Porta & Mattoni, 2016), in this case are white women joining online arguments to oppose with criticism of black feminists.

In order to understand how the participation of white women on contemporary feminist movements has urged the racism debate on which both black and white women are discriminated, it is necessary to put the phenomenon in the context of Trump's promoted philosophy on white identity politics and the long-lasting history of white identities in feminist movements. By this way, the research is hoped to provide a righteous and critical view on social impact of Women's March on Washington.

This research is driven by my concern about social movements and feminism in Trump age since Trump stated a myriad of racism and sexism assaults which have brought back "retro" arguments over classic problem of women position in the society as well as the terror upon social groups such as lesbian, immigrants and black communities. Women's March on Washington was a fierce response to Donald Trump and his potential threats. It claimed to be intersectional by catering all the features of the marchers such as race, gender and sexual orientation; however, its reality was arguable and debated among feminist community by both white and black women. While the felt exclusion of black women are understandable to me because of mainstream racism in the U.S., the articulations of white women that they also

were “marginalized” in the march (Markowicz, 2017) since white women are usually not considered as marginalized groups in American society are questionable. By reading articles of this topic, I am under the impression that white feminists involving in the heated debate can hardly understand the anger of black feminists before, during and after the march. This seems to reveal the different catering purpose of each social group. This question brings me to this research with the target to explore why the experience of white feminists are different from black ones in Women’s March on Washington, a largest women-driven protest in U.S. contemporary history, which is said to “act as a flashpoint for the generation of emergent spaces to do politics differently” (Moss, 2017).

As observing from the unfolding of the event, the march was, in fact, a platform for intra-feminism conflict with various perspectives which represented different systems of thought involved. I argue that exploring these systems of thought will lead to a clear view of white feminists’ experience in the march as well as the interaction between white and black feminists. Because these mentioned systems of thought were embedded in arguments as pre-known conceptions, they can be viewed as discourse in the definition of Foucault.

According to Foucault, discourse can be understood in two meanings, “a statement of a group of statements that, within a certain historical context, are understandable to a person or group of persons” and “a single system of analyzable rules and transformations that govern these statements” (Phung, 2016, p.2). In other words, a discourse is a system of thought that is rendered in language. Discourse can refer to the sayable of recognizable things within the limit of human perception. As Fendler (2010) put into words, “As soon as we can know something, it is in discourse”; thus, discourse in the scope of the study’s discussion will not only refer to verbal statements. In the case of Women’s March on Washington, the existing tension between white and black women in contemporary feminist movements, at the same

time, is expressed in words and reflects two or more systems of underlying thought which govern the reasoning of involved subjects. The process of analyzing this system of thought will entail discourse analysis.

Moreover, according to Foucault, discourse is “the product of collective thoughts and actions” while “discourses are historically specific” (Fendler, 2010). Thus, a Foucauldian discourse analysis involves the study of historical conditions that contribute to the existence of statement patterns in a context. In the study, historical conditions are not only events but also networks of meanings that events generate. For instance, the tension in contemporary feminist movements of white and black women is made intelligible by discourses about race and sexism in Trump age. Therefore, the discourses about race and Trumpism sexism in contemporary American society partially contribute to the historical conditions of the issue.

Another concept of Foucault that is of particular relation to this study is the concept of power relations among subjects involved in the creation and circulation of discourse. To create and maintain discourses, the interactions of subjects are necessary, which results in inter-related power among subjects. Foucault’s definition of power has two key features: (a) power is a system, a network of relations encompassing the whole society, rather than a relation between the oppressed and the oppressor; (b) individuals are not just the objects of power, but they are the locus where the power and the resistance to it are exerted (Mills, 2003). By thinking about power as a strategy and not as possession, power can only be exerted; thus, dispersing the society and potentially “come from below” (Balan, 2010). Discourse about white-privilege identities involve the subjects of race, gender and politics. This network of powers provides a basic to understand ourselves and others. Therefore, a network of power is also a network of meanings.

In the light of Foucauldian perspective, the conflict in Women’s March on Washington can be understood as a network of discourses that govern the interaction

and participation of white and black feminists. As argued above, due to the main subject in question is white feminists, the study will focus mostly on exploring the network of discourses that govern the participation of white feminists in Women's March on Washington 2017. In other words, this thesis is actually a synthesis of how white feminists are made subjects by discourses in the certain context of the march; thus, its objective is to find out how subjectivity is historically constituted. Based on this objective, the thesis will also deploy the aspect of historical a priori proposed by Foucault in the analysis part. In the words of Foucault, historical a priori is "all the discursive and non-discursive rules that provide the formation of knowledge that constitutes our subjective experience" (Öner, 2016) and "a condition of reality for statements" (Foucault, 1997, p.127). This definition is used to view factors that contribute to the general subjectivity of white feminists.

In order to achieve the research target, I would make use of Foucauldian scholarship for the study of conflict discourse in feminist movements. This naturally leads to a research on historical conditions that have contributed to the tension between white and black women in contemporary feminist movements along with the power relations that govern the circulation of the feminist conflict in Donald Trump age. Artifacts that archive these historical records are preserved on social media platforms and the Internet in the time of tremendous online influence. Considering that Women's March on Washington was initially prompted on the Internet, online platforms are certainly a critical space for the circulation of statements, claims and arguments. Thus, the artifacts would be retrieved mostly from online media. Moreover, besides artifacts from direct participants, I also collected ideas of scholarly publications. As Women's March on Washington generated great inspiration for the rise of feminism movements in other states, it was of particular interest to scholars from different distance. On exchanging arguments and observation of the march's phenomenon, the Internet was made use to circulate scholarly publications. All in all,

Women's March on Washington was embedded in online space; hence, defining its origin of artifacts.

### **Overview of the chapters**

After chapter 1, chapter 2 tracks the history of white women identity in U.S. feminism movements by delving first into the construction of white identity in American history and its specific development in feminism with white feminists as protagonists who both consolidated racism and attempted to break through racism. The chapter also traces back the development of the sense considering white as a minority in recent years which was strongly promoted by Donald Trump and subconsciously governed beliefs of white feminists in Women's March on Washington, contributing to the conflict in the march.

Chapter 3 specifically records and analyzes the discursive formation of race and sex and the governance of white identity politics on discourse circulation in Women's March on Washington 2017. This chapter exposes how the political participation of white feminists are mostly shaped by social manifestations of race and gender.

Chapter 4 concludes the importance of understanding experience of white feminists in feminism movements in order to avoid the over-inclination to black feminism and build a successful coalition.

## **CHAPTER II: The evolution of white women identity in U.S. feminist movements**

This chapter is dedicated to making clear the history of white women identity that has contributed to race discourse in feminist movements. This history is restored in scholarly publications which is supposed to be as objective as it could be. I argue that the construction of white identity in feminist movements is a critical part in determining the circulation of race discourse in contemporary movements.

### **The construction of white identity in America**

First of all, it is crucial to acknowledge that “whiteness is a social construction in that it can be analyzed, modified and discarded” (Kincheloe, 1999). Race and whiteness are guided not only by biological foundation but by the social meanings that are attached to it. Therefore, to trace back the origin of race and whiteness in the U.S. society, it is certainly necessary to rely on the social definition of certain past situations.

According to observation of Lyman (1977), current American “race” relations are the legacy of the intersection of three major events in the U.S. history which were “the conquest of the Indians, the forced importation of Africans, and the more or less solicited coming of Europeans, Asians and Latinos”. Thus, to understand the evolution of race discourse in American society, these events are keys.

#### *The conquest of the Indians*

The war against Native Americans was the foremost initial step of America to racism. Before coming to American continent, the English – original invaders of the land – had a legacy of colony in Ireland and other surrounding European countries. In Ireland, the English treated the Irelandic people as an inferior race, called them savages and promulgated cruel laws including the Penal Laws of slave codes which was further developed in new American colonies in the time to come. Thus, it is



observed that concept of the inferiority of other peoples as well as belief of superior traits usually being attached with biological traits as universal imposition, which became the premise for whiteness and white supremacy, were ingrained into English minds before English colonist arrived in America.

