

# Fight Like Hell for the Living

Art Ellison

**BEFORE YOU READ:** Look at the title, the headings, and the photo of the author. What do you think his perspective will be? Why?

## People Died for Our Right to Vote

We vote because we want a better community, state, nation, and world for ourselves but more importantly for our children. People throughout the centuries in this country have fought for the right to vote so that their voices could be heard.

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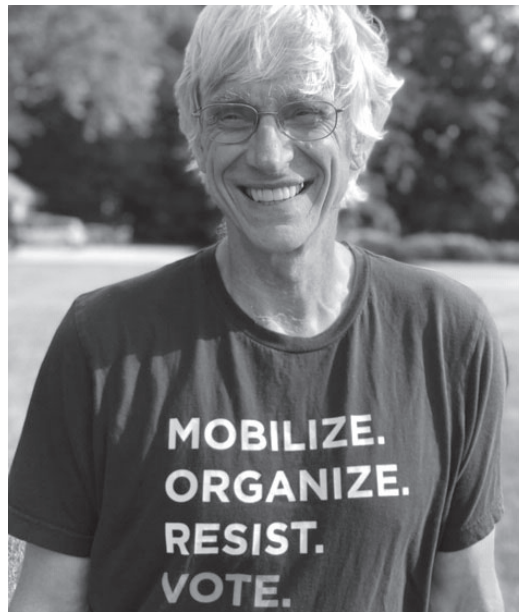
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The men who founded our country limited the right to vote to white males who owned property. After the Civil War, black men got the right to vote, but racism created barriers (poll taxes, literacy tests, and terror from

groups like the Ku Klux Klan), which often prevented them from voting. It wasn't until 1920 that women finally won the right to vote. And it wasn't until the 1960s that people of color gained true voting rights. During both the women's suffrage movement and the civil rights movement, people died to ensure access to the ballot box.

## Every Vote Counts

We should keep in mind that even one single vote can make a difference. I am a member of the New Hampshire House of Representatives. During our last session, we had a vote to override the Governor's veto of the bill to abolish the death penalty in our state. In order to successfully override his veto, we needed a minimum of 247 votes (two-thirds of the House). The final vote had exactly 247 in favor. If we had lost a single vote, we would not have been successful. The New Hampshire Senate



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also overrode the veto, so the bill abolishing the death penalty became law.

## But Don't Just Vote

While voting is at the very core of letting our voices be heard, we should be willing to amplify those voices by helping our friends to vote and to work for the political candidates who support our philosophies and beliefs. Meanwhile, we keep in mind the words of the famous labor organizer Mother Jones who said, "Pray for the dead, and fight like hell for the living."

### AFTER YOU READ:

1. How does Art Ellison feel about voting? How do you know?
2. Explain in your own words what happened in the "Every Vote Counts" section.
3. What if you can't vote? (See pp. 28-29.)