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**“ The 53 percent issue  
- This time, the problem in American feminism has a name.”**

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There is a 53 percent problem in American feminism.

According to exit polls, that is the percentage of white women who voted for Donald Trump. Whose votes helped hand the presidency to a man who said “[women who have abortions should face punishment](#)” and bragged that he grabs women “by the p—-.”

[ <https://bioethics.georgetown.edu/2016/04/guest-post-abortion-punishment-and-moral-consistency/> ]

[“It feels like women betrayed us,”](#) Madonna told *Billboard* magazine earlier this month. [ <https://www.theguardian.com/music/2016/dec/07/madonna-on-the-us-election-it-feels-like-women-betrayed-us> ]

“The triumph of President-elect Donald Trump represents the failure of many things. One of them is white feminism,” [black feminist author Tamara Winfrey Harris](#) wrote on [bitchmedia.org](http://bitchmedia.org) after the election.

[ <https://www.bitchmedia.org/> ] [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Black\\_feminism](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Black_feminism)

**Even though a majority of white women voted for Trump, white feminists are now urging resistance to his presidency.** They’ve [White women have] called for solidarity across racial lines and for a massive Women’s March on Washington - the day after the inauguration. <https://racial-justice.aflcio.org/blog/est-aliquid-se-ipsam-flagitiosum-etiamsi-nulla>  
<https://theundefeated.com/features/kamala-harris-is-second-black-woman-elected-to-the-u-s-senate/>

**But a vocal segment of women of color, especially black feminists, are saying, hold up, pump the brakes. While white feminists are issuing all-hands-on-deck calls to stand against a Trump presidency, these women say, they haven't worked hard enough to even win over a majority of their own ranks. ( Polls show 94 percent of black women — the highest percentage in the nation — voted for Hillary Clinton, as did 69 percent of Latinas. )**

<https://www.cnn.com/election/2016/results/exit-polls>

And, where were *most* “white feminists” when women of color, lesbians and transgender women were marching in the streets to protest police shootings? – And, other issues important to nonwhite, or non-middle-class women? Women of color stand ready to protest! Some of them are key organizers in the [Women's March on Washington](#); Others have voiced support. [And, still] others will be protesting in their local areas. [ Susan's local area=45405- she goes to Kleptz YMCA everyday- 4 REHAB]

But, this whole ally thing feels a little one-sided. There's [an elephant in the room](#), some feminist ( *thinkers* ) say. And, it's an old one, [an old elephant] with a history that stretches back to [the foundations of feminist thought](#).

Black women **especially** are saying [that] “ **if white feminists want them to make ‘common cause’, there needs to be a reckoning with old business.**”

[ <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/08/13/nyregion/sexual-harassment-nyu-female-professor.html> ]



Thousands of anti-Donald Trump protesters, including many pro-immigrant groups, hold a demonstration outside of a Trump property as New Yorkers react to the election of Donald Trump as president of the United States on Nov. 13. -- SPENCER PLATT/GETTY IMAGES

[ [black feminist author Tamara Winfrey Harris](#) ] agrees that the progressive alliance relies on women coming together. But she is not excited about the Women's March and is not planning on attending.

### **What's the problem?**

Issues that galvanize “white feminists” focus too narrowly on the needs of straight, white, middle-class women she contends.

They say too little about poverty, which affects 35 percent more women than men.

**White feminism “focuses on ‘mommy wars’ more than affordable and accessible child care.**

It [ **White feminism** ] gives scant attention to violence faced by women of color and trans women. It [ **White feminism** ] is centered on the “[urban coastal experience](#)” to the exclusion of suburban and rural women of all races,” Harris wrote.

“Self-reverential, non-intersectional feminism, doesn't speak to most women of color – but, [AND]here's the real rub, at least - when it comes to progressive politics: It doesn't speak to most white women, either.”