However, though the conquest of Ireland created the template for the ideology of white supremacy, not until the official English war against native Americans did the white identity mark its formation. Takaki (1993) used to comment in his book “A Different Mirror: A history of Multicultural America” that, “The social construction of race occurred within the economic context of the competition for land”. This was the result of both war-inflicted paranoid and the religious simulation. The origin of white American identity can be dated back to King Philip’s War, the war in 1675 – 1676 between English colonists and Wampanoag Indians and their allies – the Narragansett and Nipmuck. On calculations of mortality, this could be considered the most cruel war in record of North America in which both sides aggressively urged the war by “killing women and children, torturing captives and mutilating the dead” (Lepore, 1998). However, the more the war progressed, the more English soldiers interacted with native Americans, coupled with their settlement leading to their fixed navigation and distance from England, they started to form identity doubt, resulting in their departure from colonists and going to live with native Americans. As this happened, the remaining of English colonists further consolidates their pre-conceptions of Indian people as “the Devil and everything the Puritans feared – the body, sexuality, laziness, sin and the loss of self-control” (Takaki, 1993).

One notable factor that played a significant role in the bloody war was the disparity of religion between English colonists and native Americans. They simply followed different religions which were hardly to be understood by foreign view and converted to another religion. Thus, the conflict was deeply intertwined with notion of religion. As attaching Indian people with “devils”, some Puritan soldiers regarded the war as

a holy war fought to clear “devils” and barbarians. They labelled Indian natives with degrading and divisive adjectives such as “inhuman, illiterate, non-Christian, and uncivilized” (Gardiner, 2009). These kinds of label, especially religion-related discourse, gave the Christian soldiers justified and righteous reasons to wage wars against Indian natives.

In the observation of Takaki (1993), religion was identified as the outstanding underlying reasons for the extreme atrocity of English soldiers:

What happened in America in the actual encounters between Indians and the English strangers was not uniform. In Virginia, Indian savagery was viewed largely as cultural; Indians were ignorant heathens. In New England, on the other hand, Indian savagery was racialized; Indians had come to be condemned as a demonic race, their dark complexions signifying an indelible and inherent evil. Why was there such a difference between the two regions? Possibly the competition between the English and the Indians over resources was more intense in New England had brought with them a greater sense of religious mission than the Virginia settlers. For the Puritans, theirs was an “errand into the wilderness” – a mission to create what John Winthrop had proclaimed as a “city on a hill” with the eyes of the world upon them... Thus savagery was racialized as the Indians were demonized... Once the process of this cultural construction was under way it set a course for the making of a national identity for centuries to come.

This religion-backed notion of “self” soon took over the climate of American with the widespread take-over of the European whites. It can be observed from this period of history that American whites have since resorted to a myriad of justifications including God’s mission, Manifest Destiny and Social Darwinism to assert their invasion in American continent.

### *The enslavement of African peoples*

The enslavement and its related slavery has been popularly attributed to racism in America. Upon tracing back the origin of whiteness, it is impossible to disregard the role of the enslaving history and its roots.

The establishment of whiteness in relation to African peoples derived from three key factors: “the need for cheap labor, the desire for social control, and the fear of insurrection” (Gardiner, 2009). As acknowledged in the book *A history of Affirmative Action*, Rubio (2001) stated that:

Neither slavery nor the white race constituted fixed or natural categories or activity, but rather both were institutions devised over the course of the first century of settlement by Anglo American colonial authorities in Virginia, Maryland and the Carolinas in order to cut labor costs and blunt the threat of labor solidarity and rule.

The initial ground to establish the whiteness power was the urgent need for cheap labor. As the agriculture on fertile lands, especially tobacco farming, flourished, English colonists needed a large load of workers to execute difficult field works. With the expansion of farming and the greed for more profits growing, they need even larger amount of workers at cheap price. During the early time, white indentured servants, mostly kidnapped ones and prisoners, were the ones who were in charge of these field works. Another category of white indentured workers were the ones who voluntarily came to America to seek for economic opportunity, political and religious freedom as well as a brand new start on life. This category was far more educated than the former category, which led to a number of backlash while they were forced to work under horrible conditions.

In the influx of indentured workers, there were also Africans who came from the Europe, just like two mentioned above white categories. However, with changes in American society resulting from the realization of “seemingly-endless” natural resources in American continent, until 1650, 70% of Africans in Virginia was indentured for their whole life, implying a feature of over-exploitation which set the pace for the following years. Africans were easily enslaved due to the fact that they were easily identified in case they wanted to run away as well as their lack of knowledge on the terrain. With their obviously imposed inferiority on both the status and the living condition at the very beginning, it had paved the way for white

landowners to take advantage of them in order to solve their headache of finding cheap labor. This was further consolidated by a law promulgated by Virginia Assembly in 1661 to legalize the practice of life enslavement of African peoples.

The second vital factor contributing to the construction of whiteness was the need for social control of whites during constructing a new nation in the context that whites had become dominant population in the community and white indentured servants had had a record of working under harsh conditions. It was the throbbing problem for high-status figures to prevent them from joining African slaves to overthrow the freshly established system.

The realization of a potential danger among workers was the event of Bacon's Rebellion in 1675. Nathaniel Bacon was a wealthy white worker who united white workers to invade Indian land and integrated enslaved Africans workers into their movement. This event caused severe shock and fear to white structure since they had never been dawned upon by this possibility of a civil strike. Though the rebellion was soon put down, the ruling class was already startled by Bacon's rebellion. As Takaki (1993) noted, "Large land owners could see that the social order would always be in danger so long as they had to depend on white labor...They could open economic opportunities to white workers and extend political privileges to them. But this would erode their own economic advantage and potentially undermine their political hegemony. Or they could try to reorganize society on the basis of class and race." And this was solved by the increasing importation of a group who were already enslaved.

However, the grudges of a possible rebellion stayed obsessed to American white people. They were scared of slave insurrections. The more African slaves were imported, the more fear of a revolt white population felt; thus, they were motivated to establish a system in which slave suppression would be imposed by the majority of population. In the research world, there have been many different opinions on the

process in which a so-called “superiority of whiteness” emerged. Theodore Allen in the book *The Invention of Whiteness* argued that the laboring class of southern whites, who made up 60% of the white population, was “coerced into being a superior race to provide social control over Africans and native Americans” (Gardiner, 2009). However, there was also an opposite perspective of Philip Rubio that “laws, at that time, were deliberately passed giving privileges to whites of humble means”. Due to these newly-given privileges, the status of poor indentured whites became higher in comparison with Africans and in the eyes of white superiors. Naturally, this kind of status stimulated whites to develop “a new caste consciousness and a new caste loyalty” (Gardiner, 2009). In order to maintain their certain power in the society, there must be an inferior class for their mental comfort. This was the remark of the birth to a class of working white people. This was noted in words by Scott (2000) in the book “*One Drop of Blood: The American Misadventure of Race*” that, “Under relentless pressure from the lower classes, a broad social liberty had been born but at the cost of a complete denial of liberty to a portion of society.”

#### *Defining whiteness through immigration policy*

As mentioned above, one of the key events that contributed to the construction of the whiteness was the immigration of Europeans, Asians and Latinos into the U.S. The aspect that this was most influential was immigration policy promulgated by the U.S. court.

Immigration policy had been created to determine who might enter the U.S. and whether they can become citizens, leading to the need to define whiteness and indirectly providing economic benefits for white people. In 1790, the Federal government regulated that the right to become a naturalized citizen was reserved to “free white persons”. In 1870, in order to grant the citizenship for freed black laborers within the U.S., a new category for people who were eligible for naturalized citizenship was immigrants from Africa or those of African descent. As can be

observed, this kind of classification based on geography is in stark difference with the policy for white people based on race. Lopez (1996) stated that, “such policies determined who was in the U.S., which in turn determined what genetic stock was available to make up an “American”. However, those policies also marginalized other groups of immigrants including Europeans, Asians and Latinos.

Many immigrants, though being genetically white, was not initially accepted by the general populace as white such as Italians. In the mass immigrations of the late 1800s and early 1900s, there were some protest against federal government policies for permitting people from European ethnic groups not typically found in the U.S. to officially enter. Most of established white people in the U.S. saw them as a threat in terms of both economy and culture. However, once those white people were granted to become citizens, despite initial hostile reception, they had the opportunity to adopt the norms, ideologies and practices of whiteness, which helped them to be accepted as white and to join the systemic advantages for white. This was obviously difference from the situation of immigrants who were not considered as white such as East Indians. These people were refused the right to become naturalized citizens, which made them unable to both receive the same privileges that white people enjoy and get the chance to assimilate as white.

