

Chapman Law Review

Volume 23

Issue 2 *Symposium: 1920–2020: The Effects of Women’s Suffrage 100 Years After the Ratification of the 19th Amendment*

Article 1

Spring 6-15-2020

Keynote Address: The Honorable Leslie Abrams Gardner of the U.S. District Court for the Middle District of Georgia

Leslie Abrams Gardner

United States District Court for the Middle District of Georgia, chapman.law.review@gmail.com

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Recommended Citation

Leslie A. Gardner, *Keynote Address: The Honorable Leslie Abrams Gardner of the U.S. District Court for the Middle District of Georgia*, 23 CHAP. L. REV. 285 (2020).

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CHAPMAN LAW REVIEW

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Keynote Address: The Honorable Leslie Abrams Gardner of the U.S. District Court for the Middle District of Georgia

*[Dean Matthew Parlow of the Chapman University Dale E.
Fowler School of Law opening remarks]*

Good afternoon everyone, thanks for being here. Welcome, my name is Matt Parlow. It's my privilege to serve as the Dean of the Fowler School of Law. This is such a terrific event and it's great to see such a wonderful turnout. The first panel this morning was really terrific, can we give them a round of applause again?

Before I introduce our keynote speaker I wanted to say a few thank-you's and welcome's. I'd like to thank Bethany, Jillian, and all of the *Law Review* editors, as well as Professor Celestine McConville—the Advisor to the *Law Review*—and Associate Dean Marisa Cianciarulo who worked closely with the *Law Review* on putting together this program. Thank you for all of your work on this.

There are several people in the audience I want to recognize. I'd like to recognize Don Rotunda, brother of our departed college Professor Ron Rotunda. It's really meaningful for you to be here with us today, thank you for being here. Would also like to recognize my decanal colleague from the Wilkinson College, Jennifer Keane, as well as the president of our Alumni Association, Shannon Switzer, and alumna, trustee, and member of our board of advisors, Zeinab Dabbah. Thank you for being here with us.

I'd also like to recognize a special individual whose life story should be something that all of us are mindful of in being those who study the law and those who aspire to become lawyers, and that is Jimmy Gardner who is sitting at the head table. Jimmy was leading a very robust and exciting life when he was wrongfully convicted and imprisoned. He spent twenty-six years in jail before being exonerated. He tours the country speaking about his experiences as a motivational speaker; works a lot on innocence project work. Perhaps you'll accept an invitation in the future to come back and maybe talk about your story. But his story should be a guidepost for us in remembering how the justice system is not always perfect, how there are problems with

it on so many different levels, and it's just really great to have you here with us today. Thank you for being here Jimmy.

And now, it is my honor to introduce our keynote speaker, and my good friend, Judge Leslie Abrams Gardner. Judge Gardner went to Brown University where she received a joint bachelor's degree in public policy and African American studies. She received her J.D. from Yale Law School, which is where we overlapped and became good friends. She then clerked for the Honorable Marvin J. Garbis of the United States District Court for the District of Maryland. She practiced law at Skadden Arps in Washington D.C. before becoming an Assistant U.S. Attorney for the Northern District of Georgia.

She then was nominated by President Obama and confirmed by the Senate by 100–0. Now, let's pause for a moment there and marinate on that in our era of, shall we say, strained partisanship. She took the oath of office and in doing so—in taking the bench—became the first female federal judge in the Middle District of Georgia and the first African American woman to become an Article III judge in the State of Georgia.

I commend you to read her bio. It is telling that on her bio in our program, the majority of it is not what I just went over, but actually her commitment to the community and all the work that she does in the community. And as someone who has known and admired Judge Gardner for, I can't believe, twenty years—we started really young, we were like in elementary school when we started law school—it speaks volumes about her character, about her commitment, all the work that she does in the community. We're so fortunate to have her with us here today, please join me in welcoming Judge Gardner as our Keynote.

