

Introduction

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SYMPOSIUM
COMMEMORATING THE 100TH
ANNIVERSARY OF THE 19TH AMENDMENT
INTRODUCTION

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This issue of the *St. John's Law Review* contains several articles which were first presented at the *Law Review's* Fall 2020 Symposium. This symposium was organized to commemorate the 100th anniversary of the 19th amendment, which states very simply, “[t]he right of citizens of the United States to vote shall not be denied or abridged by the United States or by any State on account of sex.”¹

The right to vote is one of the most important political rights in this country but for most, it was also one of the hardest-won rights. For 244 years, American women were denied this right; thus, women were prevented from participating fully and equally in our supposed democracy. But, just over 100 years ago, as the result of tremendous strength and sacrifice, the first women in America exercised their newly secured constitutional right to vote.

Of course, the story of women's suffrage does not end there. Asian Americans could not become citizens, so they could not vote, until 1952.² Black women, who built this country, and Native Americans, whose land we live on, could not vote until 1965—*only fifty-six years ago*.³ And still today, because of felony disenfranchisement and burdensome election laws, millions of Americans are unable to vote.⁴

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¹ U.S. CONST. amend. XIX (emphasis added).

² See Grace Panetta, Olivia Reaney & Talia Lakritz, *The 19th Amendment Passed 100 Years Ago Today. The Evolution of American Voting Rights in 244 Years Show How Far We've Come – And How Far We Still Have To Go*, INSIDER (Aug. 18, 2020), <https://www.businessinsider.com/when-women-got-the-right-to-vote-american-voting-rights-timeline-2018-10> [<https://perma.cc/33FH-9ACF>].

³ See *id.*

⁴ See *id.*

The racial and ethnic disparities seen in women's fight for voting rights are emblematic of most gender issues we have faced and continue to face in this country. That is, in white women's pursuit of equality, we have weaponized our whiteness to ignore, endorse, and participate in the oppression of women of color—making the disparities among women often worse than those among different genders.⁵

This country has come a long way in the past 100 years, but our work is far from over. For starters, the United States is currently ranked fifty-third in the world for overall gender equality by the World Economic Forum.⁶ We are ranked seventy-sixth in terms of women's representation in government.⁷ Our current Congress is the most diverse in our history and yet less than 25% of our congressional representatives are women, less than 5% are Black women, and less than 3% are Latina or Hispanic women.⁸ Despite federal legislation outlawing discriminatory pay practices, women still earn less than men for doing the same work.⁹ For every dollar a white man earns, a white woman earns 79 cents, a Black woman earns 62 cents, and a Latina or Hispanic woman earns just 54 cents.¹⁰ And, when it comes to maternal mortality, we are ranked fifty-fifth in the world¹¹—a shameful fact for one of the world's wealthiest countries. Even more shameful, though, is that the maternal mortality rate for Black women is more than twice that for white women.¹²

Deciding which statistics to cite in furtherance of this point is a dizzying task because it is a harsh reminder that the topics the following articles explore are only the tip of the iceberg. But it is

⁵ See *Racial Wealth Divide Snapshot: Women and the Racial Wealth Divide*, PROSPERITY NOW (Mar. 29, 2018), <https://prosperitynow.org/blog/racial-wealth-divide-snapshot-women-and-racial-wealth-divide> [<https://perma.cc/9CEY-WKCU>].

⁶ WORLD ECON. F., GLOBAL GENDER GAP REPORT 2020, at 353 (Dec. 16, 2019), http://www3.weforum.org/docs/WEF_GGGR_2020.pdf [<https://perma.cc/ET9E-H9QV>].

⁷ See *id.*

⁸ See JENNIFER E. MANNING, CONG. RSCH. SERV., R46705, MEMBERSHIP OF THE 117TH CONGRESS: A PROFILE 7-9 (2021).

⁹ See ROBIN BLEIWEIS, CTR. FOR AM. PROGRESS, QUICK FACTS ABOUT THE GENDER WAGE GAP 1-2 (Mar. 24, 2020), <https://www.americanprogress.org/issues/women/reports/2020/03/24/482141/quick-facts-gender-wage-gap/> [<https://perma.cc/8QF8-ZEQ2>].

¹⁰ See *id.*

¹¹ See Julia Belluz, *We Finally Have a New U.S. Maternal Mortality Estimate. It's Still Terrible.*, VOX (Jan. 30, 2020), <https://www.vox.com/2020/1/30/21113782/pregnancy-deaths-us-maternal-mortality-rate> [<https://perma.cc/2HD5-5SUQ>].

¹² See *id.*

also a necessary reminder that we cannot move forward in the fight for equality without reevaluating how we have gotten to where we are today, or we will continue to leave most women behind.

Remedying gender inequality in this country is no small task, which is not surprising when you consider that the systems on which this country was founded were built without the input of women. Nevertheless, in part because of the community that gathered for our fall 2020 symposium, we should have faith in the possibility. We were joined by students, faculty, administrators, friends, family, and a group of legal scholars who committed their time and expertise to explore solutions to these difficult issues—the results of which are featured in this issue. As long as our community, and others like it, continue to show up, learn, grow, and act, the 200-year anniversary of the 19th amendment is bound to be one worth celebrating.