

NOW's Long History of Working for Racial Justice and Equity

August 13, 2020

Not too long ago we observed the 54th anniversary of NOW's founding in 1966 at the **Third Annual Conference of the Commissions on the Status of Women**, when 28 women contributed \$5 each to fund the new National Organization for Women. They were concerned about the failure of the **Equal Employment Opportunity Commission** to enforce **Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964** which prohibits employment discrimination based on race, color, national origin, sex, and religion.

The little-known fact of our founding is that a distinguished civil rights leader and African American woman, Yale Law Professor **Dr. Pauli Murray**, spurred **Betty Friedan** and others to establish an organization to pressure the EEOC to carry out its mandate. Dr. Murray, who wrote **NOW's Statement of Purpose**, is known as a bridge between the civil rights movement and the modern women's movement.

These activities have increased significantly in the recent years. **NOW stands out as the one broad-based, multi-racial national women's rights organization that has taken early, important and consistent steps to work against racism through public education, legislation and advocacy -- especially as it relates to women of color.** This is our documented history. Every NOW president has undertaken various efforts to combat racism as it is one of our core issues. But the most intensive focus on this issue has taken place in the recent years.

What follows is a summary of the many (though certainly not all) initiatives and accomplishments of the National Organization for Women uplifting on racial justice and equity. Marches, rallies, summits, press statements, event co-sponsorships, litigation, participation in coalition work, signing on to joint letters and writing letters to Congress, shaping and endorsing legislation, sending out alerts, featuring women of color as important NOW leaders, as conference speakers and awardees – all are a part of our 54-year history of advocating for racial justice and equality. This information and other facts about NOW's work at the national level are filed with our archives at the Arthur and Elizabeth Schlesinger Library of the History of Women in America, at Radcliffe/Harvard. (State and local NOW chapter histories of working to end racism should be compiled and sent to their in-state libraries and archives.)

CURRENT ACTIONS

On June 1, NOW signed on to a letter to the U.S. House of Representatives prepared by the Leadership Conference on Civil and Human Rights (LCCHR)

joining more than 400 organizations to advocate for fundamental reforms in policing, including a federal standard on the use of force only in situations when absolutely necessary as a last resort, a ban on chokeholds, prohibiting racial profiling and requiring robust data collection on police-community encounters, banning no-knock warrants, stopping federal funds for police to purchase military equipment and ending the Qualified Immunity doctrine which prevents police from being held accountable, among many other important reforms. The letter can be read at, <https://civilrights.org/2020/06/01/400-civil-rights-organizations-urge-congressional-action-on-police-violence/>

NOW staff has continued to participate with the Civil Rights Coalition, led by LCCHR's Policing and Justice Reform Project staff, to review House and Senate legislation being considered to address racism and misconduct in law enforcement. We sent an action alert to NOW activists asking them to contact their senators to oppose the very weak Senate JUSTICE Act, which then failed a Motion to Proceed (Thanks, NOW activists!). NOW President Toni Van Pelt issued a statement upon passage by the U.S. House of Representatives of the George Floyd Justice in Policing Act, calling for a strengthening of key elements in the bill and the adoption of a ban on Qualified Immunity which has allowed police who abuse or kill persons with impunity, among other provisions needing serious improvement.

For decades, NOW has maintained a membership in the Leadership Conference for Civil and Human Rights (LCCHR) and NOW officers serve on the executive committee as an important voice for the women's rights community. We sign on to LCCHR's statements and letters to Congress and the Administration concerning critically important issues and participate in many LCCHR task forces. More than 200 national organizations belong to LCCHR; Vanita Gupta is the current president and CEO.

NOW staff participates in meetings of the LCCHR Employment Task Force and its working group on harassment in the workplace. We also participate in the LCCHR Hate Crimes Task Force, plus monitor the LCCHR Immigration Task Force, and closely monitor the Justice Reform Task Force, of the Civil Rights Coalition. Over the past few months, staff has been following developments in Congress concerning policing reforms, now proposed in the House's **George Floyd Justice in Policing Act** and with the Senate's much more conservative JUSTICE Act – which we oppose.

NOW Leaders: For your advocacy to end police violence which has resulted in thousands of deaths of unarmed persons of color, primarily African Americans and including many women of color, the Leadership Conference Education Fund offers a helpful guide. Under a special section, entitled **Can't Breathe? Let's Fight Back Together**, grassroots activists can review their recommended approaches, **Creating a New Era of Public Safety**, <https://civilrights.org/edfund/creating-a-new-era-of-public-safety/> and follow the toolkit, <https://toolkit.civilrightspolicing.org/> for use in their own communities.

We have issued press statements decrying the recent murders of Ahmaud Arbery, George Floyd, Breonna Taylor and Rayshard Brooks of the recent incidents as well as numerous earlier ones – particularly those regarding women of color.

NOW has endorsed a new Senate resolution, **Declaring Racism a Public Health Crisis**, sponsored by **Sens. Kamala Harris, Cory Booker and Sherrod Brown** which describes deep and persistent disparities in health care access and outcomes that have afflicted people of color throughout our history. These disparities were laid bare in the COVID 19 pandemic with people of color disproportionately suffering from severe illness and death.

The Resolveds of this Resolution call upon the Senate *to establish a nationwide strategy to address health disparities and inequity across all sectors in society; dismantling systemic practices and policies that perpetuate racism; advancing reforms to address years of neglectful and apathetic policies that have led to poor health outcomes for communities of color, promoting improved access to the social determinates of health—especially for Black, Latino, and American Indian and Alaska Native people in the United States and other people of color.*

LEGACY ACTIONS

Ending racism and working for racial justice is one of **NOW's six core** issues; there are 66 resolutions addressing racial justice and equity that have been adopted at our annual conferences over the years. Additionally, equity concerns that relate to all women, regardless of race, such as access to education, healthcare, safety, economic well-being, etc. are addressed among the hundreds of resolutions adopted at national NOW conferences and meant as guides for action by national NOW, our leadership and our many state and local chapter activists.