[Honorable Judge Leslie Abrams Gardner Keynote Address]

Good afternoon. Thank you Matt for the invitation and Marisa for getting me here and putting up with my calls. I also want to congratulate the editors and the members of the *Chapman Law Review* for this wonderful summit. This is not only a great symposium topic, but the focus on voting rights and individual rights is certainly timely. Our nation is struggling to navigate and balance the rights of free speech, technological innovation, and intellectual integrity at this time. Questions of who can vote and how we vote are prime subjects in legislatures and court rooms across the nation. These same questions are central to accessing equal rights in all spheres of American life, including access to justice.

The issue of voting rights has always been in the center and the forefront of my life. I grew up on stories of my parents work

in the Civil Rights Movement. Their marches and the trouble that my dad got in fighting to secure the right to vote in 1960s Mississippi. These stories of my childhood fueled my desire to be a federal judge. Now, as my father would tell it, I decided to become a federal judge when I was in the second grade and I wrote an essay about Thurgood Marshall. I will note that I get younger every time he tells that story. But I do remember learning about Thurgood Marshall and about Constance Baker Motley and the work that they were doing and the fight that they engaged in to ensure equal rights for everyone. And I decided I wanted to be like her. To me, their lives were legacies about fighting for justice and that is the legacy that I want to leave.

Now while I grew up listening to the exploits of my parents and my aunts and uncles, I never really heard much about my grandparents' role in the Civil Rights Movement. Now, my grandparents were the members of the greatest generation and I thought that that was just part of their normal stoicism. But it turned out that, that wasn't really what was going on. Rather, my grandparents were equally committed to voting and securing equal rights for themselves, but their story was a bit more complicated than even my parents. My grandparents were from Mississippi and they grew up when asserting your rights could literally mean death. It could mean you could lose your housing, your job, your livelihood in a moment's notice. And so, for them they had to learn to not talk about it, to be very strategic in their actions in order to take care of their family.

My grandmother, Wilter May Abrams, was born on July 5th, 1927 in Clark County, Mississippi and I fortunately had her in my life for most of my life as she passed away on January 24th of last year at the age of ninety-one. She was a high school graduate and she worked as a caterer in the food services for the University of Southern Mississippi for over fifty years. She was married to my grandfather, who was a veteran of World War II and of the Korean War for sixty-five years. They had six children, five of whom survived. Three of their children went on to get college degrees and graduate degrees and the two others served in the military. Now think about this: these are poor black people from Mississippi, and they were able to put three of their children through college; they went on to get graduate degrees. Of their grandchildren, I think at last count we, because we just found out we had another, I think we were at twenty-seven. The majority of us have graduated from college, gone on to get graduate degrees, or served in the military. My grandmother lived to see one of her granddaughters run for governor of the

State of Georgia and another become a United States District Court judge.

We're talking about promise and progress today and to me, that story, that arc, is exactly what we're talking about. My grandmother went, as you'll hear, from someone who was denied the right to vote several times to seeing her granddaughter sworn in as a judge. My parents and my grandparents instilled in us the belief that education was the key to success and would pry open doors that others sought to shut in our faces. And they also taught us that service to our community was a duty, not a choice. She and my grandfather were adamant about voting and I remember them planning—as we were growing up—planning their work schedules so that they could go to the polls together. They voted in every election: local, state, federal, primary, or general, they were going to be there. And I didn't really understand their fervency until 2016.

And I was living in Albany and I was driving home to Mississippi to see my grandmother and my parents and my dad called when I got into Hattiesburg and said: "Hey, can you stop and grab an absentee ballot for your grandmother?" who was at that time, eighty-nine years old and was housebound. And of course, I did it and I took it to her, and I sat back in the room with her and I gave it to her, and she started to cry. And I couldn't understand why she was crying until she explained to me that the first time she went to vote, she had taken a class at her church so that she could pass the poll test. And there was a group of them and so when they went down after their teachers decided that they were ready, they went down and they sat through the test and by the end of the day, my grandmother and one other person were left. And she had passed the test, the written test, and she was so proud. And so, she walked up to the registrar and she gave them the piece of paper that said she passed the test. And the registrar told her they had one more question she had to answer.

