

JOHN PROCTOR IS THE VILLAIN

By **Kimberly Belflower**

Directed by **Karen Azenberg**

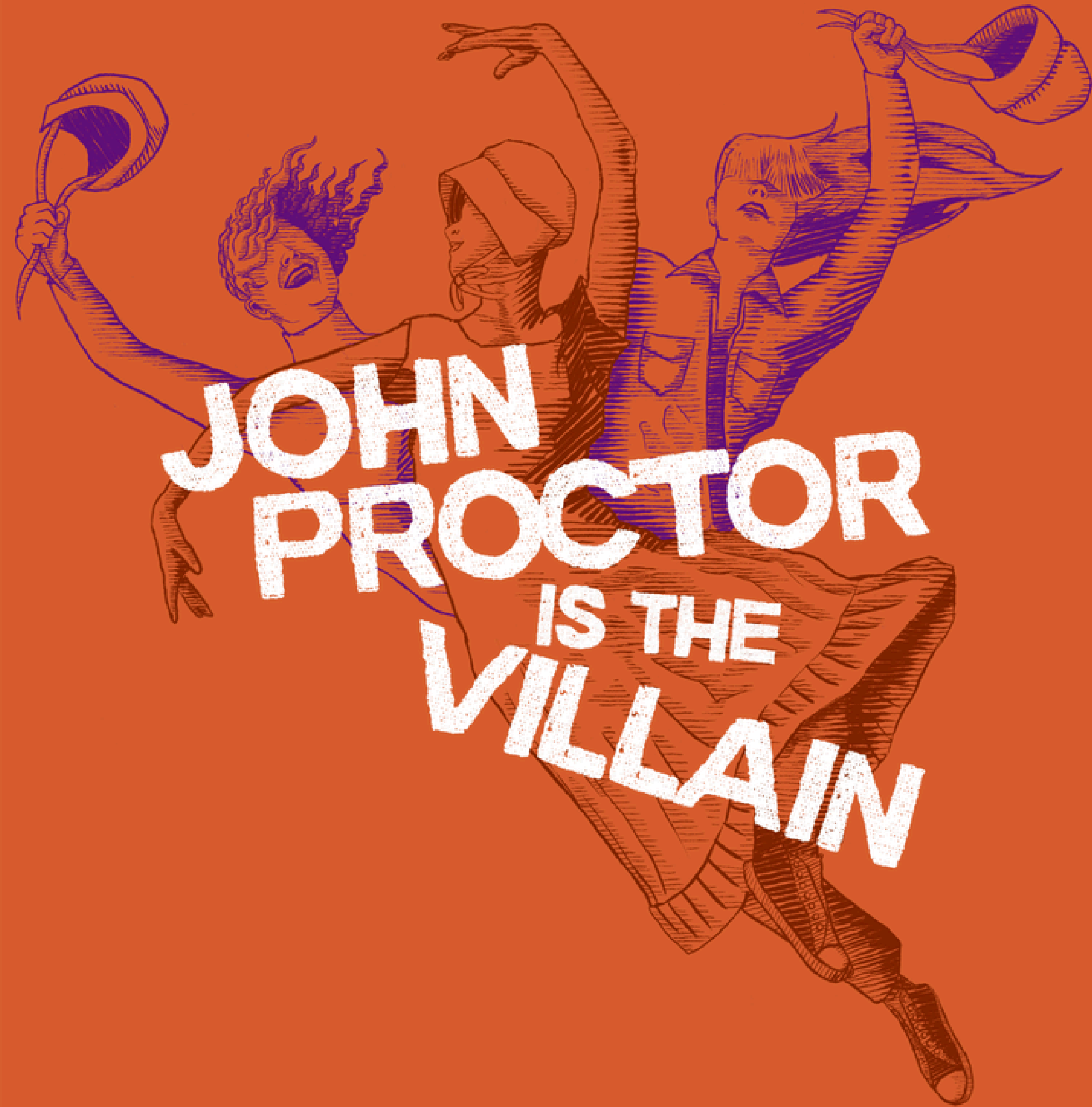
September 11-2026

Spotlight Study Guide For Teachers and Students



**ZOO
ARTS &
PARKS**

Pioneer Theatre Company's Student Matinee Program is made possible through the support of Salt Lake County's Zoo, Arts, and Parks Program, The Simmons Family Foundation, and The Meldrum Foundation Endowment Fund.



