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OPINION

Stealing Our Vote If They Get the Chance

Voting rights have been lost before

BY DIALLO BROOKS

One October morning in Richmond, Va., 32-year old Joseph Cox watched his friends and neighbors go to the polls for the first time.

The fight to get to that moment had been long, bloody, and vicious. But as a black man newly eligible to vote after a lifetime of discrimination, Cox did something that would've seemed incomprehensible only a decade before: He won an election.

Cox was one of 24 black representatives elected across Virginia that year — 1867.

But the response to that progress was vicious.

Racist white politicians worked to find new justifications for stripping the voting rights of African American men (women could not yet vote), alleging voter fraud and implementing heinous tactics like literacy tests, poll taxes, and voting roll purges.

The fact that thousands of African Americans voted and held elected office during Reconstruc-

tion only to face a brutal Jim Crow backlash underscores an important theme in our country's history: Voting rights have been won, then weakened, and then lost before.

Today, too many people take for granted that the advances achieved during the civil rights movement are still firmly in place. But progress is neither promised nor irreversible.

The latest incarnation of the long right-wing campaign to weaken voting rights is Donald Trump's "Election Integrity" Commission, which Trump convened after absurdly claiming that he only lost the popular vote because millions of people voted illegally. But there's not one shred of evidence of widespread in-person voter fraud in the United States.

The same sham justifications used to prop up voter suppression tactics during the Jim Crow era — claims that such measures preserve the integrity, efficiency, and sustainability of elections — are being unapologetically recycled today.

Trump's new voter suppression commission, which met for the first time in July, is led by some of the most strident opponents of

voting rights alive today — people who've built careers on stripping the voting rights of thousands upon thousands of eligible voters of color.

Kansas Secretary of State Kris Kobach, who co-chairs the commission, is among the worst.

After requiring Kansans to

time — putting voters at risk of losing their most essential right.

Another member is Hans von Spakovsky, a former Justice Department lawyer described by former colleagues as "the point person for undermining the Civil Rights Division's mandate to protect voting rights."

progress and regression.

When I think of Joseph Cox winning his right to vote in Richmond in 1867, and when I think of my grandparents having to fight for that same right in that same place all over again a century later, I wonder how so many Americans have forgotten the



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show a passport or birth certificate in order to register to vote — a move that blocked nearly 20,000 eligible voters — a federal court said Kobach had carried out "mass denial of a fundamental right."

Kobach also promotes the "Interstate Crosscheck" program that claims to identify in-person voter fraud. But in reality, the Washington Post reports, the system "gets it wrong over 99 percent of the

Of course, no one should be allowed to vote twice in an election. But voter impersonation is basically non-existent. While the commission might claim to be about promoting the integrity of our elections, their true task is to find justifications for laws that make it harder for members of certain communities to vote.

The history of voting rights in America is a one filled with both

fragility of this precious right.

I wonder how so many are blind and indifferent to the assault on the right to vote — a right people fought and died for — happening right before our eyes today. We've seen these attacks before. And not all of us have forgotten.

Diallo Brooks is the director of outreach and public engagement at People for the American Way.

Threats Move World Closer to Catastrophe

Trump's adolescent bellicosity

BY MEL GURTOV

The problem with Donald Trump's "fire and fury" statement on North Korea isn't merely that it intensifies an already tense situation. Nor is it just another example of Trump's inappropriate, childish language when faced with a complex issue.

Most worrisome is that he seems to have no grasp of how his remarks might play out in real-world international politics. Trying to one-up the North Koreans with threats may give Trump the false sense that he is besting them, since he believes—as always, from his business experience—threats work.

But he has no awareness of how threats are received in

Pyongyang, not to mention in Seoul, Tokyo, Beijing, and other capitals. Trump's language does

nothing to move the nuclear issue toward dialogue, but does much to further envenom relations with North Korea and to support the widespread view elsewhere that the president of the US is unstable and prone to violent actions.

In the past Trump has said of North Korea that attacking it sooner rather than later is the best way to resolve the nuclear issue. Bill Clinton disproved that in 1994 by rejecting an attack on North Korea's nuclear facility at Yongbyon and instead entering into an Agreed Framework with Pyongyang that prevented war. Does Trump still hold to that view?

Numerous specialists, and Trump's own defense department leadership, have concluded

that war would be catastrophic, with immediate one million deaths and economic costs of around \$1 trillion. Needless to say, Koreans north and south, Japanese, and Chinese would pay the heaviest price for such madness.

But Trump, with his well-known ignorance about nuclear weapons, seems blissfully unaware of such matters. He would rather talk about "fake news," attack critics, lie about his accomplishments, and keep pushing a domestic agenda that has gotten nowhere. Nuclear weapons, Korean history, North Korean motivations, and the art of diplomacy are outside his area of interest, and to say he is not a fast study is to be overly polite.

Secretary of State Rex Tillerson responded to questions about Trump's latest threat by saying "Americans should sleep well at night," dismissing the threat as "rhetoric." Given the drumbeat of war that the media

has engaged in over North Korea's missiles, I doubt that many informed Americans are sleeping well. I doubt that US military leaders in particular are sleeping well; they have an inexperienced, unpredictable commander-in-chief who just might issue an order to attack North Korea. And most assuredly South Koreans and Japanese are not sleep-

ing well.

Warlike rhetoric from the US president can never be dismissed. In a word, President Trump is loose cannon, a serious threat to national and international security.

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