And he asked her: "How many bubbles were in a bar of soap?" And when she couldn't get the "right" answer to that, they told her she could not vote. And as she turned around she said she had felt so proud just two minutes before, and there was this feeling of despair. And the thing she remembers most about that moment, because there were people outside throwing racial slurs at them and jeering at her, but she remembers three young white men, leaning against the wall, laughing at her.

And so, she told me she made sure once she finally got the right to vote that she exercised it on *every* occasion. And there were times where the weather was bad, and she didn't have a car

and she would have to walk to the polling place. There were times when she was working and raising five children, and she was just too tired, and she thought about not going. But she remembered being taunted and she remembered winning the right to vote and she went to the poll every time. So, the fact that this time she had to cast her ballot in writing broke her heart.

Now, when I think about my grandmother and I think about this story I've always thought of it in terms of race. But my grandmother, like all black women, had to navigate through life dealing with both racism and sexism. And as I began to write this presentation the story came to mind, and I realized that the racial intent behind the poll worker and the people taunting my grandmother could very well have been gender based. As you heard this morning, opponents of the women's right to vote argued that women lacked the intelligence to vote in much the same way that they asserted that black people weren't smart enough. Thus, you had the birth of poll tests. And when I read tales of the Women's March of 1913, they were replete with stories of the slurs and the insults that were hurled at the protestors. And I imagine that they were just as vulgar and degrading as the slurs and insults that were thrown at my grandmother that day. Every vote my grandmother cast honored not only those who fought for civil rights but also paid homage to every person who fought to secure the right to vote for women.

I ask myself: Where are we now? Has so called universal suffrage resulted in equal rights? Equal access? Equal justice under the law? To see where we are, however, I think it is important for us to know where we've come from. And to ask ourselves: What does equal justice under law really mean?

The words "equal justice under law" are carved into the façade of the Supreme Court. And, they were, in 1932, Chief Justice Charles Evan Hughes approved that engraving. The inspiration for the engraving came from the Court's opinion in *Caldwell v. Texas*, an 1891 case interpreting the Fourteenth Amendment in which Chief Justice Melville Fuller wrote: "The powers of the states in dealing with crime within their borders are not limited. But no state can deprive particular persons, or classes of persons, of equal and impartial justice under the law."

Now, while the Supreme Court was unanimous in this opinion, this version of American justice was not shared by everyone. In 1935, in fact, at that time the justices and journalists apparently would engage in open debate in the papers, and one particular journalist suggested that the word "equal" should be removed from that engraving. And Justice

Hughes pushed back because he noted that there was a need to place a strong emphasis on impartiality in the justice system.

This idea of equal justice under the law also has its bearings all the way back to the beginning of what we have founded our democracy on. The Athenian leader Pericles stated that “[i]n democracy there exists equal justice to all and alike in their private disputes.” The ideal of equality, however, was often espoused, if not enacted, by our Founding Fathers.

One hundred years ago, this country continued its journey towards a more perfect union by ratifying the Nineteenth Amendment, which granted women the most fundamental right of democracy—that is, the right to vote. But as we all know, that battle was long and hard-fought. There were embers of promise in 1756 when Lydia Chapin Taft of Massachusetts became the first woman to vote in, what would become, the United States. Now, I call this only an ember because she was only allowed to cast a vote for her deceased husband. She couldn’t vote for herself; she could vote for him. Not quite equality, but, ok, we had a start.

Twenty years later, however, the Founding Fathers acted to actively bank that sentiment, and this seems to be despite the not-so-subtle pressure from their wives. In G. J. Barker-Benfield’s *Abigail and John Adams: The Americanization of Sensibility*, there is a letter that she prints from Abigail Adams to her husband in 1776. And Mrs. Adams wrote: “In the new Code of Laws which I suppose it will be necessary for you to make, I desire you would remember the ladies and be more generous and favorable to them than your ancestors. Do not put such unlimited powers into the hands of the husbands.” Future President Adams blithely, but presciently, responded: “As to your extraordinary Code of Laws, I cannot but laugh. Depend upon it, we know better than to repeal our masculine systems.” And that’s exactly what they did.