The circumstance of Chinese immigrants in the U.S. is another notable example of how whiteness was further consolidated to maintain the economic advantage of the white. Chinese workers were admitted to the U.S. during the mid and late 1800s to take over the hard manual labor required in building the infrastructure for the U.S. expansion, especially in the West. After the West of the U.S had been developed to a certain extent, some Chinese workers desired to stay in the U.S.; thus, wanting to be granted as citizens. However, federal court concluded that the Chinese were not white; therefore, after the need for workers declined, this portion of Chinese workers were prevented from owning property such as land and basic right of political

participation like voting and had to settle down to be merchants or service providers. During that time, an economic recession interceded, which gave rise a discourse that “the presence of an ‘industrial army of Asiatic laborers’ was exacerbating class conflict between labor and capital within white society” (Takaki, 1993). As white workers felt threatened, the ruling class had to exclude this portion of potential threat in terms of political and social participation in order to assure them. Once again, the boundaries of whiteness were further concreted by exclusion of the ‘other’ race.

Another group subjected to exclusion was Mexican farm and service workers. Up to present, immigration policy only allows a small amount of Latinos to enter the U.S. Nevertheless, due to the demand for labor in agribusiness, factories, food and service industries, Mexicans have been employed repeatedly, leading to their illegal entry. Popular discourse gradually saw these undocumented workers as illegal elements which should not be widely accepted. This, coupled with their label as “non-white”, barred them from receiving the same approval as white populace.

Since most of the ‘non-white’ immigrants in the history of the U.S. were workers while immigration policy had produced an intricate system of laws governing how one can be accepted as citizens, an inferior status had been attached for immigrants. Lopez (1996) noted as follows:

To be non-white meant one was unfit for naturalization, while to be white defined one as suited for citizenship. This stark division necessarily also carried important connotations regarding, for example, agency, moral authority, intelligence, and belonging. To be unfit for naturalization – that is, to be non-white – implied a certain degeneracy of intellect, morals, self-restraint, and political values; to be suited for citizenship – to be white – suggested moral maturity, self-assurance, personal independence, and political sophistication.

As the history of whiteness construction suggests, the history of exclusion of people of color in both social and political participation has been the foundation of the American society; therefore, political involvement of both white and black social groups have always been controversial since it provokes a history of exclusion in

which the tension seems not to ever be resolved. Thus, by understanding the stated above history, it would be easier to perceive the dynamics of the unease in feminism movement, a kind of social movement which represented an intersection of race and gender, in contemporary American history.

### **The Unease History of White and Black women in feminism**

Feminism was a part of a youth movement initiated in the 1960s and 1970s. These period of years marked the completion of struggle against legal racial segregation, resulting in a series of consequences including the consciousness of race and sex discrimination, the transformation of sexual norms as well as the distrust for the government and major corporations in the advent of Vietnam war. The doubt of authority naturally led to civil rights movements in which African Americans, people of color, youth, women, homosexuals and environmentalists went to streets. These movements achieved monumental turning points in American society including but not limited to the end of apartheid in the South, increasing space for racial dialogue, the antiwar movement, the recognition of people of color's contributions to the nation, the growth of gender equity and opportunities for marginalized people along with the sexual knowledge and openness. With the climate of democracy arise in American society was the corresponding rise of civil movements with previously oppressed groups like the black and women at the frontline.

According to Breines (2007), the story of race in the women's movement lies precisely in the profound racial distance and tentative reconciliation between women, which is a microcosm of American society in the past half century. First-wave feminism movement from late 19<sup>th</sup> century to early 20<sup>th</sup> century focused on legal issues, primarily on gaining the right of women to vote; thus, it had not involved much of racial divergence. However, with social changes caused by context of history, racial discourse was begun to be more open. Throughout the American contemporary history, what defines the conflict between black and white feminism



most was the separation of both to two different genres in second and third waves of feminism. Therefore, in order to have an in-depth insight into the generation-inherent conflict of black and white women in feminism, it is necessary to track the following record of each wave.

Second-wave feminism happened in the early 1960s to 1980s in the U.S. Feminists in this wave broadened the debate to a wider range of issues compared with first-wave focuses encompassing sexuality, family, the workplace, reproductive rights, de facto (natural) inequalities and official legal inequalities. In this period of time, women were unlikely to seek for employment due to their dominant responsibility of domestic and household duties, making them isolated within the home and estranged from politics, economics and legal issues.

The popular narrative of second-wave feminism was that it was a white movement because of its racism (Daniels, 2014). However, by observing closely the dynamisms of ideals and practices of both two groups in this period, it would provide more equal scrutiny on both groups. It can be attributed to interracial romantic relationships between black men and white women in the civil rights and Black Power movements that had laid obstacles for relationships between the women, making heterosexual black women angry. Another notable event was that although there had certainly been a number of movements organized by white women to include black women for the sake of solidary sisterhood, their efforts were rejected by the black women and were primarily expelled from black freedom movements. Jo Freeman, civil rights activist and feminist noted in 1968 that, “Our contacts with minority women were few, despite our roots in the Civil Rights Movements and community organizing projects. The message white women got from black activists was to stay away; our presence, our ideas, our whiteness was oppressive”. Most of radical black women at that time was into black nationalist politics and culture which emphasized much on racial awareness to develop black identity. Nevertheless, it cannot be stated that the goal of

black and women in this period did not align with each other because male chauvinism was oppressive to both. Like women in the civil rights and Black Power movements, white women also had to struggle with male dominance and even men in movements who disregarded the significance of women's subordination. This was echoed in words by author Marge Piercy (1993) that "Movement men are generally interested in women occasionally as bed partners, as domestic-servants-mother-surrogates, and constantly as economic producers: as in other patriarchal societies, one's wealth in the movement can be measured in terms of the people whose labor one can possess and direct on one's projects." Both groups of women faced pressures of decreasing in sexual and social capital as they detached from the mixed-gender movements. The need to organize movements exclusively representing their own identities at the early times might be the critical reason of dividing loyalties.

Popular argument of black women at that time, though still common today, was that feminism organized by white women "was not relevant to their lives as black and primarily working-class women and that white women were insensitive, often insulting and obtuse, about their interests" (Breines, 2006). In order to understand this discourse, it is significant to acknowledge "the feminine mystique" – a realization of women's roles in the society. Changes in the context of history urged people to rethink about stereotyped notions of femininity that governed girls not to be so successful otherwise men would not want them, to become wives and mothers while not pursuing careers so as to become backbone for their men. At the same time, schooling taught young, white women that their futures would rely on a man, which was enhanced with the prosperity of postwar America. This social-structured notion was acknowledged in words by Meredith Tax, a leader of Bread and Rose – an influential feminism movement in 1960s of white women:

The total structure of a woman's life...all combine to give her a sense of her utter unimportance as a human being. She is dispensable: a decorative object, a replaceable part, a service station. Her destiny and her sense of herself are both

dependent upon men, or a man. She is convinced that it is her place to serve, to efface herself, to live for and through others—brothers, husbands, children.

However, it should be taken into consideration that in order to be “decorative object”, a certain condition had been created from race and class positions for them to be put in a protective status. This was usually dismissed by white women while the fact that conditions of black women were in stark contradictions was also not taken into consideration. For example, working-class women and women of color were not easily able to imagine themselves in the role of a full-time housewives and mothers because to ensure the survival and leisure life, they were forced to work along with domestic tasks. While the role model of black women in activism movement was strong black women like their mothers, white women worried about the stereotype of feminine services which were not great concerns of black women. Another illustration of ideal difference between white and women of color lied in their own analysis of nuclear family. With characterization of sex roles in stereotyped family, white women argued that “it was primarily through their roles as wives, mothers and daughters that women were ‘kept in their place’” (Popkin, 1978) and “within the family system, men function as a ruling class, women as an exploited class. Historically, women and their children have been the property of men” (Willis, 1969). In general, white women took a rationalized approach to the existence of family, encouraging them to protest for more supportive way of living arrangement. In contrast, black women felt alienated in this fight because the family was an institution that radical black women admired since “their parents sacrificed to protect and nurture children in a harsh racist world” (Breines, 2006). In these examples, it can be observed that socialized race and class had shaped distinct political ideas and forms, which further encouraged the circulation of controversy. Black women had their own reasons to opine that white women who were born privileged could concentrate solely on personal concerns and were unable to comprehend that, as for black women, “race and class discrimination were as important as sex

discrimination” (Breines, 2006). On the whole, the prominent feature of second-wave feminism was emphasis on sexism with white female identities at the central of the activism.