CHARACTERS

SHELBY HOLCOMB,

student, 16, F. her brain works faster than her mouth, but her mouth works fast. People have always underestimated her.



BETH POWELL,

student, 17, F. nervous and ambitious and enthusiastic.



RAELYNN NIX,

student, 16, F. a cheerleader type who's always lived her life by other people's standards. she is always paying careful attention and keeping score.



CARTER SMITH,

teacher, mid to late 30's, M. a former golden boy, but a rare smart and sensitive one. now he is a great teacher: charming, engaging, goofy.



LEE TURNER,

student, 16, M. a carhartt wearing good ol' boy. deeply insecure and without the tools to deal with it. he's always been good at getting what he wants.



CHARACTERS

NELL SHAW,

student, 16 F. from Atlanta. grounded and sincere. a good judge of character, and a quick study.



MASON ADAMS,

student, 17, M. he's never really tried before, and he is surprised by how good it feels. earnest and affable.



IVY WATKINS,

student, 17, F. fiercely loyal and always well intentioned. from money.



BAILEY GALLAGHER,

councilor, 24, sweet in all the ways a southern woman is supposed to be, she is trying her best



ESSENTIAL QUESTIONS

Does history repeat itself
and when will it stop?

What happens when our
actions are driven primarily
by fear?

How does authority and
popularity influence how we
react when people do bad
things?

COMING TO THE BIG SCREEN...

Belflower is adapting *John Proctor is the Villain* for a feature film with Tina Fey and Marc Platt at Universal Pictures.

WHO IS THAT?



In the original Broadway production, *Stranger Things* actress Sadie Sink played the role of Shelby Holcomb.



In 2025, Lorde visited *John Proctor is the Villain* on Broadway. Her song "Green Light" is an integral part of the production.

MEET THE PLAYWRIGHT

Kimberly Belflower is a playwright and educator originally from a small town in Appalachian Georgia. Plays include: *John Proctor is the Villain* (2025, Tony Award Nominee for Best Play; *Lost Girl* (Kennedy Center Darrell Ayers National Playwriting Award); *Saint Pigtail* (commissioned and developed by Studio Theatre, 2023 O'Neill Finalist). She proudly holds an MFA from the University of Texas at Austin and teaches playwriting at Emory University in Atlanta. She has also worked with South Coast Rep, Manhattan Theatre Club, Alliance Theatre, Ojai Playwrights Conference, the Farm Theatre, *We the Women*, *Less Than Rent*, among others. Additionally, Belflower has worked as a writer and narrative lead for Meow Wolf, Santa Fe's celebrated immersive arts company.



WHAT WAS KIMBERLY BELFLOWER'S INSPIRATION FOR THIS PLAY?

"John Proctor does do a lot of really moral upstanding things in *The Crucible*. He does some really brave stuff. And also he's totally abusive and misogynist. And that became the guiding force in writing the play: What if it's not as easy as being like, ok, Harvey Weinstein is a monster, full stop. What if it's your favourite person in the whole world? What if it's the best person you know?" – Kimberly Belflower

WHAT IS GROOMING?

"Grooming is the deliberate act of building trust with a child, teen, or at-risk adult for the purpose of exploiting them sexually.

Grooming typically starts with friendship, mentorship, or kindness that gradually turns into manipulation, control, and sexual abuse or assault."

—RAINN

If you or someone you know
might be at risk or in danger,
call or text:

800-422-4453

Child Help National Hotline

CONSENT SHOULD BE

WANT SOME FRIES WITH THAT?

FREELY GIVEN

REVERSABLE

INFORMED

ENTHUSIASTIC

SPECIFIC



THE RED SCARE

In the early 1950's, paranoia swept the United States as the U.S. Government warned its citizens that they should be weary of potential communist influence in their lives. Families were told that anyone could be a communist, their teachers, their bosses, or even their friends.



