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Trail-blazing women look ahead 100 years

Opinion by Marianne Schnall

Updated 1:52 p.m. ET, August 27, 2020

Where should we be by 2120?

- August 26, 2020 is the **centennial of the certification of the 19th Amendment** barring denial of the right to vote on the basis of sex. **August 26** is also Women's Equality Day.
- To reflect on what we can learn from our past and help us envision and manifest a more equal world, **Marianne Schnall** asked a renowned set of women leaders the following questions: *Where should we be by 2120? And what must we achieve during the next century in America and around the world to realize true and lasting gender equality?* **CNN Opinion** is publishing their responses on Wednesday and Thursday.
- *The views expressed here are those of the authors. View [more opinion](#) on CNN.*



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9:25 a.m. ET, August 26, 2020

On the centennial of the 19th Amendment, legendary women look to the future

By Marianne Schnall

In an unthinkable 2020, we mark the 100th anniversary of the ratification of the 19th Amendment, which in theory granted American women the right to vote (though in practice, left many women of color locked out of the vote until the passage of the Voting Rights Act over four decades later).



As we mark this complicated and seismic occasion for American women, we are living in a moment that would have seemed unfathomable for many of us even just months ago: a pandemic, a fraught election campaign, calls for racial and social justice that continue unabated. While there has certainly been progress in the path toward gender equity since the 19th Amendment was ratified—including the fact that **more women than ever in history are running for Congress in 2020** and Kamala Harris just became the first Black and South Asian female vice presidential candidate of a major political party—there is still much work to be done.

There is still a persistent wage gap disparity, and women remain vastly underrepresented in all levels and sectors of leadership here in the US and around the world. At the start of this year, only **15 of the 193 United Nations countries were led by women**, and that has now dropped to 13. Women currently make up only **23.7% of the US Congress** and only **5.8 % of Fortune 500 CEOs**—and these numbers fall even lower when it comes to women of color. There are also concerns about how the pandemic is disproportionately impacting women and other marginalized groups, whether in the ways they are suffering more financially or the failings in our caregiving systems that are forcing many women to drop out of the workforce to take care of their children, slowing or even reversing whatever progress has been made.

From the vantage point of this turbulent moment, and as we look back at 1920, it seems equally crucial to consider the **next** hundred years and ask where the road to true equity should take us next. Is there a “women’s movement” in 2020? What does the turbulence of 2020 teach us about what 1920 left undone?

...that over, and we all benefit when our institutions and industries are as diverse and reflective of the communities they aim to serve. Read on for galvanizing words from prominent female leaders who offer valuable insight, inspiration and powerful calls to action.

Marianne Schnall is the author of "*What Will It Take to Make a Woman President? Conversations About Women, Leadership and Power*" and the founder of *Feminist.com* and *What Will It Take Movements*.



8:38 a.m. ET, August 26, 2020

Anita Hill: We can't wait another 100 years

Early suffragists saw the vote as key to all women's personal as well as political autonomy--and blamed the unfettered physical and sexual abuse men wielded against women on male lawmakers, jurors and judges. Winning the right to vote for women was their antidote to sexual assault in the home, on the streets and in workplaces. Unfortunately, in their passionate pursuit of gender equality through the vote, few white activists considered how Native, brown and Black women's oppression under colonialism, immigration law and slavery figured into the solutions suffragists sought.



binds that have weakened our claim to universal personal and political autonomy. And the abuses borne by diverse individuals of all genders because of their gender continue at shocking rates.

We can't wait another 100 years. We must recognize gender violence as the national crisis that it is and use the franchise to ensure both our political and personal equality. That means that our vote must be deployed to enact laws, elect representatives and elicit public will to, in the words of abolitionist and feminist crusader Sarah Grimké, get our "brethren to take their feet from off our necks" both literally and figuratively.

Anita F. Hill is a professor at Brandeis University and the chair of the [Hollywood Commission for Eliminating Sexual Harassment and Advancing Equality](#).



8:38 a.m. ET, August 26, 2020

Megan Rapinoe: The truth of our country has been laid bare in 2020

The year 2020 marks the 100th anniversary of the passage of the 19th Amendment -- a moment that is largely celebrated as the movement victory that allowed women to vote.

Except it didn't.



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United States or by any state on account of sex. Which meant the same codes that had been executed against Black, brown, Asian and indigenous men were going to carry over to apply to those women.

As we watch our current president **pardon Susan B. Anthony** almost 150 years after she was arrested -- while the legislation to fully restore the Voting Rights Act sits on the desk of the administration he oversees -- a stark picture appears of the reality of how far and ultimately how little the country has progressed.

In so many ways, the 100th anniversary of the 19th Amendment is the perfect example of where we have failed in our work. When a certain group, in this case white women, are willing to sell the rights of others for their own, the foundation is compromised. The progress becomes inherently flawed, gaining power at the expense of other people is simply reenacting the same injustices on each other.

