

Voter Engagement Product

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Introduction

On November 6th the nation underwent the challenging, yet rewarding process of voting. Whether the challenge presented itself as an unregistered citizen wanting to vote or the lack of transportation to a voting booth, the nation held its breath as results aired in real time across media platforms. As a social work student and a dissatisfied millennial, I submitted my absentee ballot on the 31st of October hoping my vote would make it in time to help my candidate win the number of votes needed to take office. There is no way for me to know if the ballot reached in time; the results were in by that evening and the candidate I had voted for did not win.

I became a registered voter in 2015, but did not fully appreciate the power that slip of paper held for me until our current president came into office. I realized that my action (or inaction) directly impacted marginalized groups, the safety of our peers, and the hatred our people of color endure. I hoped my involvement with the voting party would slow the America's deteriorating social climate.

Organizational Assessment

When I agreed to volunteer with the *#votetogether Party at the Polls* movement, I did not know what to expect. A middle-aged gentleman informed me and the other Southern volunteer that he had canvassed the neighborhood with voting ballots and the tools necessary to enroll unregistered voters. Prior to the mid-term elections, he confessed that he was active in his community and had been canvassing the area to remind people about the importance of voting and how the voice of every person should be heard. The movement of 'Party at the Polls' is a nonpartisan movement that seeks to entice people of all backgrounds and levels of eligibility to come out and enjoy free music, food, and most importantly: to vote.

While mingling with other volunteers, I came across an older woman in her 80's who marveled at the attention the elections had brought to her community. It was hard to hear her voice above the too-loud music, but I quickly caught on that I was in the presence of former Chattanooga representative, Tommie Brown. Time had done her well and left her as strong and witty as she were 10 years ago. Of course 10 years ago she was still serving as the Chattanooga representative, from 1992 – 2012, but now she was taking retirement as a period of personal reflection.

We talked for nearly an hour, me asking questions and learning so much about this amazing woman and her legacy. As a social worker, she firmly believed in the power of the vote; so many years ago she could not exercise that right, so she voted whenever possible and encouraged young people to engage in politics. Raquetta Dotley, the young woman who had made the polling party possible, overheard our conversation and weighed in on the importance of voting. She concurred that it was time for millennial voters to start taking their voices seriously and becoming community advocates. With the rash of gun violence spreading across America, she felt that steps were necessary to be in place to protect the very children who walked in and out of the recreational center behind us.

As I took the I-75 home, I thought about the power my vote possessed.

Personally, I am ambivalent to the moral and organizational implication voting has on the profession of social work. I believe there is no political candidate who can provide a panacea for every marginalized and oppressed person; when we vote for a candidate who promotes the well-being of one group over the other, we have unintentionally hurt someone. I believe social work

and voting are compatible, but I have yet to personally figure out how. Is there a party which encompasses the needs of the disabled, LGBT+, women of color, and all known religious organizations? No. By voting for someone who supports the upwards movement of women in positions of power, have I unintentionally set the disabled community's progress back by 20 years? No part of politics is easy and everyone is under the impression they're right;

What is not an issue of debate for me is the impact our current president has on white young men. In order to be unbiased I would have to

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tommie_Brown