**The history of white feminists and race is long and complicated.**

**On** Election Day, upward of 10,000 women visited the Rochester, New York, grave site of suffragette Susan B. Anthony and left “I Voted” stickers on her tombstone. But, in fighting for women's voting rights (in the late 19th century), Anthony called black men “ignorant”; - and,

along with other [first-wave feminists](#), vehemently opposed the 15th Amendment which (on paper) gave the vote to black men.

Black women didn't pilgrimage to Anthony's grave in masse, but "we did show up at the polls," Harris said. "I know a lot of black women who won't carry the label of feminism – but, they're still doing the work."

And perhaps, if so many of those identifying as feminists took **more than symbolic action**, then many black women wouldn't find the label so corrupt.

"You can put the Planned Parenthood sticker on your car, or wear the safety pin," to show solidarity with people who feel threatened by Trump, or watch Amy Schumer's *Last FUCK-ABLE Day* video, said Harris, but "that's kind of the least you can do. That's a way of positioning yourself as a good person without actually doing any work."

[ <https://www.vanityfair.com/hollywood/2016/05/amy-schumer-last-fuckable-day> ]

**With Mike Pence as the anti-abortion vice president-elect, a Trump administration threatens a dramatic rollback in reproductive rights.**

Women wore pantsuits to work on Election Day and that's a gesture, but "being an ally to women", being an "activist for women", also means having "difficult conversations" with people who don't agree with you," said Harris.

If you can't have hard conversations about what it means to have a ["president-elect"](#) who admitted to groping women "with the people closest to you -- then, I'm not sure what you're doing," she said.



A woman arrives for her voting ballot during the U.S presidential election at the James Weldon Johnson Community Center in the East Harlem neighborhood of Manhattan on, Nov. 8. - REUTERS/ANDREW KELLY

[Patrisse Cullors](#), a queer feminist and one of the three founders of the [Black Lives Matter Movement](#), **supports the Women’s March**, but will be attending Los Angeles-area protests. She ( [Patrisse Cullors](#), ) calls the 53 percent of white women who voted for Trump, a “deep statistic,” and said white feminists need to find those Trump voters and “figure out how to win them over ... It’s hard labor organizing people, and black people shouldn’t be the only ones doing it.”

[Deanna Zandt](#), a [white feminist author and co-founder of Lux Digital](#), which provides “**digital strategies for feminist groups**”, said she was one of those people talking about the election at Thanksgiving dinner. “While conservatives were in one room and the liberals were in the other room, I was like, ‘Cheers! Let’s get some primers on racial justice,

everyone. Let's bring it all to the table. What are you going to do as a racial justice ally?" Zandt said. "I made everyone go around the room."

Zandt said she's torn between attending the Washington march and a local protest in New York. She says she's seen a defensiveness in mainstream feminism since the election. No one wants to be the bad guy with regard to race and gender and "people take it as a personal attack on who they are when you're trying to dismantle a structure that they belong to and that they're participating in."

**At the same time, there is real anger around the election.** There are calls for unity and against identity politics. She recalls a Facebook post that said "...progressives need to stop **“privilege shaming...”** one another.

To stop calling attention to working-class and rural white people "for not having awareness of their whiteness, or awareness of their gender, or awareness around queerness, or any other kind of identities," Zandt said.

"What I interpreted that to mean was that we really needed to reach out to [**Southern, nonurban, Midwest Trump voters**] and bring them into the fold. And the way not to do that was by holding them accountable for their racism."

Zandt calls it the "wrong instinct." If white women could but sit with their discomfort, they could help change the world.

The beginning of [second-wave feminism](#), which mainstreamed contraception and white women in the workplace, is marked by the 1963 publication of [The Feminine Mystique](#). It famously chronicled discontented housewives trying to come to terms with [“the problem that has no name.”](#)

The second wave mantra of *the personal is political*, the notion that women's everyday struggles fit within larger political systems, has been



warped to “if it’s not my personal experience, it’s not my politics,” Zandt said. And that’s crippling feminism.

