

# Renewing Voting Rights Act vitally important

By Ron Walters  
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Let me sign on now to the campaign of Rev. Jesse Jackson Sr. to obtain one million signatures to give to Congress and the president to renew the Voting Rights Act by August 6, the 40th anniversary of its signing into law by President Lyndon Johnson. This campaign was rolled out recently at the 40th Anniversary of "Bloody Sunday" in Selma, Ala.

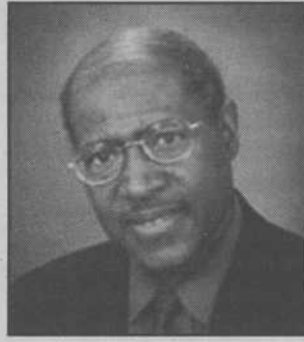
As most of us now know, it was that scene of unspeakable brutality against civil rights workers, flooding into the living rooms of millions of Americans through the device of television, that created the sentiment for the passage of a new civil rights act. Bloody Sunday was an act of personal and collective responsibility unrecognized by many who call for that today.

In fact, the Black liberation movement, comprised of movements for civil right and others proposing more systemic change, was filled with such acts of personal and collective responsibility that went unnoticed. But Bloody Sunday was noticed, and it has lived as a symbol of a people's movement that

sought to acquire the unfettered right to vote as an equal human and civil right.

As usual, the launching of the one million signatures campaign for the renewal of the VRA is a brilliant idea by Jackson, begun early enough to begin the campaign for the renewal of the Act, since important provisions of it expire in 2007. Let's be clear: this year is the 40th anniversary of the Act, but important provisions of it expire in 2007. This is so because the Voting Rights Act, though passed in 1965, was amended in 1970 and 1982, and some of the provisions added in 1982 were to remain in force for 25 years — until 2007.

I will keep writing about this because there is a lot of confusion about this in the—Black community. On many talk shows, I encounter people who think that the voting rights of Black people will end in 2007. That is not so, because the right of Blacks to vote was enacted by the 15th Amendment to the U.S. Constitution, passed in 1870.



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(some in southern elections) during that time. But most Blacks, especially in the South, were excluded from the polls. The Voting Rights Act was passed as a modern enforcement measure to open up voting to all Blacks.

So, I am suggesting that people can go to the website [www.civilrights.org](http://www.civilrights.org) to get accurate information on which provisions of the VRA will be coming to an end in 2007 unless they are renewed.

One of these provisions is Section 5 that called on the states covered by the Act in 1965 to submit all changes to their electoral systems to the Justice Department; another of the 1982 amendments provided for bilingual

The 15th Amendment says: "The right of citizens of the United States to vote shall not be denied or abridged by the United States or by any State on account of race, color, or previous condition of servitude."

This amendment remained in force until the civil rights movement, and many Blacks voted in northern elections

translation of voting materials and assistance at the polls; and another provided the Justice Department with the authority to send federal voting examiners into states to monitor elections.

In light of what happened in 2000 and 2004 in Florida, Ohio and in other states, it is clear that not only are these provisions needed, there also needs to be some action eliminating the exclusion of convicted felons from voting.

There are cases now in the court that ask the question whether excluding felons from voting constitutes a "voting requirement" or test that was outlawed in Section 4 of the VRA. And although the Supreme Court recently refused to hear such a case, it will come again. It should also be considered as an added measure in the renewal of the VRA.

Let us join Rev. Jackson's campaign. Get the petitions from his website [www.rainbowpush.org](http://www.rainbowpush.org) or by phone from his office in Chicago or Washington, D.C.—and let's get going.

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## Justice

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ing programs where there are opportunities for visits with children, but often there are no special considerations for visits with a child. There is so much more we could be doing in terms of educating children's mental health providers and child protection workers. We could be educating them more about what the impacts of maternal incarceration might be on a child. What some of their fears are. What some of the distortions they might have because of their age are, and

how we could support them," she said.

Some of those "alternative" facilities are in California. One program is called the Community Prisoner Mother Program (CPMP), which is a program that allows women convicted for nonviolent offenses to serve their sentences in live-in facilities with their children. Mothers receive case management, including parenting classes, vocational training and substance abuse treatment. "There are three CPMP facilities in the state of Cali-

fornia. Each one houses about 24 women and the women have to meet a long list of eligibility criteria before they can get in that program," Pierson of LSPC said. "I get mixed reviews on these types of programs. On paper it looks good, but I get complaints from some women."

The CPMP program and other facilities like it are designed to make it easier for children to cope with having a jailed parent. Not only do some people question these types of programs, they also question whether or not a

child should visit his/her parent in prison at all."

