

The Politics of Disenfranchisement: Ideas and Action

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Disenfranchisement is popularly understood as the revocation of the right to vote, but it can rightly be conceived as much more than that. In this essay, I elaborate an expansive political perspective on disenfranchisement and connect that perspective to a vision for political action. By considering both ideas and action, I advance a theoretically and practically important conversation about the politics of disenfranchisement, the empowerment of the disenfranchised, and the responsibilities of the enfranchised. *[Article copies available for a fee from The Transformative Studies Institute. E-mail address: journal@transformativestudies.org Website: http://www.transformativestudies.org ©2017 by The Transformative Studies Institute. All rights reserved.]*

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If “disenfranchisement” were proffered in a game of word association, the first terms to emerge would likely be related to voting. A basic Google search underscores this link: nearly all of the hits on the first ten pages of Google results are about voting rights. Similarly, Wikipedia begins the entry on “disenfranchisement” by describing it as the “revocation of the right of suffrage (the right to vote).”² Both historical and contemporary records justify this popular emphasis on the infringement of voting rights as a central mechanism of disenfranchisement (Keyssar 2000; Redding 2003; Valelly 2004; Uggen and Manza 2008; Michener, “Race, Poverty”; Bateman 2016). Still, while being stripped of the right to vote is a particularly arresting instantiation of disenfranchisement—it is not the only one. Common

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² “Disenfranchisement,” *Wikipedia*, last modified April 26, 2017.