

Compact history of Americans' fight for voting rights

Book is Portland author's latest

Portland-based progressive talk show host Thom Hartmann is a veritable human tornado of energy. Over the course of his career he has worked as a DJ, an engineer, an entrepreneur, a psychotherapist, a humanitarian and a filmmaker. Along the way, he became an ordained minister. And he's written more than 30 books to date.

Most recently, he wrote a series of "hidden history" handbooks — on the Second Amendment, the Supreme Court, the rise of

This Week's Book

'The Hidden History of the War on Voting'
by Thom Hartmann

Berrett-Koehler Publishers — 192 pp — \$15

big business and — especially pertinent in this election season — America's electoral system.

"The Hidden History of the War on Voting" is a pithy review of the United States' disconcertingly uneven approach toward voter eligibility and access. The book's subtitle "Who Stole Your Vote — and How to Get It Back" makes no bones about where Hartmann is heading with this.

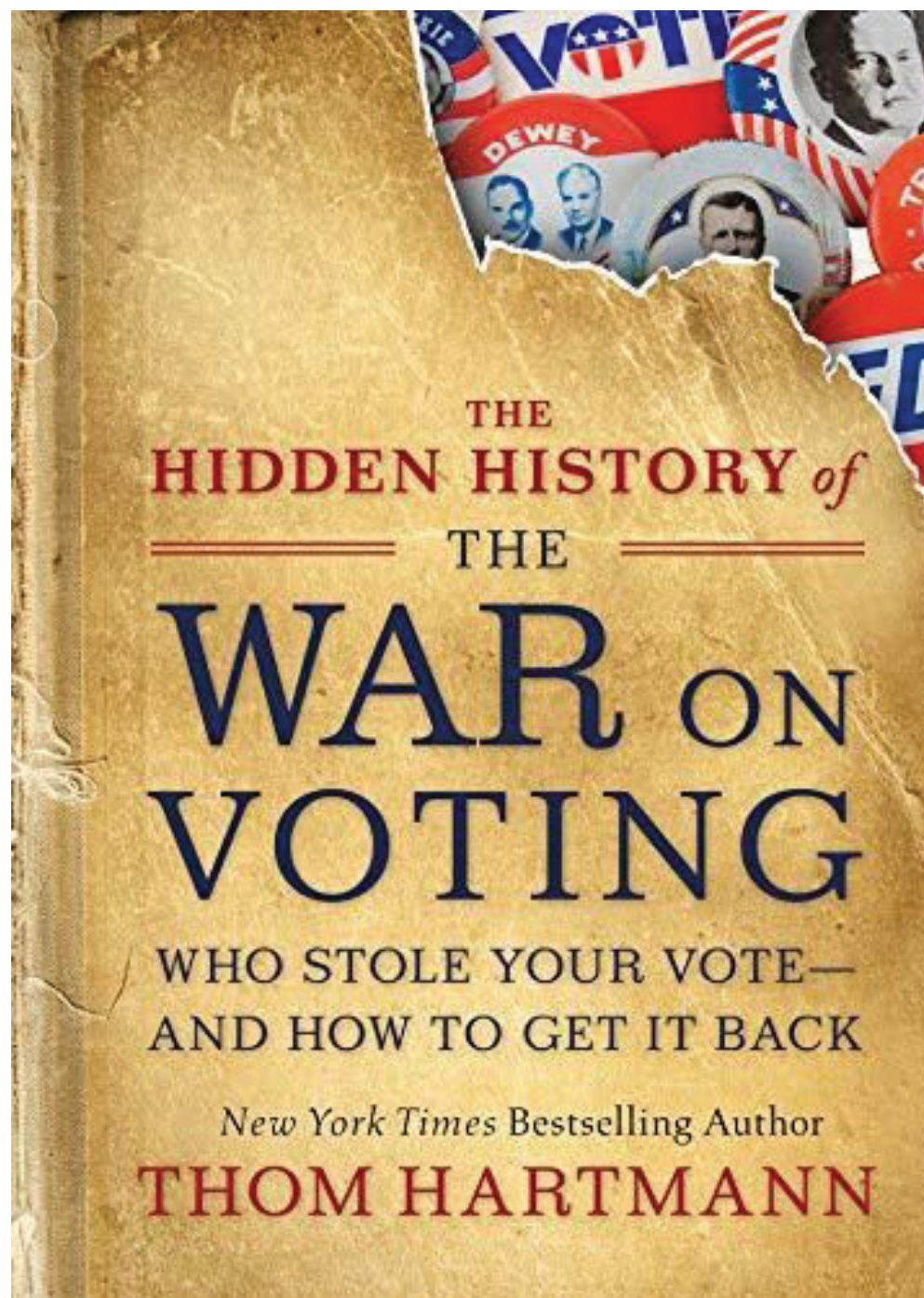
That said, this history supplies a pretty perfunctory gloss on the roots of voting rights inequities. Hartmann gives quick overviews of the Constitutional Convention, the Three-Fifths Compromise and the foundation of the Electoral College.

With regard to the latter, Hartmann points out that for every member of Congress, there's an electoral vote — which he contends creates a gross imbalance because "the 25 smallest states control half of the Senate... but represent only 16 percent of American voters." Consequently, these states can override the will of the vast majority of Americans — and have done so in five elections.

Hartmann touches on how voting rights eventually were secured by Blacks, Native Americans and women — but doesn't mention the McCarran-Walter Act of 1952 which, despite its xenophobic bent, abolished the practice of prohibiting Asian immigrants a path to American citizenship and voting.

He also neglects to cover the Expatriation Act of 1907 that took away an American woman's citizenship and all of her attendant rights if she married an immigrant in the U.S. While the Cable Act of 1922 ended the practice of expatriation through marriage, it did not automatically grant American citizenship back to women from whom it had been taken — they had to go through the naturalization process as if they themselves were immigrants to this country.

Hartmann focuses significant attention on strategies that have been in play over the last century to limit access to the voting booth. These include literacy tests, wanton purging of names from voter rolls, closing polling



places in predominantly poor and non-white neighborhoods, legal obstacles designed to prevent felons who have served their time from voting and today's rampant misinformation campaigns about the "dangers" of voting by mail.

Who are the ones working to undermine this fundamental American right? They are people in power who believe they can only stay in power if they deny fellow Americans

their right to vote.

Chew on that for a moment, then move on to Hartmann's chapter on ways to reclaim America for all Americans. This little book demands your engagement.

The Bookmonger is Barbara Lloyd McMichael, who writes this weekly column focusing on the books, authors and publishers of the Pacific Northwest. Contact her at bkmonger@nwlinc.com.

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**1046 Grand Avenue
Astoria, OR 97103**

503-325-2280