Our bylaws, beginning in 1980, assure positions for women of color on our national board and we know that our state and local chapters make a special effort to recruit women of color members and leaders. The NOW conference adopted an affirmative action bylaw, reserving a minimum of nine National Board seats (out of approximately 34 seats) for women of color. Later bylaws which adopt a smaller board membership have maintained assured seats for women of color.

Women of color have been NOW founders, national officers and board members steadily throughout our history. One of our co-founders, the **Rev. Dr. Pauli Murray**, wrote **NOW's Statement of Purpose** and is one of the most distinguished American women as an author, poet, civil rights leader, advisor to presidents, friend of Eleanor Roosevelt (whom she counseled about racism and poverty) and the legal theorist behind **Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka** (1954) (separate is not equal, 9-0) ruling and other ground-breaking accomplishments.

Aileen Hernandez was named NOW's executive vice president at the first NOW meeting in 1966; she was then elected as our first president in 1970.

NOW features African American, Latina, Asian American, Pacific Islander, Native Americans as speakers and awardees at our annual National NOW conferences and summits. In February, at our Congressional Briefing and Racial Justice Summit, NOW presented **D.C. Del. Eleanor Holmes Norton** with an Award of Distinction for Intersectional Feminism, noting that Holmes Norton was the first woman to chair the **Equal Employment Opportunity Commission**.

Loretta Ross - author, activist, organizer, public speaker, thought leader - served as the director of **Women of Color Programs for NOW** from 1985 - 1989, organizing the first national conference on Women of Color and Reproductive Rights in 1987. She went on to co-found and lead SisterSong Women of Color Reproductive Health Collective, and many other organizations focused on Black women's health and human rights. Ross coined the term **Reproductive Justice**, meant to encompass everything in a woman's life affected by women's bodily autonomy (or lack of). Ross was a national co-director of the April 25, 2004, March for Women's Lives in Washington, D.C. which drew more than a million marchers.

For many decades, the national NOW Board has maintained a **Racial Justice Committee** which meets and advises the organization on policy and actions. The RJC is coordinated by NOW VP Christian Nunes. Currently, the Racial Justice Committee is addressing problems of disparities in education and healthcare in communities of color, and the need for reform of policing. The committee meets often and is considering specific recommendations for near future implementation.

As former NOW president Ellie Smeal has pointed out, women of color have always been a part of the National Organization for Women, Special members of NOW have included: Shirley Chisholm, Coretta Scott King and Carol Moseley Braun. Former national officers include Aileen Hernandez, Karen Johnson, Latifa Lyles, Chitra Panjabi, Elizabeth Toledo, Olga Vives, Allendra Letsome, Gilda Yazzie and Christian Nunes (current vice president). Over the years, we have been fortunate to have a number of national board members, state and chapter leaders who are outstanding leaders.

We owe our success, in large part, to dedicated NOW staff and interns. Among that group, some of the names of the women of color that come to mind are: Wanda Alston, Loretta Ross, Ginny Montez, Zenaida Mendez, Rose Afriye and Tyler Goodridge. This is not to forget to mention the hundreds of NOW's interns: they have been bright, talented and hard-working young women of color who let us know they enjoyed their time at NOW, learned a lot and felt empowered.

The **National Action Center's small but mighty staff** is currently majority persons-of-color. Officers, staff and interns have always been diverse, racially, ethnically, generationally and in sexual identity. We also seek to hire interns that are diverse; A

NOW Latina intern went on to head the National Latina Institute for Reproductive Justice and another as an outreach coordinator for Majority Leader U.S. Sen. Harry Reid. Additionally, an Asian American intern for NOW Government Relations, upon graduating from law school, worked for the George Washington University School of Law domestic violence clinic, co-authoring a detailed practice guide for lawyers representing survivors of domestic violence in court.

NOW officers and staff frequently attend the annual National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) national legislative conference held in D.C. For the past two years both staff and interns attended.

Former **NOW President Ellie Smeal**, who has become an icon of the modern women's rights movement, served three terms as NOW's president and then founded the **Feminist Majority Foundation** in 1987. She is also the publisher of **Ms.** and is an advisor to NOW and NOW PAC. Ms. magazine makes important contributions to the cause of racial justice and equity through its incisive and timely reporting under the excellent editorial leadership of **Kathy Spillar**, <https://msmagazine.com/>

NOW's work with the Feminist Majority in Virginia to get out the vote for the 2019 legislative elections helped turn both the Senate and the House of Delegates a Democratic blue. This, in turn, enabled **Equal Rights Amendment** supporters in both chambers, led by women of color legislators, to pass a ratification measure making Virginia the 38th and final state needed for the ERA to become part of the U.S. Constitution.

CONFERENCES, SUMMITS & TRAININGS

In the 1990s, **NOW President Patricia Ireland** held a board meeting when two invited consultants on issues related to racism made a presentation and a lively discussion followed. Ireland also made sure that workshops about white privilege were held at several conferences during her tenure. She was assisted in these activities by **Jessie Washington**, former aide to Carol Moseley Braun and a long-time friend of NOW.

Under President Kim Gandy, NOW joined with the **institute for Women's Policy Research** to hold a unique research and activism conference in Atlanta, GA where much of the discussion focused on how to address women's poverty. We were joined by many speakers, researchers, and attendees of color. Attendees agreed that the combining of researchers on women's issues with women's rights activists made for a potent combination.

One of many memorable presentations was when **Dr. Mariko Chang** spoke about findings in her ground-breaking report, Lifting As We Climb – Women of Color, Wealth and the Future of America which detailed the huge wealth gap between women of color and the rest of the population – which she says holds back progress of future generations and has a dampening effect on the American economy. One very striking fact: Black women often arrive at retirement with negative net wealth, according to her research (!).

