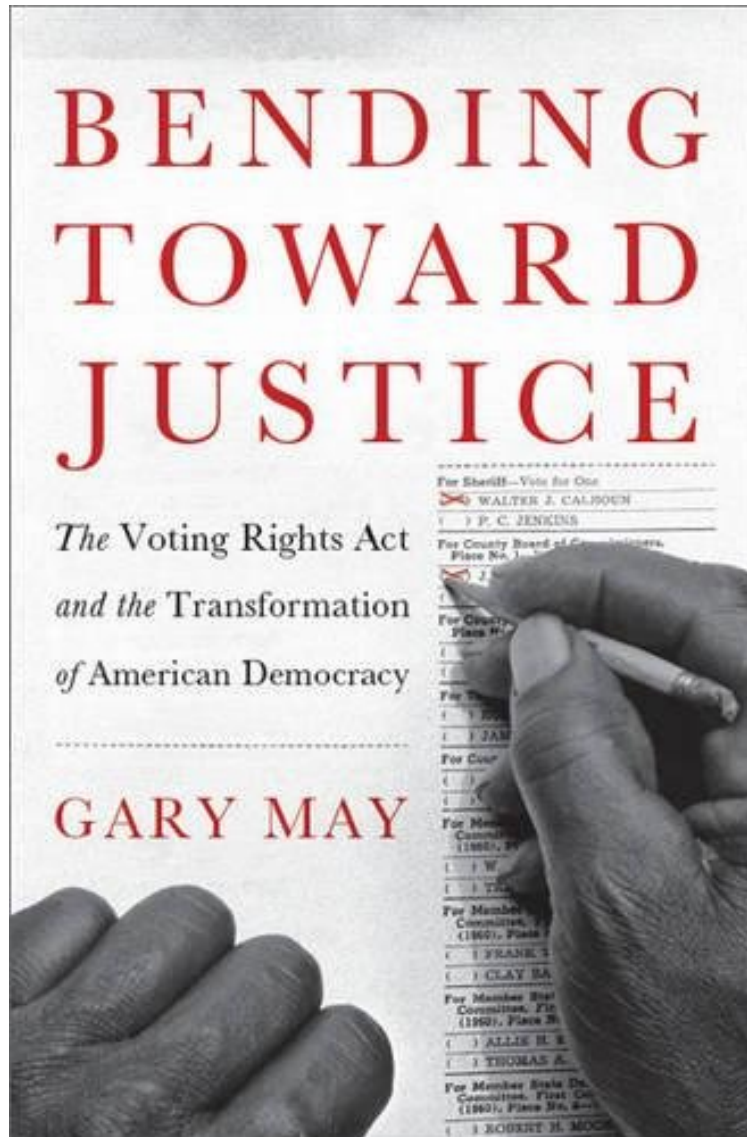


# Bending Toward Justice: The Voting Rights Act and the Transformation of American Democracy

Gary May

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Gary May : Bending Toward Justice: The Voting Rights Act and the Transformation of American Democracy before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Bending Toward Justice: The Voting Rights Act and the Transformation of American Democracy:

22 of 23 people found the following review helpful. The Story of a Critical Law By Alan Ginsberg Bending Toward Justice is a superb book. It fully, yet succinctly, recalls the mighty efforts by so many to make the Fifteenth Amendment a reality. The successful Congressional fight in Congress to pass the Voting Rights Act was complex, but here is clearly explained. Author Gary May does a fine job of discussing renewals of the Voting Rights Act, which coincided with increasing political participation and office holding by African Americans. He tells of recent efforts to limit voter registration and voting--what I call "equal opportunity Jim Crow laws". And with the Supreme Court now (late May, 2013) on the verge of possibly overturning key parts of the law, Gary May reminds us that the "history [of disfranchisement] may well repeat itself."

1 of 1 people found the following review helpful. "Bending Toward Justice" is an extremely important history of voting rights in the U.S. By Janet E. Wolfe As a participant in the last part of the Selma-Montgomery march in 1965, I found May's book an extremely good review of the history of that period and all the difficulties that were faced by the nonviolent resisters of white power and injustice. Though it is not discussed in the book, I also took part in the SCOPE project of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference in the summer of 1965. I worked in Greenville, Alabama. We found out just how difficult it was to register black voters under the Alabama laws, not to mention the harassment that we and the potential voters received. A dramatic change took place after August 4, which the Voting Rights Act was signed by President Johnson. May discusses such problems thoroughly. Not only did May do a good job of describing the civil rights movement, but he also did an excellent job of describing the somewhat tedious efforts to change the Voting Rights Act over the years, especially in 1982 when the Reagan Administration was in office. He also shows the danger of current efforts to roll back voting rights by such things as Voter ID, cutting back on early voting, eliminating same day registration where it exists, redistricting in a partisan manner, and denial of voting rights to ex felons, many of whom are from minority groups. Voting rights for black citizens is only one of the many efforts to expand the franchise in the course of our country's history. The original Constitution only allowed white male property owners over 21 to vote. Now, women, and minorities and young people over 18 can vote, with no property restrictions. The Supreme Court's decision in Shelby County vs. Holder in the summer of 2013, written after the book was completed, has challenged the "preclearance" section #5, which required states or other entities with a history of discrimination to get approval from the justice department for changes. Already such states as Texas and North Carolina have instituted more measures to suppress the vote. Martin Luther King, Jr., said on the capitol steps in Montgomery at the end of the march from Selma, "The arc of the universe bends toward justice.." However, It requires eternal vigilance. This Is a must-read for those who participated in these events and those who are too young to have done so. It is an essential part of American history.