For more than 100 years, the men who ran this country by and large refused to repeal their masculine systems and enshrined in the very fabric of this nation *inequality* under law. The desire to preserve the masculine systems, and more specifically, the white, male, Protestant, moneyed systems, are the roots of many of the ills and the shame that are in the history of this country. We have only to look at the Three-Fifths Compromise and the Alien and Sedition Acts to see this. Yet despite the systemic and overwhelming obstacles, women in this country have consistently pushed towards that more perfect union of universal suffrage.

In the fight to right the original wrong against women in this country, the Modern National Women's Movement was born, as you've all heard, in 1848 with the Seneca Falls Convention. The Seneca Falls Convention birthed the Declaration of Sentiments airing the grievances and listing the demands that those in attendance thought were long overdue. This document was a living, breathing testament to the movement fighting for social, civil, and religious rights of women. Mirroring the Declaration of Independence, it stated: "We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men and women are created equal, and that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable rights, that among these are Life, Liberty, and the pursuit of Happiness."

Following the convention, the demand for the vote became a centerpiece of the Women's Rights Movement. Activists raised public awareness and lobbied governments to grant voting rights to women. But, I want to note that the suffragettes didn't just want the symbolic right to vote. They wanted to harness the power of the electorate to make change. Women of the time saw voting rights as a tool to achieve the many changes that they believed were necessary to have their families and their communities prosper. Whether it was advocating for the abolition of slavery, the temperance laws, or child labor laws, these women knew that they could affect greater change by voting themselves than by working to have some man vote in their favor.

In the 1870s, the fires of equality began to burn brighter as the states shined a great light on the value of federalism and moved women's rights forward, even as the nation stood still. As the Wyoming Territory stood poised to become the forty-fourth state, the issue of women's suffrage was front and center. The territory's constitution was the first to grant women the right to vote, but the U.S. Congress demanded that this right be rescinded before they would admit Wyoming into the Union. Wyoming, however, stood firm, and they said: "We will remain out of the Union 100 years rather than come in without the women." Wyoming prevailed and became the first state to allow women the right to vote. And, on September 6, 1870, Louisa Ann Swain became the first woman to cast a vote in a general election. Wyoming was part of a western wave that by 1915 saw nine states allow women to vote.

Now, as with every major struggle, women of color were in the fight and race was front and center in the Women's Suffrage Movement. Sojourner Truth's "Ain't I a Woman" speech is as enduring as the Declaration of Sentiments. Truth, who had been born into slavery and later freed, was an ardent abolitionist and a womanist. In 1851, at the women's conference of Akron, Ohio,

some male ministers were—as they were want to do at the time—condescending to women about why men were superior and why they should be in charge.¹ And, in response to one gentleman who preached about Eve’s original sin, Truth responded stating: “I can’t read but I can hear. I’ve heard the Bible and I’ve learned that Eve caused man to sin. Well if woman upset the world, do give her a chance to set it upon right again.”

Truth and the other black women seeking equal rights spoke directly to those who were determined to maintain the masculine systems as well as those who strove to maintain the racist systems that underpinned this country. They understood, as Frances Willard did, that in any society where men are not free, black women are less free because we are further enslaved because we are enslaved by our sex. They, along with generations of black women that followed them, would often find themselves pinned between fighting for women’s rights and fighting for the rights of African Americans. As explained by Deborah Gray White, black women not only have to see themselves through the lens of blackness and whiteness, but also through the lens of patriarchy. Whenever they are in black spaces, women have to situate themselves in the context of patriarchy. Whenever they are in fem spaces, they must still situate themselves in the context of their blackness. But despite this oft-exhausting triple consciousness, black women would continue to agitate for all of their rights.