Third-wave feminism began to emerge in the 1990s. According to Lise Shapiro Sanders, one of the major features of third-wave feminism is the privileging of the “diversity of women’s experience over the similarities amongst women”, which detached from the focus on “white, middle-class biases” of second-wave feminism. Because of the concentration on “diversity”, women of color were recruited more to involve in the movement. Along with that was the reverse of traditional feminine symbols, which were rejected as symbols of oppression by second-wave feminism, to become potential sources of female empowerment. Amanda Lotz (2007) had commented on this wave that “conflicts between second and third-wave ideologies can therefore be seen to result from both political and generational differences”, making the generational conflict during third-wave’s process of “distancing itself” from their fore-mothers central debate of contemporary feminism. The central message of third-wave feminism was “Girl Power” which indicated that women could be powerful while being “girly” – a clear backlash against second-wave feminism that such stereotypes caused women’s oppression. In the context of rising neoliberalism in the American society, consumerism – a repercussion of neoliberalism – was adopted as a method to link “Girl Power” with “purchasing power”. This, according to Kendal (2012), marked the shifting position of women from domestic dependents to financially self-reliant, calling into attention the message of third-wave that “market participation necessarily enhances women’s liberation”. With Affirmative Action programs giving opportunities for historically excluded groups including women and racial minorities to join market force and mobilize social status, the financial self-reliance of women have gained considerably; thus, aligning with the notion of market participation, having increased much of women’s liberation. However, the racial division between black and white women

has not ceased although there has been more involvement of mixed racial participation in feminism. It was argued by Holloway (2018) that after benefiting economically from the anti-discrimination programs, white women were now parting from the movements dedicated for equality of people of color. This was illustrated by the survey of Vox.com that “according to the 2014 Cooperative Congressional Election study, nearly 70 percent of the 20,694 self-identified non-Hispanic white women surveyed either somewhat or strongly opposed affirmative action”. This was noted by women of color as a “betrayal” to the discourse of solidarity and the so-called fight for privileges of diversity in third-wave feminism. In addition, with the escalation of black social activism on police racism against black citizens as in the case of Ferguson and Sandra Bland, it was bitterly stated by women of color that though feminism in the past declared to be the platform for diversity and freedom for all, there had been no signs of white women involved in these movements or in the black feminism – Black Lives Matter provoked to include stated above activist movements.

The dynamisms between white and black women in third-wave feminism are pretty much the same with conflicts in the past years in which ideals and practices are the basic divisive factors. The issues of white women’s interests could not be aligned with that of black women due to socially constructed features of intersectionality including race, class and gender. White women, as was critically analyzed by Frankenberg (1993), was implicated in the racial standpoint because they are part of a system that they seek to challenge.

In summary of the historical record on white construction and conflict in feminisms, the interconnection between race and gender leading to the subordination include three main categories which are the biological difference between Blacks/Whites and male/female, the ideological beliefs that position both Blacks and women as the Other and the social division of labor where Black and women perform “feminine”

labor that is culturally specific and attached to them (Ware, 1992). The juxtaposition is created on the same grounds although varies with white and black women due to layered oppression constructed by history. On addressing this kind of social construction for the sake of coalition building, white women find it easier to study black women than to study themselves, perhaps due to the ‘other’ being more real than the ‘self’ (Frankenberg, 1993). Additionally, the problem of centering white women as the object of the study could pose the risk of re-enforcing the privileged position, either consciously or unconsciously. Thus, there, so far, has been a limited library of literature on the experience of white women in feminism compared with that of black women. However, according to Ellis (1996), one way to build coalition between white and black women is to develop self-defined knowledge that is reflective of their own standpoint. Upon the process of definition, white women would certainly have to experience a stronger setback than black fellows since they are normally exposed to less harsh reality of racism. Therefore, by exploring the case of Women’s March on Washington where white women have made attempts to involve black women by self-acknowledging their own unearned privileges in the context of sexism oppression promoted by Trump, it is aimed to shed a light on the interconnection of contemporary social pressures (race and sexism discourses) as repercussions of changing political climate on the experience of white feminists.

## **WHITE IDENTITY POLITICS IN DONALD TRUMP AGE**

### *White identity crisis*

In 1990s, a panoply of socio-economic and political forces changed deep-rooted notions of white identity. The realization that they may not continue to be a majority of the population in light of dominant demographic trends shifting towards non-white population like Hispanic as well as the acknowledgement that they have been labelled as oppressors in the eyes of the world led to an unprecedented crisis of whiteness. In other words, there is a new consciousness about race in contemporary Western

societies (Gallagher, 1994; Winant, 1994; Rubin, 1994). Corresponding with the increase in media exposure to traditionally marginalized groups, whites gained more understanding of racial category plagued the society. In the argument of Kincheloe (1999), the crisis of whiteness had ended the notion of white racial invisibility, resulting in a myriad of questions about how whites will construct a new white identity in this new racial world – a world in which people are soberly aware of racial inequity and appreciate subordinated cultures more (Frankenberg, 1993). This increasing consciousness made the whites feel guilty about their interaction with a group subjected to historically racial oppression. In the midst of identity crisis, guilty whites had tendency to engage in “a form of white self-denigration” which regarded non-white cultures as superior to culture of the white and attributed to them positive features such as authentic, natural and sacred. However, the episteme of conservatism shaped another ways of crisis confrontation, one of which was gaining greater cultural correspondence with “right-wing racial codes and articulations of racial anxieties” (Kincheloe, 1999). With the arguments of right-wing political party exerted by Pete Wilson – a Republican presidential candidate – in 1995 that white people were not allowed to be white anymore under the pressure of non-white, young whites, who were most vulnerable to the struggle of white identity in new historical context, began to believe that anti-white/anti-racism minorities and multiculturalists were repressing their free expression of a white identity. This kind of belief flamed up racial hostility and re-brought the attack against non-whites, for example Latino immigration in the Golden State in late 1990s with a series of prohibition policies. As Kincheloe (1999) put into words, the new white identity became “the defiant signifier of the new self”. The ideological construction following this new kind of self-definition stimulated the recovery of white supremacy which was expressed in paranoid methods such as blaming non-whites for increasing social ills and opposing inter-racial marriage due to the fear of “miscegenation”. The ideology was justified righteously by the intervention of all fields including academic rhetoric. As Russel

Eisenman (1994) argued in the publication “The Chronicle of Higher Education”, “it is bad enough that whites are victims of a quota system called affirmative action which causes them (especially white males) to be discriminated against, to work (as I have in the past) for an incompetent supervisor” and “because of immigration laws, whites will become a minority early in the next century”. Though articulating in academic vocabulary, these kinds of arguments were backed by an emotional rather than a rational foundation, it was actually a result of white anger towards the threat of losing dominant status. On the confrontation of identity against the rising popularity of alienation and anonymity, the emptiness of postmodern condition and failure of modernist humanism to respond to globalism, whites were forced to define their distinct features against other groups. However, this was a difficult process because their identity was mostly established by the oppression of other groups as argued in the previous chapter of white colonial legacy. The realization of this desperate process urged them to seek for a way to construct their own identity by a variety of methods such as referencing their immigrant grandparents’ stories of struggle, the status of European ethnic minorities and reviving ethnic practices abandoned by previous generations. Nevertheless, these efforts were in vain due to the impossibility of aligning immigrant experiences with major obstacles in language and customs with that of contemporary whites. This led to a popular sense at that time of a rising white identity crisis among young whites that there existed no good reason to be white (Yudice, 1995; Gallagher, 1994; Tanaka, 1996; Winant, 1994; Keating, 1995). One central reaction of whites towards the identity crisis was the attempt to reposition themselves as victims. The argument for white victimization resonated in writings of Aaron Gresson (1995). He recorded that in the new turning point of history, to recover white domination, non-whites had been depicted as new oppressors. Everyone except for white males enjoyed privileges while non-whites exploited white guilt about a long-dead white racism. On this ground of moral indignation, whites attempted to position themselves in a new racial order. A



repercussion of this argument was the construction of a colorblind belief in which everyone was equal. This kind of belief automatically deemed racially motivated organizations racist because they were promoting exclusive notions; thus, also leading to the inability to perceive the role of race discourse in breaking an existing unjust status quo. A detrimental result of these concepts was the denial to confront charges of white racism since whites believed firmly that they were being seriously victimized.

