



The Fight to Vote

Michael Waldman

Download now

Read Online 

The Fight to Vote

Michael Waldman

The Fight to Vote Michael Waldman

“Important and engaging” —*The Washington Post*

From the president of NYU’s Brennan Center for Justice and the author of *The Second Amendment*, the history of the long struggle to win voting rights for all citizens.

In *The Second Amendment*, Michael Waldman traced the ongoing argument on gun rights from the Bill of Rights to the current day. Now in *The Fight to Vote*, Michael Waldman takes a succinct and comprehensive look at a crucial American struggle: the drive to define and defend government based on “the consent of the governed.” From the beginning, and at every step along the way, as Americans sought to right to vote, others have fought to stop them. This is the first book to trace the full story from the founders’ debates to today’s challenges: a wave of restrictive voting laws, partisan gerrymanders, the flood of campaign money unleashed by Citizens United. Americans are proud of our democracy. But today that system seems to be under siege, and the right to vote has become the fight to vote.

In fact, that fight has always been at the heart of our national story, and raucous debates over how to expand democracy have always been at the center of American politics. At first only a few property owners could vote. Over two centuries, working class white men, former slaves, women, and finally all Americans won the right to vote. The story goes well beyond voting rules to issues of class, race, political parties, and campaign corruption. It’s been raw, rowdy, a fierce, and often rollicking struggle for power. Waldman’s *The Fight to Vote* is a compelling story of our struggle to uphold our most fundamental democratic ideals.

The Fight to Vote Details

Date : Published February 23rd 2016 by Simon & Schuster

ISBN : 9781501116483

Author : Michael Waldman

Format : Hardcover 384 pages

Genre : Politics, History, Nonfiction, North American Hi..., American History, Law

 [Download The Fight to Vote ...pdf](#)

 [Read Online The Fight to Vote ...pdf](#)

Download and Read Free Online The Fight to Vote Michael Waldman

From Reader Review The Fight to Vote for online ebook

Paul says

A breezy, very readable history of the expansion – and retreat – of the right to vote since Jefferson wrote the immortal words, "All men are created equal." The book is split into four parts – the founding generation, the 19th century constriction of democracy, 20th century expansion and today's current retreat from voter equality. The first three parts are excellent; if anything, they read too quickly, and I wish Waldman had spent more time delving into the details. The last part is less history and more polemic, befitting his title as president of the Brennan Center for Justice, which advocates for expansion and protection of voting rights. Overall, I wish it was more dispassionate (and less partisan), but he concludes on a note of optimism that I found helpful, especially after the recitation of frustrating reversals of campaign finance reform and the Voting Rights Act engineered by the Roberts-led Supreme Court in recent years. Overall, I found *The Fight to Vote* insightful and educational. In some ways, reading about voting-rights reversals that occurred in previous centuries helped me to realize that partisan and racial obstruction of the vote is an impulse America has struggled with since its inception – and provided a measure of solace when thinking about the maddening efforts we've seen by Republican legislators and governors since 2011. I definitely recommend *The Fight to Vote* as an easy way to get good context for the battles currently ongoing.

Angelic says

Excellent and thorough look at current American democracy from 1776 through 2016. The subject was interesting, and often overwhelmingly emotional, and worth the time to finish it.

Lucy says

Written with Waldman's usual articulate grasp of his subject matter. I was fascinated by the Founding Fathers chapters but felt impatient through the rest of it. I've set it aside to try and re-read at a later point.

Deirdre says

A comprehensive history of voting in the United States that highlights IMPORTANT issues up to the 2016 election and considers those beyond including Citizens United ("dark money" and the billions donated to political parties), gerrymandering and poor voter registration (60% of eligible population votes in presidential elections and 40% in midterm elections). A passage I think is important:

"Some perspective: recall the scandal that first led to the first federal campaign finance law, that electric moment when J.P Morgan's man confessed to the campaign contribution from New York Life. That gift was \$48,702. How much would that be worth today? In terms of purchasing power, that contribution would be about \$1.3 million in 2012. That year Sheldon Adelson spent at least \$93 million on behalf of the Republican presidential candidates. At a January 2015 meeting in Palm Springs, California, Charles and David Koch, the libertarian oil billionaires announced that the groups they back hope to spend nearly \$900 million in the run-up to the 2016 election on behalf of conservative candidates and causes. This pledge roughly equals the amount spent in 2012 by each of the two major political parties in the United States." (243)

Worth noting, Waldman also investigates Bloomberg and Sierra Club & Greenpeace. But their donations are no where near these figures.

Alice says

Very strong and readable history of our tortured history of voting rights. Don't expect much on actions in the past year or possibilities for the future but look for a clear understanding of how we got to where we are.

