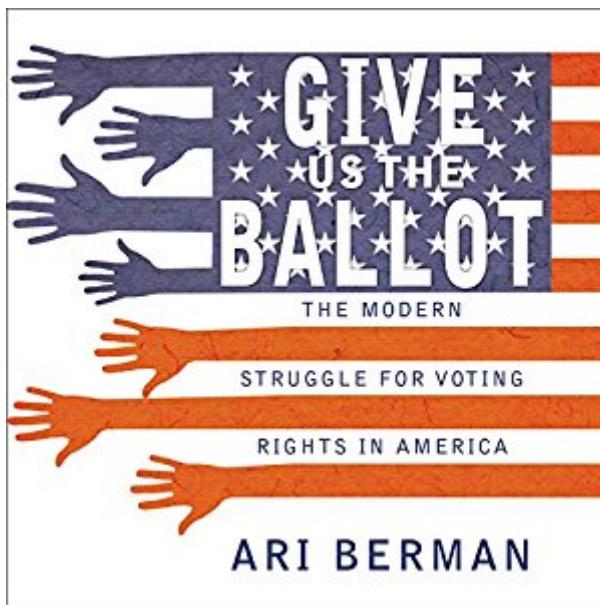


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# Give Us The Ballot: The Modern Struggle For Voting Rights In America



## Synopsis

The adoption of the landmark Voting Rights Act in 1965 enfranchised millions of Americans and is widely regarded as the crowning achievement of the civil rights movement. Yet fifty years later, we are still fighting heated battles over race, representation, and political power - over the right to vote, the central pillar of our democracy. A groundbreaking narrative history of voting rights since 1965, *Give Us the Ballot* tells the story of what happened after the act was passed. Through meticulous archival research, fresh interviews with the leading participants in the ongoing struggle, and incisive on-the-ground reporting, Ari Berman chronicles the transformative impact the act had on American democracy and investigates how the fight over the right to vote has continued in the decades since. From new strategies to keep minorities out of the voting booth to cynical efforts to limit political representation by gerrymandering electoral districts to the Supreme Court's recent stunning decision that declared a key part of the Voting Rights Act itself unconstitutional, Berman tells the dramatic story of the pitched contest over the very heart of our democracy. At this important historical moment, *Give Us the Ballot* brings new insight to one of the most vital political and civil rights issues of our time.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

*Give Us the Ballot* is the history of how the Voting Rights Act came into being, took hold and changed America. It's also the story of the conservative undertow that contested the law from its

beginning, recognized its value in shifting the polarities of our two major parties via "The Southern Strategy" and then launched a counterrevolution during the Reagan Administration set on undermining the law before the nation's changing demographics could pose a serious threat to the right's southern and rural hegemony. You'll recognize many of the stars of the conservative effort to limit voting rights -- from William Rehnquist to John Roberts to Ted Cruz. But it's the life of John Lewis who provides the through line of Berman's spirited narrative. From Selma to Shelby, Lewis is a participant and a witness to the massive changes he helped force and the backlash those changes sparked. No testimony is more stirring or crucial to understanding the stakes -- both moral and political -- involved in providing America's most vulnerable citizens access to the ballot. "How many of you are going to leave here and remember the blood of the martyrs?" William J. Barber, the architect of North Carolina's Moral Mondays movement that rose up in part to oppose the right's attack on voting rights, asked a crowd in 2014. Berman's book is asking us that same question.

This book provides a superb history of the events leading to the Voting Rights Act, and the history of the impact of the Voting Rights Act, including countless efforts to limit the voting or impact of minority voters. The book also makes clear that the impetus behind voter fraud concerns and restrictions on early voting and registration is really an attempt to limit the voting of the poor and minority voters. Royal Masset, the former executive director of the Texas Republican party said that "anyone who says that a lack of voter ID won't discriminate against otherwise legal minority voters is lying" and said voter ID laws were "sheer racism" designed to suppress Democratic voters (at 259-260). Cutbacks in early voting hours were defended by the Republican party chair in Ohio who said we "shouldn't contort the voting process to accommodate the urban-read African-American-voter-turnout machine" (at 264).

I remember the day the Supreme Court effectively gutted the Voting Rights Act and as this election was in full swing, began paying increasing attention to the increasingly stringent laws passing in Republican controlled states in the name of protecting the integrity of elections (eliminating voter fraud) which was just a means of suppressing votes and disenfranchising minorities, the elderly, students and those more economically disadvantaged. I came across an article talking about Ari Berman's book "Give us the Ballot" and began reading it a week before the election and finished it a few days later. "Give Us the Ballot" is a monumentally critical book for all Americans, not only in light of the 2016 election, but really to understand that the bedrock of democracy, the right to vote, has

been under assault. This certainly isn't a new story since it goes back to our founding when essentially only white landowning men could vote. The march of history has certainly led to progress where ostensibly all adults are entitled to vote in theory, yet in practice that is hardly the case. Berman focuses this book on the time period from the modern civil rights movement and one of the most important pieces of legislation, the 1965 Voting Rights Act which was instrumental in eliminating post-Reconstruction barriers like poll taxes and literacy tests that prevented black Americans from exercising the franchise. Berman provides brilliant detail around the progress made because of the VRA, the people and forces that worked to undermine it (John Roberts within the Reagan administration and later as Chief Justice of SCOTUS) and the chicanery undertaken by politicians to promote non-existent voter fraud as a means to "justify" the need for strict voting laws. With the evisceration of section 5 of the VRA, large numbers of Americans across many states now face far more obstacles to vote than ever before. Yes, the election is rigged but not for the reason you PEOTUS wants you to believe. "Give us the Ballot" will make you understand that DJT wouldn't be President if voter suppression wasn't rampant. This is truly an enlightening and critical book to read about the politicization of what is the most fundamental American right. Berman shines a illuminating and harsh light on voter disenfranchisement.

I really enjoyed reading *Give Us The Ballot*. Berman brought the subject of voting rights with all its historic, legal, racial, human, and political implications to life through the stories of the people whose votes were denied, made difficult, or deliberately weakened. Weaving the story of John Lewis, the great civil rights leader throughout the account created an element that connected me into the struggle, victories, and defeats of voting rights. Understanding the role Chief Justice John Roberts has played in the Voting Rights struggle was new information for me. This book was an easy, engaging read which helped me develop a better understanding and deeper appreciation for the issue of Voting Rights. I highly recommend this book.

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