



The Crucial Need for Fair Voting Rights

An Earth Manifesto publication by Dr. Tiffany B. Twain
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This essay is intended to be a persuasive pitch explaining exactly why expansive voting rights and a stronger commitment to democratic fairness are critically important to people's freedoms, well-being and the general welfare.

Every Memorial Day near the end of May, many Americans pause to reflect on the ultimate sacrifices that have been made by military personnel who have died while serving in the U.S. armed forces. Those whose lives have been cut tragically short often lost their lives in service of a greater purpose. To properly honor their sacrifices, "It is incumbent upon all of us, but especially those elected by the people, to do right by those sacrifices by standing for what is right and making this country a more peaceful and just place. Some died for democracy, so it is on us to strengthen and maintain it. Some died for freedom, so it's on us to make sure we are all free. Some died for justice, so it is on us to root out injustice wherever we find it."

Since the 2020 elections, Republicans have introduced over 440 bills in 49 states to restrict the right to vote, and 30 of these bills have been passed into law in 19 states. These efforts to restrict voting are generally targeted to discriminate against people in certain groups, especially against Black people and the poor. These wrongful actions erode the fabric of our democracy by limiting the freedom to vote and disenfranchising the voices of tens of millions of American citizens. All of these new laws share the same objective: "Making it as hard as possible for people of color and low-income people to vote."

Republicans in Congress are perniciously opposed to expansive voting rights and initiatives that would help reduce inequities and inequalities, because they want the economic and political system to remain rigged in favor of the top dogs, particularly those who are millionaires and billionaires. They can only adopt this extreme position because of the corruption in politics that allows wealthy people to buy outsized influence. This state of affairs makes voting rights reform urgently necessary, along with campaign finance reform and other democracy-strengthening changes to the status quo, so that every voice can be heard, and well-informed fair-minded decisions can be made.

Sacred democratic principles are at stake in this matter, like the egalitarian "one person, one vote" principle, and the idea that all people should have equal rights under the law. We really should rightly transcend politics and get back to trying to perfect our union, and help honestly create a much fairer nation by giving respect to all citizens.

We need free, fair and secure elections to stop minority factions from imposing their oppressive laws and dictates on the majority. As the New York Times has gravely warned, "If Republicans prevail, America will become one of the faraway seemingly lawless places where every election is in doubt and no part of our political culture remains above the partisan fray."

"Democrats have a narrow window now to recognize the existential threat not just to their party but to the country as a whole. But if they don't do that, then the ship is going to hit the iceberg. And then we're all sunk."

In March 1965, President Lyndon Johnson gave an historic speech to Congress about the importance of voting rights -- and not long thereafter he signed the Voting Rights Act of 1965 into law. Historian Doris Kearns Goodwin, who served in the Johnson administration, remembered LBJ's speech during a March 15, 2021 appearance

on "Morning Joe" -- and she warned that now, 56 years later, voting rights are under concerted attack in the United States.

Goodwin, now 78, told *Morning Joe* hosts Joe Scarborough and Mika Brzezinski that it is important to remember that Lyndon Johnson, from the South, gave "the most extraordinary address, called the 'We Shall Overcome Address', to mobilize the Congress to pass the voting rights bill -- which it does, four months later. And it means so much to me personally."

Restrictions on voting rights are just one rotten plank in what constitutes an on-going attempted coup against democratic fairness and institutions that defend it. And it's a dirty trick unscrupulous one. In Michigan, Republican Ryan Kelley, who ran for governor in 2022, openly attacked the idea of democracy. "Socialism -- it starts with democracy," he said. "That's the ticket for the left. They want to push this idea of democracy, which turns into socialism, which turns into communism in every instance." What baloney! Kelley made a curious distinction between "democracy" and a "constitutional republic" that is similar to that of the racist John Birch Society in the 1960s, which used such a distinction to oppose "one person, one vote" and prevent many African Americans from voting.

The Birchers back then drew from the arguments of white supremacists during Reconstruction, after the Civil War, who warned that Black voters would elect leaders who promised them things like roads, schools and hospitals. These benefits would cost tax dollars that in the postwar South would have to be paid largely by white landowners. Thus, white voters insisted, Black voting would lead to a redistribution of wealth; by 1871, they were insisting that it was essentially "socialism."