In 1992 NOW's third **March for Women's Lives set a record** for the largest civil rights demonstration in the U.S. to date, with 750,000 marching. NOW chapters and National NOW participated in efforts throughout the year to defend clinics. As a commencement to a campaign of non-violent civil disobedience, NOW and Feminist Majority organized an illegal speak-out in front of the White House protesting the U.S. Supreme Court decision in *Casey v. Planned Parenthood*.

NOW held its first **Women of Color and Allies Summit** in 1998 during which activists staged a demonstration in support of equal wages for women janitors in the U.S. Capitol.

In October 2000, NOW organized the U.S. event of the **World March of Women**; the same weekend NOW Foundation hosts the Women's International Symposium on Health (WISH). We facilitated the travel to the U.S. of scores of women's health leaders from developing countries. A colorful march of these leaders in traditional dress was held in downtown D.C.

In 2004 NOW was a lead organizer with our women of color allies of the massive March for Women's Lives in Washington, DC. **With 1.15 million marchers**, it was the largest civil rights march in U.S. history. Co-chairs of the event, which was nearly a year in the planning, were Alice Cohan of Feminist Majority Foundation and Loretta Ross, former NOW Director of Women of Color Programs and co-founder of **SisterSong**, women of Color Reproductive Justice Collective.

Our second Women of Color and Allies Summit in 2005 drew hundreds of women to Arlington, VA to draft an action plan to empower, enfranchise and energize women of color. Also, in 2005, National NOW Conference delegates called for regional NOW Women of Color and Allies Summits and direct a study of the "war on drugs" and its negative impact on women, particularly women of color.

Again in 2005, NOW's National Board of Directors passed a resolution calling for NOW to demand U.S. officials address the discrimination apparent in the response to Hurricane Katrina by the Federal Emergency Management Association (FEMA), Homeland Security, and the Bush Administration. **NOW vice president Olga Vives** traveled to New Orleans to determine the extent of the devastating impact on communities of color.

NOW President Kim Gandy joined the Hip Hop Caucus, Rep. Cynthia McKinney, New Orleans organizers and other civil rights allies in a 2005 march across the Crescent City Connection Bridge into the city of Gretna, Louisiana. It is the same bridge where hundreds of desperate Katrina survivors, mostly African American, tried to flee the devastating floodwaters—and were prevented from crossing to safety by Gretna police officers who fired shots in the direction of the crowd.

In 2006 **NOW was a lead organizer of the huge anti-war march in NYC**, the March for Peace, Justice and Democracy in April, as part of our ongoing "Peace is a Feminist Issue" opposition to war in the Middle East.

Also, in 2006 NOW opposes punitive immigration 'reform' measures and participates in **national immigrants' rights marches** in New York and Washington, D.C.

In 2013, NOW staff attended a special luncheon event where women who helped organize the historic 1963 **March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom** spoke. The stories they told about their efforts made it clear that the march would not have been the great success that it was without the women's dedicated organizing. Most speakers said that they felt that their contributions had not received the recognition that was due.

NOW has a continued presence in civil rights actions. NOW co-sponsored the March for Black Women in D.C. in Fall, 2017. Participation in the event was due to a pledge NOW President Toni Van Pelt made following her election that summer. NOW made a generous donation and led a contingent in the March. NOW Board member **Christian Nunes** spoke at the event.

NOW's work with the Feminist Majority in Virginia to get out the vote for the 2019 legislative elections helped turn both the Senate and the House of Delegates a Democratic blue. This, in turn, enabled **Equal Rights Amendment** supporters in both chambers, led by women of color legislators, to pass a ratification measure making Virginia the 38th and final state needed for the ERA to become part of the U.S. Constitution.

In February, on Capitol Hill NOW and NOW Foundation co-sponsored the Racial Justice Summit and Congressional Briefing: Addressing the Intersects of Gender, Health, Economics, Violence and Race. The event featured prominent authors, opinion-makers, leaders, and legislators, addressing urgent issues of concern in communities of color. NOW Vice President Christian Nunes moderated. Speakers included **U.S. Reps. Gwen Moore, Sharice Davids, Raul Grijalva, Ayanna Pressley, Rashida Tlaib, and Maxine Waters.** NOW Vice President Christian Nunes moderated. You can read more about the event at, <https://now.org/blog/nows-racial-justice-summit-embodies-activism/>

During Fall 2019 and later in February, To carry out a pledge made at the 2017 National NOW conference, Toni Van Pelt initiated intensive trainings of staff and board on issues of racial equity and is planning for Part II of the trainings. These are all-staff, all-board racial equity trainings that have ever been held. Additional sessions are scheduled as part of the 2020 National NOW Conference programming.

Beginning in the spring of 2019, at President Toni Van Pelt's direction, NOW launched a book club, initially featuring books about racial equity and justice. These two books were featured in workshops at the 2019 Conference: *White Fragility* by Robin Diangelo and *So You Want to Talk About Race* by Ijeoma Oluo, both now best-sellers. Most staff members and interns read these; interns prepared discussion guides to be used at the 2019 conference workshops – which were well attended.

NOW President Toni Van Pelt asked that a written Code of Conduct be presented to attendees at our 2018 National NOW Conference. This was the first such occasion that we asked attendees to pledge to follow the Code. This action was taken partly in response to a previous election conference where members of the losing slate marched

around in the hotel shouting "Racist!" – though both sides featured women of color candidates and neither had publicly engaged in racist comments.

A similar charge of racism was hurled at the winning side in the 2009 elections – though both slates featured women of color. NOW elections are often high-spirited events where the opposing sides feel strongly about their preferred candidates and the term "racist" has been used without much evidence. Several times in the aftermath of a contested national NOW election bitterness and conflict has followed on, but eventually the parties forgot their differences and moved on.

A revised **Code of Conduct** in 2019 pointed out that, "*NOW is an intersectional, multi-issue organization; and, therefore, conflict cannot always be avoided. We recognize the organization is stronger for its diversity and hold in high regard the importance of ethical behavior and effective communications that further our goals. We also recognize that constructive dialogue is essential to successful advocacy.*" Words that are now more important than ever.