The truth of our country has been laid bare in 2020. If we want to fight for true progress, we have to go back and study the minds that led women's suffrage to the consciousness of white America more than 100 years ago.

We need to study **the work** of Sojourner Truth, Fannie Lou Hamer, Ida B. Wells, Marie Louise Bottineau Baldwin and the many Black, brown and indigenous women who **worked alongside them** only to watch the movement woefully leave them behind. We, as White women, have to allow ourselves to be led by the next wave of women and gender expansive thinkers and fight for a future that is built upon a foundation strong enough to last. Something that we can all celebrate in 100 years.

Megan Rapinoe is co-captain of the US Women's National Soccer Team, with whom she won two World Cup championships.



8:38 a.m. ET, August 26, 2020

Melinda Gates: Unless we move faster, it will take 208 years to reach gender equality in the US

Picture a little girl born on Women's Equality Day, 2120. One hundred years from now, women's equality might still be a day on the calendar, but, unless things change, it won't be a reality. Last year, the World Economic Forum projected that if the pace of progress remains constant, it will take **another 208 years** to reach gender equality in the United States. That means you won't



Of course, if there's one thing we've learned in 2020, it's that the pace of progress is anything but static. At this time last year, how many of us had ever heard the terms “social distancing” or “flattening the curve”? How many times have you already heard them *today*?

That's what pandemics do. They force us to change in uncomfortable ways at speeds we never thought possible. But by making us do things differently, they also present us the chance to do things better.

What does that mean for gender equality? If we're serious about thanking essential workers—**the majority of whom are women, the majority of whom are women of color**—let's stop undervaluing women's work and remove the structural barriers that keep so many women in low-wage jobs.

If we really have new appreciation for the unpaid caregiving work women are doing at home every day, let's make sure lawmakers and business leaders are passing new policies like paid family and medical leave to make caregiving easier and more evenly distributed. If we now have a deeper understanding of the importance of effective government, let's start opening new pathways to ensure that women are running for office in equal numbers.



to us. We can accept another two centuries of incremental gains, or we can celebrate Women's Equality Day by insisting on something much better much sooner.

Melinda Gates is co-chair of the *Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation* and founder of *Pivotal Ventures*.



2:09 p.m. ET, August 26, 2020

Jennifer Finney Boylan: 'Maybe not in my lifetime, but in yours, I feel sure'

The good news for the women's movement is that our idea of what it means to be a woman has become more open-hearted and inclusive, and many people like me (a woman of transgender history) now get to live our lives openly, with pride and dignity and joy.



The bad news is that women continue to be under attack, both from new adversaries as well as older, more traditional ones, who hate the idea that men might have to share their power or have to grant women autonomy over their own bodies and lives. Part of the pushback against the dignity of transgender women's lives, in fact, is just the same old misogyny taking on a new form.



...and equality in particular, I think of that Paul Simon song. "I believe in the future we will struggle no more; maybe not in my lifetime, but in yours, I feel sure."

Jennifer Finney Boylan is the author of 15 books, including the novel "Long Black Veil" and the memoirs "She's Not There: A Life in Two Genders" and "*Good Boy: My Life in Seven Dogs*." She is the inaugural Anna Quindlen Writer in Residence at Barnard College of Columbia University and is a member of the Board of Trustees of PEN America and formerly chaired GLAAD's board of directors.



8:39 a.m. ET, August 26, 2020

Annie Lennox: The real question for the next century – will we be here at all?

I've been trying to figure out what I could say in a 200 - 400 word piece that might have any impact or purpose when it comes to the question of what feminism will look like by 2120. What I'd *like* to see in terms of female empowerment across the globe and what will eventually evolve is impossible to tell at this juncture.

I've been passionate about global feminism ever since I had the opportunity to fully appreciate the full scale as to how "disempowerment" affects the lives of millions of women and girls across the world.



Just to offer some context, at this point in time, globally, **one in three women** are impacted by sexual or physical assault in their lifetime, while the Covid-19 lockdown situation has created a horrific spike in domestic violence against women. **Two thirds** of the world's 774 million illiterate adults are women, according to the United Nations. This situation has not changed much over the last 20 years. In Central and West Africa, 28 million girls are not in school and will never step inside a classroom. Across the world, 39,000 girls under the age of 19 **become child brides every day**. Worldwide **according to** the World Health Organization, 800 women die every day due to pregnancy or childbirth related complications--99% of these live in developing countries. Women currently make up **only 24%** of the world's parliamentary seats.

I'm just citing a few facts, but the list of injustices and equities against women goes so much further. As a woman of 65, I feel encouraged and discouraged by some things that have taken place. Encouraged by the #Me Too and #TimesUp movements but discouraged that the moment of focus came and went far too quickly, when there's still so much work to be done in every corner of the world.

