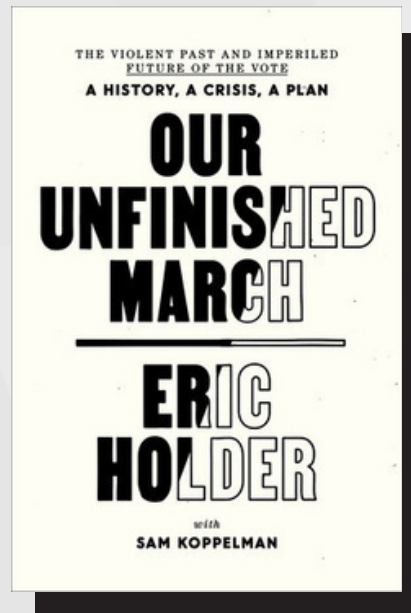


PAGES FOR PROGRESS

Study Guide:

“Our Unfinished March:
The Violent Past and
Imperiled Future of the
Vote—A History,
A Crisis, A Plan”

Eric Holder with
Sam Koppelman



Preface

In the summer of 2024, the second cohort of Pages for Progress gathered virtually to read and study Eric Holder's book, *Our Unfinished March*. The meetings took place amid a tense election season, as the United States grappled with growing concerns about the state of its democracy. It was a diverse group of both laity and clergy committed to studying the history of voting rights in the United States while also focusing on how to ensure free and fair elections.

In the following pages, you'll find a general overview of each session along with detailed guidelines. This study guide is designed for use in small groups within your local church, district, annual conference, ecumenical groups, or neighborhood community groups. Meetings can be held either in person or virtually.

If you have any feedback or questions on this study guide, please email seminars@umcjustice.org, we'd love to hear from you!

This study guide is the result of the spirited and insightful discussions from the Summer 2024 cohort. A heartfelt thanks to everyone in the cohort!

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Structure

This study is structured into four sessions. Each session features a welcome, the establishment of communication guidelines, a theological grounding, a discussion of the book, and a closing. Sessions are approximately 90 minutes long. Additionally, this resource guide includes a "Take Action" page with suggestions on how to prepare and engage in elections.

Reading Assignments by Session

Session One: Introduction to Chapter 2

Session Two: Chapter 3 to Chapter 5

Session Three: Chapter 6 to Chapter 8

Session Four: Chapter 9 to Conclusion

Session Overview

WELCOME

(approximately 10 minutes)

Begin with prayer.

This is an opportunity to get to know the group and establish communication guidelines.

We recommend the [Communication Guidelines](#) created by Eric Law, from The Kaleidoscope Institute.

Respectful Communication Guidelines

R take RESPONSIBILITY for what you say and feel without blaming others

E use EMPATHETIC listening

S be SENSITIVE to differences in communication/cultural styles

P PONDER what you hear and feel before you speak

E EXAMINE your own assumptions and perceptions

C keep CONFIDENTIALITY

T TOLERATE ambiguity because we are not here to debate. There are no “winners” or “losers”

S STEP UP/STEP BACK If you notice that you are speaking a lot, step back to create space for others to speak. If you notice that you have much to share but not, take courage and speak up so that others can learn from you. (*Not from Eric Law, but from previous study groups.)

(Source: [Eric Law's "Respectful Communication Guidelines"](#))

THEOLOGICAL GROUNDING (approximately 25 minutes)

Each theological grounding session has been designed to align with the chapters assigned for that week. This alignment serves two purposes:

1. so that we don't separate our religious self from the realities of the world, and
2. so that we practice what it means to live with “holding the newspaper in one hand and the bible in the other.”

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS (approximately 50 minutes)

Each question was created with the assigned readings in mind to go deeper into the chapter topic and/or to understand the social analysis through a faith lens. It is recommended to provide the questions in advance to give the participants time to develop their answers.

If you have a large group, we recommend breaking up into smaller groups/breakout rooms for the book discussion.

CLOSING (approximately 5 minutes)

Each session ends with a reminder of the assigned chapters for the following gathering and a benediction.

The 2024 Summer Cohort ended each session with the benediction given by Bishop Woodie White at the 1996 General Conference in Denver, Colorado.