In addition, at the first board meeting following the **2017 conference**, Toni promised a comprehensive analysis of NOW's policies and programs and development of a strategy and set of actions to promote racial equity within the organization. The NOW Book Club and the all-staff and board racial equity trainings were undertaken, among other actions.

SUPPORTING WOMEN OF COLOR CANDIDATES

Each election year, NOW PAC endorses federal candidates, many of whom are persons of color with outstanding records of feminist and progressive advocacy. Thus far this year, 150 candidates have been endorsed and more candidates may be considered. There is a high rate of successful elections among our endorsed candidates, To keep up with information during the election season, go to <https://www.nowpac.org/>

The work of **the National Organization for Women Political Action Committee (NOW PAC)** has been going on for many decades. The PAC relies on NOW state and local activists to encourage diverse candidates to run for public office and to provide recommendations to NOW PAC members.

Not to be forgotten is the support of NOW members of the great **Shirley Chisholm**, the first African American woman to run for president, in 1972. Chisholm, who counted herself among NOW's founders, was the first Black woman elected to the U.S. House of Representatives (NY) in 1968 and with the support of NOW's activists. NOW endorsed Chisholm for president.

Illinois NOW members provided a statewide campaign field for **Carol Moseley Braun** for the 1992 primary that catapulted her to become the first Black woman elected to the

U.S. Senate. She served with distinction from 1993 to 1999 and was later appointed Ambassador to New Zealand and Samoa. Moseley Braun ran for president in 2004, endorsed by NOW PAC. She also served as an advisor on the NOW national board.

NOW has often worked closely with the Transformative Justice Coalition, led by Barbara Arnwine, president and founder. The Transformative Justice Coalition is dedicated to voter education and building election turn-out, plus leading efforts to stop voter suppression frequently aimed at disenfranchising persons of color. Arnwine, is a NOW awardee, recognized for many years of leading the Lawyers Committee for Civil Rights Under Law and for her contributions to the landmark Civil Rights Act of 1991, plus many other accomplishments to promote voting and human rights.

During President Kim Gandy's term, NOW Foundation received a large grant to conduct voter registration among unregistered women of color. There were projects in Chicago, Washington State and rural Georgia. Under the direction of NOW's political director, Linda Berg, thousands of new voters were registered.

ADVANCING CIVIL RIGHTS LAWS

We have long participated in LCCHR's Hate Crime Coalition, having led with NOW LDEF the successful effort to include the categories in criminal law prohibitions of gender-based hate crimes, along with sexual orientation-, gender identity- and disability-based hate crimes. The **Matthew Shephard and James Byrd Jr. Hate Crimes Prevention Act of 2009** makes many improvements in federal law, such as expanding the reach of hate crimes law beyond just a few limited instances such as going to school or voting.

NOW has signed on to and mobilized support for every civil rights bill since our founding. From 1984 - 1988, NOW worked to pass the **Civil Rights Restoration Act of 1987**, reversing Supreme Court cases that limited federal laws combating discrimination based on gender, race, age and disability. President Ronald Reagan vetoed it.

NOW served on the drafting committee of the **1991 Civil Rights Act**, landmark legislation making it easier to establish employment discrimination in court. This was passed in response to United States Supreme Court decisions that limited the rights of employees who had sued their employers for discrimination. The Act represented the first effort since the passage of the **Civil Rights Act of 1964** to modify some of the basic procedural and substantive rights provided by federal law in employment discrimination cases.

President George H. W. Bush used his veto against the more comprehensive **Civil Rights Act of 1990**. He claimed that he feared racial quotas would be imposed but later approved the 1991 version of the bill. It provided the right to trial by jury on discrimination claims and introduced the possibility of emotional distress damages and limited the amount that a jury could award. It added provisions to **Title VII of the Civil**

Rights Act of 1964 expanding the rights of protected parties to sue and collect compensatory and punitive damages for discrimination or harassment.

The Civil Rights Restoration Act specifies that recipients of federal funds must comply with civil rights laws in all areas, not just in the particular program or activity that received federal funding, finally adopted in 1997.

NOW co-founder, the Rev. Dr. Pauli Murray, was responsible for getting the word “sex” into the 1964 Civil Rights Act, leading to the stunning June 15, 2020 ruling (*Bostok*, three cases consolidated) by the Supreme Court that employers could not discriminate on the basis of sexual orientation or gender identity (6-3). Conservative Justice Neil Gorsuch wrote the majority opinion! NOW Foundation had joined *amicus* briefs in all three cases.

LITIGATION

NOW Foundation joins between 10 and 20 *amicus curiae* briefs a year in a wide range of legal cases, many addressing discrimination against women, persons of color and LGBTQIA+ persons. Thus far in 2020, we have joined about a dozen briefs, including the ‘women’s community’ *amicus* brief recently filed in federal District Court, District of Columbia, directing the **Archivist of the United States** to certify the Equal Rights Amendment.

NOW Foundation, joined by the Feminist Majority Foundation and Legal Momentum, filed an *amicus curiae* brief on April 21 in U.S. District Court, Middle District of Alabama in the case of *Robinson v. Marshall*. The brief supported abortion providers; the ACLU and Planned Parenthood joined as *amicus* parties. The State of Alabama had appealed to the 11th Circuit Court the Preliminary Injunction ordered by the District Court judge stopping the state Health officer from using the COVID-19 pandemic as an excuse to ban abortions. The impact of such an action would have negatively impacted women of color in Alabama.

Three days later a three-judge panel on the 11th Circuit Court of Appeals denied Alabama’s Motion for Stay Pending Appeal in a strongly worded opinion adopting many of the arguments we made in our *amicus* brief! Among the harms cited was the impact on Alabama’s sizeable population of women of color who depend upon the one clinic in the state. Seventeen organizations signed on in support. The brief was prepared with the help of Covington and Burling, LLP, a distinguished Washington, D.C. law firm.

