

## Issue Brief: Women/African-American Women and Gender Issues

### **Key Words**

Gender Issues, Women, African-American Women, suffrage, feminism

### **Description**

This issue brief outlines the major gender issues that women have had to overcome in America, including suffrage and the wage gap. It also discusses the added issues that African-American women have had to face, including discrimination within the movement.

### **Key Points**

- In most countries, women's suffrage was not granted until the 1900s.
- In the United States, women's suffrage was granted in 1920 with the passage of the 19<sup>th</sup> amendment.
- The National Organization for Women was founded in 1966 and sought to bring about equality for women, which included improving the wage gap among men and women.
- African-American women were discriminated against within the women's suffrage movement and were not always welcome to participate in organizations, such as the National Woman Suffrage Association.

### **Issue Brief**

In the United States, gender issues have always been a topic of much debate, particularly the rights and equality of women. Topics ranging from women's suffrage to the wage gap have been very important in the women's rights movement. African-American women have also had to endure this shared struggle among women, as well as many other issues that are exclusive to their ethnicity.

The first major issue in the women's rights movement was women's suffrage. Women's suffrage has been granted at different times in different countries throughout the world, but most countries granted suffrage during the 1900s. In some countries, however, women's suffrage was granted before universal suffrage, which excluded women from certain races and social classes. In the United States, women's suffrage was achieved over time beginning at state and local levels, before being achieved on a national level. After the end of the American Civil War, the demand for women's suffrage began to rise. With the passage of the 15<sup>th</sup> amendment, which gave African-Americans the right to vote, many women refused to endorse the amendment due to the fact that it did not include women. This controversy spawned two women's suffrage organizations, the National Woman Suffrage Association, which sought to achieve women's suffrage at the federal level, and the American Woman Suffrage, which sought to achieve suffrage at the state level. Both of these organizations led to the passage of the 19<sup>th</sup> amendment in 1920. It states "the right of citizens of the United States to vote shall not be denied or abridged by the United States or by any state on account of sex."



In the 1960s, the fight for women's rights began to rise once again with a movement called feminism, which sought to establish more rights and legal protection for women. Activists fought for many rights including equal pay among men and women and equal rights in law. In 1966, the National Organization for Women, the largest feminist organization in the U.S., was founded and sought to bring about equality in all areas for all women. One of main issues during this time was the wage gap among men and women. The wage gap is a statistical indicator, which is often used to compare women's earnings to men's. It is also used to compare the earnings of other races and ethnicities to white males. It is expressed as a percentage indicating the median annual earnings for a particular group compared to men. In 1970, white women earned 58.7% as much as white men. This has begun to increase over the years, but the percentage still fluctuates. In 2006, they earned 73.5% compared to men. African-American women's wages, however, are even lower. In 1970, African-American women earned 48.2% as much as white men and in 2006 they earned 63.6% compared to men. Similar to white women, African-American women's earnings have increased over the years, but still fluctuate as well.



In general, African-American women usually face added aspects of racism, in addition to gender issues, when it comes to equal rights when compared to women in general. One of the

biggest examples of this is in the women's suffrage movement. During this period, African-American women often faced discrimination within the movement. Some white activists within the movement argued that granting suffrage would cancel out African-American votes all together, as there would be more white women voters than African-American men and women combined. In addition, some organizations, such as the National Woman Suffrage Association, allowed African-American women to participate, but did not always welcome them to do so. Finally even after the passage of the 19<sup>th</sup> amendment, African-American women in the south were still prevented from voting due to state laws and vigilante practices. It wasn't until a strong push for voting rights during the Civil Rights Movement of the 1960s when African-American women in the south were finally free to vote.

### **General References**

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<http://www.history.com/content/womenhist/the-history-of-women-s-suffrage>

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### **Websites**

The National Organization For Women

<http://www.now.org/>

National association of Women Business Owners

<http://www.nawbo.org/>

African-American Women's Association

<http://www.ncnw.org/>