**SENATOR
JOE MCCARTHY**

1954

MCCARTHYISM

Arthur Miller wrote *The Crucible* as a direct allegory for The Red Scare and McCarthyism... but what was The Red Scare Anyway?

In 1954, Senator Joe McCarthy claimed to have a list of communists working within the U.S. State Department. McCarthy's fear mongering created a culture of fear in many sectors of American life. Primary targets included teachers, politicians, and high-profile individuals in the entertainment industry. People lost their livelihoods due to these allegations; some even went to prison. Yet, one dared stand up to McCarthy for fear of being blacklisted.

SALEM WITCH TRIALS, 1692-1693



In January of 1692, three young girls of the Salem began to have fits that local doctors blamed on a supernatural presence. The young girls accused three women of cursing them. One of them, Tituba, a Caribbean woman enslaved by the Parris family, confessed to the crime. This began the paranoia that led to 200 accusations.

1692

By May 1693, Governor William Phips pardoned everyone imprisoned for witchcraft, but it was too late. Nineteen men and women were hung on Gallows Hill.

1693

The courts often used spectral evidence to convict people of witchcraft. Spectral evidence is a person's testimony about a dream or vision they had.

Salem was not the first place to prosecute people for being witches. From the 1300s to the 1600s, a witchcraft craze spread across Europe. The Salem trials took place just as the witchcraft craze was coming to a close.

In Medieval Times, Christianity and other religions taught that the devil could give witches the power to hurt others in exchange for their loyalty.



POP/ CULTURE IN JOHN PROCTOR IS THE VILLAIN

WUTHERING HEIGHTS

1847

EMILY BRONTË'S (1818-1848)

only novel, blending realism, romance and the Gothic

"He shall never know I love him: and that, not because he's handsome, but because he's more myself than I am. Whatever our souls are made out of, his and mine are the same."



1953

THE CRUCIBLE

ARTHUR MILLER'S play

"Why, you taught me goodness, therefore you are good. It were a fire you walked me through, and all my ignorance was burned away. It were a fire, John, we lay in fire."

– Abigail to John Proctor, Act II

1968

SLOUCHING TOWARDS BETHLEHEM

A collection of essays by JOAN DIDION describing her experiences in California in the 1960s

"Was anyone ever so young?
I am here to tell you that someone was."



2005

TWILIGHT

STEPHENIE MEYER'S vampire romance novel.

"What if I'm not a superhero. What if I'm the bad guy?"

"I am from a very small town in rural Georgia, much like the one in the play. I feel like [pop culture was the] way that I figured out that other lives were possible. I'm the only person in my family who doesn't farm. I feel like [pop culture was the] way that I figured out that other lives were possible. I'm the only person in my family who doesn't farm. Entertainment Weekly was my Bible. I wrote *Gilmore Girls*' fan-fiction in high school, and I used to write down all of the books they were reading and all of the pop culture references they made, and then make that my education.

But I think that that is such a common teenage thing: You read something in school and then you're like, Wait, that reminds me of this other thing. It becomes so enmeshed in the way that you're forming your identity and yourself and making sense of your place in the world."