EQUAL EDUCATION

In 2002, NOW called on the Supreme Court to uphold the race-based **Affirmative Action** policies in colleges and higher education and planned a Supreme Court rally in support. Affirmative Action has been under steady attack by well-funded conservative

legal advocacy groups for decades. Both people of color and women have benefited by Affirmative Action policies.

NOW was one of the chief advocates for passage of the **Title IX of the Education Act Amendments of 1972** which prohibits sex discrimination by any educational institution that receives federal funding, including grade/middle/high schools and postsecondary institutions. This important civil rights law assures that equal opportunity is to be provided for women and men, boys and girls, in both academics and athletics.

The benefits of Title IX go further to address: recruitment, admissions and housing, assistance to pregnant, parenting and/or married students, financial assistance, student health services and insurance benefits, and sexual harassment. Title IX has helped countless young women with limited economic resources to attain higher education and there is little doubt that many girls and young women of color have benefited immensely.

When the federal government was dragging its feet in promulgating regulations following adoption of Title IX in 1972, **NOW formed the National Coalition of Women and Girls in Education** to pressure the Feds to follow through. The NCWGE is still in operation, meeting monthly, and issues a report on Title IX implementation every five years; you can read the latest at <https://www.ncwge.org/index.html> While great progress has been made for girls and young women in education, there is still much to be accomplished, as the report details. Unfortunately, the Trump Administration has recently adopted a new regulation that greatly undermines protections against sexual harassment and assault of students.

As tennis great Serena Williams has pointed out: Title IX's promotion of athletic opportunity has opened the door to success for girls and young women who found that engaging in sports has multiple benefits, including improved physical health, higher self-esteem, and more likely to graduate and attain higher education, among other gains. The number of women seeking higher education and seeking advanced degrees since 1972 has dramatically increased. Participation in athletics under Title IX has increased ten-fold, but many schools (mainly in poverty-impacted communities) are still not providing equal opportunities.

As proof of the success, **U.S. women at the Olympics** demonstrate the power of Title IX. At the 2016 Summer Olympic Games in Rio de Janeiro, the U.S. Olympic team fielded 292 female athletes including women of color, outnumbering their male teammates. They were the largest group of women ever to compete in Olympic history. The U.S. women earned 61 medals at the games – more than any other group -- male or female – from any country! Further, U.S. women in the Paralympic Games, earned 70 of Team USA's 115 medals. The 2016 U.S. Olympics team was the most diverse yet.

EQUAL PAY

NOW continues its 54-year-long campaign for equal pay, backing legislation in Congress and the states. One of the bills we support at the federal level is the **Paycheck Fairness Act (H.R. 7)** which proposes important steps to be taken towards that goal. The Paycheck Fairness Act has lingered in Congress for more than 20 years, blocked by Republican majorities. The House has passed H.R. 7 in the current Congress, though it is doubtful that the Republican-controlled Senate will take up the bill.

NOW issues statements on the specific days of the year when women of different racial groups reach the day into the following year when women of color are paid what white men are paid in the previous calendar year. The gender-based wage gap's narrowing has stalled in recent years and research shows that a wage gap persists no matter which occupational category women work.

Black women were paid 61.4 percent of what White, non-Hispanic men were paid in 2019 in median weekly earnings, an earnings gap that has not changed in 25 years. The gender wage gap for all other racial groups, except Asian women, increased in 2019, indicating that women of color are losing ground when it comes to closing the gap. It has been estimated that women overall lose anywhere from \$400,000 -- \$1 million and more over their working lives due to sex- and race-based pay discrimination.

NOW supports the passage at state and federal levels equal pay for “substantially similar jobs” to most effectively address pay discrimination. And we continue to support efforts to require the **Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC)** to mandate submission by employers of pay data with gender and race information so that systemic patterns of discrimination can be identified. This initiative has been in and out of court for years, but, at the moment, the Trump administration is winning the battle to keep that information from the public.

NOW also supports the **One Fair Wage of \$15 an hour**, especially for tipped workers, a majority of whom are women and a substantial number are workers of color. Both the \$15 an hour wage and equal pay for jobs that are substantially similar are initiatives best sought at state and local levels – great projects for NOW activists.

From 2002 – 2006 **NOW's Women Friendly Workplace Campaign** named Wal-Mart a **Merchant of Shame** because of their sex discrimination policies in hiring, pay and promotions. NOW chapters picketed local stores for four years. A substantial number of Wal-Mart employees are women of color. Wal-Mart greeter Betty Dukes led the largest class action lawsuit, representing 1.5 million employees, in history against the company charging violations of Title VII prohibitions on pay and promotions.

The **Supreme Court dismissed the Wal-Mart case in 2011**, ruling that it was not possible to find commonality among the entire class of 1.5 million employees because there was no proof showing that all of the Wal-Mart managers throughout the huge corporation used their pay and promotion discretion in the same discriminatory way. The majority opinion was written by conservative justice Antonin Scalia. Scores of

lawsuits are filed against Wal-Mart every year, many charging discrimination by the company.

2001 Following the 9-11 tragedy, NOW joined labor and civil rights advocacy organizations to speak out for low-wage workers, calling for a real “economic stimulus” package, including extending unemployment and health insurance for laid-off workers. NOW called for lifting the time limit on benefits for welfare recipients in light of the massive layoffs in the service sector.

In the current COVID-19 pandemic, NOW is calling out the disparate and harmful impacts of the pandemic on women and people of color. We are joining with allies to support passage of adequate COVID-19 relief and stimulus legislation to assure that women and their families have adequate income to feed their families and remain in their homes. We are disheartened by the fact that persons of color and persons from poverty-affected community are being infected and dying at disproportionately higher rates. It is a clarion call, we believe, for this nation to finally take action to address those disparities.

VIOLENCE AND WOMEN OF COLOR

Over the years, NOW has issued numerous action alerts and statements calling attention to needs and injustices of African American, Latina, AAPI and Native American Women – especially so in recent years. Such as our calling attention to the unduly lengthy sentencing of Marissa Alexander in Florida and Cyntoia Brown in Tennessee. Both are now free.