Feel free to close with the benediction by Bishop Woodie White or with another prayer.

Benediction

And now,
May the Lord torment you.

May the Lord keep before you the faces of the hungry, the lonely, the rejected and the despised.

May the Lord afflict you with pain for the hurt, the wounded, the oppressed, the abused, the victims of violence.

May God grace you with agony, a burning thirst for justice and righteousness.

May the Lord give you courage and strength and compassion to make ours a better world, to make your community a better community, to make your church a better church.

And may you do your best to make it so, and after you have done your best, may the Lord grant you peace. Amen.

Sessions

Session One: Introduction to Chapter 2

WELCOME (approximately 10 minutes)

Say: Welcome to the first session of Pages for Progress as we read and study, “Our Unfinished March” by Eric Holder. Since this is our first gathering, let’s go around and get to know each other. Please share your name and a memory of voting for the first time.

Pause for a time of sharing.

Pray: God of Justice. We thank you for the opportunity to gather. We thank you for this opportunity for fellowship. We thank you for the conversations that we are to have. May it open our eyes, stir our hearts, and put faith into action. May your Spirit guide us. In Jesus’ name, we pray. Amen.

Say: Since this is our first meeting. We will spend a few minutes on communication guidelines to create a safe space for everyone to share and discuss.

*Create or introduce Eric Law’s Respectful
Communication Guidelines*

THEOLOGICAL GROUNDING (approximately 25 minutes)

Say: The passage that we will be looking at today is from Luke 18: 1-8. We are going to read the passage in its entirety and then we will read it again, taking time to look at the verses.

Read: Luke 18: 1-8

Pause before reading the passage the second time.

Read: Luke 18: 1-8

Ask: As stated in verse 1, the parable underscores Jesus' message to remain persistent in prayer. How do you interpret Jesus' understanding of prayer as depicted in the parable? In an era when the phrase "thoughts and prayers" often feels empty, how does this parable shape your view of persistent prayer? What is the connection between prayer, persistence, and advocacy?

Pause for discussion.

Ask: In this parable, justice is not achieved through the judge's change of heart, but through the widow's persistence. Verse 5 states, "Yet because this widow keeps bothering me, I will grant her justice, so that she may not wear me out by continually coming." The English Standard Version translates "wear me out" as "beat me down." This imagery also evokes the prophet Amos (5:24) and his description of justice "flowing down like a mighty stream." How does the course of justice, as described in this parable, align with your own experiences and understanding of justice?

Pause for discussion.

Ask: Faith is often understood as "if we have faith that God will deliver." How does this parable, which upends the focus on having faith in God's deliverance to a focus on whether can we be steadfast, and reliable in the pursuit of justice, affect our understanding of God, justice, and advocacy? How do you receive the question in verse 8? Is it a challenge? A critique? An invitation? What are the challenges we find in the church?

Pause for discussion.

BOOK DISCUSSION QUESTIONS (approximately 50 minutes)

Question #1 - In the introduction, Holder highlights the connection between Jimmie Lee Jackson, his grandfather Cage Lee, and movement elders like Representative Lewis and Diane Nash. What is the importance of intergenerational engagement in the effort to achieve voting equity and preserve access to the ballot?

If you have a large group, break up into small groups for the Book Discussion.

Question #2 - Holder presents four reasons supporting his case for democracy. Do you find these principles to be valid in terms of creating policies that reflect the desires of people in your community or state, and in holding elected officials accountable?

Question #3 - How does theology, specifically white Christian nationalism, influence the perspectives of individuals like Governor Morris, John Dickinson, and Elbridge Gerry, whom Holder discusses as opponents of democracy? How do these influences manifest today within the Christian faith, particularly in the context of support for or opposition to democracy among people of faith?

Question #4 - In the second chapter, Holder argues that the narrative taught in schools about Reconstruction was part of a deliberate effort to obscure a critical period in American history, one that marked the beginning of a multi-racial democracy. In many ways, Reconstruction was similar to Carol Anderson's examination of voter suppression, a "feigned legal innocence" and "legislative evil genius," mechanisms designed to thwart the equality Reconstruction aimed to establish. Where do we see examples of this "legislative evil genius" in modern-day voter suppression tactics?