There has been a great deal of "talk" going on for decades, but the real challenge is to create lasting systemic transformation--with urgency and pace. So it's essential that the global movement for women's rights continues to galvanize and energize. It must discover a strengthened will to take action to create lasting positive change.

Right now our planet is going through an extreme (manmade) crisis at so many levels. Quite honestly, I feel that the crucial question is whether human beings will actually even be here in



Annie Lennox OBE is a singer/songwriter and founder of *The Circle*, an organization championing the rights of women and girls around the globe.



8:39 a.m. ET, August 26, 2020

Mikki Kendall: We must turn feminism's power into funding

Feminism has empowered so many women, now we must use that power to end inequality by closing the wealth gap via universal basic income strategies, living wages and affordable housing.



To achieve those goals, we should spend the next 100 years focusing on creating better social systems that make sure that everyone's needs are being met without attaching a social stigma to poverty. We should focus on protecting the right to vote, to be educated, to access medical care of all kinds, and to be safe whether you are in your home, the workplace or at school. We should be teaching respect for cultural and racial differences in our media, our schools, and in our homes.

term of xenophobia, transphobia, homophobia, racism, ableism or classism. We should stop paying lip service to the ideals of justice and start doing the very real work of abolishing the systems that abuse and disenfranchise so many people.

Devoting funding to violence intervention, anti-poverty and other measures proven to improve communities by ensuring the health of the people in them is work that we can and should do right now, as well as for the next century.

Mikki Kendall is the author of *“Hood Feminism: Notes from the Women That a Movement Forgot.”*



8:40 a.m. ET, August 26, 2020

Ileana Ros-Lehtinen: The hardest and most telling test will be in large-scale business and industry

The most important goal for America is to create a truly equal playing field. The barriers, both explicit and implicit, to equal opportunity for women must be eradicated. The answer, of course, is not artificial quotas, but equal access to positions, jobs and other benefits within our society. With true equal opportunity will come equal performance and achievement.





terms for certain groups, which groups will necessarily lose such prized positions and favorable treatment. Success in this regard should be reflected in the composition of corporate boards and CEOs of Fortune 500 companies. The private sector, while aspiring to provide opportunities for women, seems to suffer more significantly from the lack of women's participation in the long term leadership development timeline which corporate executives undergo.

Diversity in elective and appointed office (legislative, executive and judicial) is, oddly enough, achieved more readily as social consciousness grows. There are less experienced-based barriers in such public offices. However, large corporations, even while seeking diversity in high management selections will be hampered unless steps are taken while women are in middle management to generate the experience and other prerequisites necessary for high level management.

This is why the most telling test and the most difficult to achieve goal is women's leadership in high level, large scale business and industry. This is also why it takes the longest time to achieve this goal. But with commitment from all sides, this goal can be achieved in our children's lifetime and this will have a transformational impact on American society and maintain America's leadership as the land of opportunity.

Ileana Ros-Lehtinen is a former Republican US representative from Florida and the first Latina elected to Congress.



8:40 a.m. ET, August 26, 2020

Carol Jenkins: The next century's tasks -- pass the ERA and repair our souls

The work ahead for us in the next century is repairing our souls. The measure of equality must start with enough clean water, food and care for every person on this planet.

I think if we've learned anything from the year 2020, it is how profoundly vulnerable we are. In every way, being under the influence of a deadly pandemic, the resurgence of hate, and the vision of everyday brutality has forced us to stop and ask some specific questions about the future, especially for women. We may be celebrating 100 years of the 19th Amendment giving some (White) women the right to vote, but we know that voting—even for a century—was not enough to deliver equality for girls and women.



Women are the impoverished of our country, our children are hungry (1 in 4 children in America **can't be sure** they will have a next meal)—and this scandal exists while businesses enjoy their lush profits, many at the expense of poorly, unequally paid employees. Some would call the women of America the cheap labor that fuels our economy.

The work to make women equal in our society has already absorbed billions of dollars over many years by untold numbers of well-meaning advocates. So far, nothing has worked sufficiently to be able to celebrate the status of all women. We do have individual success stories we can point to—but in the next century we need to think less of personal excellence and more of lifting all women up from the sub-standard existence we have.

I think true equality for women will not happen until we've "fixed" our Constitution to add the Equal Rights Amendment. It's a simple statement that says one can't be discriminated against because of one's sex. That's it. And yet we are approaching a century of work to get this idea into the Constitution as the 28th Amendment.

These days we talk a lot about systemic racism, systemic sexism. There is nothing more systemic than our Constitution. It spells out, in fact, the system: who has rights and protections—and who does not.

My hope is that in 2021 we will finally adopt the ERA and spend the next 100 years creating the democracy we now think we have—one that includes girls and women.

Carol Jenkins is co-president and CEO of *The ERA Coalition* and *Fund for Women's Equality*.

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