

Dear Editor,

Many of us share our favorite Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. quotes as we celebrate MLK Day. Mine is “The arc of the moral universe is long, but it bends toward justice.” I am writing to sound the alarm bell to my brothers and sisters in Generation Z. I am at the tail end of this generation. In just two to three years, all of us will have the privilege to vote. Although we identify this as a “right,” it is one that is not guaranteed without persistent and vigilant awareness and work. The practice of gerrymandering continues to threaten our most salient rights, including our voting rights. Every ten years, states redraw their legislative and congressional district lines following the census. “With gerrymandering, politicians chose their voters instead of voters choosing their representatives. Although Gerrymandering affects all Americans, it disproportionately affects Black and Brown communities.”¹ One month ago, the Supreme Court allowed Galveston County, a county less than 100 miles from where my maternal Great-Grandparents raised my Grandmother and her four siblings, to use a map judges deemed as racial gerrymander.²

At the beginning of this year, I have been thinking about my maternal Great-Grandmother more than usual. Perhaps this is because she was a leap year baby, born in 1920. Her name was Mrs. Gladys Coleman. She and my Great-Grandfather raised my Grandmother and her four siblings in Wharton County, near Egypt, Texas. Just 16 years before my Great-Grandmother’s birth, Texas Blacks were banned from the political system just one generation after emancipation with the poll tax requirement. The legislature in 1903 and 1905 also “encouraged use of the exclusive white primary by the major parties and established an annual four-month registration period that ended nine months before the general election.” As Robert Brischetto writes in *Quiet Revolution of the South*, “the effect of these developments was to depress black voter participation from 100,000 in the 1890s to about 5,000 by 1906.”³

Although Black voters no longer must contend with poll taxes, gerrymandering is a tool by which our rights continue to be threatened. As David Lublin so insightfully writes in his book *The Paradox of Representation: Racial Gerrymandering and Minority Interests in Congress* “The overall direction is clear: the Court plans to constrain the use of creative cartography to draw additional black districts. The negative impact of racial redistricting on black substantive representation will likely increase as the judiciary overturns or states repeal plans that fail to meet its guidelines. African Americans will suffer a drop in descriptive representation as plans contain fewer black districts or a more severe decline in substantive representation as states redraw these districts more compactly.”⁴ Morgan Kousser reminds readers in the book *Colorblind Injustice* that in her prevailing opinion in *Bush v. Vera*, Justice Sandra Day O’Connor declared that the Supreme Court would not have examined Texas’s congressional redistricting of 1991 so closely “if race-neutral, traditional districting considerations [had] predominated over racial ones.”⁵ I greatly appreciate the opportunities that growing up in Texas affords me, including learning about how leaders in my state used the legal system to implement change.

Voter’s Rights suppression is frustrating and exhausting, but I am reminded of my favorite Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. quote. I wonder if I’ll ever see the end of that moral arc of the universe

and I think about those that came before me, those that tirelessly fought to protect our rights. I learned at a young age that my Great-Grandmother was one of the first African American election judges in the area. She was also a lifetime member and officer of the Wharton County Chapter of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), an organization integral to the fight and protection of Voter's Rights for all citizens. She attended its conventions throughout the country. When I feel frustrated, I think about how the Voter's Rights Act was not passed until my Great Grandmother was in her mid-40s. The injustice that she faced did not cause her to turn bitter or hateful. She was loving and selfless, just like her daughter, my Grandmother.

My Great-Grandmother passed when I was 12. During her funeral, I remember the song "This Little Light of Mind" playing as we viewed the video reflection. I reflect on the wisdom of the late Honorable Congressman John Lewis "You are a light. You are the light. Never let anyone — any person or any force — dampen, dim or diminish your light ... Release the need to hate, to harbor division, and the enticement of revenge. Release all bitterness. Hold only love, only peace in your heart, knowing that the battle of good to overcome evil is already won."

My fellow generation Z freedom protectors, let's let our light shine, get involved, and in the words of the Honorable Late Congressman John Lewis let's get into good trouble.

1- Kirschenbaum, J. (2023, June 9). *Gerrymandering Explained*. Brenna Center. <https://www.brennancenter.org/our-work/research-reports/gerrymandering-explained>

2-Hurley, L. (2023, December 12). *Supreme Court Allows Texas County to Use a Map Judges Deemed a Racial Gerrymander*. NBC News. <https://www.nbcnews.com/politics/supreme-court/supreme-court-allows-texas-county-use-map-judges-deemed-racial-gerryma-rcna129385>

3-Davidson, Chandler and Grofman, Bernard. *Quiet Revolution in the South: The Impact of the Voting Rights Act, 1965-1990*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994. <https://doi-org.ezproxy.lib.utexas.edu/10.1515/9780691225197>

4- Lublin, David. *The Paradox of Representation: Racial Gerrymandering and Minority Interests in Congress*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997. <https://doi-org.ezproxy.lib.utexas.edu/10.1515/9780691221397>

5- Kousser, J. Morgan. *Colorblind Injustice : Minority Voting Rights and the Undoing of the Second Reconstruction / by J. Morgan Kousser*. Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1999. Print.