"That context explains Kelley's absurd insistence that 'we truly are losing our country to the radical left.' But the argument is not only racial and economic. Some American evangelicals are converting to the Russian Orthodox Church out of support for its nativism, white nationalism, rejection of LGBTQ rights and abortion, and support for the authoritarian Russian president Vladimir Putin. Like him, they object to the diversity inherent in democracy."

Point Counterpoint

Here is a convincing reason that corporations and rich people should be more strictly restricted from buying influence in our political system, and why American citizens must be given more power.

In an outrage against fairness and decency, "The preferences of the average American appear to have only a miniscule, near-zero, statistically non-significant impact upon public policy." This was a finding reported by researchers in a Princeton study in 2015 that found the opinions of 90% of Americans have essentially no impact at all on the decisions made by our representatives in Congress.

While the opinions of the bottom 90% of income earners in America have vanishingly small influence, "Economic elites, business interests and people who can afford lobbyists still carry major influence."

"Moneyed interests get what they want, and the rest of us pay the price. In the last 5 years alone, the 200 most politically active companies in the US spent \$5.8 billion influencing our government with lobbying and campaign contributions", and those same companies got \$4.4 trillion in taxpayer support --- earning a return of 750 times their investment."

This is clearly "a vicious cycle of legalized corruption." And as I mention in *Divide-to-Conquer Roguery*, "One of the biggest near-term threats to the survival of our constitutional republic is found in the extreme imbalance of power between the top dogs who are most financially fortunate and everyone else in the bottom 90% of *We the People*."

In a self-centered and biased counter-argument, the billionaire Tom Perkins sent a letter to the *Wall Street Journal* in January 2014 comparing criticism of the rich to the Nazi persecution of the Jews in the 1930s. In his letter, titled *Progressive Kristallnacht Coming?*, Perkins wrote, "Writing from the epicenter of progressive thought, San Francisco, I would call attention to the parallels of Nazi Germany and its war on its 'one percent,' namely its Jews, to the progressive war on the American one percent, namely the 'rich.'"

Soon after sending his letter, Perkins made an appearance at the Commonwealth Club in San Francisco, where he created a big controversy by arrogantly declaring, in effect, that a "one-person, one vote" system is too unfair. He

proposed a better system (for him) -- a "one-dollar, one vote" system.

"The Tom Perkins system is: You don't get to vote unless you pay a dollar of taxes." During his appearance, he was asked to name one idea that would change the world. He wryly responded, "what I really think is, it should be like a corporation. You pay a million dollars in taxes, you get a million votes. How's that?"

Imagine how really inequitable our society would be if greedy jackasses like Tom Perkins (R.I.P.) were given even more power and influence than they already have. The reality is that the USA today actually is much more of a "one dollar, one vote" system than a "one person, one vote" system. This is mainly due to the gross negligence and dysfunctional incompetence of Congress in its abject failure to institute campaign finance reforms and place restrictions on influence peddling in elections and lobbying. This failure has been facilitated by the treachery of Republican Supreme Court Justices who have claimed they can't see even an appearance of the extremely negative impacts on our society of allowing Big Money to exert overwhelming influence and undermine democratic fairness. Big Money, of course, is monopolized by wealthy people and top management of giant corporations. This influence peddling is political corruption incarnate.

Wealth inequality in America is already excessively extreme. While everyday people struggle to survive, billionaires become richer than ever. In a June 2022 report by the Institute for Policy Studies, it was exposed that there is an average 670-to-1 gap in compensation between the CEO and median worker, in the top 300 companies in the U.S. This *Executive Excess* is stunning, for the CEO-to-median worker pay ratio was only 20:1 in 1950, and 42-to-1 in 1980, and 120-to-1 by 2000.

Today, with the productivity of American workers higher than ever, "they continue to get fleeced by CEOs who keep all of these benefits to themselves."

Of the 300 corporations that have CEOs earning 670 times as much as their median worker, 40% are federal contractors. "President Biden already took executive action to raise the minimum wage for all federal contractors to \$15 an hour, and now he must make federal contractors narrow their wage gap and rein in CEO pay."

