

Occupy the Polls...if ever there was a time for a movement!

Written by Jeffrey L. Boney
Thursday, 02 February 2012 00:00



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Forward Times Staff Writer

Lyndon B. Johnson delivered a speech to Congress on March 15, 1965. In that speech, which precluded the Voting Rights Act of 1965, he shared, "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 race, color, or previous condition of servitude. The most basic right of all was the right to choose your own leaders.

The history of this country, in large measure, is the history of the expansion of that right to all of our people. Many of the issues of civil rights are very complex and most difficult. But about this there can and should be no argument. Every American citizen must have an equal right to vote. There is no reason which can excuse the denial of that right. There is no duty which weighs more heavily on us than the duty we have to ensure that right. The Constitution says that no person shall be kept from voting because of his race or his color. We have all sworn an oath before God to support and to defend that Constitution. We must now act in obedience to that oath. Wednesday, I will send to Congress a law designed to eliminate illegal barriers to the right to vote."

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This speech was delivered and heard by the media and the citizens of the United States.

The power of the media has always been used as a powerful tool to influence the minds of many and shape culture.

The media has been and always will be at the forefront of reporting the good, the bad and the ugly of things that go on in our world. With that being said, it is amazing to think about how the media, through a blog post from a magazine on July 13, 2011, sparked a global phenomenon and movement.

OCCUPY WALL STREET

Adbusters Media Foundation, which is best known for its ad-free magazine *Adbusters*, offered up an idea to have peaceful protests on Wall Street aimed at bringing attention to the corporate influence on government, the lack of accountability and repercussions for those behind the global financial crisis that caused our country to spiral downwards in peril and the increased disparity in wealth.

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A universal movement came about after an internet group called “Anonymous” challenged their readers to join the protests by setting up tents and flooding lower Manhattan with peaceful protestors for several months. The original protest, which took place on September 17, 2011, spread like wildfire through social media and other forms of media. As a result, other groups began to join in and hold their own protests across the United States and even across the globe. It began the movement now universally known as “Occupy Wall Street” (OWS). The phrase “The 99%” is the slogan of OWS protesters, referring to the vast wealth that the top 1 percent of income earners have compared to the other 99 percent of the country.

The average age of OWS protesters is 33 years of age, with a tremendous diversity in gender, religion and political affiliation. Interestingly, however, a survey done by the Fordham University Political Science Department showed that 25% are Democrats and 2% are Republican, but 39% of the participants reported no party affiliation.

According to a study based on survey responses at OccupyWallStreet.org, the racial makeup of OWS participants show that roughly 81% are White with only 1.6% responding as Black.

FOUGHT FOR YOUR RIGHT

In 1965, African Americans in the United States had possessed the theoretical right to vote for

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almost a hundred years. Under Reconstruction in the 1870s, many black men in the South did vote. Some who had been slaves only a few years before were elected to local and, in some cases, national office. By the turn of the 20th century, however, white “Redeemer” governments had reclaimed the legislatures in former Confederate states and adopted new constitutions disenfranchising African-American voters. Black citizens who attempted to exercise their constitutional right to vote encountered barriers that they often found insurmountable. These included poll taxes, literacy tests, clauses that limited voting to people whose ancestors had voted in the past, and party primary elections that were limited to whites.

Peaceful demonstrations attracted media coverage, particularly when they were met with violent opposition. This helped generate the widespread support necessary for the passage of civil rights legislation. This legislation, particularly the Civil Rights Act of 1964, sought to achieve equal education, access to places of public accommodation and transportation, and equal employment. In 1965, however, most Southern blacks were still unable to overcome the obstacles set up to prevent them from voting.

Between August 1964 and July 1965 the State of Alabama used 100 different literacy tests to make it difficult for people to “study” for the test. Applicants were asked to pick a test at random from a loose-leaf notebook.

BLACK POWER

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African-Americans make up roughly 13% of the population in the United States, but has a buying power so strong that it cannot be ignored. While buying power in itself is a powerful asset to have, turning that asset into a long-term wealth generating asset will strengthen the overall position of African-Americans, especially in the area of politics.