We have frequently decried racist police violence that has resulted in the deaths of a horrendous number of girls and women of color, following the lead of the **African American Policy Forum’s #SayHerName** campaign. Sandra Bland, Loreal Tsingine, Korryn Gaines, Atatiana Jefferson, Pamela Turner, Yvette Smith, Tanisha Anderson, Miriam Carey, Shelly Frey and more recently, Breonna Taylor, are just a few of the many women of color who have lost their lives due to state violence.

NOW and NOW LDEF led the campaign to pass the **Violence Against Women Act** in 1994 and worked with allies over the years to reauthorize VAWA and assure funding to support programs preventing violence against women, protections for survivors, and other supports. We know that women of color, especially, are at risk of domestic and sexual violence, and murder. VAWA supporters are looking forward to passage in the Senate of a VAWA reauthorization in late fall, 2020; the House passed VAWA reauthorization in 2019. Sen. Dianne Feinstein (D-Calif.) is sponsoring the legislation the Senate.

Over the last ten years or so, NOW and the **National Task Force to End Sexual and Domestic Violence** have worked diligently to include within the Violence Against Women Act provisions that would facilitate better protections and justice for Native American women as survivors of violence living on reservations which depend upon tribal law enforcement and tribal courts to properly prosecute perpetrators.

NOW appointed a panel of experts to the **End Demand Committee** to advise this organization on the growing problems of sex trafficked-related prostitution. Reports indicate that young women of color in Washington, D.C. and elsewhere are targets of sex traffickers, particularly teens from poverty-impacted communities. Some researchers have described sex trafficking in the U.S. as an epidemic primarily targeting young- African American women.

The D.C. ordinance would have fully decriminalized the sex trade, allowing traffickers and pimps to expand their exploitation of young people with impunity. NOW officers testified and heard many women of color testify about the violence and poverty they encountered in the sex trade. The ordinance failed to pass out of committee, thanks to strong opposition by women's groups. NOW commends **Rights4Girls, an organization headed by savvy young women of color**, who had defeated this dangerous ordinance twice previously and provided guidance to us and other groups who opposed the measure. Shelter directors testified that they see many adolescents in their offices who have managed to escape being trapped in the sex trade in the District of Columbia.

NOW President Terry O'Neill traveled to Oklahoma City in 2015 to attend a press conference urging the conviction of Daniel Holtzclaw, a former Oklahoma City police officer accused of raping women while on duty. Holtzclaw ran through police records to find his victims; he was convicted on 18 of 36 counts of sexual assault in attacks on 13 women. Holtzclaw was sentenced to 263 years. All of his victims were women of color; some had been arrested on drug charges and were thus more vulnerable to his predation. We know from testimony provided by women of color to the African American Policy Forum that sexual abuse by police of women of color in custody is not uncommon.

NOW is guided by a resolution opposing racial profiling and our leaders have often spoken out against this dangerous police practice. After police murdered Eric Garner in 2014 NOW's leaders urged, "*As demonstrations and protests are conducted throughout the city, NOW calls on police and authorities to exercise restraint and refrain from engaging in violence. Do not tear gas the peaceful protesters. Do not shoot them with rubber bullets. Do not advance on them with military-grade weaponry. We urge the New York City authorities to follow the law and respect the constitutional rights of demonstrators.*" Authorities declined to indict Garner's NYPD murderers. NOW also called on the Department of Justice to conduct a thorough investigation of this case and of the larger issues of racial profiling and police brutality against people of color in New York City.

WOMEN'S HISTORY

A very special initiative during this 100th year since women **took (not "were given") the fundamental right as U.S. citizens to vote**, NOW is featuring on its website and in social media, **Sisters in Suffrage**. The idea for a special campaign to honor suffragists of color came from NOW president, Toni Van Pelt. This is a daily feature which tells the

stories of suffragists and organizers, nearly all women of color, whose important contributions to woman suffrage has been a suppressed history. Only now are these remarkable women getting their due with a more inclusive re-telling of how women took the power of the vote, <https://now.org/celebrate-the-100th-anniversary-of-women-suffrage-with-now/>

The now more than **100 Sisters in Suffrage** listing includes, in addition to many African American women, Native American women, Chinese American women, Japanese women (who visited the U.S. to get ideas about promoting women's suffrage), Lesbian women, Mexican-American women and other Latinas from different cultures, women with disabilities, Trans women, women in poverty, formerly incarcerated women, working class women, immigrant women, Jewish and women with professional degrees. It is a wonderfully varied list, thanks to the Communications Team at the National Action Center and the 2020 Vision committee, <https://now.org/sisters-of-suffrage/>

NOW supported the National Women's History Alliance in 2018 through an ad in the program booklet for the Washington, D.C. luncheon program honoring the Rev. Dr. Pauli Murray, a NOW co-founder, activist, lawyer, author, poet, and Episcopal priest. Murray's work led to the historic *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka* Supreme Court ruling that in public education separate is not equal, opening the door to integration.

NOW suggested to Smithsonian researchers that an exhibit about the extraordinary life of Pauli Murray be added to the collection. The current exhibit at the National Museum of African History and Culture is about the importance of family history and features Murray's several books about her family.

NOW supported the National Women's History Alliance's honoring E. Fay Williams, Esq., President and CEO of the National Congress of Black Women, in 2019. Rev. Dr. Williams is a longtime friend of NOW and one of the nation's most distinguished leaders.

NOW has worked with the National Domestic Workers Alliance, National Nurses Alliance, the women farmworkers (Alianza Nacional de Campesinas), SEIU (Service Employees International Union) and many other associations and unions that have substantial employees of color members. We have often invited their leaders and organizers to be speakers at our national conferences.

In the mid-1990's, **NOW President Patricia Ireland** declared a NOW hunger strike to oppose Republican attacks on women receiving welfare assistance, using the derogatory term, "welfare queens". NOW helped stall this regressive welfare reform until President Clinton finally signed the Republican bill, the effects of which later shown to greatly further abject poverty among women and their families. To protest, NOW VP Karen Johnson led the nightly hunger strike sit-ins at Lafayette Square near the White House. Ireland, NOW staff and allies demonstrated in front of the White House; comedian and activist Dick Gregory joined the sit-ins.