Back to Tom Perkins. He was basically complaining about taxes and saying they were a form of persecution, in essence declaring that it would be "like Kristallnacht" to assess more highly graduated tax rates for the purpose of creating less glaring disparities of after-tax income and wealth in our society between the rich and the poor. What? Here's the story from January 2014:

"Class tensions in the San Francisco Bay Area got even hotter this weekend, over the public musings of Tom Perkins, a prominent venture capitalist and co-founder of the firm Kleiner Perkins Caufield & Byers. The billionaire wrote a letter to the Wall Street Journal comparing the class tensions between the San Francisco middle class and the tech-affluent to one of the most horrific events in Western history -- *Kristallnacht*, or 'Night of the Broken Glass', a series of coordinated attacks against Jews in 1938 Nazi Germany."

He added, "From the Occupy movement to the demonization of the rich embedded in virtually every word of our local newspaper, the San Francisco Chronicle, I perceive a rising tide of hatred of the successful one percent."

The hedge fund billionaire was famous for owning a gargantuan sailing yacht, the square-rigged superyacht Maltese Falcon, which is almost 300-feet long. His hyperbole about Kristallnacht was chilling. Here's the backstory of that event: "On the night of November 9, 1938, violent anti-Jewish demonstrations broke out across Germany, Austria, and the Sudetenland region of Czechoslovakia. Nazi officials depicted the riots as justified reactions to the assassination of German foreign official Ernst vom Rath, who had been shot two days earlier by ... a 17-year old Polish Jew distraught over the deportation of his family from Germany."

"Over the next 48 hours, violent mobs, spurred by antisemitic exhortations from Nazi officials, destroyed hundreds of synagogues, burning or desecrating Jewish religious artifacts along the way. Acting on orders from Gestapo headquarters, police officers and firefighters did nothing to prevent the destruction. All told, approximately 7,500 Jewish-owned businesses, homes, and schools were plundered, and 91 Jews were murdered. An additional 30,000 Jewish men were arrested and sent to concentration camps. Nazi officials immediately claimed that the Jews themselves were to blame for the riots ..."

"Kristallnacht, or the Night of Broken Glass, referred to the thousands of shattered windows that littered the streets afterwards, but the euphemism does not convey the full brutality of the event. Kristallnacht was a turning point in the history of the Third Reich, marking the shift from antisemitic rhetoric and legislation to the violent, aggressive anti-Jewish measures that would culminate with the Holocaust."

Tom Perkins was, in a sense, a Zealot. The concept of zealotry is derived from members of a first-century political movement among Judean Jews who sought to overthrow the occupying Roman government -- the Zealots.

"Of importance in New Testament history, the Zealots led a rebellion when Rome introduced imperial cult worship. The Great Jewish Revolt began in A.D. 66. The Zealots successfully overtook Jerusalem, but their revolt was ultimately unsuccessful. In A.D. 70, the Romans destroyed the city of Jerusalem and the temple. A remnant of the Zealots then took refuge in Masada."

"Because of their often-violent tactics, the Zealots have been called some of the world's first terrorists. Though the label is only partially true (not all Zealots were violent), the reputation of Zealots as forceful, aggressive agitators carries a significant lesson for us." ... "They were known to camp out in the hill regions and strike Roman villages and caravans, killing and injuring some and disrupting everyday life."

"They especially loved to target other Jews who they saw as cooperating with or compromising with the Romans. Tax collectors were one of their number-one targets, not only for their role in cooperating with the Romans, but also in helping to oppress their fellow Jews. Tax collectors were widely hated in Judea, but the Zealots took it to a new, bloody and violent level."

After that meandering digression, let's review the commendable progress that has taken place in voting rights in the history of our great nation.

The Evolution of Voting Rights

To properly understand the evolution of voting rights in the United States, it is instructive to review history, as gleaned from some of the main actions taken by legislatures and courts since the Constitution was ratified. Here is a brief summary, along with additional commentary about the implications of the U.S. today joining other democratic nations that are backsliding because authority-abusing politicians are managing to grab power.

"Voting rights in the United States, specifically the enfranchisement and disenfranchisement of different groups, has been a moral and political issue throughout United States history," explains Wikipedia.

This history of voting rights has largely been a story of progress in fair representation followed by episodes of reactionary retrenchment.

At first, when the Constitution was successfully ratified in June 1788, only property-owning white men -- a small fraction of the citizenry -- were allowed the right to vote. As the first half of the 1800s passed, almost all states extended the right to vote to all white men, without restrictions on property ownership or religion. By 1840 more than 90 percent of adult white men had been given the right to vote.

