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Time for Disinformation The Other Side of the Tracks By Perry Redd BC Columnist

I get sad and melancholy when I hear my people express intense apathy when it comes to voting. Hell, I get sad when I hear anybody give an excuse not to vote. "Man, it's an electoral college that decides; my vote won't count anyway" or "They already know who they want to win, so I'm not voting" or "Those people gon' do what they're gon' do no matter how I vote." My sadness morphs into anger when I hear a neo-conservative celebrating a means to prevent those same people from voting.

Most of us are aware of the pains and sacrifices that brave Americans traversed to gain the right to vote. In Philadelphia, Mississippi, the murder of voting rights activists, [James Earl Chaney](#), [Andrew Goodman](#), and [Michael "Mickey" Schwerner](#), gained national attention, along with numerous other acts of violence and domestic terrorism in the South. By 1965, concerted efforts to break the grip of state disfranchisement had been under way for a decade but had achieved only modest success, and in some areas efforts proved largely ineffectual.

Television, in the 1950s, had become a primary mass communication tool; the information transmitted showed the vicious lengths that some people would go through to prevent certain classes of other people from voting. Many people didn't believe efforts were underway to stop Blacks from voting. The information - or disinformation - on TV could leave them with either stark realities or false impressions of reality. That's what we face today...on an elevated scale.

Through collusive and conglomerated media outlets, most of the country is inundated with misinformation about their franchise or their right to vote. Polls are released daily - especially during election seasons - that forecast the winners. Boasts of accuracy lead one to believe that "the polls can't be wrong." So, if that's the case, then "why should I even go out and vote for my guy?" Though one can argue the legitimacy of polls, they are just *one* mean or method of misinformation - but just one.

I read a September 11, 2012 article in *The Washington Times*, the right-leaning daily in Washington, DC. It gave the impression that President Obama is a Muslim. That, itself, wouldn't be a bad thing if he was, but the article is patently false and misleading. The article quotes the President as saying, "My Muslim faith." Once you read the article, it is clear that the author is trying to connect dots and steer you to a certain belief (reminds me of the Bible). The author is using a supposedly legitimate vehicle - *The Washington Times* (its banner nearly a copycat of its competitor, *The Washington Post*) - to convey this disinformation.

Then, there are the less covert means to suppress and/or steal the vote. In Florida, Virginia and Indiana, voters received phone calls that wrongly told them *not* to cast ballots in person on Election Day because they could vote by phone. We all know that voting by phone is not an option, but to new or "low-information" voters, that option may seem plausible. This is theft and of course, somebody should be in jail.

In Ohio and Wisconsin, media conglomerate Clear Channel funded billboard ads aimed at low-income and minority residents and students that showed prisoners behind bars and warned of criminal penalties for voter fraud - an effort that voting rights groups say was designed to intimidate voters. Who do you know wants to even risk going to jail? The vote fraud is being committed by the very people who, not only paid for the billboard message but allowed the message to be posted! [Clear Channel has since agreed to remove the ads].

Certain classes of people have concocted voter identification laws that draw strict prohibitions against the right of under-classes of people to vote. Courts in Texas, Florida, Ohio, Pennsylvania and elsewhere in this country have struck down these attempts, but the efforts don't stop there. The use of information - or disinformation - is an effective way to achieve the same end.

Within the past week, an *Associated Press* poll reported that 18% of Americans think President Obama is Jewish, but a few days later, it corrected that headline to read: 18% of Americans *do not think* Obama is Jewish. Like a lawyer's question sustained during trial, it cannot be considered during deliberations, but that doesn't erase it from the juror's mind. This election cycle has become a campaign of disinformation, directed toward those likely to vote Democratic.

James O'Keefe, a chief operative funded with conservative money, set up the son of Virginia Democratic Rep. Jim Moran by proposing to him the possibility of committing voter fraud to increase the number of voters. Why would anyone even present this option to someone? The younger Moran wasn't even *thinking* about this until he was entrapped. Unfortunately, he took the bait. This is an extremely rare occurrence, but for those who commit the fraud, it only gives them ammunition to claim 'but the *other* side does it too.' The reality is that most vote scam efforts to suppress voting rights are committed by the likes of O'Keefe and funded by extreme right-wing and Evangelical interests. (Read the latest news about Romney's family ties to H.I.G. Capital, a major partner in the company that owns the voting machines in Ohio).

But what's germane here is that voting is important. It is so important that people will lie, cheat and steal in order to win an election. So much for a "godly nation." Moral compasses, intestinal fortitude and American honor have no place in the conversation.

Voters in at least 28 counties in Florida have received official-looking letters saying they may be ineligible to vote. Election officials in Maricopa County, Arizona, where Sheriff Joe Arpaio is in a tough reelection battle, have twice given the incorrect date of the election to Spanish-speaking voters. First, officials sent letters in Spanish with the wrong date; then, they distributed bookmarks that had the correct day in English on one side, and the incorrect day in Spanish on the other. Do you really think these instances were mistakes? Who would pay a vendor handsomely to make glaring mistakes on tens of thousands of bookmarks? If my business cards came back with errors, do you think I would pay the printer?

Arpaio's campaign also dispatched [robocalls](#) suggesting it was illegal for people to have someone else deliver their early voting ballots to election officials. That's not illegal. Also, in Ohio, the Republican-run Ottawa County Board of Elections sent a mailer to 2,300 voters informing them that Election Day was November 8 and telling them that their voting location had been moved to a building on the east

side of a high school. The actual location is on the west side. An "official" agency did that! You see which political party runs the agency.

Look. President Lyndon B. Johnson signed the nation-changing Voting Rights Act into law on August 6, 1965. [Section 2](#) of the Act, which closely followed the language of the 15th Amendment to the Constitution, applied a nationwide prohibition against the denial or abridgment of the right to vote and the use of literacy tests. Among other provisions, the Act contained special enforcement provisions targeted at those areas of the country where Congress believed the potential for discrimination to be the greatest. It did not foresee misinformation and disinformation, let alone rampant and blatant lies.

A petition at *Credo Action* is circulating to tell the Department of Justice: Don't let Republicans steal the election in Ohio with Romney-owned voting machines. The possibility for vote scam is reality. Beware of where you get your information and know that those who disseminate it are banking on your apathy on Election Day. Go to the polls. Vote.

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