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OPINION | OUR VIEW

History And The Voting Rights Act

Perhaps it's slightly more than a small historical coincidence that, on the 150th anniversary of the Civil War battle of Gettysburg, we ponder the ramifications of last week's Supreme Court decision to undercut a key section of the Voting Rights Act.

The epic 1863 battle was a pivotal moment in a bloody, fierce insurrection that tore this nation apart. It was a war fought, in part, over the emancipation of a race of people from the chains of slavery, and the guarantee of freedom and the entitlements that come with it — entitlements like the right to vote.

But it didn't exactly work that way. For nearly a century after the war, some southern states implemented restrictive laws that suppressed the black vote. Thus, despite its defeat at Gettysburg and the Confederacy's eventual destruction, the south arguably was able to achieve some measure of victory from the Civil War.

It was against that backdrop that the Voting Rights Act of 1965 was passed outlawing discriminatory voting practices and establishing rigorous federal oversight over the administration of elections, particularly in states that had a history of voter discrimination.

Last week, the Supreme Court struck down Section 4(b) of the Voting Rights Act, which empowered the federal government to demand preclearance — as set forth in Section 5 — of any changes in voting laws made in certain states with a history of voter-rights problems. The decision didn't forbid preclearance; instead, it referred the process back to Congress to establish new parameters, if it so chooses.

Those who applauded this decision have said that the Voting Rights Act is no longer needed because the times have changed.

However, new problems in ensuring voting rights continue to crop up as some states have tried to, for instance, limit early voting and increase demands for voter identification at the polls. This has resulted in major problems in some places, as seen most graphically in Florida last November where voters were forced to line up for hours just to cast their ballots. Whether these things are done for racial purposes or for political gains (or a cocktail of both), it shows that vigorous oversight remains essential to our process, especially given the changing demographics in this country.

So, have things changed? The short answer is that they have, but they have done so because of the Voting Rights Act. It did the job it was designed to do and has worked well for nearly five decades, the recent issues notwithstanding. It did what could not be done in the century that followed the Civil War.

That speaks volumes. In her dissenting opinion on the Supreme Court's decision, Justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg condemned the logic behind the majority opinion. "In the Court's view, the very success of (Section 5) of the Voting Rights Act demands its dormancy," she said. "... Throwing out preclearance when it has worked and is continuing to work to stop discriminatory changes is like throwing away your umbrella in a rainstorm because you are not getting wet."

The court's decision aims to undo something that's working. The schemes that have percolated throughout our history have shown that, in this arena, federal oversight is still vital and needed.

It's up to Congress now to ensure that the spirit of the Voting Rights Act — and of voting rights — remains intact. But the words "It's up to Congress" should give you pause. This issue must not be overlooked or dismissed, or decades of progress could be gradually undone.

kmh

ONLINE OPINION

The results of the most recent Internet poll on the Press & Dakotan's Web site are as follows:

LATEST RESULTS:

Do you agree with the Supreme Court's decision that does away with the Defense of Marriage Act?	
No	58%
Yes	40%
Not sure	2%
TOTAL VOTES CAST	328

The Press & Dakotan Internet poll is not a scientific survey and reflects the opinions only of those who choose to participate. The results should not be construed as an accurate representation or scientific measurement of public opinion.

CURRENT QUESTION:

Do you view NSA leaker Edward Snowden as a traitor?
To vote in the Press & Dakotan's Internet poll, log on to our website at www.yankton.net.

ON THIS DATE

By The Associated Press

Today is Tuesday, July 2, the 183rd day of 2013. There are 182 days left in the year.

Today's Highlight in History: On July 2, 1963, President John F. Kennedy met Pope Paul VI at the Vatican, the first meeting between a Catholic U.S. chief executive and the head of the Roman Catholic Church.

On this date: In 1776, the Continental Congress passed a resolution saying that "these United Colonies are, and of right ought to be, free and independent States."

In 1812, Connecticut Gov. Roger Griswold declared his state's militia would not serve in the war against Britain, reflecting New Englanders' opposition to the conflict.

In 1881, President James A. Garfield was shot by Charles J. Guiteau at the Washington railroad station; Garfield died the following September. (Guiteau was hanged in June 1882.)