– Kimberly Befflower

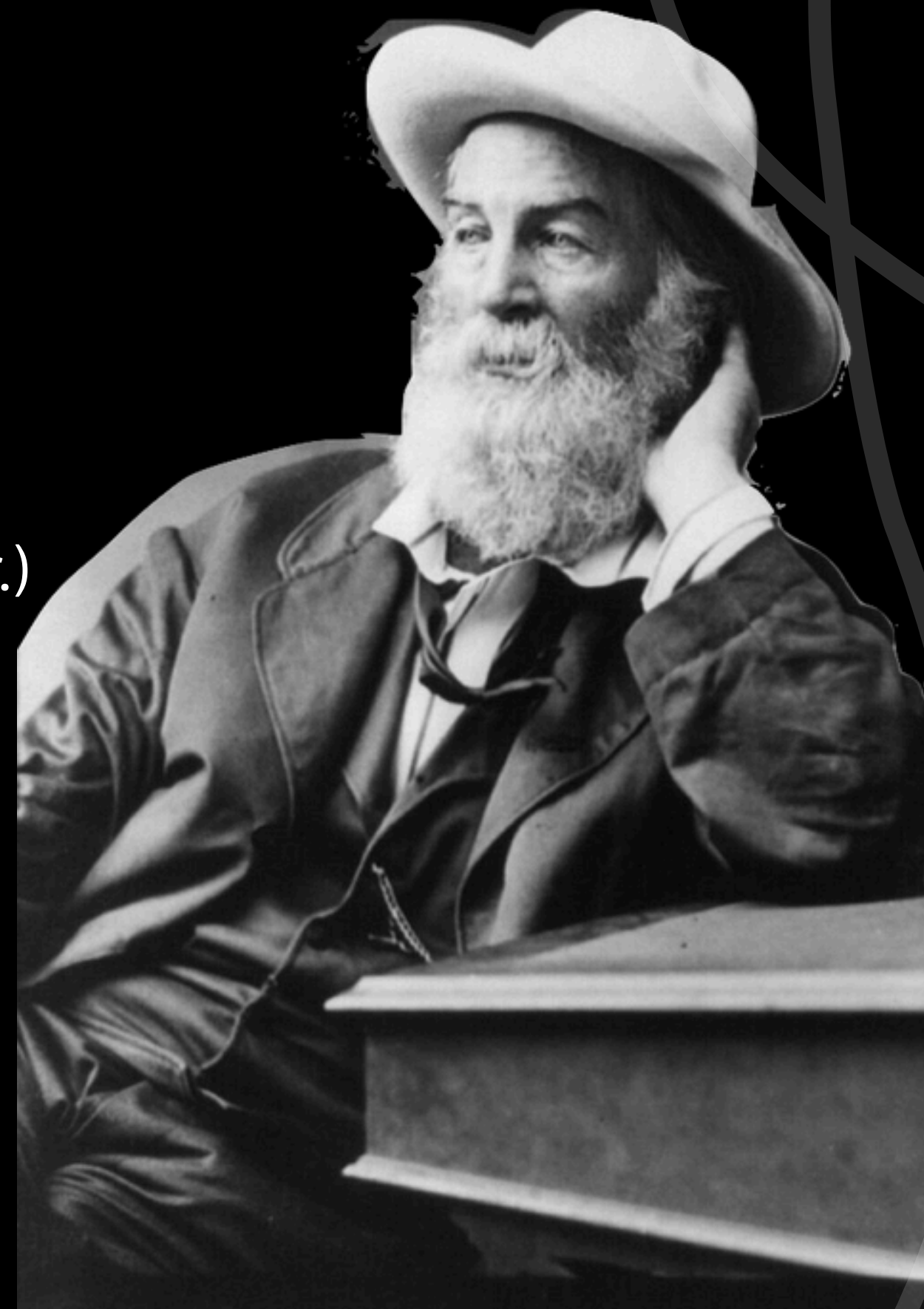


OTHER LITERARY FIGURES IN THE WINGS

1855

The past and present wilt—I have fill'd them, emptied them.
And proceed to fill my next fold of the future.
Listener up there! what have you to confide to me?
Look in my face while I snuff the sidle of evening,
(Talk honestly, no one else hears you, and I stay only a minute longer.)
Do I contradict myself?
Very well then I contradict myself,
(I am large, I contain multitudes.)
I concentrate toward them that are nigh, I wait on the door-slab.
Who has done his day's work? who will soonest be through with his
supper?
Who wishes to walk with me?
Will you speak before I am gone? will you prove already too late?

“Song of Myself”, Walt Whitman



1925

“Possibly it had occurred to him that the colossal significance of that light had now vanished forever. Compared to the great distance that had separated him from Daisy it had seemed very near to her, almost touching her. It had seemed as close as a star to the moon. Now it was again a green light on a dock. His count of enchanted objects had diminished by one.”