Scott Rhee says

“[The] right of voting for representatives is the primary right by which other rights are protected. To take away this right is to reduce a man to slavery, for slavery consists in being subject to the will of another, and he that has not a vote in the election of representatives is in this case.” ---Thomas Paine

“Who are to be the electors of the federal representatives? Not the rich, more than the poor; not the learned, more than the ignorant; not the haughty heirs of distinguished names, more than the humble sons of obscurity and unpropitious fortune. The electors are to be the great body of the people of the United States.” ---James Madison

According to statistics from the U.S. Census Bureau, 57.5% of Americans voted in the last presidential election. (<http://www.statisticbrain.com/voting-...>) Looked at one way, the fact that more than half the country voted is impressive. Looked at another way, however, it's sad to think that only half the population utilized a right for which many people have fought and died.

I understand some people's disillusionment with voting, that their vote doesn't count, that voting is irrelevant. I understand it, but I don't agree with it at all, precisely because a refusal to vote and claiming that your vote doesn't count is akin to saying that you won't take a risk asking people out on dates because nobody will go on dates with you. It's bad logic.

There are political forces today that don't want a majority of the electorate to vote. They create laws that restrict voting rights for certain demographics of the population, specifically poor black people. They do this because they know, statistically, that this group of people tend to vote a certain way, overwhelmingly toward a certain political party or political leaning. And they know exactly where to hit these people. Poor black people tend to vote early (many of them can't afford to get off work on Election Day, which is a Tuesday) and they are less likely to have an alternative form of ID other than a driver's license, so certain political forces create laws that put an end to early voting and enforce showing "proper" ID.

Many of these forces do this in the name of preventing voter fraud, a crime which has been proven not to exist, or exist in such ridiculously small numbers as to be completely ineffectual in altering election outcomes.

Our right to vote, for many people in this country, is, in reality, a literal fight to vote. It has been this way since the ink was barely dried on the Declaration of Independence, and it has continued on to the present day. It will continue to be a fight until everyone in this country is able to freely vote without impediment.

Michael Waldman's "The Fight to Vote" is an important and vital history of voting rights in this country,

with an eye toward the legal and moral imperatives that voting embodies in a democratic society. It is every bit as fascinating as Ari Berman's excellent "Give Us the Ballot", except that whereas Berman's book focused primarily on the Civil Rights Act of 1965 and the subsequent years, Waldman takes an overview of voting rights in this country starting at the beginning, in 1776.

As the group of wealthy white males we have come to know as the Founding Fathers gathered to create a document that would provide a blueprint for the new country of America, the topic of voting was something that came up quite a bit, but, at the same time, was significantly limited.

The vote was severely limited to white, male property owners. Some opened the discussion to the possibility of giving the vote to white males who didn't own property, but it didn't take long for some to express serious concerns.

Take, for example, Gouverneur Morris (his real name, by the way), a New York representative who said, "Give the votes to people who have no property, and they will sell them to the rich who will be able to buy them... The time is not distant when this country will abound with mechanics and manufacturers who will receive their bread from their employers. Will such men be the secure and faithful guardians of liberty?"

Herein lies the roots of contemporary Republican fears that giving the vote to just anyone will somehow dilute or taint the electorate. God forbid mechanics should be able to vote!

Thankfully, the historical mood regarding the vote shifted toward more inclusiveness, but it wasn't overnight and it wasn't without major hard feelings.

It wasn't until 1848, after a convention of women in Seneca Falls led by outspoken suffragists Lucretia Mott and Elizabeth Cady Stanton that the Suffrage Movement officially began.

Meanwhile, after the country had just suffered a major Civil War over slavery, freed blacks were also fighting for the right to vote.

Sadly, it took black people until 1870, after the Fifteenth Amendment was added to the Constitution, to be able to legally vote.

For women, the right to vote didn't come about until 1920, after the Nineteenth Amendment was added.

Unfortunately, none of these constitutional amendments, in reality, guaranteed voting rights.

In 1890, Mississippi became the first of many states to rewrite their constitutions to disenfranchise---through a variety of means, including poll taxes, literacy tests, and voter registrations---black voters. Virginia Senator Carter Glass gleefully bragged that such actions were necessary to prevent blacks from voting.

When asked if he thought the constitution promoted discrimination, Glass responded affirmatively, apparently not realizing (or, more likely, not caring) that discrimination based on race was, besides being unconstitutional, simply not very nice.

"Discrimination!" he said. "Why that is precisely what we propose. That, exactly, is what this Convention was elected for---to discriminate to the very extremity of permissible action under the limitations of the Federal Constitution, with a view to the elimination of every negro voter who can be gotten rid of, legally, without materially impairing the numerical strength of the white electorate." (p.85)

Score one for blatant racism!

It wasn't until 1965, after President Lyndon B. Johnson passed the Voting Rights Act, that the Federal government could finally step in and determine whether state constitutions were denying people's right to vote and put an end to the unconstitutionality.

