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## Interview with Erin Slaughter (FA 1293)

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Interviewer: Chloe Brown  
Interviewee: Erin Slaughter  
Date: March 22<sup>nd</sup> 2017  
Topic: Women's March

### Erin Slaughter Interview

CB: This is Chloe Brown interviewing Erin Slaughter. It's March 22<sup>nd</sup>. Alright. So where did you march?

ES: So we marched at- in Nashville. We weren't actually sure where the sort of taking off point was but we ended up uhm kind of near- I don't know Nashville very well but near the bridge and the lake front sort of area uh parked over there and we kinda just followed the mobs. It was a lot bigger, than I think, than we all expected it to be. I went with- It was me and Lena and then Conner and Allison, as well. And uh I think we took two separate cars that day but we uh ended up parking sort of near the bridge and then saw the, ya know, cluster of pink hats and the signs and everything. And just kind of uhm followed people. They had things set up to where there was a sort of like grassy knoll area with a stage in the middle and so they had speakers coming up and I think they had a musician at one point. Just different, different people from different communities that were sort of pep talking the crowd. And so more and more people filtered in around that and sort of gathered there. And then from there we took off to march over the bridge and then through downtown.

CB: Okay. How long were you there?

ES: Oh wow. Uhm I want to say we were there- the actual march maybe from when we got there to the end of the march maybe an hour and a half, two hours? I feel like we spent a lot more time in the sort of grassy knoll area listening to speakers than actually marching because uhm maybe it was just the adrenaline of actually marching too that it seems like it wasn't as long as, as it felt to be. And it was- a large group too, so you know, there was the waiting in line sort of to go up on the bridge but it was really just over the bridge and then through a couple different streets of downtown and then once we reached the sort of top of downtown, there was this sort of like hill, we reached the top- then people were kind of unsure what to do from there. So I guess we went to go get lunch and a lot of people did too. There might have been some other stuff that happened afterwards but maybe- ya maybe like 2 hours. Something like that.

CB: Alright. So in terms of why you marched, why did you choose to go?

ES: I-okay so that's a good question! I chose to go because I haven't in, I haven't in the past been very politically engaged, even though I've always been sort of interested in the social aspect of politics. I've always been very interested in women's rights, LGBTQ rights, things like that sort of in a social sense but I haven't been really engaged with what bills are being proposed, things like that. And I think with the election, I mean I think a lot of it too is most -Barak Obama was elected when I was 16 so for most of my life as far, you know, as I can remember, I didn't feel like I really had to be worried about politics even though there were things that of course happened that weren't flawless but I was never concerned at the state of what might be happening. And then I think in November, ya know, we were all really shaken by the results of

the election and very quickly realized that we needed to be concerned about what's happening. Like about the details of who's being appointed to cabinet decisions, who is proposing bills, what kind of bills, what are, you know, the details of those and the implications of those. And so I think that a lot of the reasons I marched are the reasons that a lot of other people marched. Which is a sense of obligation to what is left of what feels like our country and a sense of fear and worry and wanting to protect the people and the ideas that are dear to us. But I think it's also sort of a way for me, at least, to have like a physical manifestation of my renewed sort of I guess resolution to be more engaged and be active and to do the things that I can do to help influence what's going to happen to us, I guess. Yeah I think that's probably an answer.

CB: So have you, in terms of future engagement, do you have any plans for that? Are you currently doing things?

ES: Yeah! So, I am going to- this weekend actually, write- look up a list of representatives and write about saving the NEA, because that is something that is really important to me right now and is really frightening to me as a writer and someone who's worked in independent publishing. You know, all of the things that I've sort of built my career around and want to continue to build my career around in the literary world usually rely on the NEA in some way. And my sort of long term career goals is to start a-like an arts based, writing based, nonprofit to help serve disadvantaged communities, which also would most likely rely on funding from the NEA or from the NEH or something like that, so that is really upsetting to me that it's being proposed for the NEA to sort of lose their funding. And I think it is to a lot of other people too, but because the writing and artist community, is sort of- it's not a small population but I think it's an overlooked population. I don't know that the common people care about saving arts' funding so that's a thing that I am doing. I guess that's an answer. I'm also planning with my class list this year- last semester I had them do their research on the presidential election issues with the new election and this semester I am still tweaking their assignment but I think I'm going to have them do something about a civil rights movement of some kind. And as part of that, leading up to that, one of their assignments is going to be to write to a representative about some issue that matters to them. So giving a very open, maybe suggesting some issues or bills that are up, keeping it open to where they can engage with something that is important to them regardless of what that might be.