The Great Gatsby, F. Scott Fitzgerald



THE #ME TOO MOVEMENT

In 2006, the Me Too Movement was founded by American activist Tarana Burke. Her mission was to bring resources and pathways for healing to Survivors of Sexual Assault.

2006

In 2017, #MeToo went viral on social media. Survivors worldwide were coming forward, and sharing their sexual assault experiences. People all around the world were shocked when they realized how prevalent Sexual Violence is today.

2017

The Me Too Movement energized national legislation and inspired global involvement, but it also received a lot of backlash. Some people felt that the movement gave a platform to false accusation. Others simply refused to believe that so many abusers walk free today.



Woody Allen Comments On Weinstein Scandal

In an interview with the BBC published early Sunday, the director Woody Allen, below, addressed the wave of allegations against Harvey Weinstein, calling it "tragic for the poor women" but also warning against a "witch-hunt atmosphere."

Woody Allen Warns of 'Witch Hunt' Over Weinstein, Then Tries to Clarify

Mr. Allen's comments to the BBC, published on the heels of the Weinstein scandal, have ever come to mind. "And they horror stories with any real seriousness," he said. "And they don't, because you are not making your movie." Mr. Allen said. "Tragic for poor women that were accused, sad for Harvey that his life is so messed up." However, Mr. Allen