In 1926, the United States Army Air Corps was created.

In 1937, aviator Amelia Earhart and navigator Fred Noonan disappeared over the Pacific Ocean while attempting to make the first round-the-world flight along the equator.

In 1943, Bing Crosby and the Ken Darby Singers recorded "Sunday, Monday or Always" for Decca Records.

In 1961, author Ernest Hemingway shot himself to death at his home in Ketchum, Idaho.

In 1964, President Lyndon B. Johnson signed into law a sweeping civil rights bill passed by Congress.

In 1973, actress Betty Grable, 56, died in Santa Monica, Calif.

In 1982, Larry Walters of San Pedro, Calif., used a lawn chair equipped with 45 helium-filled weather balloons to rise to an altitude of 16,000 feet; he landed eight miles away in Long Beach.

In 1997, actor James Stewart died in Beverly Hills, Calif., at age 89.

In 2002, American adventurer Steve Fossett became the first person to fly a balloon solo around the world as he returned to western Australia.

Ten years ago: Palestinian police marched into Bethlehem, taking control of the ancient West Bank city after Israel withdrew under a U.S.-backed

peace plan. Vancouver was awarded the 2010 Winter Olympics.

Five years ago: Colombian military spies tricked leftist rebels into freeing 15 hostages: Ex-presidential candidate Ingrid Betancourt, three U.S. military contractors, and 11 Colombian policemen and soldiers. Police in Randolph, Vt., unearthed the body of 12-year-old Brooke Bennett from a makeshift grave, ending a weeklong search. (The girl's uncle, Michael Jacques, has pleaded not guilty to rape and murder.)

One year ago: Jim Yong Kim began his new job as president of the World Bank, promising to immediately focus on helping poor countries navigate a fragile global economy. The U.S. Justice Department said British drug-maker GlaxoSmithKline would pay \$3 billion in fines for criminal and civil violations involving 10 drugs taken by millions of people.

Today's Birthdays: Country singer Marvin Rainwater is 88. Former Philippine first lady Imelda Marcos is 84. Jazz musician Ahmad Jamal is 83. Actor Robert Ito is 82. Actress Polly Holliday is 76. Racing Hall of Famer Richard Petty is 76. Former White House chief of staff John H. Sununu is 74. Former Mexican President Vicente Fox is 71. Writer-director-comedian Larry David is 66. Luci Baines Johnson, daughter of President Lyndon B. Johnson, is 66. Actor Saul Rubinek is 65. Rock musician Roy Bittan (Bruce Springsteen & the E Street Band) is 64. Rock musician Gene Taylor is 61. Actress-model Jerry Hall is 57. Actor Jimmy McNichol is 52. Country singer Guy Penrod is 50. Rock musician Dave Parsons (Bush) is 48. Actress Yancy Butler is 43. Contemporary Christian musician Melodee DeVevo (Casting Crowns) is 37. Actor Owain Yeoman (TV: "The Mentalist") is 35. Race car driver Sam Hornish Jr. is 34. Singer Michelle Branch is 30. Actress Vanessa Lee Chester is 29. Figure skater Johnny Weir is 29. Actress-singer Ashley Tisdale is 28. Actress Lindsay Lohan is 27.

Thought for Today: "The instinctive feeling of a great people is often wiser than its wisest men." — Louis Kossuth, Hungarian statesman (1802-1894).

FROM THE BIBLE

But God led the people around by the way of the wilderness toward the Red Sea. Exodus 13:18. Portals of Prayer, Concordia Publishing House, St. Louis



The Rez Of The Story

Defining Independence

BY VINCE TWO EAGLES

Hau Mitakuyepi (Greetings My Relatives), An 18th century British writer and philosopher once wrote, "Independence I have long considered is the grand blessing of life, the basis of every virtue; and independence I will secure by contracting my wants, though I were to live on a barren heath."

As we listen to the steady, and sometimes annoying, sound of our neighbors lighting their fireworks, and as we watch the sometimes fantastic displays of colored explosions, I wonder, sometimes, if those folks ever think about why Americans from every corner of this country do this once a year at this appointed time.