This belief was further consolidated by the economic decline of the last twenty years in the twenty century, which was articulated that due to liberal concern with racial injustice, whites' job possibilities were narrowing while their futures were correspondingly threatened. This kind of argument was also echoed in the speeches of Donald Trump in 2016 when America was also experiencing a serious decline in economics under the lead of a black president.

It is a rule that when power declines, its wielders will embrace their interests more fiercely. This reflected in the reaction of whites towards the fact that they will no longer constitute the majority of U.S. population in the twenty-first century. By rearticulating the fear of black and non-white people on popular media, white expressed and spread the panic by integrating the everyday experience with the pending threat of black people. As Kincheloe (1999) wrote to reflect fear of white people, "the taunting [...] is from within on the post-civil rights landscape at the end of the century. It is within our integrated neighborhood schools with their multicultural curriculums, our workplaces with their affirmative action, and our universities with their preferential admission policies."

On the whole, the perception of a new psychological disprivilege among whites emerged from the increasingly valued concept of difference while whites basically lack it due to their subconscious and socially-regulated privileges created by the history of oppression on other groups. Thus, white people can only claim little

“oppression capital” in a world where representations of one’s oppression seems to mean so much in the eyes of white observers (Kincheloe, 1999). Such loss can be found mostly in white-working class who not only receive the least of white privileges but also are affected most in governmental policies favoring non-whites; thus, confirming their belief that their considerable loss was due to the non-white exploitation of oppression capital.

*Politicized white victimhood identity – the formation and rise of white identity politics*

According to King (2017), whiteness as an identity within the system of white supremacy reflect durable historical structures, but such structures cannot be reproduced without the mobilization of support for race as a political set of practices and the enactment of white identity at the level of individual consciousness and political agency. To be clearer, white identity which acknowledges white as a victim of disprivileges can only be realizable in and through tangible political policies that openly demarcate the significance of race through a system of racialized terms. Therefore, in order to trace the development of white victimhood leading to its strongly appearance in right-wing political tactics nowadays, it is vital to critically re-examine political figures and institutions that facilitated racialized terms.

In 1990s, non-white groups were given more opportunities to appear with positive images on mediascape. Such images allowed many whites to suppose that these groups had made great progress in recent years, leading to the belief that racism had not been much of a problem anymore. Hence, when confronted with charges of historical racism, their reactions tended to be hostile. For example, white students expressed intense anger about compulsory courses on race that they thought was useless in the new age of equality. This idea was further echoed in the term “Silent Majority” of President Richard Nixon in 1969 which he had delivered in a speech calling support for Vietnam war against the rising wave of opposition: “And so tonight – to you, the great silent majority of my fellow Americans – I ask for your

support.” The “silent majority” that he referenced to were Americans who did not participate in large demonstrations against Vietnam War and counterculture. As in the articulation of Nixon, this group was being overshadowed in the media by the more vocal minority. By putting two words “silent” and “majority” together, Nixon deliberately utilized psychological tactic in invoking the invisible suppression of public discourse and the threat of counterculture of minority against the will of majority. Nixon’s Silent Majority was actually the reconstitution of a cross-class racial alliance through which public support was mobilized against the racial insurgencies at that moment. Such divisive term, though initially for the purpose of politics, re-introduced the debate over who were empowered and who were victimized; hence, re-brought the sense of white victimhood in the midst of white identity crisis.

The historic economic crisis of U.S. capitalism emerged in the mid-1960s forced a transformative political change in the U.S. society. It was within this period that working-class as well as working union power seriously declined, steering the wheel of the debate towards racialized fears and economic arguments about taxes and government spending, which gave birth for neoliberalism as the need to increase the role of private sector promoted by the ideology of individuality in the economy and society. In words of King (2018), a generation of working-class wage stagnation and political decline has symbiotically coincided with a nativist white politics of carcerality and class hatred for the racialized poor who have been hit the hardest by these politico-economic shifts. In the political context which gave enormous privileges to the formation of colossal corporations, the likelihood for white working class to demand a greater share of economic pie was little; thus, they mobilized fear and hostility to working class of color. Therefore, it was clear that by the influence of social state retrenchment and state expansion was racism revoked.

The election and re-election of Ronald Reagan in 1980s proved that the Right had been successfully able to broaden its support through provoking dominant groups threatened by social equality in the midst of white identity crisis. Reagan had rearticulated old ideologies that re-inscribed a racism that deliberately ignored the protagonist. With repetitious reference to “city on the hills” in presidential speeches, Reagan had resorted to old ideologies of social Darwinism and Manifest Destiny in order to reassure whites caught in identity crisis that “they were the inheritors of the moral capital of the ideal Puritans” (Kincheloe, 1999). Such narrative and its implications contributed to attempts in re-establishing white hegemony and turned them into active support for race-making political policies with the aim to “roll back limited civil rights gains and fundamentally shift the American state away from Keynesian redistribution toward punitive neoliberalism, from a modest liberal welfarism to a corporatist carceral-warfare state” (King, 2017). On the whole, white victimhood can be considered as a political-constructed concept through conservative narratives which utilized mythical forces of liberalism about their unfair policies exclusively designed to target, exploit and disadvantage historically dominant groups like white.

By both participating in and being created by politics, white victimhood politicized itself and thrived on the space of right-wing politics. This similar concept was found in speeches of Donald Trump in 2016 presidential campaign and during his presidency. Though there have been certain changes in both social and political American landscape, white victimhood is still resilient in minds of Americans, facilitating and subconsciously justifying the statements of Trump on racism.

It should be noted that after the candidacy and presidency of Barack Obama – a African-American president, white American’s partisan identities and vote choice in presidential and congressional elections have all become more polarized by racial attitudes (Tesler and Sear, 2010; Piston, 2010; Kam and Kinder, 2012; Luttig, 2015;

Tesler, 2016a). This fact shows that racial category still plays a huge role in social- and political-related decisions, which is reasonable since Barack Obama was an advocate for race-related issues including racial equality. However, by being a direct representative of African-Americans and black people as well as a Democratic member who focused on bettering the life experience of black communities, Obama was confronted with charges of overtly favoring black people at the whites' expenses. This directly brought back the sense of victimhood among whites. Such self-acknowledgement is reflected in survey statistics among white population. In 2016, more than half of whites (52%), but just 20% of African-Americans, stated that life is worse for people like them in America than it was 50 years ago (Pew Research Center, 2016). Whites' perceptions of discrimination against their group, a kind of belief associated with racial consciousness also increased (McClain et al. 2009). Approximately six in ten (57%) white Americans and roughly two-thirds (66%) of non-college educated whites said that "discrimination against whites is as big a problem today as discrimination against blacks and other minorities" in 2016. Another noteworthy is of American National Election Studies (ANES) Internet surveys in 2016 that 47% of whites thought that there was at least a moderate amount of discrimination against whites. These figures are evidence that white victimhood has been on a tremendous rise, especially during the moment of so-called post-American period in which the pivot has been gradually relocated.

Understanding the psychological inclination of majority population, Donald Trump has turned to a major theme of his 2016 presidential campaign: white identity politics. Trump, under the influence of his own point of view, repeatedly emphasized cultural, economic and physical threats posed to whites from non-whites. In the summer of 2017, he delivered a speech on immediate threat to public safety posed by one immigrant gang – MS-13, which received tremendous criticisms from civil rights groups and the Congressional Black Caucus for using "racially coded" language and advocating police brutality. It was also announced by Trump administration that

resources of Civil Rights Division in Justice Department would be redirected to investigating and suing universities over affirmative action admission that polices considered as discrimination against whites. The explicit standpoint of Trump also expressed in the way that he defended marchers in a white supremacist rally that became violent while protesting against the removal of Robert E. Lee in Charlottesville – a confederate statue by remarks that “they are trying to take away our history and our heritage.”

