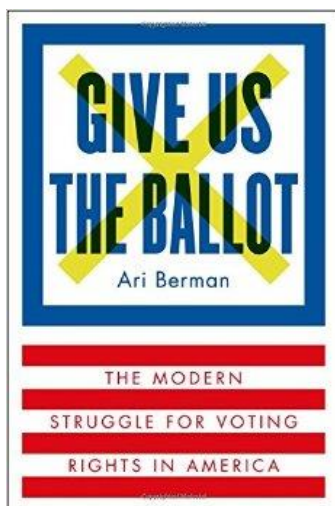


Voting Rights Under Attack: An NCJW Toolkit to Protect the Vote

Book Club Discussion: Give Us the Ballot

Books can offer a good basis for discussion and further understanding of important subjects, and book clubs can be a great method for NCJW members and supporters to get more involved and active. Reading a book about voting rights with a group is an excellent way to raise awareness about the complex history and continued fight for this most basic of civil rights.



Give Us the Ballot, by Ari Berman: In a narrative history, Ari Berman charts both the transformation of American democracy under the Voting Rights Act (VRA) and the counterrevolution that has sought to limit voting rights, from 1965 to the present day. The VRA enfranchised millions of Americans and is widely regarded as the crowning achievement of the civil rights movement. And yet, 50 years later, race, representation, and political power are at the heart of state legislative strategies to keep minorities out of the voting booth following a 2013 US Supreme Court decision declaring a key part of the Voting Rights Act unconstitutional. Berman brings the struggle over voting rights to life through meticulous archival research, in-depth interviews with major figures in the debate, and incisive on-the-ground reporting.

Invite Ari Berman to Speak! To invite Ari Berman to speak to your section, contact Faith Fried in NCJW's Washington Office (faith@ncjwdc.org).

Preparation for the Book Club Gathering:

- ▶ Remind participants to be prepared to discuss how the book relates to NCJW's mission.
- ▶ Encourage participants to bring statistics and information about voting laws in your state and your community.
- ▶ Confirm location and decide who is bringing snacks and beverages.
- ▶ Ensure a facilitator is prepared to ask questions and guide discussion.
- ▶ Download and print copies of NCJW's [Promote the Vote. Protect the Vote Resource Guide](#).

Discussion Questions to Consider:

- ▶ *Give Us the Ballot* is a narrative history of voting rights over the past 50 years. What voting rights or voting activism stories have you heard from family or friends? Do you remember your first vote? Why are personal stories a good way to talk about voting?

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- ▶ Are you familiar with NCJW's work on voting rights and the federal judiciary?* Does knowing or learning about this history make you feel differently about the events in the book?
- ▶ Did anything in the book surprise you? Was there a portion of voting rights history that you previously were not familiar with?
- ▶ In the book, the author details expansions in voting rights and subsequent reactions to limit registration and voting. Why was the 2013 Supreme Court decision, *Shelby County v. Holder*, different from past efforts to curtail the right to vote?
- ▶ The *Shelby County* decision is only one example in the book of how the federal courts impacted access to the ballot box. How did the previous cases set the path for the *Shelby County* decision?
- ▶ Over the course of this book, there is an ideological shift in the federal judiciary regarding its views on the Voting Rights Act and the role of the courts. What made it possible for that shift to occur? How did progressive groups respond? Should constituents have a role to play in the federal judges who hold lifetime seats?
- ▶ The book includes numerous examples of the grassroots work done to expand the right to vote — marches, protests, registration campaigns, etc. Why do you think grassroots organizing is so effective for voting rights? What might you do today in your community to advocate for voting rights or judges that support access to the ballot?
- ▶ During the civil rights movement, the Jewish community worked closely with African Americans to advocate for equal rights. How can we engage today with communities impacted by restrictive voting laws, like voters of color, students, language minorities, and individuals who may be elderly, disabled, and/or low-income? Why is it important to advocate together?
- ▶ The [Voting Rights Advancement Act](#) is the current federal response to the *Shelby* decision. How might you work to support the passage of this bill? Based on current voting laws in your state and municipality, what would you advocate for in this or the next legislative session?

* NCJW was proud to work for passage of the Voting Rights Act of 1965 and has continued to work to ensure access to the ballot box. NCJW launched *Promote the Vote* in the early 1990's and expanded to include "Protect the Vote" in 2008 to respond to the introduction of voter ID and other suppressive voting laws. With *BenchMark*, NCJW's Judicial Nominations Campaign launched in 2001, NCJW was one of the first organizations to launch a campaign aimed specifically at educating and mobilizing people around federal judicial nominations.

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