

# "Ain't I a Woman" March is a response to the whiteness of January's women's marches



Protesters march during the Women's March on Washington on Jan. 21. Source: Mario Tama/Getty Images

SLAY



Published July 14, 2017 by Marie Solis

SHARE TWEET EMAIL

Trending Topics: Cost of Kids • Abortion Rights • Nintendo Switch • Donald Trump • Game of Thrones • Final Fantasy 14 • Super Smash Bros 4 • Destiny 2 • Wedding Advice • NASA • Pokemon Go • Dream Daddy

## RECOMMENDED VIDEO

Sen. Kamala Harris is making her voice heard

SLAY June 19, 2017

## IN OTHER NEWS



The most underrated way to make money feel worth more, according to science

3h ago



5 simple steps to find the best job for your personality

4h ago

Imani Mitchell didn't go to [January's women's marches](#), but when she watched YouTube videos of the one held in Sacramento, California, she noticed something striking: overwhelming whiteness. And she wanted to do something about it.

A month later, Mitchell and a group of other black women formed [Black Women United](#), a Sacramento-based nonprofit dedicated to the "education, protection and advancement of black women." On Saturday, the organization, of which Mitchell is now president, will hold its first big event: "[Ain't I a Woman': The Black Women's March and Rally.](#)"

"I think in many ways we are a response to the Women's March back in January," Mitchell said in a phone interview Thursday. "By no means are we in opposition to the march — we're definitely in addition to it. We just want to continue the conversation and focus on black women."

Mitchell said she was particularly moved by many of the pieces penned by black women explaining why they [wouldn't](#), or [didn't](#), attend the Women's March on Washington. Even more eye-opening, she said, were the responses to those pieces, which involved a number of white women [accusing black women](#) who critiqued the march of "hijacking" and "dividing" the effort.

"Those responses really illuminate the issue at hand," Mitchell said. "When we speak out about being excluded from the conversation and you say,

'Don't you dare rain on our parade,' you're telling us to just keep going and act like everything is OK."



The board members of Black Women United: outreach and logistics coordinator Monae Williams, volunteer and outreach coordinator Vocheri Thomas, vice president Erika Bernard, social and community outreach Autumn Jackson, political advocate Sadalia King, president Imani Mitchell, social media manager Hassana Schell, treasurer Nefertiti Schell and secretary Sarah-Michael Gaston. Source: Angel Rodriguez/Black Women United

The "act like everything is OK" message is particularly damaging to black women, who Autumn Jackson, BWU's director of social and community outreach, noted are constantly asked to put their womanhood before their blackness, or to make an impossible choice between the two.

"We can't separate our womanhood from our blackness," she said Thursday. "There's a form of erasure that happens when you don't acknowledge black women's specific issues. And erasure is a euphemism for lying, frankly. You're not telling the story of women if you're only focused on white women."

This point is embedded in BWU's march, which gets its name from Sojourner Truth's famous "Ain't I a Woman" speech. Truth, a former slave, made the speech in 1851 at a convention in Akron, Ohio, where women had been [demanding the right to vote](#).

Advertisement



What you can learn from ancient coffee rituals around the world

5h ago

Venice's uncertain future is one reason Andrew Zimmern has loved the city for decades

10h ago

Sick of being "on call" nights and weekends? How to start saying no to your boss.

July 21, 2017

### STAY UPDATED

# SLAY

Who run the world? GIRLS. Sign up for Mic's feminist of the day newsletter.

Enter your email address

SUBSCRIBE

Advertisement

### RELATED COVERAGE

Here's what you need to know about the Women's March #NRA2DOJ

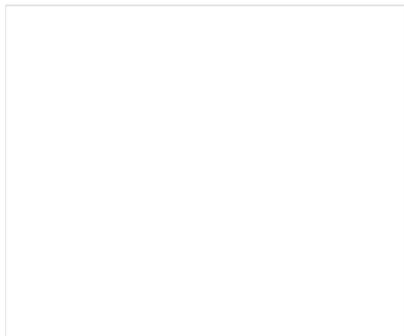
July 13, 2017

If you're stuck on a particular 'Pokémon Go' raid, here are some great counters to try