I know many Native people in Indian Country and on the reservation have guarded opinions about the meaning of "Independence Day" even as they have their own Fourth of July "celebrations" and pow-wows. It is a thorny and awkward expression of independence for many Natives in accordance with the "American" holiday because as the U.S. gained independence, many Native nations were and are still subject to absolute control called "plenary" authority of the federal government over Indian or tribal governance and affairs. This unbounded control has been assumed by the U.S. but runs contrary to many Native nation's notions about independence and runs contrary to the principles set forth in the "United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples."

Article 4 of said Declaration states: "Indigenous peoples have the right to maintain and strengthen their distinct political, legal, economic, social and cultural institutions, while retaining their rights to participate fully, if they so choose, in the political, economic, social and cultural life of the State," and Article 5 says that "Every indigenous individual has the right to a nationality."



Vince TWO EAGLES

Therein lies the rub for many Native people. The torn loyalties between American nationalism and tribal nationalism creates mixed feelings and conflicting thoughts. Often times the political and economic interests of the U.S. and individual tribes are diametrically opposed. This is especially true when it comes to land issues and treaty issues which are closely entwined.

Article 7 of the Declaration goes on to say: "Indigenous individuals have the right not to be subjected to forced assimilation or destruction of their culture. States shall provide effective mechanisms for prevention of, and redress for:

"(a) Any action which has the effect of depriving them of their integrity as distinct peoples, or of their cultural values or ethnic identities;

"(b) Any action which has the aim or effect of dispossessing them of their lands, territories or resources;

"(c) Any form of forced population transfer which has the aim or effect of violating or undermining any of their rights;

"(d) Any form of forced assimilation or integration by other cultures or ways of life imposed on them by legislative, administrative or other measures;

"(e) Any form of propaganda designed to promote or incite racial or ethnic discrimination directed against them."

This recognition of our rights as indigenous people underscores the autonomy of our tribe as a distinct political and cultural entity. If it is understood that independence is a "good" thing, it won't be so difficult to understand that while some Native people choose to celebrate the Fourth others may not. This is not an effort to be radical but merely an exercise in sovereignty and self-dignity for many Native people. And now you know the rez of the story.

Doksha (later) ...

Celebrating Our Roots

BY KATHY KO CHIN

MCT Information Services

For me, July 4 is special because it celebrates what Lady Liberty symbolizes — our shared immigrant roots.

Immigrants come to the United States from different places and for various reasons. Some come to leave behind a life of poverty. Others come to escape war and oppression.

But they all come with one common goal in mind: to make a better life for themselves and their families. And immigrants continue to contribute to the vitality and economic engine of this country.

My dad, who came to the United States from China with just \$24 in his pocket, achieved the American Dream. Two years after arriving in the United States, he earned a master's degree in electrical engineering. Five years after that, he earned his Ph.D.

In 55 years of teaching, he's trained 180 graduate students, some of whom have gone on to start Silicon Valley companies. What he's contributed to this nation, in the form of intellectual capital, is much more than what he's received in financial benefits.

The same holds true for the Chinese immigrants who came here in the late 1800s. They toiled for long hours for cheap wages on farms, in mines and along the railroad tracks.

Rampant xenophobia led to passage of the Chinese Exclusion Act in 1882, and Chinese immigrants were detained and interrogated at the Angel Island Immigration Station in San Francisco Bay. Immigrants were left to languish at Angel Island for weeks, months, sometimes even years. But they were never deterred because they knew America promised the pursuit of life, liberty and happiness.

Today, it's shocking that some immigrants to this country still have to endure an immigrant experience similar to that of those Chinese immigrants who were held at Angel Island.

We can't abide that in the year 2013. That's

YOUR LETTERS

Defending Marriage

Fred Bender, Yankton
In Defense of Marriage: When DOMA was enacted several years ago a colleague of mine suggested that if we were REALLY interested in strengthening marriage we should criminalize extra-marital affairs. I suspected at the time that her (former) husband had perhaps been unfaithful, but I didn't ask. I did appreciate the common sense of her comment.

Defending Religion

Louise Kuchta, Yankton
I'm writing concerning the column in the Press & Dakotan on Monday, June 24, from Bill O'Reilly. He knows what he is talking about. If we aren't careful our religion will be taken away from us.

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