CB: Okay. Do you feel like the march had- so there have been criticisms that the march was just a repudiation of Trump- do you feel it was a march against Trump or a march for something or both?

ES: I think both, or I think ideally both. I think that the atmosphere of the Nashville march, when we were in that little knoll area with the speakers, there was definitely a lot of anti-Trump talk. I think that the reasons why I marched and a lot of people there marched were trying to stand for something. And I think that is not- and think that comes hand in hand with standing against Trump. Because he is for trying to destroy all of the things that are important to a lot of people. And for destroying the communities and harming people in communities that were marching with us and that we wanted to standing solidarity with. So I think it has to be both, probably.

CB: Okay. What about the way the march was portrayed in social media- well not social media but the general media? Do you think it was accurate or do you think the message was not communicated correctly?

ES: I'm not sure. I mean I've seen it portrayed in a lot of different ways and when I'm looking through my own social media, I'm thinking about that day- I remember seeing a lot of different marches all over the world, in Dublin and Paris and Denmark. I remember feeling- that was really exciting to see, sort of like, my news feed flooded with either people I knew who went to different places to march and in Nashville marching or other cities marching, or even just on different Facebook groups, people, strangers from other places who were marching. That felt really inspiring to see that worldwide solidarity. I don't know- I think that when I think about general media coverage, I also get that feeling of it sort of being this inspiring movement, it's been talked about it being, I think, the largest protest in American history, something like that. The turnout for the protest was larger than the inauguration. So but it could also be the media outlets that I consume and that they are portraying it in that light. You know I have heard a lot of, sort of, not counter arguments against the march necessarily, but critics of the march and what the march stands for and how it was enacted. A lot of the critics that I have heard or that I remember hearing have to do mostly with who is women. So there was, I think in Nashville I saw this but, I've heard people talking about it in other marches where there is signs with vaginas on them and things like that and that excludes trans women sort of from the narrative. And I think that is a valid critic of -and I mean again I don't think that like of sort of celebrating cis womanhood has to exclude trans womanhood but I think that it's valid for trans women to feel that maybe their voice wasn't as heard in that march when it should have been. So yeah, I don't know- I think that my perception of how it was portrayed probably is very based around the kind of media that I consume and I don't go looking for things that are going to anger me and maybe I should to get the opposite perspective. I should do that more often, probably.

CB: In term of the criticism, I think you covered pretty much all the criticism that I've heard. Would you say that the purpose of the march was still achieved, despite it being not as inclusive as it could have been?

ES: Yeah! I think the purpose of it was achieved in that it raised awareness. I think that's kind of all that a march, on some level, can do, right, is to raise awareness to show in the popular consciousness that this is something that people care enough about to go out into the streets and make signs and talk about it. So I do think in that sense that the purpose was achieved. I think it was a good way to sort of jump off to all these other protests that are happening all over the country and like there's a tax march that's being proposed for April 15<sup>th</sup>, things like that. But I think that at the same time we should be careful to, of course always participate in the things that are available for us to participate in, things like that, but not stop there and not feel, "Oh I marched and I've done my duty." Because marching doesn't repeal a bill, it doesn't help protect anyone's rights. So I think that marching is a good way to- is a good jumping off point to make people engage, to go do those further actions, so I hope that what it achieved was sort of rallying people together and helping them to feel empowered, to take action through other ways also throughout the year.

CB: Okay. Do you think that the resistance will continue?