According to Sides J. et al. (2017), such appeals to physical, material, and cultural threats to whites in the 2016 campaigns have made white identity strongly associated with support for Donald Trump. By delivering elements of whites into political acts and speech, it can be argued that Donald Trump has turned this sense of white victimhood into white identity politics, a politics that stresses strong collective group identities as the basis of political analysis and action (Mandle, 2017). In this kind of politics, specific cultural and ideological identity groups made rights, status and privilege claims on the ground of a victimized identity. Although there have been arguments on whether there existed a white identity politics, its existence cannot be denied by the unfolding of recent events. In nature, identity politics defines groups with their distinct features, marking the difference from other groups with the gap dividing them “wide and unbridgeable” (Mandle, 2017) that mutual interaction is deemed purposeless. Thus, identity politics is popularly regarded as a zero-sum game in which things that help one group will inevitably harm another. Thus, in the names of advancing the interests of one’s own group, identity politics will accept the status quo and its essentially conservative nature by rejecting to make contact with the society. In other words, identity politics advocates the protection of the self based on the collection of group identity. These particular features are clearly evident in the narratives and actions of the 46<sup>th</sup> president. It is remarked that in the President’s embodied and rhetorical flourishes, his white masculinity stands in stark contradiction against a multitude of others that would destroy ‘us’ (Smith &

Gokariksel, 2017). In his first days in office, he demanded a list of executive actions including a 'global gag rule' that restricts U.S. funded non-governmental organizations working abroad from discussing abortion as a family planning option, immediate deportation of 'illegal' immigrants, a 'Muslim ban' that attempted to bar or suspend travel to Muslim-majority countries. By March 2017, he signed away a series of executive orders that suppress the rights of women on reproduction, of immigrants, Muslims and native Americans while relaxing regulations on manufacturing companies, increasing support for law enforcement and the military and moving towards dismantling the 'administrative state'. From these evidence, it is clear that the Trump administration is investing considerably in strengthening masculinist state institutions like law enforcement and the military while divesting from feminized state institutions that are connected closely with the care, well-being, and education of the population and soft power of diplomacy (Smith & Gokariksel, 2017). One of the noteworthy remark is that the obvious expression of white masculinity emerging from white identity politics.

The emergence of new factors in political and climate change certainly foster changes in the dynamisms of social movement protagonists, especially feminists because they are the ones who are burdened most by intersectional elements of both race and gender. White feminists, who are subjected to white identity crisis as the repercussion of not having culturally-specific identities like black communities and excluded from white masculinity of Trumpism, are the category in constant fluidity; thus, transforming their embodied experience in recent feminism movements.

### **CHAPTER III: The subjectivity of white women in Women's March on Washington**

Women's March on Washington is a march organized to protest against Trump inauguration and is attributed to the wake of feminist movements across the U.S. and the world. As a largest demonstration in the contemporary history of America, it has not escaped from the criticisms, especially over the representation of women and diverse race in the march. I argue that the march has formed a critical platform for white feminists to confront their privileges despite subjecting them to blames from media and race discourses of black women; hence, transforming their participation and provoking reflections on social-constructed effects that entail. This kind of transformation is expressed in discourses and power relations in the march and will be analyzed in the following pages by Foucauldian Discourse Analysis. By using this approach, I will look at the formation of conflict in the march in terms of surfaces of emergence, authorities of delimitation and grids of specification proposed by Foucault. Additionally, the power relations between subjects in discourses will also be examined in order to give a full record of how the March has opened a chance for us to look at white involvement in contemporary feminism; thus, forming the subjective experience of white feminists in the march.

#### **Race discourse**

The debate over race-related issues had been provoked since the first days of the march. After the merging of call-out events on Facebook was finalized, organizers decided to choose the name "Million Women March" as a tribute to March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom in which Martin Luther King Jr. delivered his historical speech "I have a dream" and to 1997 Million Woman March in Philadelphia by African American women. However, right after the name was announced, there had been a colossal pressure for organizers to change the name from both black movements like Black Lives Matter and other peoples of color including white, Asian



and Latino. Since the name possessed a strong scent of black feminism, there was a voice that “I will not even consider supporting this until the organizers are intersectional, original and come up with a different name”. The protest against the name’s origin was caused due to a fact that was confirmed by Bob Bland – the initial organizer of the march – “The reality is that the women who initially started organizing were almost all white”. Thus, in order to include more people of diverse backgrounds in the march, Bland confirmed on her Facebook event page that “It was, and is, clear that the Women’s March on Washington cannot be a success unless it represents women of all backgrounds” and after that, changed the march’s name to Women’s March on Washington.

The appearance of race issue in this case represents both a debate deriving from the over-emphasis on black rather than white and a compromised self-recognition of white dominance in the march. From what the event suggested, the self-recognition was a deliberate process caused by public criticisms, which later subjected the march to another question of whether the change of name as well as the march’s statement can be truly intersectional and inclusive. The notice on race and dominant proportion of a particular race was a suggestion that contemporary feminism-related issues are still under the influence of exclusionary aftermaths in previous feminism waves. The public is ingrained with the conflict that white women can never reflect the interests relevant to black and black women as well as taking for granted the liberation success of black-centric movements in the past as its exclusive legacy owned by black people. The act was considered as “a bunch of white organizers were selling their protest with the intellectual property of black people” (Cauterucci, 2017). However, due to attempts to include black and black activists in recent movements with the call to “be intersectional” popularized by Kimberle Williams Crenshaw in the paper “Demarginalizing the intersection of race and sex: A black feminist critique of antidiscrimination doctrine, feminist theory and antiracist politics” published in 1990, they are forced to acknowledge race-related matters in movements; thus

opening up space for race issues to arise. On the other hand, the involvement of white voices in the criticism over the initially chosen name that reflected black movements also suggested the reluctance to be included in a black-centric march. This group is obviously in the other end of the spectrum with the over-conscious feminists above. This group of white was clearly indifferent to the history of exclusion of black women, which drove them to focus solely on the threat of sexism brought by the inauguration of Trump. Such kind of indifference resulted in a number of questions from white women about “why black women have to be so divisive”, further provoking the anger of black women since they were reminded of the shadow of white colonial power in which black people were regulated as the group lacking political sophistication. As this event suggests, race discourse relating to the recognition of white supremacy had existed since the initial stage of the march, which set the tone for later discussion.

On addressing the criticism that the march was not intersectional since the initiative of the march came from the white, three veteran organizers of color was included to add more diversity into the march’s direction and organization in order to create a platform that demanded the demilitarization of American law-enforcement bodies and the end of mass incarceration promoted by Trump. Not only that, one outstanding activity of the march was to convene thousands of activists in an attempt to carry forward a panel discussion titled “Confronting White Womanhood”. The convention was held to provide a space for white women to “unpack the ways white women uphold and benefit from white supremacy” and “check their privileges” (Cauterucci, 2017). The convention, held in Detroit, focused on tracking history of how white women have been used and have used themselves to justify violence against black men, helping to spread and consolidate racism in contemporary society. Thus, the experience of confrontation to white women was described as “difficult” and “eye-opening” as it required participants to overcome their unease of judging their own self and practices that they have taken for granted. Though the convention was held

by the willingness of the participants, a number of resistance statements against the phrase “check the privileges” advocated by black women towards white activists had circulated widely. As Ms. Willis, the South Carolina wedding minister and a lesbian women exerted, on encountering the statement of Shishi Rose, a black feminist, about requiring the white “to check their privileges regularly rather than just joining the march”, that “can you please tell me what that [the phrase “check your privileges] means?” and “the last thing that is going to make me endeared to you, to know you and love you more, is if you are sitting there wagging your finger at me”, aiming to argue against the imposing tone of the black’s argument. This event was directly created by both the need to depart from the history of exclusion in historical feminism movements and the democratic school of equality. Because of this history-governed rationale, in terms of power relation, the white had stripped itself off their rights to self-defend in order to ensure the consideration of race. This was echoed in the suggestion of Ellman-Golan – a feminist speaker in Women’s March Convention in Detroit – for white feminists in the convention that “Don’t call the police. Don’t do it. How dare we choose as the enforcer of safety an institution that has demonstrated how deeply unsafe it is?” upon the approach of black people in order to avoid incidents of racist police brutality like in the past. Nevertheless, by this call, white feminists were imposed to refrain from protecting them of what they deemed threatening. The divestment of authority was supposed to destroy the ladder of inferiority. However, by giving up the authoritative power over one certain historically oppressed group created to level up the position of the white and the power to claim privileges, white women made themselves more vulnerable to external powers, in this case is media which will be discussed later.