July 12, 2017

No, criticizing Ivanka Trump doesn't make you a bad feminist

July 10, 2017



---

**Can Ice Cube's The Big 3 league help fuel a new kind of basketball video game?**

June 28, 2017

---

**Watchdogs are suing to find out how Donald Trump tried to stall the FBI's Russia probe**

May 24, 2017

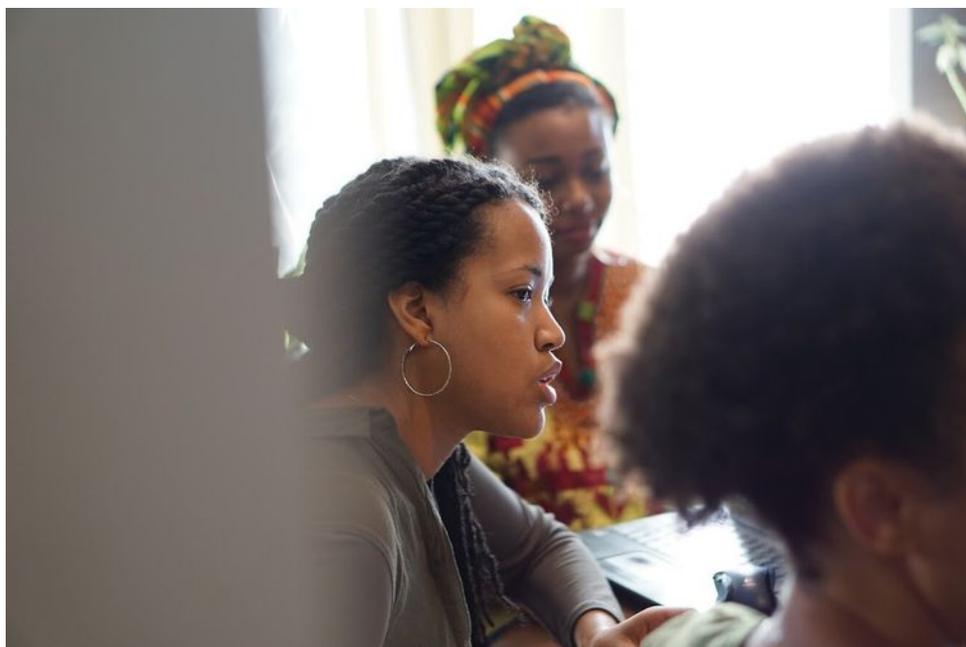
---

"That man over there says that women need to be helped into carriages, and lifted over ditches, and to have the best place everywhere," Truth [said at the time](#). "Nobody ever helps me into carriages, or over mud-puddles, or gives me any best place! And ain't I a woman?"

The speech was an indictment of anyone who would diminish or dismiss black women's womanhood, especially the white women who are complicit in it.

Mitchell said by [turning out in droves](#) to January's women's marches — as important and powerful as they were — white women exposed themselves as only caring about threats to their own rights and interests. When BWU began spreading the word about its own march, Mitchell said she was baffled when white and nonblack people of color came down on her for creating an event that was only meant for black women.

"These are the same people who don't show up at protests outside a school when another black girl was expelled for having her hair in an afro or braids," Mitchell said. "Now that all of a sudden we have a platform, we also seem to have a responsibility to carry everyone on our shoulders."



Outreach and logistics coordinator Monae Williams, Mitchell and Jackson attend a planning meeting for the march.

Source: Angel Rodriguez/Black Women United

But even in the face of these demands, Mitchell, Jackson and the other BWU organizers are determined to turn Saturday's march into a site of black joy.

The march will feature speakers like Raquel Willis, a black transgender activist; former Black Panther Party chairwoman Elaine Brown; and Miss Tami Gibson, the mother of Chyna Doll Dupree, a black trans woman who was shot and killed in New Orleans earlier this year.

Mitchell said BWU is trying to create an environment that's safe, celebratory and, most of all, intersectional in the truest sense of the word. For Mitchell, that means not asking anyone to put their sexuality, religion or gender identity second to their race.

"We want everyone to unite and feel empowered and celebrate, but I don't want anyone to feel like, 'I left this march and I didn't get to be who I am,'" Mitchell said. "We want you to be who you are with everyone else being who they are in this space, and to be sisters with each other."

How much do you trust the information in this article?

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10



By Marie Solis | @msolis14

Marie is a staff writer with a focus in feminist issues. Her writing has appeared in Gothamist and the Awl. You can reach her at marie@mic.com.

### STAY UPDATED

# SLAY

Who run the world? GIRLS. Sign up for Mic's feminist of the day newsletter.

Enter your email address

SUBSCRIBE

### MORE FROM SLAY

**'Game of Thrones' gives fans the feminist sex scene we've waited seven seasons for**

By Claire Lampen

5h ago

**'Girls Trip' made more money in one weekend in the US than 'Rough Night' did in a month**

By Zak Cheney Rice

6h ago

**Women beer drinkers finally get the Beer for Her they never asked for**

By Claire Lampen

July 22, 2017

**Six months after the Women's March on Washington, the Resistance Revival has a message for Trump**

By Claire Lampen

July 21, 2017

**20 attorneys general write letter urging Betsy DeVos to keep sexual assault protections**

By Claire Lampen

July 20, 2017

**New study suggests high workloads and aging doctor population means looming OB-GYN shortage**

By Claire Lampen

July 20, 2017



STAY UPDATED



Get the story to fuel your conversation today.

Enter your email address

SUBSCRIBE

COMPANY

[About](#) [Tips](#) [Jobs](#) [Policies](#) [Archive](#) [Topics](#) [Contact](#)

CONNECT WITH MIC

© 2017 Mic Network Inc. All rights reserved.