ES: Uh, yeah! I think it has to. Things are only getting more frightening and I think that, I hope it will. I hope it will even if just sort of in spirit. I mean I often feel like with politics there is a sense of helplessness because you can write your senators, you can go to town halls that they hold but in the end they don't all care about their constituents. And a lot of them have other interests that are unphased by their 12:00. I mean we are seeing that with the repeal of Obamacare where a lot of these counties and states are people who voted for Trump and who rely on healthcare, government health care and are being hurt by the bills that are proposed. And are talking about it and their kind of nothing really can happen to help them. So I think that even though there is that sort of sense of helplessness in action sometimes, and there is not a lot that we feel like we can penetrate that, I hope the resistance continues in the sense of people supporting each other and standing up for the things that they believe in and standing in solidarity with people who are harmed. I hope that that continues.

CB: Do you plan on attending any future marches?

ES: Yeah! I don't know of any that are coming up. I don't know if they are having a tax march in Nashville but I mean I would definitely consider attending anything that I found out about, for sure.

CB: How did your- did you talk to your family about going to this march?

ES: Yeah!

CB: You did? How did they take it?

ES: So I'm in a weird place with my family, right now. I think it's a good place but both of my parents are conservative, my mom doesn't talk to me about politics but my step dad is very antagonistic about it. And in the past it's been a real source of tension in our relationship where he'll say something very offensive and I'll get upset and he'll, ya know, play the whole "oh I was kidding. Why are you upset?" And then get upset that I'm upset. Which is how it went for many years so I just avoided it altogether. And now we're in a place where I'm trying to be more open with my parents and being more honest with them and I think they are being more open with me. And so me and my step dad- we'll talk about politics now and we'll send each other things and it's- we almost never agree on anything but having that open dialogue feels very respectful now, in a way that it never used to. So I talked to him after the Women's March; we were meeting the next weekend or something and he said- he mentioned some comment about "oh I saw your pictures on Facebook or whatever. You and your friends out protesting." And he did say that, he thought it was good that I was standing up for something that I believed in and he was proud of me for that and that was really nice. He had a problem with a sign that I made that said "Make America Gay Again." He said that he was offended by that but like that didn't bother me that he was offended by that. You know, of course, I tried to kinda explain to him "oh it's an offshoot of Trump's slogan" and all this stuff. But I think that, yeah, it's strange. Ya know a year ago if this sort of thing happened, I would have been afraid of posting the pictures of Facebook because of different people in my life who wouldn't be supportive. And it was really empowering to do that

and then to have that conversation and to be able to disagree and not feel guilty about that. So, yeah.

CB: Speaking of signs, what sign- so was the “Make America Gay Again” sign the sign that you made and carried or..?

ES: So yeah, I think we all had- we all made signs and then we had one on each side of our sign so one side of my sign say “Make America Gay Again” and the other side said “Compassion Trump’s Fascism.” And then other people had other ones that I will let them talk about.

CB: Why did you choose those two statements?

ES: Uh, well I was trying to find puns but I couldn’t think of any good puns the night of which was strange. So the “Make America Gay Again” one for me was- I chose that because one of the main reasons why I was marching, like I said, was in solidarity with LGBTQ rights. And it was also really empowering and freeing for me because, as I said, I probably wouldn’t a year ago posted Facebook pictures of me at a protest at all because of people who would disagree but I also wasn’t out to my family as bisexual until this past fall. So it was really empowering to not- to be able to post that, a picture with that particular sign and to be able to hold that sign and to not feel I was hiding anything. And it was sort of empowering in this sort of double way. The other one “Compassion in Trump’s Fascism” is, I mean, of course, a play on Trump and so I was trying to do something clever there but it was really sort of- I don’t know, I guess it gets at one of my core philosophies which is kinda radical compassion. And that being powerful and meaningful in some way. Just sort of, that that can take precedence over other kinds of things.

CB: Did you get together, did your friends get together to make signs?

ES: Yeah, we did. It was actually really great. So the night before we got together at Lena’s apartment and we, ya know, all brought cardboard and paints and we were just all on the floor painting and making signs for it and listening to 60’s folk music. It was a protest playlist and I felt like I was in a movie, like a movie of what I hope my life would one day be and - so yeah that just felt really good to have that time together too and to sort of get excited for the protest the next day.