1 of 1 people found the following review helpful. Powerful and Inspiring By Andrew Williamson I am a College student who is a political science major; this book was listed as "recommended reading" for my Constitutional Law: Civil Rights class. I found it be a powerful and inspiring read and believes others will feel the same. While the focus of this book examines the historic struggles that African-Americans faced in their fight to gain suffrage, it is also a timely read considering the recent efforts to suppress the vote. There is no doubt that voting rights are once again under attack, and that attack is coming in various forms. For example, two recent Supreme Court cases have actually challenged the constitutionality of the hard fought Voting Rights Act of 1965. These cases are Shelby County v. Holder (2013) and Northwest Austin v. Holder (2009). The decisions that came out of these two cases have weakened this important Act. Another recent form of voter suppression has come in the rise of photo-ID requirements being implemented throughout the country. This issue has also made its way up the U.S. Supreme Court and in the case of Crawford v. Marion County (2008), the Court actually ruled such photo-ID requirements to be constitutional "on their face" despite the fact that there has never been one reported incident of in person voter fraud in the state of Indiana (where the case was based). If there is any question as to why such laws continue to be implemented, we need not look further than the partisan politics that makes up our political culture. Clearly, the best example of this was when Pennsylvania House member Mike Turzai said that voter-ID laws were "gonna allow Governor Romney to win the state of Pennsylvania." After the election, even though President Obama ended up winning Pennsylvania, the Chair of the Pennsylvania Republican Party stated that their Voter-ID laws had helped narrow to gap between the President and Gov. Romney. When taking the history of voter discrimination into account with current efforts underway this book can serve as an inspiration. Perhaps it will even call some of us who believe in a fair democracy to do whatever we can to make sure that ever vote is counted and all those who want to register are able to do so.

When the Fifteenth Amendment of 1870 granted African Americans the right to vote, it seemed as if a new era of political equality was at hand. Before long, however, white segregationists across the South counterattacked, driving their black countrymen from the polls through a combination of sheer terror and insidious devices such as complex literacy tests and expensive poll taxes. Most African Americans would remain voiceless for nearly a century more, citizens in name only until the passage of the 1965 Voting Rights Act secured their access to the ballot. In Bending Toward Justice, celebrated historian Gary May describes how black voters overcame centuries of bigotry to secure and preserve one of their most important rights as American citizens. The struggle that culminated in the passage of the Voting Rights Act was long and torturous, and only succeeded because of the courageous work of local freedom

fighters and national civil rights leaders as well as, ironically, the opposition of Southern segregationists and law enforcement officials, who won public sympathy for the voting rights movement by brutally attacking peaceful demonstrators. But while the Voting Rights Act represented an unqualified victory over such forces of hate, May explains that its achievements remain in jeopardy. Many argue that the 2008 election of President Barack Obama rendered the act obsolete, yet recent years have seen renewed efforts to curb voting rights and deny minorities the act's hard-won protections. Legal challenges to key sections of the act may soon lead the Supreme Court to declare those protections unconstitutional. A vivid, fast-paced history of this landmark piece of civil rights legislation, *Bending Toward Justice* offers a dramatic, timely account of the struggle that finally won African Americans the ballot. Although, as May shows, the fight for voting rights is by no means over.

From Booklist The Supreme Court will soon consider *Shelby County (AL) v. Holder*, challenging the pre-clearance provision of the Voting Rights Act (which Congress extended for 25 years in 2006). For readers who don't recall the era before the VRAs hard-fought passage, in 1965, University of Delaware historian May offers an involving narrative of the law's history and consequences. May's prologue sketches African American voting rights from the Emancipation Proclamation to the early 1960s and spotlights national leaders (Rosa Parks, Thurgood Marshall, Charles Evers, John Lewis, James Farmer, Rev. Martin Luther King Jr.) present when Lyndon Johnson signed the bill into law. In the chapters that follow, however, he stresses the critical work of lesser-known activists, like Amelia and Sam Boynton, Bernard Lafayette, and James Forman, and the powerful impact they and their intransigent opponents, Sheriff Jim Clark and Alabama governor George Wallace, had on public and congressional attitudes. May then traces the bill's dramatic legislative history, describes the results of its implementation, examines the issues in its four congressional reauthorizations, and outlines challenges it currently faces. An illuminating history of a law that remains all too relevant. --Mary Carroll

From Bookforum *Bending Toward Justice* offers up a bracing reminder of what has changed since the civil rights era, and what hasn't. --Dahlia Lithwick

Rick Valelly, Swarthmore College, author of *The Two Reconstructions* In this vivid and beautifully written page-turner, May brings the story of the Voting Rights Act to life in an altogether new way by deftly drawing out the personal stories and voices of this epoch-making statute. At a time when the future of the Voting Rights Act is uncertain and up for debate, May's book could not be more timely or more readable. Nick Kotz, winner of the Pulitzer Prize and author of *Judgment Days: Lyndon Baines Johnson, Martin Luther King Jr., and the Laws That Changed America*

Gary May's dramatic *Bending Toward Justice* brings alive the critical dynamic between grass roots advocacy and political leadership which produced the most significant advance in civil rights since the Emancipation Proclamation. How this victory was achieved provides vital lessons to any citizen concerned about the importance of voting rights protections and the dangers and challenges to those rights today. The Washington Post