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Martin Luther King Jr. led his famous March on Washington on the eighth anniversary of Emmett Till's death. Fifty years later, his son, Martin Luther King III, led another march—this one to celebrate his father's legacy and address “the festering injustices of inequality, racism, [sic] and poverty in this country.”^[2] Now, nearly seven years later, in the midst of nationwide riots protesting the unjust treatment and subsequent death of George Floyd, the words of Martin Luther King III continue to resonate: The challenge of our generation is “to restore the Voting Rights Act, strengthen voting rights, [sic] and broaden voter access in the legislatures of the 50 states.”^[2]

Congress passed the Voting Rights Act (VRA) in 1965, at the height of the Civil Rights Movement. The VRA prohibited southern states from imposing racist and discriminatory voting laws. Since then, minority voters have had an opportunity to fully participate in our democracy. In fact, according to Hans Von Spakovsky, a Senior Legal Fellow of the Heritage Foundation, “By 2005, the registration rate [and turnout rate] of black voters was on par with and in many states exceeded that of white voters.”^[4] However, in 2010, Shelby County, a white suburb located in Birmingham, Alabama, challenged the constitutionality of the VRA. Residents claimed the VRA was “Unconstitutional because Congress used outdated criteria to determine which jurisdictions would be subject to the preclearance requirements.”^[7] In 2013, during the *Shelby County v. Holder* case, the Supreme Court ruled in a five to four decision that portions of the Voting Rights Act were unconstitutional. Today states previously covered under the VRA no longer need federal approval before enacting changes to their voting laws and 17 states, including North Carolina, South Carolina, and Virginia, have completely reworked their election

laws.^[3] For example, two months after the *Shelby County v. Holder* case overturned portions of the VRA, North Carolina passed a voting bill that implemented a strict photo ID requirement, curtailed early voting, eliminated same-day registration, restricted pre-registration, prohibited annual voter registration drives, and prevented county boards of elections from keeping polls open for an additional hour.^[1] While some of these changes might have been rejected due to the VRA, there was no longer any legislation to stop them from being passed. This is why we as a people must rally together to restore the VRA. We must propose a new coverage plan to apply to the VRA, so that states will once again have their voting laws put in check. The VRA is a symbol of civil rights, and we must not let that symbol be trampled on.

Advocating for voting rights is hard work, and people all over the country have been doing it for decades. Lawsuits such as *NAACP v. McCrory* and *NAACP v. Steen* have targeted and successfully put an end to some of the discriminatory laws that restricted minorities from voting.^[1] This is a step in the right direction. Putting an end to discriminatory laws will further strengthen voting rights, and we need to do this now more than ever. According to the Federal Commission on Civil Rights, federal actions to enforce voting rights for minorities have declined sharply since the Supreme Court struck down the core of the 1965 Voting Rights Act seven years ago.^[5] This hampers the ability of minorities to fully participate in the voting process. In America, full participation in the voting process has never come easy, but segregation is not the only reason for this.

Providing reasonable access to poll stations is a continuing issue for many Americans, but particularly for urban voters. Poll stations are typically fraught with long lines and lengthy wait times that tend to discourage voters. In fact, when asked why voting can be difficult, an

anonymous voter replied, “Because voting is a painful process. [This past election], I stood in line for three hours in the rain just to vote.”^[1] Another voter who spoke on the condition of anonymity stated, “The churches where I vote keep closing down due to low attendance, so I am not completely sure what [voting] location I’ll have to go to right now.”^[1] These are just some of the problems that make poll stations inconvenient. Not only do the locations of poll stations frequently change, but limited voting hours cause voters to wait in large lines for extended periods of time. Since many employers do not provide workers with time off to vote, and many states, such as Virginia and South Carolina, do not require employers to do so, this presents a significant problem.^[5] Increasing the number of volunteers assisting at poll stations would cut down on the amount of time voters have to wait in line, and mandating that poll stations be accessible to everyone—including minorities—will increase voter turnout. Enacting these measures will improve voter access throughout America.

In conclusion, constitutional amendments have provided voting rights to all citizens, but those rights are not yet secure. In order to protect the basic right to vote, *We the People* must be willing to challenge the ideas and laws that discriminate against minorities. Martin Luther King, Jr.'s March on Washington was an impetus for change, but King's dream of a society in which justice and the ability to fully participate in the democratic process is not dependent on the color of one's skin is not yet fully realized. King dreamed that “[his] children [would] one day live in a nation where they [would] not be judged by the color of their skin, but by the content of their character.” Today King’s son, Martin Luther King III, is 62 years old--seven years older than Emmett Till would have been—had he lived—and fifteen years older than George Floyd. There

is still time to make the changes needed to honor the men and women who have dedicated their lives to the pursuit of equal rights. Why wait any longer?

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