During the lead-up to the adoption of welfare reform legislation in 1996, NOW worked with advocates from poverty-impacted communities, bringing several of their leaders to D.C. to protest the many draconian changes that were proposed.

In 1996, NOW launched the **Women-Friendly Workplace** campaign, naming Mitsubishi Motors, where race and sex discrimination and harassment were rampant, its first **NOW Merchant of Shame**.

NOW led with **NOW Legal Defense and Education Fund** a successful effort in 1997 - 98 to require screening for domestic violence among women who received Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (TANF), the welfare reform program so that they could receive services, if they wished. NOW attended conferences for many years afterwards which evaluated the success of the reform in reducing (or not) poverty. TANF made employment mandatory for poor mothers, but did not provide adequate support for transportation, childcare or other critical support services. Many mothers had to take low-paying service sector jobs that kept them poor.

NOW's Vice President Olga Vives traveled in 2005 to El Paso, Tex. to join a congressional contingent led by **Rep. Hilda Solis**, calling attention to the nearly 400 Latinas murdered since 1993 in and around Ciudad Juarez, Mexico. A resolution authored by Rep. Solis called for an investigation and justice for the young victims. Many worked in the maquiladoras or factories near the U.S. border, and died as a result of gang violence and pervasive misogyny.

NOW livestreamed a press conference on new proposals to improve Social Security for women and lifetime low-income workers as well as for caregivers with allied organizations. Speakers were Dr. Maya Cummings and Carol Estes, Dr. Heidi Hartman and Terry O'Neill. NOW helped write and distribute to lawmakers and activists three published reports beginning in 1998 on the need to improve Social Security benefits and establish a caregiver credit under Social Security for family caregivers who have taken time out of the paid workforce to care for family members. This credit could be especially beneficial for women of color who often retire with a very modest income.

NOW co-authored and published several reports on the importance of **Social Security**, highlighting the problem of women of color and women, generally, living near the poverty line in retirement, owing to sex/race discrimination in employment and pay. Women's career earnings are lower often due to systemic discrimination, resulting in low-paying job categories where women and women of color dominate, NOW and allies proposed increasing Social Security benefits across the board for all retirees, especially, for widows/divorced/never married women, women with disabilities, and for life-time low income earners.

NOW participated in a town hall meeting in New Orleans with the African American Policy Forum (AAPI), organized by AAPI's executive director, Kimberle Crenshaw, and has incorporated AAPI's focus on intersectionality, the criminalization of trauma and state sanctioned murder of black women (#SayHerName) into our national action

campaigns and communications. Crenshaw, a widely respected academic, originated the concept of how intersecting patterns of systemic discrimination disadvantage women of color.

NOW members joined in a historic re-enactment 1913 march of the suffragist African American Delta Sigma Theta sorority in 2013, marching behind the Delta members, unlike the earlier march when white suffragists asked them to march from the rear along Washington, D.C. downtown streets. Courageous anti-lynching crusader Ida B. Wells-Barnett, however, managed to get to the front of the march. For the 2013 event, NOW Vice President Bonnie Grtabenhofer spoke to the large crowd of Deltas decked out in red and black, then headed a contingent of NOW members down Pennsylvania Avenue, following the Delta's lead.

Some NOW members and much of the public fail to realize that throughout this country's history – well up into the 20th Century that white superiority (as differentiated from “white supremacy”) was a widely held view. It is mainly through the work of the civil rights, women's rights and other progressive movements of the last half of the 20th Century that a more egalitarian view of society has begun to take hold. Recent books documenting the 72-year struggle for women's suffrage illustrated how much of a constraint that racial prejudice, Jim Crow laws and the ever-present threat of violence against African Americans had on state legislatures in nearly defeating the 19th Amendment.

A number of years ago, NOW leaders organized a panel at the **U.N. Commission on Status of Women** regarding concerns/needs of Native American women, with Native American panelists calling attention to the tragic matter of hundreds of missing and murdered indigenous women. We have also featured Native American women leaders at our conferences, like Charon Asotoyer (Comanche) and LaDonna Harris (also, Comanche), many others. At our 2019 National NOW Conference in St. Paul, many Native American women leaders spoke, including Assistant Majority Leader in the Minnesota House of Representatives, Rep. Mary Kunesh-Podein, Prof. Sarah Deer, University of Kansas; and we invited Lt. Gov. Peggy Flanagan (who was unable to attend).

REPRODUCTIVE JUSTICE

NOW regularly participates in a large coalition of women's reproductive health and rights organizations, meeting monthly to share information on current legislation and policies. Over the past three and one-half years the information has been consistently bad: 200 anti-abortion rights federal judges have been confirmed, the **Department of Health and Human Services** has been deployed to limit access to medication abortion, the birth control insurance coverage mandate of the Affordable Care Act has been undermined by the Supreme Court. President Trump has expanded the scope of religious and conscience objections in the provision of health care overriding anti-

discrimination protections adopted under the Obama administration. Since 1995, more than 1,000 pieces of state legislation narrowing access to reproductive health care have been adopted.

Every other year leading up to an election, NOW joins with dozens of other organizations focusing on women's reproductive health produces a **Blueprint** for policies and action. Much attention is paid to the health needs and concerns of women of color, including such important issues of access to abortion care, access and affordability to contraceptives and maternal health. NOW participated with a small group of organizations working on women's reproductive health issues in submitting our recommendations (with strong emphasis on the need to address health disparities that women of color face). The most important needs were identified from the [Blueprint for Sexual and Reproductive Health, Rights, and Justice](#). (Click on this link to read.)