In "The Godfather Part III, the third installment of the classic series, a valuable lesson was shared that African-Americans should pay close attention to.

Vincent Mancini-Corleone, played by actor Andy Garcia, has become mentee to aging mafia don Michael Corleone. Vincent (Garcia), who is not familiar with politics, has a conversation with Italian mafia kingpin Don Lucchesi and the exchange between the two is memorable:

Vincent Mancini: Don Lucchesi, you are a man of finance and politics. These things I don't understand.

Don Lucchesi: You understand guns?

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Vincent Mancini: Yes.

Don Lucchesi: Finance is a gun. Politics is knowing when to pull the trigger.

If ever there was a time to understand the importance of putting your money where your influence is, the time is now.

It is time that black people realize their true power and join in on the most important movement of this era; the movement to "OCCUPY THE POLLS!"

OCCUPY THE POLLS!

In order to occupy the polls, there are several things that must be done to make it work and be effective. One of the biggest critiques of the OWS movement is that there is no clear vision or objective. Bold visions need bold leadership.

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The Forward Times has chosen to take the lead on working with community leaders and activists that are committed to creating a movement that supersedes the November elections, but carries on beyond November and permeates the local, county and state races as well.

“Let’s get as many people as we can registered to vote and let’s stay relevant in our country,” said Occupy The Polls (OTP) movement organizer, Roslyn “Rozzy” Shorter. “Being upset changes nothing, however when we show up at the polls and make an educated vote, then and only then will we begin to see ‘change in motion’.”

The objective is to educate, equip and empower African-American youth, voting age adults and senior citizens with the information they need to get registered and ensure their voices are heard at the polls. With the passage of the recent Voter ID bill in Texas, which is currently being looked at by the Department of Justice, it is imperative that African-Americans have their right to vote protected and ensured.

WHAT’S NEXT?

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Rozzy Shorter shared some simple tips with the Forward Times that will help begin the process of getting each and every person that is interested engaged and involved to make a difference. She is also committing herself to walk everyone through each process and help get everyone engaged.

We are asking all African-Americans, regardless of political affiliation, to do the following:

Go to your county tax office and let them know that you want to become a Deputy Registrar.

If you are in:

Harris County - Go to 1001 Preston Street, Houston, TX or call 713.368.2000 and ask for Marty Morrison.

Brazoria County - Go to 111 E. Locust, Angleton Texas or call 979.864.1320

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Fort Bend County - Go to 1422 Eugene Heimann Circle, Richmond, TX

Tarrant County - Go to 2700 Premier St. Fort Worth, TX and ask for Steve Ranborn.

Becoming a Deputy Registrar is important, because once you have completed the process, then you can start with a very simple process of making sure the people in your precinct are registered to vote.

Shorter states that even if people get started with their own block, that is a great start.

"I currently have 300 voter registration forms and last week alone I registered 45 people standing outside of Walgreens in my neighborhood while I was waiting on my Passport picture," said Shorter. "We can make a difference if we want."

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ONE VOTE CAN MAKE A DIFFERENCE

In 1800 one vote elected Thomas Jefferson president.

In 1845 the U.S. Senate passed the convention annexing Texas by two votes (27-25).

In 1867 one vote ratified the purchase of Alaska.

In 1868, while President Andrew Johnson was “impeached” (to be charged with a crime or misdemeanor) the Senate was one vote shy of the two-thirds necessary to remove him from office.

In 1920 one vote in the legislature made Tennessee the 36th state needed to ratify the amendment that gave women the right to vote nationwide.

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In 1941 one vote pressured the selective service (draft) just four months before the attack on Pearl Harbor.

In 2012, know that your vote will make a difference.

This movement is not a “favorite politician” driven movement, but rather a movement of the people, by the people and for the people.

Are you down?

For more information, leave a message on the Forward Times website or contact Roslyn “Rozzy” Shorter at rozzy@roslynshorter.com. {jcomments on}