



Keynoter and Advancement Project Co-Director Judith Browne Dianis Provides Post-Election Remarks

From the “No Taxation without Representation” slogan of the American Revolution, to the triumphant Voting Rights Act of the Civil Rights Movement, every historical struggle in our country has involved the franchise. Voting is not only a fundamental element of American citizenship—it is a foundational right. Without the right to vote, all other rights are imperiled.

Yet this year we witnessed the greatest rollback on voting rights in more than a century. This past election cycle brought with it an unprecedented wave of new laws and policies that made it harder to vote in dozens of states, including restrictive voter ID laws that severely limit the type of identification a voter can use, dramatic cutbacks to early voting periods, and attempts to unilaterally throw registered voters off the rolls. It was no mistake, by the way, that these strategies affected people of color the most.

Despite these challenges, a determined American electorate came out to cast their ballot, breaking records in early voting and turnout. Latinos came out in unprecedented numbers, and more young people between the ages of 18 and 29 voted in this year’s election than in 2008. African-American voters likewise exceeded their 2008 turnout in Ohio, Virginia, North Carolina and Florida.

The partisan strategy to make voting harder didn’t work. In fact, it backfired. The national conversation about voting rights was invigorated like we haven’t seen since 1965. Americans started to understand that their rights were under assault. And rather than cower under the weight of discriminatory laws and policies, it motivated them more than ever.

But fighting back doesn’t end after Election Day. The politicians who betted against democracy are only going to redouble their efforts now—laying the groundwork, once again, during the “off years” when there are no elections, when they count on people not paying attention to the right to vote. We must likewise intensify our work to protect that right.

Sure, we enjoyed numerous victories over the past two years – including gubernatorial vetoes of voter ID laws in six states, as well as court or Department of Justice orders blocking such laws in Pennsylvania, Wisconsin, Texas, Mississippi and South Carolina. But there are more roadblocks ahead.

Some of those victories were partial wins with laws blocked for now, but on track to stand in the next election. The Department of Justice’s review of Mississippi’s law has it merely on hold for now. Court orders striking photo ID laws in other states are on appeal, still to be considered by higher courts.

Then there are the problems we saw on Election Day. Thousands of citizens—disproportionately African Americans and Latinos—were improperly forced to vote a provisional ballot, particularly in Ohio, Florida and Arizona. And although the resolve of voters who waited in line for up to eight hours made for an inspiring sight, it also proved that our system of elections is in dire need of repair. As President Obama made it plain in his re-election victory speech, “We have to fix that.”

Fixing it will require new approaches. That means pushing for affirmative measures—a modernized, automated voter registration system; early voting in every state; declaring Election Day as a federal holiday. It means working to enshrine the right to vote in our Constitution to provide national election standards.

Our nation’s fundamental values, in the spirit of the *Declaration of Independence*, are equality and freedom. Election Day should be a time when all Americans – whether rich or poor, young or old, and regardless of race – have the same say when they enter the voting booth. Now is the time to protect those values by doing even more to ensure that our elections are free, fair and accessible to all. Now is the time to build the next-generation voting rights movement. [HNN](#)