Our joint recommendations were submitted in early July to the Democratic National Committee for inclusion in the 2020 Party Platform. In commenting on those recommendations, President Toni Van Pelt joined other reproductive rights leaders on July 9th in releasing a statement which included Van Pelt's quote,

"The 2020 Democratic Party platform must commit to comprehensive improvements that provide access to a full range of reproductive health care. This includes expansion of telemedicine for abortion care, medication abortion, contraceptive coverage, and expansion of critical services such as prenatal care. They must commit to explicitly opposing all kinds of coverage bans (including the Hyde Amendment), ending forced sterilization, and prioritizing maternal health in the Black community. As our coalition partners have articulated, the party platform must address the need for racial equity and make a significant effort to center the lives of Black and Indigenous women and LGBTQIA+ populations, who are most impacted by political attempts to restrict abortion and reproductive care. Moving forward, the Democratic Party must make a commitment to proactively seek justice for these communities, whose support has been taken for granted for far too long." –

Black Women's Maternal Health --- NOW is a strong supporter of legislation to address the crisis in Black Maternal Health. Finally, serious attention is being paid to the very serious risks faced by African American women and Native American women when giving birth. Tragically, the U.S. compares with poor developing nations in high rates of maternal mortality -- an indictment of the richest nation in the world. Black Women are dying at three to four times the rate of white pregnant women, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). American Indian women and Alaska Native women are 4.5 times more likely to die from pregnancy and childbirth-related causes than are non-Hispanic white women.

Illinois Rep. Lauren Underwood (D) and North Carolina Rep. Alma Adams (D) have introduced the **Black Maternal Health Omnibus Act, H.R. 6142**, a package of nine bills that addresses major factors affecting the health and well-being of African

American and Native American mothers-to-be. Sen. Kamala Harris (D-CA) is sponsoring the companion measure, S. 3424.

IMMIGRANT WOMEN

NOW Foundation, under the leadership of Vice President Olga Vives, organized the **National Coalition for Immigrant Women's Rights** to work on immigration policy reform legislation before Congress, with the aim of advocating for provisions that better protect immigrant women and their families.

NOW Legal Defense and Education Fund led the effort to establish the U-Visa for survivors of domestic or gang violence seeking a safe haven in the U.S. The battered immigrant women issue led to the establishment of a law clinic at American University in Washington, D.C., under the direction of Leslye Orloff, former NOW LDEF legal counsel.

The AU law clinic, the National Immigrant Women's Advocacy Project (NIWAP), is a national provider of training, legal and social science research, policy development, and technical assistance to advocates, attorneys, pro bono law firms, law schools, universities, law enforcement, prosecutors, social service and health care providers, justice system personnel, and other professionals who work with immigrant women, children and crime victims NIWAP responds to thousands of requests for information and assistance and maintains a network of 9,000 subscribers. A proposed rule by the Trump administration could lead to many victims of violence being denied asylum in the U.S.

NOW continues to support the Obama era program, Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA), which provides temporary protection for young people brought to the U.S. as children as undocumented immigrants who could be deported. We were thrilled to learn that the Supreme Court ruled against the Trump Administration in its effort to repeal the DACA program and begin deporting these young people. A U.S. District Court Judge in Maryland has now told the Trump Administration to restore the DACA program and begin reviewing thousands of applications from the 'Dreamers.' We believe that a path to citizenship must be made available to the Dreamers as the U.S. is the only home that most have known.

In 2019 and 2020, NOW organized three press conferences and rallies near immigration detention facilities in California, Arizona and Texas to protest the inhumane treatment of undocumented immigrant women and children. NOW President Toni Van Pelt and NOW Vice President Christian Nunes, along with VIPS and local allies, at these events. A Bill of Rights outlining the proper treatment of women detainees was developed under **NOW's Unlock the Future campaign**; letters to officials at five government agencies with jurisdictions related to immigration were sent, objecting to the treatment and harmful conditions at these facilities.

WOMEN, MINORITIES IN MEDIA

NOW began advocating for opportunities for women in print and broadcast media almost as soon as NOW was founded and we had a profound influence in opening up the field. Our remarkable accomplishments are detailed in the **Feminist Chronicles, 1953-1993**, www.feminist.org/research/chronicles/chronicl.html/

In 1970, NOW became a party to the landmark EEOC petition against AT&T for “pervasive system-wide and blatantly unlawful” discrimination against women and people of color. In 1973, AT&T signed a **\$38 million agreement to pay victims of discrimination** and for wage adjustments aimed at elevating women and minority males to equal standing with white males in similar jobs.

NOW monitors print, broadcast and online reports that relate to our organization and to our core issues. We have pursued certain offensive statements or actions by media figures, exposing their sexist or racist actions. One example: when Don Imus, a CBS “shock jock”, described the **Rutgers University women’s basketball team** of talented women of color players in an extremely derogatory manner, NOW’s then president, Kim Gandy, called for his firing. A joint press conference of women’s organizations followed, corporate sponsors echoed the call and Imus was fired.

For 17 years, NOW Foundation has worked with a coalition of civil rights organizations promoting women’s and minorities’ ownership of radio and television stations and is a sponsoring party in the case of *National Association of Broadcasters, et al. v. Prometheus Radio Project, et. al.* before the Federal Communications Commission (FCC). The Institute for Public Representation at Georgetown represented NOW Foundation in four FCC ownership reviews.

A major reason for the effort was to require the FCC to routinely collect and make publicly available accurate information about which stations are controlled/owned by women and people of color. We have argued that the FCC must do a better job of promoting opportunities for women to own broadcast stations and can do so by tightening and enforcing the ownership rules, rather than further relaxing them. A listing of minority-owned broadcast outlets was made available years ago. Another round of reviews is set to begin soon.

A history of NOW’s work on racial justice and equity will go to the Arthur and Elizabeth Schlesinger Library of the History of Women in America, at Radcliffe/Harvard. The records of the National Organization for Women at Schlesinger comprise one of the largest collections and the one most often visited, <https://www.radcliffe.harvard.edu/schlesinger-library> State and Local NOW chapters who have maintained records of their work are encouraged to send these to in-state sources, such as university libraries.