In 1913, Alice Paul and Lucy Burns of the National American Women’s Suffrage Association spearheaded the planning of the Women’s Suffrage March, which fanned the flames for women’s rights again. The purpose of the parade was to march in the spirit of protest against the present political organization of society from which women are excluded. Strategically, they set it on the day before Woodrow Wilson’s inauguration so they would have a good crowd, and thousands of women marched through the streets of Washington D.C. Race, of course, reared its ugly head again and many of the white women who had come for the march refused to march with the black women. The decision was made to segregate the march and require the black women to march behind them. Many black women just moved on to the back, but many of them also refused to do that and marched along with their delegations. One of those women—I saw a picture of her up when I came in—was the famed Ida B. Wells.

¹ Judge Gardner stated the year as 1951. However, after research, it appears the accurate date is 1851.

Black women, Native American women, Latinas, and Asian American women were not deterred by racism for fighting for the right of women to vote. Even in the face of discrimination and knowing that they were not seen as equals, women of color fought along their white sisters seeking the right to vote. In fact, according to researcher Sally Wagner, Lucretia Mott and other leaders of the Seneca Falls Convention gave Native American women, specifically women of the Iroquois Confederacy, credit for inspiring the Declaration of Sentiments.

Wagner writes, “It did not start with white women; that is not the point of entry into women having a political voice. Indigenous women have had a political voice in their nations long before the white settlers arrived.” Despite this, Native American women would not gain the right to vote until 1924 when Native Americans were finally granted citizenship.

Latina author Maria Amparo Ruiz de Burton offered a better critique of American racism while supporting women’s suffrage in her 1872 book *Who Would Have Thought It?*, and Chinese American suffragette Mabel Lee was one of the leaders of the 1912 New York suffrage parade, boldly riding a horse at the front of the processional. Despite their pivotal roles and hard work, due to the fact that Native Americans and Asian Americans had yet to be granted American citizenship, Native American and Asian American women would not be allowed the vote when the Nineteenth Amendment was passed.

Now, despite this convoluted past, the Nineteenth Amendment, which was initially introduced to Congress in 1878, passed in the House of Representatives on May 21st, 1919 and in the Senate on June 4th, 1919. On August 18, 1920, Tennessee became the thirty-sixth state to vote to ratify the Nineteenth Amendment and it was finally adopted on August 26, 1920, enfranchising 26 million Americans just in time for the presidential election. And, on November 2nd of that same year, more than 8 million women across the United States voted for the first time.

But the fight was not over, and women rolled up their sleeves and got to work to achieve the full measure of equality. As Alice Paul said: “It is incredible to me that any woman should consider the fight for full equality won. It has just begun.” And she was right. While August 26th, 1920 was a pivotal day and one which we really should celebrate, it did not usher in equal rights. Nowhere is this more clear than in the legal system, and especially in one of its most fundamental structures: jury service. Many of the women of Alice Paul’s generation believed that the doors to fully participate in society would become open with the passage of

the Nineteenth Amendment. But Paul and others possessed the foresight to know that the battle had just begun. In fact, the battle to sit on juries would go well into the twentieth century.

The right to be judged by a jury of one's peers is fundamental to our understanding of justice. It is also a topic that has always fascinated me. I wrote a paper, my substantial, about it in law school, and specifically about the usurpation of the jury's role under the mandatory sentencing guideline regime. I took classes and tried to divine the mysteries of the jury as a prosecutor. And I work very hard to ensure now that juries in my court are seated and are fair and impartial. I am also probably the only person in this room who crosses her fingers in hopes that she will actually be seated on a jury when called. Alas, I think that door has closed.

Now the basis of my fascination is that the jury system, like our adversarial system, is the best way to achieve equal justice under the law. The jury is proof that diversity has intrinsic value. For, if and when we get it right, twelve people of different backgrounds and beliefs who are forced to talk to each other in order to reach a unanimous decision are far more likely to reach a just decision than one lone judge encumbered by her natural biases or the echo chamber that can result when an homogenous group of jurors are asked to sit in judgement.