In 1870, after the Civil War and the emancipation of slaves, Black men were given the right to vote with the enactment of the Fifteenth Amendment to the U.S. Constitution, which prevented state governments from denying the right to vote on grounds of "race, color, or previous condition of servitude".

Then, during the Reconstruction era, a widespread disenfranchisement of Black males began. Former Confederate states of the South passed many Jim Crow laws to effectively discourage African Americans and poor white voters from voting, using poll taxes, literacy tests, grandfather clauses and other restrictions that were applied to discriminate against Blacks. Wikipedia: "During this period, the Supreme Court generally upheld state efforts to discriminate against racial minorities; only later in the 20th century were these laws ruled unconstitutional. Black males in the Northern states could vote, but the majority of African Americans lived in the South."

In 1920, with the passage of the Nineteenth Amendment, women were finally guaranteed the right to vote. In 1924, with the Indian Citizenship Act, all Native Americans were granted citizenship and the right to vote, regardless of tribal affiliation. Some western states opposed this enfranchisement and refused to allow this right

for decades.

In 1952, all American citizens with Asian ancestry were given the right to vote through the McCarran Walter Act. Then in 1961, residents of Washington, D.C. were granted the right to vote in U.S. Presidential Elections, after the Twenty-Third Amendment to the U.S. Constitution was ratified. Unfortunately, these citizens continue to be denied representation in Congress today, due to Republican political opposition and gamesmanship. Let's rectify this wrong!

From 1962 to 1964, a historic turning point arrived after the Supreme Court made a series of landmark decisions that helped establish the nationwide "one man, one vote" electoral system in the United States. In 1964, when the Twenty-Fourth Amendment was ratified, the payment of poll taxes was finally prohibited from being used as a condition for voting in federal elections.

In 1965, the passage of the Voting Rights Act protected voter registration and voting for racial minorities. This was later applied to include language minorities. A 25-year extension of this Act was signed into law by President Ronald Reagan in 1982, and the Voting Rights Act was extended again by President George W. Bush in 2006.

In 1971, the Twenty-Sixth Amendment was passed to give adults aged 18 through 21 the right to vote, in response to Vietnam War protesters and others arguing that soldiers who were old enough to fight for their country should be granted a say in elections by being allowed to vote.

This notable progress has hit a wall since then. Martin Luther King, Jr. famously said, "The arc of the moral universe is long, but it bends toward justice." But beginning in 2010, progress has become regress in the U.S.

Supreme Court conservatives treacherously opened the floodgates to Big Money to wield dominating influence in our elections and lobbying in January 2010, after politically partisan Justices made a consequentially wrongly-decided ruling by a narrow margin of 5-4 in the *Citizens United* case.

Then in 2013, these radical "conservatives" overturned long-established precedents of the Voting Rights Act of 1965 by again narrowly ruling, in the *Shelby County v. Holder* case, that federal restrictions against states changing their voting laws were unconstitutional. This made it much easier for states to enact extremely discriminatory state laws that have the goal of restricting voting rights for partisan political advantages. And sure enough, a barrage of unfairly restrictive laws has subsequently been passed by scheming Republicans in red states.

And then in 2019, Supreme Court conservatives further blemished the fairness of their legal rulings by allowing radically partisan gerrymandering to continue, even though it broadly disenfranchises tens of millions of American voters, most notably in red states. The time has come to honorably require nonpartisan or bipartisan districting commissions to be created in every state.

Many states have gone back and forth in recent years on allowing persons with a felony conviction to vote after they are released from prison, turning a blind eye to disenfranchisement resulting from draconian drug laws that have landed millions of Americans in prison with felony convictions in our punitive *Incarceration Nation*.

Since the 2020 elections, Texas and many other Republican-controlled states have enacted sweeping legislation that further restricts voting rights and tightens state election laws, and constrains local control of elections by limiting the ability of counties to expand voting options.

