

MLK Jr. Day finds the U.S. at a Dangerous Historical and Political Crossroads

By Don Sutherland

The violence of January 6, 2021 insurrection—in effect, a failed self-coup attempt by illiberal elements backing defeated President Donald Trump—is just over a year away. Numerous Republican-led states have been rolling back voting rights unimpeded. Efforts to safeguard the right to vote have hit a roadblock in the U.S. Senate in which a Republican Minority + Senators Joe Manchin and Krysten Sinema have put preservation of the filibuster ahead of the larger effort to safeguard the cornerstone of American democracy.

On this Martin Luther King, Jr. Day, the United States is at a dangerous historical and political crossroads. The constitutional retrogression that has been hollowing out its republican framework and institutions continues. Illiberal elements have moved toward building a capacity to skew electoral outcomes to their desired result.

The words of Martin Luther King, Jr.'s seminal “I Have a Dream” address of August 28, 1963 ring as true today as they did then, even as the battle has shifted to one of preserving republican government in the United States.

Then, King proclaimed:

We have also come to his hallowed spot to remind America of the fierce urgency of now. This is no time to engage in the luxury of cooling off or to take the tranquilizing drug of gradualism.

The 2022 mid-term election is now less than a year away. The illiberal elements are in a position to regain control of one or both Houses of Congress. In doing so, they could kill the investigation into the January 6 insurrection, if it isn't completed, paralyze legal efforts to hold the insurrectionists accountable and safeguard the right to vote, and undermine efforts to protect the rights of immigrants, ethnic minorities, and others who oppose their will.

There is real urgency now. The gradualism of elevating the “sanctity” of the filibuster above all other considerations—even the fundamental right to vote and the constitutional framework itself—is a path to potential ruin.

For today, it is worth reading and reflecting on King's extraordinary speech. It lays out a humane and lofty vision of what a “more perfect union” could be. It articulates what could be lost if short-sightedness, lack of courage, and gradualism persist.

Dr. King's speech can be found [here](#).