The race discourse was particularly emphasized during and after the march. One of the most circulated posts from the march day was of a black woman holding a sign read “Don’t forget: White women voted for Trump”. This kind of counter-argument revoked the fact that 54% of white women voted from Trump, which was suggested

by the research of Jane Junn (2017) that because of the connection to patriarchal ideology and the protection of white womanhood did this happen. The sign was the result of an acknowledgment that “although 94% of black women voted for Hillary Clinton, yet here we all are at march, protesting the person that you put in office on your own” (Holloway, 2018), an acknowledgement of the desire to remain dominant as the ideology’s representative – Donald Trump. Although this kind of discourse proliferated due to the presidency of Trump, it connected with the reasons why he was elected – a system of reasons coming from white identity politics in which whiteness was defined as being minored and discriminated against. Another popular discourse generated from black women side was that the participation of majority of white women in the march was never seen in black-related marches such as Black Lives Matter. The categories of white people that eagerly joined the march but never showed support for black-centric movements included soccer moms, college students, housewives with their children, grandmothers, career women and retirees (Holloway, 2018). Because these categories accounted for most of white women in the society, it almost was like the majority of ignorance. In historical aspect, the movements fighting for the life of black people were of critical importance to contemporary black community since after the long history of attempts in eliminating racism which looked like that it was almost a success, it still plagued to the modern society; hence, fear and vulnerability vitally enhanced among blacks. Thus, when critical issues were not acknowledged and supported, it was believed not to reflect the claimed solidarity as in statements of third-wave feminism. Additionally, the “peaceful” and “successful” parade of the march also provoked discussions relating to race. In arguments of people of color, their black-related movements usually met with police brutality in which no arrest and damage was witnessed. According to Ajayi (2017) in her book “I’m Judging You: The do-better manual”, the reason why the march was being heralded as a peaceful one was because most of its participants were white. In her words, “This march, the fact that it could go off peacefully and

cops are wearing pink hats, and no one felt like they were in danger, and militarized police didn't show up, that's white privilege at its core. They have the access and ability to do the things the majority of black and brown people who protest don't have." This statement speaks volume again about the unaligned interest and experience of feminists of different color in social movements. The legacy of racism still governed the political participation of people of color as non-legitimate and less sophisticated; thus, bearing threats of social disorder and calling for involvement of police. However, this is in stark contrast with that of the white when they were considered as representatives of "orderliness, rationality and self-control" (Kincheloe T.L., 1999). Even in this case of Women's March on Washington, the counter-argument of white feminists against the mentioned above criticism was that they also had to acquire permissions and confront with deliberate suppression when they were not allowed to march at specific locations (Tolentino, 2017). This indicated a reference to the so-called innate trait of white as disciplined. In addition, the case showed that while there was little to none notice of white towards the intervention of police, it, in contrast, was of vitality to women of color. Hence, the basic interest of subjects belong to different fields.

In order to fully perceive the race discourse circulating in the Women's March on Washington, it is vital to consider it in three respective viewpoints: surfaces or emergence, authorities of delimitation and grids of specification. In definition of Foucault, surfaces of emergence is the term to illustrate social or cultural areas in which a specific "discursive formation" makes an appearance. In Women March's on Washington, the object of knowledge "race" in the discourse of feminism emerged in the areas of politics and social media. These two areas facilitated the circulation of personalized ideas on the platforms of wide-spread influence; thus, it plays a critical role on empowering the voices of black feminists and forcing the decrease in power of white womanhood. In terms of politics, the appearance of politicized Trumpism favoring racism and sexism created a space for performative politics in which every

politically able subject is making involvement with little to none intention of perceiving the regulated political dynamisms. In the formation of race as an object of knowledge in contemporary feminism, it was a bring-back of old tension; however, with the intervention of social media and performative politics, contemporary feminism bears new elements of cyber marginalization. Another aspect in analyzing the discursive formation is the “authorities of delimitation” or the authority to decide what is valid or invalid within a specific quarter. This group are deemed legitimate as they speak from a certain “enunciative modality” or subject position. In the case of Women’s March on Washington, race discourse was mostly imposed by people of color who were equipped with power of rationale from a long history of being excluded and discriminated. This authority is reinforced by mainstream media and the growing claim for democracy. These black feminists had the ability to “name” and “define” race-related behaviors of white feminists since they claim themselves to “understand the black legacy most”. On the contrary, white feminists were put into the position of lacking authority to claim since they were considered as a critical element escalating whiteness. The knowledge that black women rely on and that white feminists self-recognize are part of what Foucault identifies as the “grids of specification”. It is acknowledged as the frameworks of knowledge or systems of knowledge that legitimize the argument of black women. In this case is the legacy of racism and whiteness construction as depicted above. All in all, although race discourse formed during the unfolding of Women’s March on Washington was still grounded by the historical conflict in feminism, it was also contributed to by media and empowered personal ideas in the world of promoted equality, helping to transform race discourse and adapt it into a new historical context, indicating a depart from traditional perception of race which disregarded the role of black feminists.

### **Sexism discourse**

On viewing the dynamisms in feminism movements, the role of sexism cannot be detached. Especially in the case of Women's March on Washington, a movement dedicated mostly to counter the proliferation of sexism promoted by Trump, analyzing sexism in its inter-relation with experience of white identity is of vitality. This discourse will also be viewed in Foucauldian Discourse Analysis to find out its process of discursive formation.

Different from race discourse which was given birth from the power relation between white and black feminists, sexism is a system of thoughts which is contributed by multi-related powers. In the event of Women's March on Washington, sexism discourse was mostly circulated by media and a system of institutions empowered by Trumpism. On January 5<sup>th</sup>, the Washington Post Express saddled the Women's March with a particularly unfortunate cover illustration: a petal-pink background, against which tiny figures formed an enormous gender symbol – the gender symbol for male (Tolentino, 2017). This clearly demonstrated a disregard of the march's attempts and degraded the purpose of the march to a movement craving for attention of male. The way of illustration also reflected the instilled thought of patriarchy which regards male as the main source of women's frustration and ultimate goal. The act led to a statement of New York Post that “the Women's March on Washington is becoming a joke” – a joke backed by sexism.

The participation of white women were also receiving criticisms revolving around the fact that 54% of them voted for Trump out of their support for “men's issues”. According to a research of Christopher T. Stout et.al on Gender Linked Fate in American Politics (2017), it has been a traditional pattern that white women have tendency to be influenced by her husband and relatives' conservative views and to vote in accordance with their interests, especially economic interests. At the advent of the march, Trump had asked “why don't they vote?”. By this question, Trump had revoked the century-long problem of sexism in which women are usually coerced

and socialized into showing support for men-related issues in social institutions like family. Additionally, it was noted by Tolentino (2017) that “there has been a strong hint of gendered Schadenfreude in the coverage of the march’s organizational problems – as if a group of girlfriends who had failed to elect a female President were trying to organize the most anti-fascist bachelorette party in the world”. This refers to the way that media articulated problems arise in the march during the initial stage of organization such as arguments over names and black representation. Word usage in media upon covering these issues hinted their disregard of internal conflict in the march, making arguments seem like a trivial row among ‘ambitious women’. This way of articulation obviously diminished the meanings of racism in the march to a civic conflict and “obscured the fact that activism is internally contentious by nature” (Tolentino, 2017).