Of course, in the decades since, critics continued to scream "federal overreach!" and fought persistently to regain the state right to be racist assholes.

But racist state policies were only one of several problems facing the electoral system, as the 2000 presidential election between Al Gore and George W. Bush vividly pointed out.

Gore won the popular vote but lost the Electoral College to Bush, the first time this happened since 1888. The subsequent recount in the state of Florida shed light on the woeful inadequacies of that state's election system.

The U.S. Supreme Court ordered a stop to the recount, essentially giving the presidency to Bush. SCOTUS reasoned "that different counties' varying standards for conducting recounts and tallying votes violated the Fourteenth Amendment's Equal Protection Clause." (p. 175)

This begged the (still unanswered) question: If the standards differing between counties were unconstitutional, what about the differences between states?

Then, in 2010, the *Citizens United* decision happened.

In his State of the Union Address that year, President Obama said, "With all due deference to separation of powers, last week the Supreme Court reversed a century of law that I believe will open the floodgates for special interests---including foreign corporations---to spend without limit in our elections... I don't think American elections should be bankrolled by America's most powerful interests, or worse, by foreign entities." (p. 221)

Despite assurances by Justice Anthony Kennedy that spending by corporations and foreign bodies couldn't corrupt because it would require full disclosure and be genuinely independent, the reality is that a large percentage of campaign funding since has been "dark money", i.e. money from anonymous donors, and largely by independent billionaires.

Essentially, Obama's predictions were absolutely correct.

Thankfully, people like Bernie Sanders and Elizabeth Warren have been fighting the good fight to see *Citizens United* overturned, and now nominee Hillary Clinton is getting in on the anti-CU action.

There is, however, still many issues and problems facing the election system.

As Waldman writes, "To be clear: the rampant "voter fraud" claimed by the Heritage Foundation fellows and Wall Street Journal editorialists does not exist. The entire conservative push is premised on an easily discredited urban myth." (p. 248)

He does, however, go on to say that "election integrity" is a serious problem. Problems with election voting machines and absentee balloting are still ripe for potential abuse, despite many states having initiated more proactive steps to prevent them. Much more still needs to be done.

And those political forces will continue to enact laws or create impediments to keep people from going to the voting booth in November.

So, please, do your duty and exercise your one and only democratic right and vote.

Cindy says

This will make you VERY aware of what Congress and the Supreme Court may or may not do to protect our hard won right to vote. Never take it ,or any right you have for that matter, for granted. It can all go away while you're watching Jerry Springer!

Eric says

The Fight to Vote, is a good brief, 268 pages for the entire history of the United States, reference on the history of voting in a democracy/representative republic. The spoiler is that we have never been without voter suppression in American, since our inception. Michael Waldman does his best to stay in the middle of the road, pinning partisan voter suppression mostly on Democrats prior to the Civil Rights Act, and Republicans post, and more recently on the Roberts lead Supreme Court. Even the danger of direct voting on legislation is brought up, example California's Prop 13. Cases, Acts, Amendments and proposed legislation are all cited here, and this book makes a good jumping off point for further research. Overall a good book for anyone interested on the subject.

Dimitris says

When your whole point of view on any topic/subject is "when this happened back in XX's, humanity did a great thing and *insert minority here* could vote." ...then you've lost me.

That kind of phrasing or thinking is bullshit in my opinion. That's like a mother/father saying "I take care of my children"... YOU'RE SUPPOSED TO DO THAT, you stupid fuck.
WE WERE SUPPOSED TO BE fucking civilised and fucking good. We're not supposed to be selfish and racist or anything fucking dumb thing.

The right to vote has been fought for since the first days of America's independence and remains a core issue for the country today. Especially today. And pardon me for me and for the rest of the outside of 'Murica world for thinking 'muricans are stupid. Simply for voting for someone like Trump.

And of course I have american friends and such, and Thor know how much they hated their whole country when that happened and all the shit I've heard from them about it and whatnot. But c'mon. It was one step forward, not 1 step forward 2 steps back.

Anyways... on my main problem here:

When you write "Major *gains* have been made over generations, including granting the vote to African Americans and women"I'm just here pissed at your phrasing. I'm not here to judge the way you write of course, because that would mean I'm reading your book which I purchased--OH WAIT!.. Fuck that shit.

That's like saying Lincoln was a hero and whatnot. Whatever. He did what EVERYONE WAS SUPPOSED

TO DO. And for me, being me, meaning I'm fucking suspicious as fuck, that brings us to Lincoln, I didn't know the dude from a can of paint to trust that his motives was pure and honest to stop slavery. What was in it for him? Maybe he was the best dude ever. Maybe he wasn't. It was GOOD what he did. But that doesn't change the fact that we're all fucked up and in them old days of yore, they were super fucked and super dumb on common sense stuff as "voting" if you will.