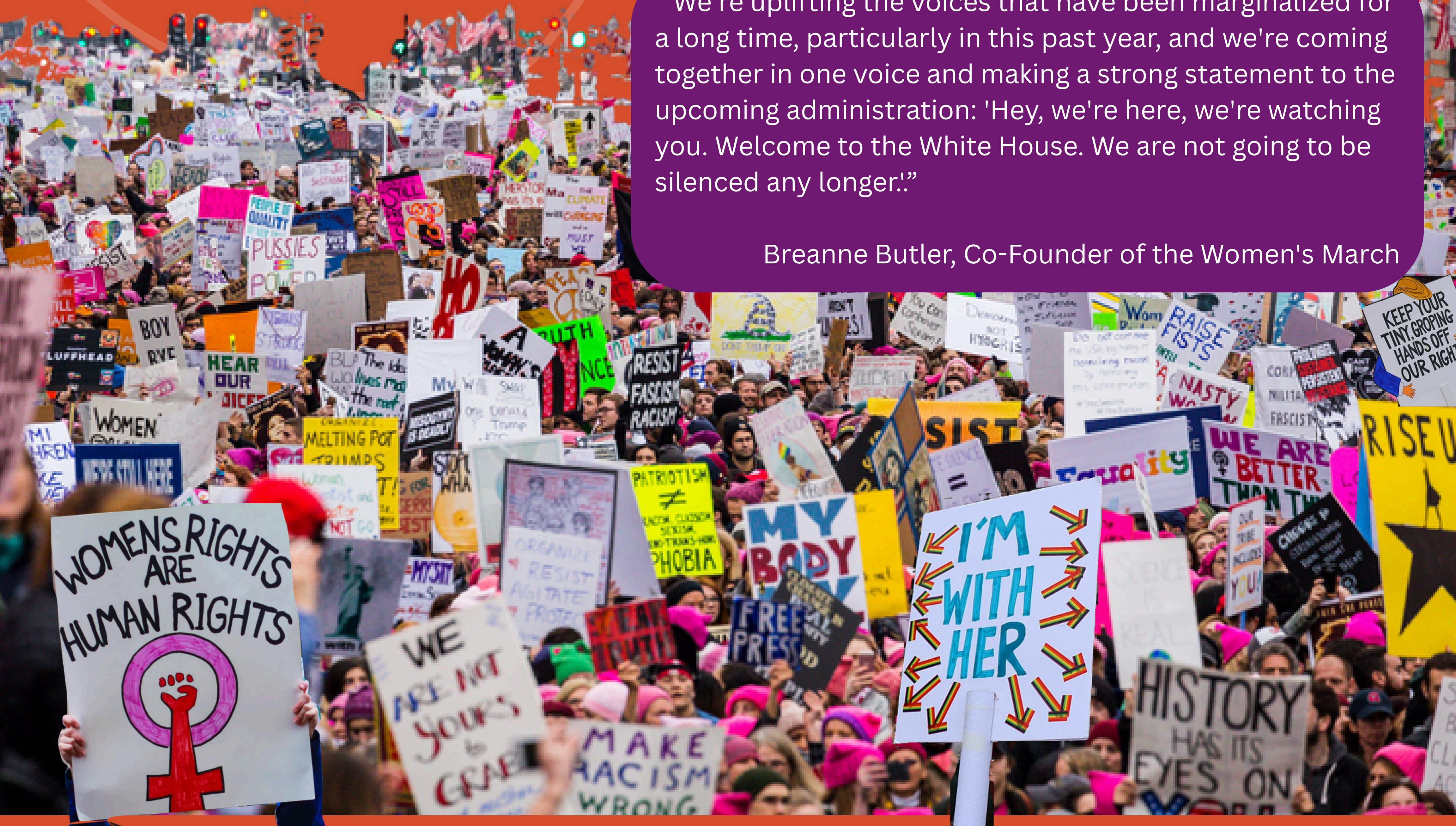
2017

THE WOMEN'S MARCH

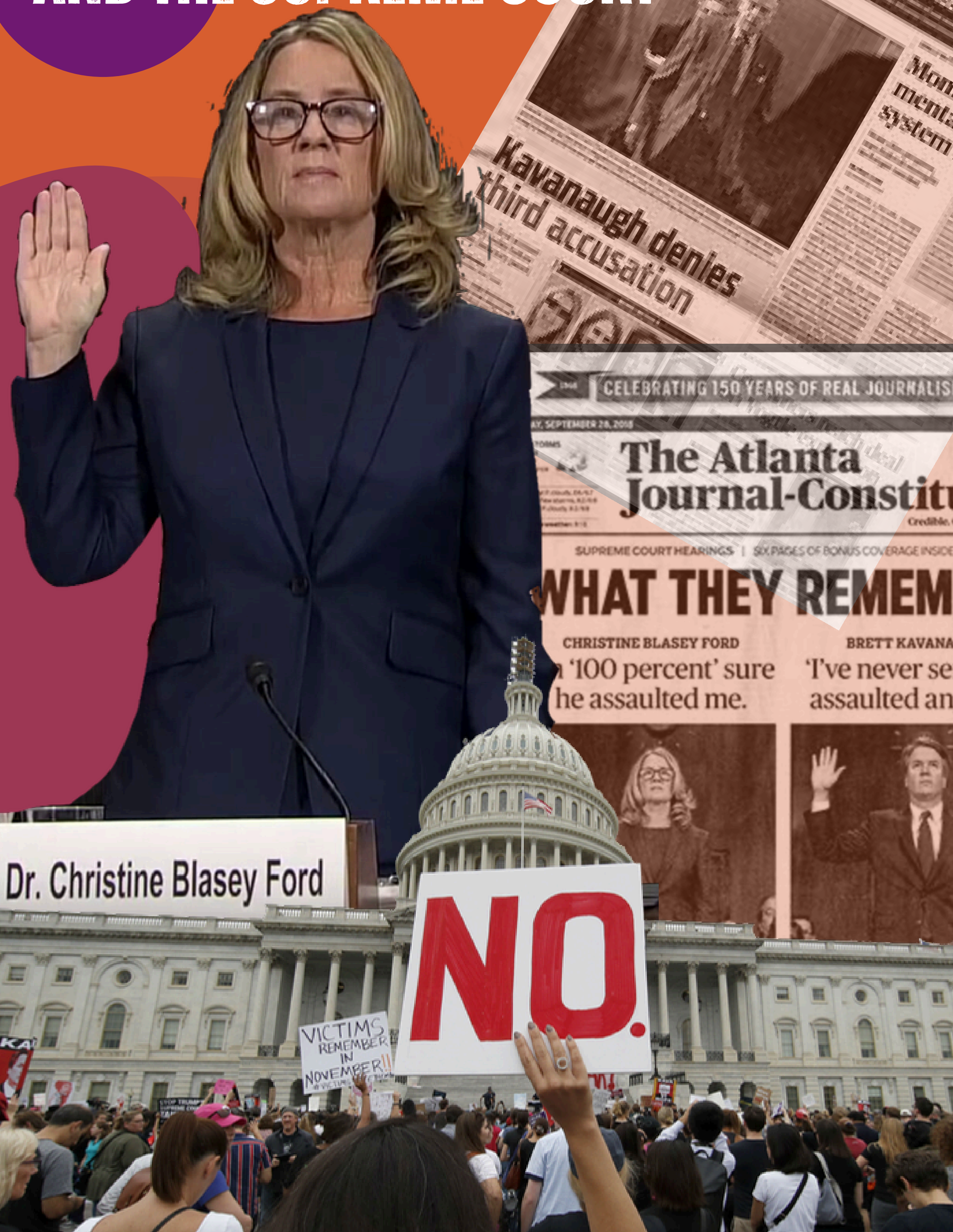
January 21, 2017, one day after Donald Trump took office, women across the country banded together to protect and celebrate women's rights.

