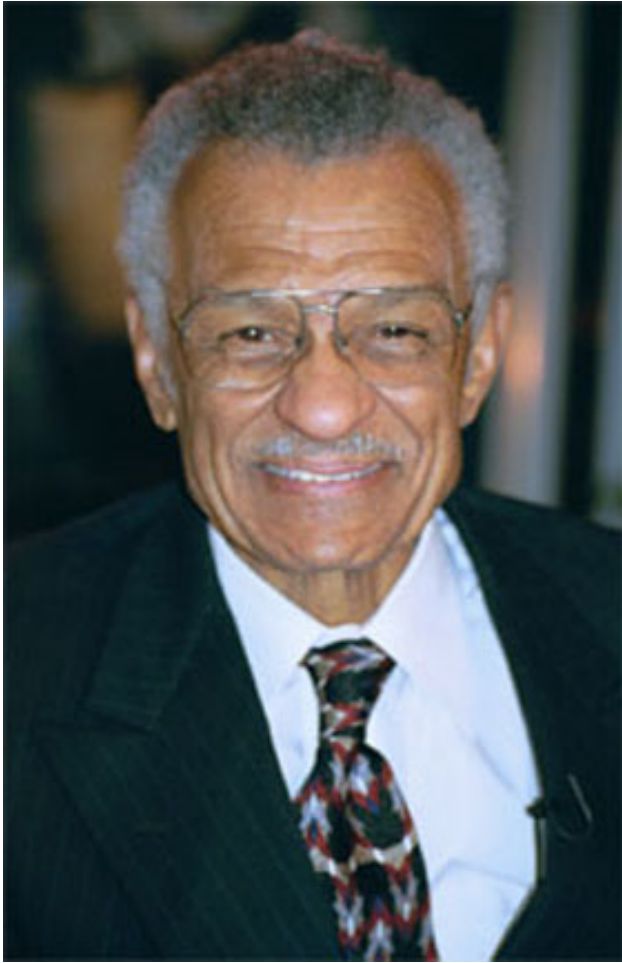


## The State of Equality and Justice in America: The urgency of now must be taken seriously

Written by Rev. Dr. C.T. Vivian  
Tuesday, 19 March 2013 14:06

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*"The State of Equality and Justice in America" is a 20-part series of columns written by an all-star list of contributors to commemorate the 50th Anniversary of the Lawyers' Committee for Civil Rights Under Law.*

*The contributors include: U. S. Rep. John Lewis (D-Ga.) LCCRUL 50th Anniversary Grand Marshal; Ms. Barbara Arnwine, President and Executive Director, Lawyers' Committee for Civil Rights Under Law (LCCRUL); Mr. Charles Ogletree, Professor, Harvard University Law School/Director, Charles Hamilton Houston Institute for Race and Justice; the Rev. Jesse L. Jackson Sr., President/CEO, Rainbow/PUSH Coalition; the Rev. Joseph Lowery, Co-founder, Southern Christian Leadership Conference; U. S. Rep. Yvette Clarke (D-N.Y.); and 14 additional thought leaders and national advocates for equal justice.*

*Here's the ninth op-ed of the series:*

We must take the urgency of now very seriously. Not just because of the pending 50th Anniversary of the March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom, but because the future of America's people; especially those who have been long oppressed, depends on right now.

Since the beginning of this country, the one thing that has never been fully decided is who will truly determine this nation's future? Will it be America's truly wealthy - the 1 percent who can decide every political and economic move in the richest and mightiest country in the world? And who, with the economic 1 percent of Europe and Asia, could take over every major decision in

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this global world? Would it be them or would it be "We the people"?

It is clear by studying recent events; coupled with patterns of history, that the democratic principle of "We the people" is constantly endangered by plutocratic mindsets, those who are often controlled by greed and quests for power. Plutocracy, according to Webster, is one, "Government by wealthy people"; two, "A society governed by wealthy people"; or three, "A ruling class whose power is based on their wealth."

I caution that America could succumb to this social mindset - if we do not continue to stand guard using our democratic powers of "We the people" to the fullest. Take the last presidential election, for instance. Mitt Romney, in his derogatory comment about the so-called "47 percent" of people who he claimed "are dependent upon government, who believe that they are victims" and who "pay no income tax" - appeared to dismiss nearly half of American voters. He even said, "... and so my job is not to worry about those people. I'll never convince them that they should take personal responsibility and care for their lives."

These derogatory comments appeared to signal a move to exclude people of a certain social status. Moreover, it appeared as a move to keep the concept of "We the people" alive while denying it in practice. What would have or could have happened had he prevailed?

It is important to note that throughout history, struggles for equality and justice in America have continued to move from victory to setback and from setback to victory. In fact, about every 30 to 35 years, there's a new movement in this country.

The civil rights movement was the last one. The one before that was the labor movement. Somewhere between 35 and 40 years, there's always a new people's movement. This time, it's the continuation of the civil rights movement, which includes the movement on behalf of the poor.

At the blessed age of 88, I recall the degradation of segregation and Jim Crow. I struggled for justice through the freedom rides and alongside Dr. King. I marched on Washington on August 28, 1963 and I was there to ultimately rejoice at the signing of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and the Voting Rights Act of 1965. And then we suddenly found ourselves mourning upon the assassination of my dear friend and brother, Dr. King, in 1968. He was only in Memphis for the cause of the sanitation workers, the poor, the struggling, and the oppressed who were suffering unequal wages and working conditions.

Fast forward, to see America elect and then re-elect its first Black president nearly 50 years later is reason to rejoice. And yet even President Obama's inaugural speech called for honest labor wages that "liberate families from the brink of hardship."

This is a clear reason that we must continue to march to the polls as well as to take up our banners and plead our causes. We must win our battles in the basic old-fashioned way that it has historically worked - with non-violent direct action protests, coupled with the vote. In doing so, our movement will continue to grow.

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A newsman once asked Dr. King, "How many members do you have?" When Martin answered, the newsman retorted, "Well that doesn't represent much of Black America". But then Dr. King said something that is so very relevant in the 21st century. He said, "We don't operate through membership. We operate knowing that if we're right, people will follow us."

The state of equality and justice in America is a continued struggle for the poor despite all of the strides America has made. The urgency of now is to maintain the power and sanctity of the vote, which has become the greatest power held by the poor. As Dr. King said, if we do what is right, others will follow us. This is the power of "We the people".

*The Rev. C.T. Vivian is national president of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference. He was also a close friend, lieutenant and advisor to Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. This article - the ninth of a 20-part series - is written in commemoration of the 50th Anniversary of the Lawyers' Committee for Civil Rights Under Law. The Lawyers' Committee is a nonpartisan, nonprofit organization, formed in 1963 at the request of President John F. Kennedy to enlist the private bar's leadership and resources in combating racial discrimination and the resulting inequality of opportunity - work that continues to be vital today. For more information, please visit [www.lawyerscommittee.org](http://www.lawyerscommittee.org)*