

OPINION

My Right as an Animal Rights Activist

Free speech is not terrorism

BY LAUREN GAZZOLA

I was three weeks away from taking the law school admissions test in 2004 when I was arrested and charged with domestic terrorism.

I hadn't hurt anyone or vandalized any property. In fact, the indictment didn't allege that I'd committed any independent crime at all, only that I'd "conspired" to publish a website that advocated and reported on protest activity against a notorious animal testing lab in New Jersey.

In March 2006, I was convicted of "animal enterprise terrorism," sentenced to 52 months

in prison, and ordered to pay \$1 million in restitution to the lab for increased security, management time spent dealing with protests,

and legal fees incurred obtaining injunctions against me and other protesters.

Incidentally, I'd been planning to focus on free speech when I got to law school.

Needless to say, now that I've finished serving my sentence at the federal prison in Danbury, Conn., I'm more than a little wary of continuing my activism, as I fear that my speech may once again be deemed terrorism.

That's why, as a plaintiff in a lawsuit filed by the Center for Constitutional Rights in Massachusetts on Dec. 15, I've asked a federal court to strike down the Animal Enterprise Terrorism Act as an unconstitutional

infringement on free speech.

This law punishes anyone who causes the loss of property or profits to a business or institution that sells animals or animal products, or to any business "connected to" an animal enterprise.

In short, it recasts as "terrorism" one of the primary purposes of protest and provides special protection to a particular class of businesses.

This is no surprise. The Fur Commission USA, the National Cattlemen's Beef Association, United Egg Producers, Pfizer, GlaxoSmithKline, and other pharmaceutical companies, all of which are protested by animal rights activists, lobbied heavily for the Act.

The campaign I was involved in when I got arrested was enormously successful. Dozens of investors, customers, and ser-

vice providers abandoned the New Jersey lab. It nearly went out of business several times, due in no small part to vigorous protests around the country.

The speech on our website was indeed controversial. When anonymous activists liberated 14 beagles from the lab, we cheered. When protesters demonstrated outside lab employees' homes, we applauded.

This is the First Amendment's strength, not its limit. The First Amendment doesn't just protect uncontroversial speech. It protects speech that's unpopular, contentious, and even shocking.

As the Supreme Court recognized more than 60 years ago, speech may "best serve its high purpose when it induces a condition of unrest, creates dissatisfaction with conditions as they are, or even stirs people to an-

ger."

The animal rights movement will continue to induce unrest, as have countless other protest movements throughout history, and as the Occupy movement is doing today. But creating unrest isn't terrorism. Unrest is the growing pain of extending rights, expanding compassion, and creating a better world.

When the government protects powerful corporate interests from powerful social movements, America abandons its high purposes, and we resign ourselves to conditions as they are.

Lauren Gazzola served 40 months in the federal prison in Danbury, Conn. for publishing a website that advocated and reported on protest activity against an animal testing lab.



Dr. King's Voting Rights Legacy under Attack

New barriers to voting a wake-up call

BY MARC H. MORIAL

On Monday, Jan. 16, America celebrated what would have been the 83rd birthday of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. The day was marked from coast-to-coast with parades, speeches, and pilgrimages to the new King Memorial on the National Mall.

But in the midst of this outpouring of praise, there is a sinister movement afoot to undo one of Dr. King's hardest fought victories, the removal of discriminatory barriers to voting and the

passage of the Voting Rights Act signed into law by President Lyndon Johnson in 1965.

In Dr. King's day, billy clubs, cattle prods and guns kept African Americans away from the polls. Today, new voter restriction laws on the books or in the works in at least 34 states could deny the right to vote to more than five million Americans this year.

These laws include new photo ID requirements, elimination of early voting, bans on voting by out-of-state college students, and rollbacks of voting rights for ex-felons who have paid their debts to society. Florida has even eliminated voting on the Sunday before Election Day which has traditionally been a day when

African-American churches organized "souls to the polls" drives for their congregations.

The mostly Republican proponents of these new laws claim they are meant to prevent widespread fraud, the casting of ballots by people who are not legally eligible to vote. But both the Bush and Obama Justice Departments have looked and not found significant voter fraud in American elections.

Let's be clear, the real reason behind this spate of new laws is to suppress the votes of people likely to support progressive candidates and issues, African Americans, Latinos, young people, the elderly and people with disabilities. This is unconscionable. It is un-American. And it dishonors the sacrifices

of generations of Americans who have fought and died to extend the right to vote to every citizen.

Fortunately, a growing number of Americans are fighting back. On Dec. 10, the National Urban League joined the NAACP and a coalition of civil rights groups at a "Stand for Freedom" march and rally at the United Nations to protest this blatant attack on voting rights.

Attorney General Eric Holder has also expressed concern about the legality of some of these new laws. Recently, the Justice Department struck down a voter ID law in South Carolina and Holder promises to continue to monitor these attempts and stop them when they violate the law.

But beating back these ef-

forts will require citizen vigilance and action.

In a recent speech at the LBJ Library and Museum in Austin, Texas, Holder urged Americans to speak out and raise awareness about what's at stake. He called on our political parties to resist the temptation to suppress certain votes in the hope of attaining electoral success, and urged policymakers at every level to reevaluate our election systems, and to reform them in ways that encourage, not limit, participation.

We agree. We must not let the hard-won voting rights secured by Dr. King, John Lewis, LBJ and so many others slip away.

Marc H. Morial is president and chief executive officer of the National Urban League.



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