It is evident that sexism became object of knowledge within the area of media and family. Many feminist media studies have identified that, in diverse media texts, women have been depicted as sex objects and devoted homemakers within the bounds of “true womanhood – piety, purity, submissiveness, and domesticity” (Triece, 1999 & Wood, 1994). As media is a vital resource of information, it is able to perpetuate the community’s ideas; thus, holding the risk of consolidating sexism and reflecting the mainstream idea of the society at the same time. As sexism is put into the relations of media and social ideas, family, as a basic social institutionalized unit, also creates a space for sexism to exist, especially in this case where family holds the power of controlling the will of white women to vote. During the process of forming regulation within the family for the sake of stability, it was social norms of sexism that worked in a patriarchal model of family nowadays. Authorities of delimitation among these two areas are mostly media creators. This group of authority possesses a huge power of creating, delimiting and defining discussions and influential norms about sex and gender. With the wide coverage of media backed by modern facility and platforms, ideas are subjected to be popularized, influencing



mass perception and governing the circulation of knowledge. Their foundation of sexism ideas, in other words, the grids of specification is a patriarchal order which regulates women in the position of subordinate. As sexism is a kind of discourse instilled in the society for centuries and less subjected to changes in new historical context, it is not of research interest to delve into the analysis of sexism discourse in Women's March on Washington. However, sexism discourse is articulated in order to clearly depict the experience of white women identity in contemporary social movement. As this group is believed to obtain more privileges than black women, which is regarded as a critical factor for them to successfully organize feminism movements, they are, in fact, being confronted with more barriers than previous wave of feminism and subjected to modern expressions of intersectionality in turn of historical events. In the climate of empowered black people's ideas and a condition of promoted racism and sexism in Donald Trump age, white women are more vulnerable to blames, forcing them to confront their identity and diminish their own status in media and political participation as an act of compromise. It is argued that this kind of experience is both a result and an exertion of white identity politics promoted by Donald Trump. The following section will specifically explore how white identity politics transforms the experience of white feminists in contemporary feminism movements and exposes the intersectionality of oppression that are limiting white feminists.

### **Subjective experience of white feminists in Women's March on Washington**

In order to establish a systematic approach to the subjective experience of white feminists in Women March's on Washington, I will categorize the analysis into two prominent discussion spaces of representations and discourses.

#### *Representation*

One of the signature representations in Women's March on Washington is the pink pussy hat. Originating from The Pussyhat Project, the pink pussy hat is claimed to represent two key goals: "proving the people of the Women's March on Washington a means to make a unique collective visual statement which help activists be better heard" and "providing people who cannot physically be on the National Mall a way to represent themselves and support women's rights". The pussy hat creates a vivid signal to celebrate femininity that is hard to ignore and amplifies a claim against a violent record of masculine assault that Trump participated in by mimicking multiple valences of vagina. Moreover, in words of Derr (2017), the project's key idea is "pink, cat-eared hats worn by a critical mass of march attendees stand to reclaim the word "pussy" from our president-elect and his crotch-grabbing tiny hands". The pink hat has parts alike to cat, making the wearer look like a kitten. According to Smith & Gokariksel (2017), it picks up the visual language of infantilizing femininity (women as playthings) and capitalist branding in the mandatory and cloying pink of the girl's aisle. The hat is knitted by female relatives to be a relation to a particular feminine task in order to remind the system of patriarchal regulations for women's subordination.

However, although being cheered on by a majority of white marchers, the usage of pussy hat as a symbol of the march also gained criticism from black feminists. Nagpal (2017) wrote in *The Cambridge Student* that "The march conflated womanhood with having a vagina. The march conflated being a woman with a pink vagina. Pictures from the various events show seas of people in bright pink vagina hats. My vagina is not pink." Such an argument strikes straightly to the exclusion of black, gay and transgender people exemplified in the march.

This choice in representation offers a view into the way that white feminists are organizing feminism movements. Under the oppression of white masculinity, a radical contradicting method of exerting femininity – the other end of spectrum – is

selected. However, it indeed works as a reminder of stereotype that have attached to females such as pinkness and vagina; thus, exerting the masculinity that has contributed greatly to exert those stereotypes. By amplifying the symbol of vagina, the marchers subconsciously confirm the descent of feminism into the cesspool of identity politics, even biologism, and its abandonment of the idea that women should be valued more for their minds than their anatomy (O'Neill, 2015). During trying hard to encounter the dominance of white masculinity and emphasize the representation of women, especially white women, white feminists have accidentally partially transformed the original purpose of the march in confirming the deserving position of women in the society.

Not only that, by attaching the pinkness with vagina for a march of mass population, white feminists also excludes the possibilities of different colors; thus, subjecting the march to criticisms on racism atop of sexism.

### *Discourse*

One argument central in Women's March on Washington was that whose concern it should attend to when 54% of white women voted for Donald Trump in 2016 presidential election. Such argument was raised not only by Trump himself but by black communities as well. For example, a black woman had held a sign written "Don't forget: White women voted for Trump" in the sea of white marchers wearing pink pussy hat. The reaction of white marchers towards such argument is white identity politics present.

Upon the accusation of voting for Trump, the majority of wanna-go marchers and white feminists responded with claims such as "Why do you have to be divisive?" and pointed out the fact that white women are being also raped and abused like experiences of black women. These kinds of counter-argument reflect a notion of color-blind belief that neoliberalism has advocated for the sake of distributing the

sense of white victimhood. Only when there is an underlying belief that everyone is equal and subjected to the same historically-constructed conditions that those responses are exerted. The degree of vulnerability is equated on the ground of supposedly dying system of racism. Through exerting such kinds of questions, white women accidentally and deliberately put them into the role of victims being marginalized by women of color in a for-all march. The belief also corresponds with the linear notion that black people are always at conflict with whites, reconsolidating white colonial ideology that only white people are rational and politically sophisticated. As this implication suggests, the conflict between white and black feminists in Women's March on Washington that is articulated on media has always been interwoven in debates about the conflicting view of white identity politics rather than white racism. White women, under the influence of white identity politics, has been unable to take into consideration the racial-related issues during both organizing and participating in the march.

In the network of power, white feminists has been given fewer opportunities to reclaim their power in public platforms under multiple layers of oppression. However, it cannot be denied that the power of femininity in a world of rising masculinist institutions like police and white stereotypes have contributed partially to the success of the march. As the police is one of the dominant institutions that is traditionally used to exemplify the oppression on black communities, its power relation in facilitating the notion of white femininity is considerable. By creating a peaceful atmosphere for the march compared with other feminist-led movements like Black Lives Matter, the police exercised disciplinary power and reinforced the power of white femininity as a need-to-be-protected status. However, it should be noted that during the creation of the interactions between black and white feminists, there have been web of powers established which both gave rights for each group to argue and exert their identity-based claims.

With all these events that open up space for observation and the power relations that involved in circulating the discourse, it can be interpreted that both discursive and non-discursive practices that have involved in the participation of white feminists, which is especially revealed by the interaction between black and white feminists in the march. This makes white feminists a subject in historical a priori in which the history constitutes and governs the shared knowledge of race and sex in the context. However, the known subjectivity also includes the notion of agency in which white feminists in the march represented feature of an agency that reproduced the discourse regardless of self-awareness. On the whole, white feminists in Women's March on Washington were both made into subjects and become agents who are subjected to the following network of discourses: (1) white masculinity in white identity politics, (2) neoliberalism, (3) legacy of white racism and (4) legacy of past feminisms.

## CHAPTER 4: CONCLUSION

Intersectionality is usually considered as a concept dedicated to black women as they are oppressed by layers of race, gender and class. However, by critically analyzing the changing climate of politics and mobilization of social forces in new context, it is evident that white women are also being subjected to a complex network of discourses in which white feminists both reproduce and oppose. White identity politics that Donald Trump is promoting poses the risk of reverting efforts of coalition building across race and re-establishing a hegemony by facilitating spaces for conflict. Therefore, the tension between white and black feminists in contemporary feminism is actually the conflict of whether there exists a white decline (a central sentiment of white identity politics).

The case of Women's March on Washington represents one of the emerging spaces for discussions on how to build up a practice of intersectionality for all feminism protagonists. Offering a view into the participation of white feminists in this emerging space is one of the contributing method to re-examine modern intersectionality as the search for it may become a passive aggressive assertion on Black women of sentiments, queries, and narratives that do not belong to them (Smith & Gokariksel, 2017). Trump's body politics works by centering an ideal masculine, normalized and heteronormative white male body, which cannot be reverted by a mixture of symbols and values. At the moment, it is critical to embrace the kind of original intersectionality that Crenshaw (1991) proposed: "intersectionality as spatially constituted and experienced offers feminists a ways of addressing the tension between the fluidity and multiplicity of individual identities and the continued importance and necessity of group politics". Although the march has been successfully in focusing attention on the varying cross-cultural experiences of global womanhood (Presley & Presswood, 2017), it is intra-national deep-seated conflict that it also needs to address.

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