Our founders understood the value of the jury system and enshrined the right to trial by jury in the Sixth and Seventh Amendments to the Constitution. Their basic understanding of the value of the jury, coupled with the desire to maintain their masculine systems, however, systematically excluded women from jury service. They and their successors subscribed to the doctrine of *propter defectum sexus*. Yes, you guessed it, the doctrine of defect of sex.

In 1879, the Supreme Court enshrined this foolishness into the Law of the Land. In *Strauder v. West Virginia*, the Court held that states could constitutionally confine the selection of jurors to males. Bowing to the spurious arguments that it was for the women's "own good" that she be barred from the jury, and preaching to women that their duty was to their family and their household as if they were too feeble-minded to do both, they also appealed to the sexist tropes of so-called finer womanhood that espoused that women should be spared the gruesome details of criminal cases and that their natural feminine sympathies would set all the prisoners free. We'd just open up the door and let them out.

Once again, the incubators of the states outpaced the federal government and the Supreme Court in seeing the rightness and

the value of women on the jury. Again, the Wyoming Territory granted women the right to serve on juries in 1870. The Washington Territory followed suit in 1883 and the list of states allowing women to sit on juries grew to twelve by the time the Nineteenth Amendment was adopted. Still, at the start of World War II, twenty-one states still prohibited women from sitting on juries. Congress got the hint in 1957, thirty-seven years after the passage of the Nineteenth Amendment, and declared that women were eligible to sit on federal juries, regardless of state law. Still, it would not be until 1966, when the barrier finally fell in Alabama, that every state had granted to women the right to sit on juries in some form or fashion.

Now, Supreme Court jurisprudence on this matter is complicated and reflects the nation's difficulty with gender equality. In 1946, the Court issued an opinion in *Ballard v. United States*, which held that women could not be systematically excluded from federal jury service. This is a good thing. This decision, however, was based on a defendant's right to a fair trial rather than a woman's right to sit on a jury. The Court wrote: "The truth is that the two sexes are not fungible; a community made up exclusively of one is different from a community composed of both. . . . To insulate the courtroom from either may not make an iota of difference. Yet, a flavor, a distinct quality is lost if either sex is excluded. The exclusion of one may indeed make the jury less representative of the community"

But just fifteen years later, in 1961 in *Hoyt v. Florida*, the Court once again relied on sexist tropes when upholding Florida's law, which required women to volunteer for jury service while jury service for men was compulsory. The Court held that it could not say that it's constitutionally impermissible for a state, acting in pursuit of the general welfare, to conclude that a woman should be relieved from the civic duty of jury service unless she herself determines that such service is consistent with her own special responsibilities, whatever those might be.

Fortunately, the Court abandoned this view in 1975 in *Taylor v. Louisiana* when it struck down a Louisiana rule that was similar to the Florida rule. This time the court held that the Sixth Amendment's right to an impartial jury requires that the venire be drawn from a fair cross-section of the community. And the Court, as it sometimes does in its reasoning, didn't quite overturn *Hoyt*, but it danced around it saying, *Hoyt* did not involve a defendant's Sixth Amendment right to a jury drawn from a fair cross-section of the community and the prospect of denying him of that right if women as a class are systemically excluded. Now, I have read both of these opinions numerous

times and I really do not understand the distinction, but, they found one.

In 1994, in *J.E.B. v. Alabama ex rel.*, the Court held that gender based preemptory challenges were unconstitutional because they violated the Equal Protection Clause, stating that “the Equal Protection Clause prohibits discrimination in jury selection on the basis of gender, or the assumption that an individual will be biased in a particular case for no reason other than the fact that the person happens to be a man or a woman.” The driving rationale behind this decision was the theory that doing otherwise would perpetuate the discrimination that precluded women from the jury pool for so long. Now, while the outcome was right, the rationale was grounded in a theory of gender-blindness that fails to recognize the intrinsic value of diversity. As Justice Sandra Day O’Connor recognized in her concurrence, the majority opinion failed to acknowledge that, like race, gender matters. After citing empirical studies that demonstrate how gender plays a role in jury service, Justice O’Connor wrote: “One need not be a sexist to share the intuition that in certain cases a person’s gender and resulting life experiences will be relevant to his or her view of the case.”

