

Millions March

By Lexi Parra



Street photography has long brought forth important political and ethical concerns. Is it right to photograph an individual in public without their explicit consent? By being in public, are people providing their consent to being photographed – and to what end may these photographs be used and proliferated?

When photographing at the Millions March in Manhattan this past December, I witnessed people marching in solidarity for systematic change. Emphasis, I believe, should be placed on solidarity. I found that photographing people together, in the context of their surroundings, stayed in alignment with the movement's intention – a coming together of people to demand change. I noticed that many other photographers chose to single out individuals and transform them into pseudo-symbols of the march. This observation led me to contemplate many complex questions regarding visual representation and photographic documentation. Who has the right to create a symbol out of a human being? Is it exclusionary to give a singular face to a movement of millions? Furthermore, what are the newfound risks provoked by the public proliferation of photographs?

As has recently been brought to the public's attention, the police and various security forces are increasingly taking advantage of such photographs, using face-identifying technology to surveil protesters documented in online civilian photography. When police utilize art, propaganda, and promotional work to arrest people retroactively, where does the fault lie? How cognizant must photographers be of the various ways in which their work may be used to jeopardize their subjects? I believe there is a responsibility – especially in an increasingly police-like state – on the part of the photographer to be aware and sensitive of the potential uses and ramifications of their work. Protests must be documented and made visible, as this is and has long been a critical part of their political function. However, this documentation cannot come at the cost of endangering already individuals.

These photographs are thus a part of my ongoing exploration of how, as a photographer and an activist, I may capture these events both intimately and responsibly.

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