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Voting-rights fight continues 56 years after Bloody Sunday | Commentary

ORLANDO, FL - March 7, 2021 Today's Bloody Sunday anniversary serves as a reminder of the importance of democracy, the value of each person's voice, and work that still needs to be done to live up to the ideals outlined in the Declaration of Independence.

On March 7, 1965, 600 nonviolent civil-rights activists began their march from Selma to Montgomery to protest the shooting of fellow activist and deacon Jimmie Lee Jackson by an Alabama state trooper, and to demand the right to vote for Black citizens. Upon crossing the Edmund Pettus Bridge, John Lewis and his fellow peaceful marchers were met with tear gas, billy clubs and mounted troopers. The violence that rained down on them by police soon became known as Bloody Sunday.

Eight days later — largely in response to Bloody Sunday — the Voting Rights Act was introduced in Congress and ultimately signed into law by President Lyndon Johnson. With its passage, racial minorities in the United States finally secured the right to vote.

Many years later, my wife and I had the privilege of meeting John Lewis. We also visited the Pettus Bridge, and walked the same area where he had his skull fractured by people who would deny people like him the right to vote. Today I not only look back on his legacy, but also look forward to the fight ahead. Many people in our country still do not have the rights that he and so many others before him bravely fought for.

These are rights promised to all Americans in the Declaration of Independence, which boldly declares, “We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men (people) are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness.” Legislation making its way through the Congress this month touches on this fundamental point.

H.R.1, the For the People Act of 2021, is making its way through Congress, reinforcing this fundamental point to our democracy: We are all created equal. First introduced and passed in the U.S. House of Representatives, the For the People Act expands voting rights, reforms campaign finance laws, limits partisan gerrymandering, and creates new ethics rules for federal officeholders.

With efforts to rename this bill the John Lewis Voting Rights Act, it includes the measure most personal to me — restoring voting rights to all returning citizens, which would finally make us equal in the eyes of our democracy.



Many returning citizens have been locked out of the very democracy they were born into, reared up in, fell short in, rehabilitated toward, and then returned to. That is why H.R. 1, the For the People Act of 2021, is so important.

On a national level, House Resolution 1 is a real effort to see democracy become inclusive for all Americans — the way those who marched on Bloody Sunday yearned for it to be.

On the anniversary of a day that was a turning point in the fight for voting rights, I'm asking every legislator to rally support for this vital legislation. Every congressional delegate from the state of Florida should think long and hard about the true meaning of democracy and the promise it gives to every American. If you are reading this right now and wondering what you can do to help, I would encourage you to contact your member of Congress and your two Senators to get this legislation passed. Fifty-six years later, let's march on together.

About The Florida Rights Restoration Coalition

FRRC is a grassroots, membership organization run by Returning Citizens (Formerly Convicted Persons) who are dedicated to ending the disenfranchisement and discrimination against people with convictions and creating a more comprehensive and humane reentry system that will enhance successful reentry, reduce recidivism, and increase public safety. For more information, visit <https://floridarrc.com/>.

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