Now, while I do not agree with Justice O’Connor’s outcome or later statement that criminal defendants should be allowed to use gender-based preemptory challenges because gender-based assumptions about juror attitudes are sometimes accurate, I do agree with her assertion that to say that gender makes no difference as a matter of law is not to say that gender makes no difference as a matter of fact. Rather, I believe that this particular truth is exactly why diversity in juries is essential. People’s varying identities, be they race, sexuality, socioeconomic status, or gender, are intertwined with their life experiences and their resulting world views; that diversity is what formed the backbone of our jury system. Diversity in the jury system is critical to equal justice under law. Not just for criminal defendants and litigants in court, but also for women to achieve the full rights of citizenship. As the Supreme Court explained, community participation in the administration of criminal law is not only consistent with our democratic heritage but is also critical to public confidence in the fairness of the criminal justice system.

And when I read this I couldn’t help but think about my husband. The jury that convicted him was all white. They were managed by a white judge who, while they were apparently deadlocked and were sent back to continue deliberations four times after they could not or would not come to a unanimous decision, they returned a verdict of guilty. A split verdict of

guilty. And I have to wonder, I have to think, that had there been some diversity, had there been some different life experiences, had there not been an echo chamber which was reinforced by the dictates of a judge, what that outcome would have been. Would he have been incarcerated unjustly for twenty-seven years? And as we see with the spate of exonerations from wrongful convictions that have been handed down by all white juries that are flooding the news every day, this is a testament to the importance of diversity in a jury.

There is also research that shows that more diverse jury pools award more balanced judgments in civil cases. But I would say that just as important, if not more important, is the acknowledgment and protection of a woman's right to sit on the jury. That is a fundamental right that has yet to be recognized by the Supreme Court and the failure to do so allows the discrimination that has shaped our history to continue, although in more covert and invidious fashions, into our future.

Each time I preside over a jury voir dire I remind the panel that jury service is a duty and a right. One that people have fought for and died for and one which we as Americans hold dear. A woman's right to sit on a jury cannot continue to be understood only in the context of someone else's rights. As Alice Paul instructed us, women, and those who believe in equality and the promise of this nation, rolled up our sleeves and have been working diligently for the last 100 years to perfect this union. We have knocked down many of the legal hurdles barring us from community participation and we continue to fight the social hurdles that fuel stereotypes regarding the spaces in which women belong and the capacity of our minds to contribute toward building this more perfect union.

In 2016, a woman, for the first time, won the popular vote in a presidential election. The Speaker of the House of Representatives is a woman who managed to capture the job twice. Today, women make up about 33% of state and federal judges in the United States and one-third of the justices who sit on the Supreme Court. In every presidential election since 1980, the proportion of eligible women who voted exceeded the proportion of eligible men who voted. In 2018, record numbers of women ran for Congress and for governorships across this country. A black woman came within 55,000 votes of becoming the Governor of Georgia. More women serve in Congress than ever before and the current democratic primary has seen the largest number of women ever vying for the presidential nomination of a major party. In the last midterms, there were

81.3 million women registered to vote in the United States, making up 53% of the electorate.

So, despite the battles yet to be won, we should be proud of our nation for achieving such monumental milestones in the century since the adoption of the Nineteenth Amendment. But we must not rest on our laurels. We continue to see disparities across the board for women compared to their male counterparts in education, workplace opportunity, pay, healthcare quality, healthcare access, and the criminal justice system. These issues and more make our voices more necessary than ever and our vote is our voice. As we celebrate the progress we've made, we must remain resolute to continue the fight for equal rights and equal justice under the law. As the path to the Nineteenth Amendment shows, the path towards equality and justice is not a straight line. But, as Martin Luther King Jr. said: "The arc of the moral universe is long, but it bends towards justice." If I might be so bold, I would amend that statement to say that "the arc of the moral universe is long, but it bends towards justice *for all*."

Thank you for having me, and Happy Centennial.