The Subversion of Democracy

In the article *The Root Cause of Voter Suppression: How SCOTUS's brazen decision subverts democracy for all*, Rev. Dr. William J. Barber II wrote on February 14, 2022:

"In an action extreme enough to inspire the objection of Chief Justice John Roberts, the Supreme Court intervened this week to block a lower court's order that Alabama must redraw its congressional maps before the 2022 midterm elections. The 5-4 decision denies Black voters, who make up 27 percent of Alabama's electorate, the opportunity to elect an additional representative of their choice this year, despite a federal court's ruling last month that the Voting Rights Act guarantees them this right. The court's decision is not simply alarming because it undermines the fruit of the most famous Black-led struggle for democracy in the very place where it was won 57

years ago. It is all the more concerning because such an extreme action was taken without oral arguments or deliberation. But just as the struggle in Selma exposed the rotten roots of Jim Crow in 1965, the Supreme Court's brazen action this week reveals the root cause of voter suppression efforts today."

"In 1965, when mounted Dallas County sheriff's deputies charged nonviolent marchers on the Edmund Pettus Bridge, the nation's attention turned to Alabama and people were compelled to ask why anyone was willing to take such extreme actions to keep Black people from voting in the South. The civil rights movement quickly organized a march from Selma to the state capitol in Montgomery. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. appealed to religious leaders around the country, asking them to come to Alabama to highlight the morality of their struggle for democracy. When 25,000 people marched up Dexter Avenue to the base of the state house steps on the last day of the march, King explained what the extremism they had witnessed revealed: 'In focusing the attention of the nation and the world today on the flagrant denial of the right to vote, we are exposing the very origin, the root cause, of racial segregation in the Southland. Racial segregation as a way of life did not come about as a natural result of hatred between the races immediately after the Civil War. There were no laws segregating the races then. And as the noted historian, C. Vann Woodward, in his book, *The Strange Career of Jim Crow*, clearly points out, the segregation of the races was really a political stratagem employed by the emerging Bourbon interests in the South to keep the southern masses divided and southern labor the cheapest in the land.'"

"Yes, racism was being used to deny Black people the right to vote and pit poor Black people in the South against their poor white neighbors. But racism wasn't the root cause, King insisted. Racism was a tool that elite interests used to subvert democracy. But their real goal was always to prevent economic justice for the Southern masses."

"Nearly six decades later, the tools have changed, but the root cause of voter suppression remains the same. Jim Crow's descendants went to law school and returned to serve elite interests as James Crow, Esquire. Claiming adherence to the letter of the law, they devised new tools to 'stack and pack' Black voters into a small number of districts where Black representatives could win easily but have little power when they got to Washington because they are outnumbered by representatives from other districts where the power of Black voters and their allies have no chance of winning. Just as Jim Crow had employed an array of tactics to subvert the letter of the 15th Amendment, James Crow, Esq., combined gerrymandering with voter roll purges, strict voter ID requirements, relocation of polling sites, and cumbersome registration requirements to create additional hurdles for Black voters. When I led the North Carolina NAACP, we sued the governor over a voter suppression law and demonstrated in federal court that legislators had asked for data to make sure they chose the barriers that would most impact Black voters. In a ruling that the Supreme Court upheld in 2016, the court found that their actions targeted African Americans 'with almost surgical precision.'"

"While James Crow, Esquire has found new ways to dilute the power of Black voters in the South, his real goal isn't to keep Black people from voting. It is to keep Black people from voting with their poor white, Latino, Asian, and Native neighbors for policies that would benefit the majority of Americans. Then as now, you can't separate the struggle for voting rights from the struggle for economic justice in America. We do democracy a disservice if we accept the narrative that says voter suppression is a 'Black issue.' At its root, it's about whether government is going to serve the people or elite corporate interests."

"For decades, lawyers and judges committed to subverting the will of the growing majority in America have made careful legal arguments to try to justify their voter suppression tactics. But the reactionary right wing of the Supreme Court showed its true colors this week. Just as Selma's officers didn't arrest or charge John Lewis before administering the punishment of their billy clubs, SCOTUS denied Black voters in Alabama a seat in Congress without even hearing arguments. Such extremism is alarming, but it is also a sign that those defending the status quo are in a panic. No one would be fighting this hard to subvert democracy if they didn't understand that the overwhelming majority of citizens want something else."

Republicans have been stealing undue excessive influence in Congress and the Executive Branch and the Supreme Court for decades, so their crusade deviously claiming that their cult leader had the presidency stolen from him in 2020 is particularly preposterous. Let's come together and take effective steps to remedy this state of affairs!

Truly,

Tiffany B. Twain

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