Not even gonna go into the whole slavery thing, Lincoln had slaves too. Everyone did back then. Slavery still exists now. And no, I don't mean the mind being slave working 8hrs a day and whatever. SERIOUS SLAVERY. Not that hippie stuff.

Anyway, getting off topic kinda here. Book was ok.

No need to read it, unless you're into politics. Better books to read about the rights to everything out there.

Whatever happened happened back then, it shouldn't happen that way, but it did, cuz humans suck. What happens now is not worse, but humanity still needs lots of shit to get better. Duh. And US for sure needs a lot too. From voter ID laws and the corrupting influence of money in politics (I should know about corrupt politicians, I'm Greek.) present new battles in the war to preserve American democracy and democracy in general.

Steve says

This is a very interesting book which looks at the whole history of democracy and the voting franchise in America, back to colonial times. (In contrast to the other recent book I read "Give Us The Vote" by Ari Berman, which focused on the time period since the Voting Rights Act of 1965.) While there is some hand-wringing over the recent efforts for conservatives, aided by the Roberts Court, to suppress minority, elderly and youth voting, this is put in the context of a long history of repeated expansion and contraction of voting. In the final chapter on the 2016 elections (this book was published in February 2016) the author makes a balanced and wide-ranging analysis of efforts to expand voting in response to voter ID laws, etc., makes some excellent, realistic suggestions for near-term policy changes, while at the same time almost totally missing the Trump and Sanders campaigns successes, which are in reaction to the issues he points out.

Glenn says

This was a fascinating read on the history of voters' rights in the US up through 2016. You can tell he author most likely leans left, but mostly takes a very unbiased approach to the issues of voter ID laws, gerrymandering, and campaign finance, laying blame on all parties seeking power. Anyone who wants to better understand voting rights issues should start here.

Susan Miller says

This is a comprehensive study of the right/fight to vote from 1787 to 2016. It explores the actions of political groups, the courts, political parties and the people in the ongoing fight to either enlarge or shrink the

electorate. It provides significant detail throughout the decades, considering effects on both outcomes and rights. The basic question of whether economic power should prevail in the determination of elections, or should the "one person, one vote" apply not just to the vote but to the "atmosphere" surrounding elections. Whose voice should be heard the loudest? Readers who enjoy history, the constitution, or the political questions of today will enjoy this book. The author is factual, but also brings a touch of ironic humor to the pages. Well written.

James says

Waldman's 'The Fight To Vote' is an outstanding , well written history on the struggle to ensure America's most basic promise... the right to vote. Starting at the birth of our nation, following the expansion and contraction of voting rights, to our current sad state, it offers solutions as well as insight.

Read this book if you care about American democracy it's as simple as that.

Kristi Richardson says

“The ballot is stronger than the bullet.” Abraham Lincoln

This was an engrossing story of the evolution of voting in the United States. Today, we take for granted the right to vote but the constitution originally only gave votes to white, male landowners. The Senators were voted by the States Governors and Legislators, not the people.

Before we were a country, some colonies allowed women and free blacks the right to vote. That was taken away in the Constitution. Women were angry when Black men were given the vote before they were allowed to vote. Women were force fed, imprisoned and beaten for protesting their right to vote.

After the Civil War, Black men were given the vote and they did vote in record numbers until the Reconstruction period was over and the states took over. They then instituted laws that made it so difficult to vote that they did not vote until the Civil Rights Act of 1967, started by Kennedy and finished by Lyndon B. Johnson. Thanks also to all the people like Martin Luther King, John Lewis, and Rosa Parks, who protested in great numbers to show that this was something that was sorely needed.

An interesting thing I learned about voting in America was that the secret ballot is a relatively new thing. In the early 1800's men were asked who they were voting for and were given a colored tag to place in a bowl. Everyone knew whom you voted for and there were dozens of accounts of men being beaten for voting the wrong way. When Andrew Jackson ran for President, a small town in New England wanted to vote unanimously but two men held out. They were tarred and feathered and sent out of town. That is what voting was like in the early days.

I was also interested to find that you did not have to be a citizen in all states to vote. That was not changed until after the Civil War.

The main theme I received from this book was that we could never take voting for granted and that voting is a duty that we should always fulfill because it will keep our country great.

Stephen Rynkiewicz says

The originalist view of elections was unenlightened. The Constitution gave the Electoral College authority to choose the president, and state lawmakers voted for Senator. Eventually white male landowners won the ballot. Former Clinton speechwriter Michael Waldman, now running the Brennan Center for Justice at NYU Law, tracks how we got to (kind of) universal suffrage, and recounts recent efforts at voter suppression. Fun fact: In the original days of fake news, Abe Lincoln funded a German-language newspaper to get out the immigrant vote. Eventually and profoundly, one man one vote became more than a slogan.
