



## Keep your eye on the ball

By: Ben Boyce, Progressive Majority Coalition  
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Citywide celebrations broke out last week in San Francisco and across the nation with the Supreme Court decision to invalidate DOMA and Prop. 8. I share in the joy of the many gay couples who can now have their personal relationships dignified with legal sanction. Welcome to the club, folks. Now you too can struggle to find work, pay your mortgages, raise children on the mean streets of new post-Great Recession American economy, with all the same legal rights as the millions of straight middle-class couples who are steadily getting ground into shabby semi-poverty. Good luck...you're going to need it.

While we were all out on the streets celebrating the marriage equality announcements, cleverly staged to push the news cycle, we lost track of the main event: the gutting of the Voting Rights Act the previous day. The deeply partisan Court unleashed the floodgates of pent-up voter suppression schemes that will ensure that the Republican Party stays in power for another generation. There is a direct line from Bush v. Gore to Citizen's United to ending the Voting Rights Act. The sum of those dreadful decisions is to fix in place the conservative movement's 40-year lock long after they have actually lost the majority support of the population.

I sometimes get annoyed with my liberal acquaintances who like to think that they are so much smarter than the conservatives. The fact is, we are playing checkers and they are playing chess. We are not winning.

The collapse of New Deal liberalism under pressure from the now dominant Conservative movement left an ideological vacuum, which was filled wall-to-wall by the corporate-funded 24/7 right-wing propaganda machine. The key document that set out the strategy for the rise of the Right was the notorious 'Powell Memo', written in 1971 by a top Washington corporate lawyer, Lewis Powell, for the U.S. Chamber of Commerce, two months prior to Powell's nomination by President Nixon to the U.S. Supreme Court. The Powell Memo urged the leadership of corporate America to invest in the intellectual defense of the capitalist system.

This seminal memo influenced or inspired the creation of the Heritage Foundation, the Manhattan Institute, the Cato Institute, the American Legislative Exchange (ALEC), the Koch Brothers' Americans for Prosperity (which funded the rise of the Tea Party movement), Fox News and the right-wing talk radio empire. These are the most powerful and durable ideological institutions in American society, by an order of magnitude over the patchwork of timid liberal foundations and underfunded progressive nonprofit advocacy organizations.

The ideologically diffuse liberal establishment was no match for this concerted plutocratic drive to reshape the terms of American politics. The Conservative movement won the ideological war, captured the courts, and broke down all limits to corporate campaign funding with Citizen's United. Their only barrier to taking every lever of power in sight has been visceral popular resistance by those who would suffer the most under their scheme to redistribute the bulk of wealth to the one percent ownership class. The New Democrats, under Bill Clinton, attempted to regain power by adopting a pro-corporate agenda and then sweeten the deal to gain votes by adopting socially liberal stances. That is still the operating formula of the national Democratic Party.

It is now apparent that the base of the current Republican Party, conservative white folks concentrated in the South and the Rocky Mountain West, is no longer a national electoral majority. The real action for smart money conservative groups like ALEC has moved to the state level, making the Presidency and the Congress less consequential. A few million dollars of undisclosed corporate political investments in gerrymandered state districts (thanks to Citizen's United and the end of the Voting Rights Act) can swing entire state legislatures, making Washington irrelevant.

In Washington, The Senate Republican Caucus has brought the institution to a grinding halt through an unprecedented abuse of rules and procedures, while the House Republicans claim the mandate to block every attempt to enact the President's agenda based on their gerrymandered control of a body in which they actually received over a million votes fewer than the minority Democratic caucus. This strategy of political sabotage reflects their deeply held attitude that only a conservative government can be considered legitimate. If they can't govern, then they will make the country ungovernable, until they return to power.

Our best hope is to get active on reversing Citizen's United and press for reinstatement of the Voting Rights Act. I would like to see my liberal allies put as much energy and passion into restoring the foundations of our democracy as they put into fighting over parcels in local zoning skirmishes or trying to push the envelope on contentious social issue battles. Keep your eye on the ball.

The 'Progressive Majority Coalition' is dedicated to an analysis of local, state, and national political developments to build an enduring progressive majority coalition to chart an evolutionary path forward for American society. Boyce aims to deconstruct the media frames of conventional political discourse in order to develop intellectual resistance to the dominant memes of mainstream media.