CB: How has friendship and your community helped kind of push away some of the negativity of the election?

ES: Oh my god. I love everyone so much. I- so for me, the sort of friendships that I have here and the community I have here is absolutely core to all of the evolution that I’ve had as a person and my time here. And is core to the freedom that I feel in being my full self and not being ashamed of my identities or even myself and my weirdness and my feelings. So the night of the election we actually had a group watch party and so we were all there together and that was exciting and then people sort of drifted off as things were getting more troubling. But it was nice to sort of be there, ya know, to have the memory of that night even though it was kind of horrible, being with those people and then the next day to regroup with those people in different ways and talk about the devastation we were all feeling. And so the group- it’s strange because

,ya know, moving to Kentucky, I was very concerned what my life would be like here. I grew up in Texas so I live in a red state, moving to a redder state. I didn't know what would happen and the group of friends that I have here is by far the most liberal, accepting, diverse group of friends I've ever had. I have a lot of male friends in my life and almost all of them are gay or queer. I have- actually mostly all of my friends are gay or queer. And so there's that but- yeah I think that, I don't know if I would have survived, have survived anything without the group of people that I have. It's really nice to be around other people who sort of fundamentally, without question, without needing any education or prompting, believe in things like feminism, things like LGBT rights, and trans rights, and lesser people of color where that is an assumed part of how people should be towards each other. And so there is not any strain in those relationships. It's as if sort of all together deciding this is important to fight for and then doing that and having that sort of community, having that philosophy be a big part of our community. It just feels really loving and accepting and really, like I can trust the people that I'm with to- I don't know I'm just blabbing now about how much I just love everyone I know but I can trust the people that I'm with to not discount my identity as a woman, and a queer woman. And to- the things that are important to me are also important to them. I'll stop there.

CB: Okay. I think this is my last question.

ES: Okay.

CB: And I'm not sure how to phrase it so- but how, I guess, how does your identity as a woman play into, and maybe being a queer woman too, play into your participation in the march, your participation in general?

ES: Yeah, I think that, I mean it's called the Women's March, right? So there's that. But it was also really nice to see a lot of men and a lot of families there. So I don't think that the Women's March has to include only women, I think that that's kinda beside the point but, for me, my engagement in the march and in politics, in general right now, comes from the fact that like my existence is kind of being challenged. You know, healthcare rights for women have been kind of under- I don't want to say under attack because that sounds so "media"- but like have been under question and have been – there's been this kind of push and pull on birth control availability and abortion rights and things like that for a long time and now those questions are in the hands of someone who doesn't care about women having access to those things. And so, I would say that my political engagement kind of, even though I'm privileged in a lot of ways, my political engagement kind of stems from the fact that I want my life to be okay. I want to be able to have access to things that I need and, more so, I just- it's more like this national attitude of letting sexism kind of just fly free and that be the norm where I think it is in a lot of places but when we look at the politicians that we have right now in charge and what we are seeing from leadership especially in Washington for the example to be set for one of malice towards women in a lot of ways. I think that it would be self-hating as a woman to not argue that and to not try and fight against that.

CB: I realized that I had one more question

ES: Okay.

CB: So if you could kind of, maybe one or two sentences just kind of sum up your experience. So pick out the most important things, what do you think were the main take-aways from the march?

ES: I'd say- mm let me think about that. So I'd say kind of beginning the year and beginning this administration change with the attitude of equal resistance and hopefully a commitment to action that will last for the next year and the next four years. I'd say that for sure. When I think about that day, I just remember marching next to my friends and holding our signs, and seeing little babies holding signs, and women with the little backpacks with children and their partners. I just remember all the colors and all the people and how there was this sense that everyone around was a friend and everyone around was just wanting the best for each other and wanting the best for other people who couldn't be there. And so I don't know, I just think about joy. Honestly, I just think about this little pocket of joy and acceptance and freedom within a very stifling and oppressive, larger atmosphere. Yeah.

CB: Is there anything that I haven't asked? Anything that is important to say?

ES: I can't think of anything. Probably not but thank you!

CB: Thank you.