"We're uplifting the voices that have been marginalized for a long time, particularly in this past year, and we're coming together in one voice and making a strong statement to the upcoming administration: 'Hey, we're here, we're watching you. Welcome to the White House. We are not going to be silenced any longer!'"

Breanne Butler, Co-Founder of the Women's March



2018 #METOO AND THE SUPREME COURT



American professor of psychology at Palo Alto University and research psychologist at the Stanford University School of Medicine Christine Margaret Blasey Ford testified during a Senate Judiciary Committee hearing on Brett Kavanaugh's Supreme Court nomination, that then-U.S. Supreme Court nominee Brett Kavanaugh had sexually assaulted her in Bethesda, Maryland, when they were teenagers.

In a letter In a letter to the Judiciary panel, Kavanaugh wrote, “I will not be intimidated into withdrawing from this process. The coordinated effort to destroy my good name will not drive me out. The vile threats of violence against my family will not drive me out. The last-minute character assassination will not succeed. I have devoted my career to serving the public and the cause of justice, and particularly to promoting the equality and dignity of women.”

The Senate confirmed Brett Kavanaugh to the Supreme Court as an associate justice on October 6, 2018 by a vote of 50-48.

2010



DEAR JOHN

A track on **TAYLOR SWIFT'S** third studio album, *Speak Now*.

Dear John

*I see it all now that you're gone
Don't you think I was too young to be
messed
With?*

*The girl in the dress
Cried the whole way home
I should've known*

2017



WE SHOULD ALL BE FEMINISTS

CHIMAMANDA NGOZI ADICHIEVES' TEDX TALK

We teach girls shame... We make them feel as though by being born female, they're already guilty of something. And so, girls grow up to be women who cannot see they have desire. They grow up to be women who silence themselves. They grow up to be women who cannot say what they truly think, and they grow up -- and this is the worst thing we did to girls --

they grow up to be women who have turned pretense into an art form.

...

What if in raising children we focus on ability instead of gender?

What if in raising children we focus on interest instead of gender?

2013

The song “***Flawless” on **BEYONCÉ'S** fifth studio album samples the message author Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's TEDx talk

2012



GREEN LIGHT

The first track on **LORDE'S** *Melodrama* album, released when she was 20.

“We all create our identities, our directions through life. We all know that “brand new sounds” feeling. At a certain point, we each cross the bridge of a specific pain into new territory. And it usually happens for the first time, as so many things do, when we're teenagers.

In a single sonic moment, Lorde gave voice to an alchemy I've never been able to put into words.”

– Kimberly Belflower



SO WHAT DOES THIS HAVE TO DO WITH JOHN PROCTOR IS THE VILLAIN?

“The impetus of the play is, What would it be like to be coming of age in a moment like #MeToo? I think that if you were reading *The Crucible* and you hear in an interview that Woody Allen calls #MeToo a "witch hunt," then I imagine you would make some parallels. But then you're also listening to Lorde and thinking about how our pop culture references reflect who we are.”

– Kimberly Belflower