"All children are not the same. It is possible that there might be a child that would be particularly distressed by visiting a parent in jail"—especially if there isn't a mother/child visiting room in the jail; however, for most children it's very reassuring to see mom and to know that she is ok," Baker said."

About 64 percent of women lived with their children prior to incarceration, compared to 44 percent of men, reports the BJS.

"What we found was that the impact on children when a father is incarcerated is different. There is often a mother in the home who enables the child to stay in the same residence. They still have their toys, their bedroom and mommy is still there... when many men come out of jail, they step out of jail and go back to their family home where things are still in place for them because their wife/partner has been taking care of things. When women come out of jail, often it means finding a place, which is of-

ten a shelter for the first while, because they may have lost their home or apartment."

Baker adds, "There are impacts for paternal incarceration and maternal incarceration, but I think the impacts are disproportionately more severe on children when it's their mother," she explains. "There are practical consequences in terms of change in school, change in caregiver, etc. and there are potential emotional consequences like feelings of shame, hurt, separation anxiety, sadness and confusion."

## Respect

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zines, says DNC spokeswoman Daniella Gibbs Léger. She says the DNC spent less than \$3 million with White newspapers.

It's not just ads, but respect that appears to be lacking despite the significant role that the Black Press still plays,

says Howard University Journalism Professor Clint Wilson, author of "A History of the Black Press."

Wilson says, "The Black Press lost a lot of its luster after the civil rights movement although the Black Press, of course, was responsible for the civil rights move-

ment and led the charge."

Wilson says there are several key reasons that circulation and readership of the Black Press began diminishing after the civil rights movement. One, he says, is because the White-owned media began luring journalists from the Black Press to inte-

grate their all-White staffs. Additionally, he says, television came of age, and people started turning more to television than newspapers.

A. Peter Bailey, who taught a course on the Black Press for four years at Virginia Commonwealth University, says the Black Press has become too soft and must return to its strong activist role of the 1960s.

"It's never going to be a *Washington Post*," says Bailey. "The Black Press basically reflects Black people. But I think it has compromised both its coverage and its editorial stances. The Black Press should be a representative of Black people; not a mediator between Black folks and White folks. And when it stopped doing that; then it began to have problems."

And aging readership is yet another challenge of the Black Press. According to a media audit by International

Demographics, approximately 70 percent of Black newspaper readers are between the ages of 30 and 75.

NNPA Foundation Chairman Brian Townsend, who oversees the NNPA News Service, says he hopes a 3-year-old partnership between the news service and Howard University will not only give students experience in writing for the Black Press, but will also help to increase readership among the youth.

"I think it's important that we give them a training ground so that they can appreciate the value of the Black Press before they go out into the world," Townsend says. "If they stay with the Black Press, then, great; if they go out into the mainstream press, at least they'll understand the value that we bring to the table."

Attracting younger readers is a challenge for Black and White newspapers, Townsend says. "That's a

secret that we're all trying to figure out." Townsend points out that the *Philadelphia Tribune* has a periodical section written by and for youth that could possibly serve as a model for newspapers to reach out to younger readers. Because young people are more drawn to the Internet, the Black Press is also developing a stronger online presence, Townsend says.

Messiah-Jiles, publisher of the *Houston Defender*, remains confident.

"The Black Press has always encountered difficulty with advertising and with circulation as far as subscribers are concerned," says Messiah-Jiles. "However, the real role and reason for the Black Press' birth was out of a need to tell our own story and to make sure that it's a positive story and that people give a correct image of us—and not the story that is told by others, which is often negative."

## Clingman

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the weekend of the festival in 2000."

This is my shout out to all of the brothers and sisters around the country who read this column each week and to all of the radio hosts with backbone enough to share it with the listening audiences. Tell everyone that Cincinnati will really be healed—this time. With P&G at the helm,—Black sellouts, and a—Black face to boot (pardon the pun), this is a "can't lose" situation.

Healing will definitely take place in Cincinnati if the music festival comes. White-owned businesses will be healed; city tax coffers will be healed; the Convention and Visitors Bureau will be healed; the pockets of the folks at Paul Brown Stadium will be healed; and even the former County Com-

missioner, who cut the deal to give away the stadium, duping Black ministers along the way, even he will be healed.

Now a well-paid employee with the stadium, he had this to say about the upcoming healing: "Our hope is, we can show promoters and artists there are these unique facilities out there that offer more than just your 1970s stadium tour..." (Wow! We get a tour too?)... The [jazz festival] is our first venture into a concert setting. We are very excited... to bring it back."

You better believe they're excited. Y'all just follow the money, 'cause somebody's getting paid (off).

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