When white feminists get attacked for non-inclusion, especially from those who feel like natural allies, it can feel like a betrayal, Zandt said,

“when in reality, it’s an attempt to make your world bigger.” Change often means decentralizing the white, middle-class experience, and sometimes means accepting that women of color need to be at the forefront.

[Tamika Mallory](#) is one of the national co-chairs of the Women’s March on Washington. She’s had to address charges of [cultural appropriation](#).

(The march was originally called the Million Women March, ignoring the fact that black women held a march in Philadelphia called the Million Woman March 20 years ago.) She’s had to challenge the idea that it’s a white women’s protest, and that she and co-chairs Linda Sarsour, executive director of the Arab American Association of New York, and Carmen Perez, executive director of The Gathering for Justice, a civil rights nonprofit begun by Harry Belafonte, were brought in to diversify the march optics.

“To think that somebody’s going to call us up and say, ‘We want y’ all to come down here and plan somebody else’s march,’ as busy as we are, with all the stuff we got going on, that doesn’t even make sense,” Mallory said in a video posted to Facebook earlier this month.

Mallory said she joined the march because she didn’t “... want there to be a national gathering of women without the concerns of black women fully represented. ...” And because, while 53 percent of white women voted for Donald Trump, 47 percent didn’t.

But, she's had to challenge women within the white feminist community and some of those conversations have gotten heated.

"Trust me, I'm conflicted every day," Mallory said. "There's been moments where it's been difficult for me. Where I've had to take a break sometimes because the conversations we are having, it feels like the fact that you are so oblivious to the pain and suffering and the specific issues that black women, and women of color in general, are facing, is part of the reason why we continue to live in this space. It's part of the reason that progress is so slow."



Tamika Mallory attends National Anti-Violence Community Press Conference at Irving Plaza with family of Ronald McPhatter, shooting victim at Irving Plaza, on May 26 in New York.

When [Sandra Bland died in a Texas jail cell](#), many white feminists, who could have brought their marching legs and outdoor voices, stayed



silent, as they did when Trayvon Martin was killed and George Zimmerman was on trial. **“The list goes on and on,” said Mallory.**

When black women, who can be “spirited,” have written about their pain and frustration on social media, some march organizers have blocked them or deleted their comments, which has added a layer of acrimony to the planning.

It’s frustrating to have conversations - where white women ask me “Why (are) black women so angry with them? ‘I’ve never done anything to black women; I don’t understand; I love all people; I care about all women; I don’t understand - why black women are so angry.”

I have to say, “I realize you don’t even know the history of feminism and how it has excluded the voices of women of color since the term was actually created,” said Mallory. “Black women have not necessarily felt like they have been an equal partner in whatever feminism is supposed to mean. They don’t know that history, some of them, and it has been frustrating having to ‘educate’—but, I know that it’s necessary.”

Trying to get broad support for the march has meant addressing the philosophical underpinnings of feminism, as well as the granular, spiritual things that have to do with black women’s positive energy and self-care. How do we feel when we’re being asked to suit up and head out? Whom do we feel like standing next to, who has our backs? And what kind of authenticity are we able to show up with?

“Black people have been naming this as a state of emergency and white people thought we were being hyperbolic, but clearly we weren’t, right?” said Cullors.

“So I think we’re in a moment where folks can be reflective about why it took the so long and then we move on. Because we can’t sit and wonder why. You’re here now, so let’s work together.”

There's a great deal of work to be done. And Mallory said black folks are confused if we think we're going to be able to make these changes alone.

“There [in fact] comes moments in history when people are forced to the table because their own fears bring them there. I think that for women of color, and for black women particularly, this march, this moment, the Trump administration is not the beginning of a new fight for us. We've been fighting.” Police brutality is an issue, but so is equal pay. The march will largely consist of white women, she said, and some of them “will become real allies.”

And some will not. That's part of the “[53 percent problem](#)” .

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*She's an author, a former columnist, has a rack of kids and she writes bird by bird.*

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