CLOSING (approximately 5 minutes)

Say: As we conclude our gathering today, let us remember the Communication Guidelines we discussed earlier. Reflect on our thoughtful conversation and consider practical ways to put our insights into action. For our next meeting, please read Chapters 3 through 5.

If divided into small groups, bring groups back to the main group.

Close the meeting with the Benediction by Bishop White (located in “Structure”) or a prayer of your choosing.

Session Two: Chapters 3 - 6

WELCOME (approximately 10 minutes)

Say: Welcome to the second session of Pages for Progress!
Let us start with prayer.

You may ask for a volunteer to lead in prayer or use the prayer below.

Pray: God of Mercy and Justice, we thank you for this time to gather to connect, share, learn, and grow. May your Spirit continue to be with us. In Jesus' name, we pray. Amen.

Remind everyone of the Communication Guidelines created during the first session or Eric Law's Respectful Communication Guidelines.

THEOLOGICAL GROUNDING (approximately 25 minutes)

Say: We will be looking at a few different passages today in correlation to passages that we read. Proverbs 14:34 says, "Righteousness exalts a nation, but sin condemns any people." Chapter 2 says, "In just over a decade following the end of the Civil War, close to two thousand African-Americans held elected office- serving in city hall, governor's mansions, and even Congress. There were Black mayors, Black sheriffs, Black senators. And they used their power to make a difference, persisting in the face of death threats to advocate for workers, reform the criminal justice system, and most important, increase access to education."

Ask: In what ways does the divine let nations and people know the consequences of discrimination and exclusion?

Pause for discussion.

Say: Deuteronomy 1:13 says, "Choose some wise, understanding, and respected men from each of your tribes, and I will set them over you." In Chapter 3 we read, "Harry

Burn, on the other hand, emerged from his bed with less certainty than ever. The twenty-four-year-old legislator had indicated that he would vote against the amendment, but his mother had written him a note telling him to “be a good boy” and “vote for suffrage,” and Burns had been raised to always listen to his mother. As he sat on the floor of the House, the letter tucked in his jacket pocket, he had no idea what to do.”

Ask: What should be a litmus test for people of faith when electing and voting for persons in political leadership?

Pause for discussion.

Say: Proverbs 29:2 says, “When the righteous thrive, the people rejoice; when the wicked rule, the people groan.” In Chapter 5, we read, “I’m shocked, dismayed, disappointed,” Congressman Lewis said when he learned about the decision. “These men never stood in unmovable lines. They were never denied the right to participate in the democratic process. They were never beaten, jailed, run off their farms, or fired from their jobs. No one they knew died simply trying to register to vote.”

Ask: Where do you hear or see the groans?

Pause for discussion.

BOOK DISCUSSION QUESTIONS (approximately 50 minutes)

Question #1 - In Chapter 3, Holder states that “abolitionism is also what led to the political awakenings of Lucretia Mott and Elizabeth Cady Stanton...to organize the first convention for women’s rights.” As the movement progressed, and the “white women marched forward, women of color were left behind... This wasn’t an accident—it was by design, the product of a suffrage movement led by white women, who chose the expediency of supremacy over the inclusivity of justice.”

If you have a large group, break up into smaller groups for the Book Discussion.

- In the pursuit of justice, there is often tension between justice for some and justice for all. What are some contemporary examples where advocacy for specific groups competes with or challenges our ability to advocate for all?
- According to Kimberlé Crenshaw, intersectionality refers to the interconnectedness of social categories such as race, gender, class, sexuality, and ability—all of which shape an individual's experiences, challenges, and opportunities. It recognizes how systems of oppression, such as racism and sexism, intersect to create unique forms of discrimination that are often overlooked. How can incorporating intersectionality into advocacy work create a more inclusive and equitable society? What is at risk if we don't incorporate intersectionality into the work for justice?

Question #2 - In Chapter 4, Holder highlights the nation's heightened attention to the deaths of Andrew Goodman and Michael Schwerner, two white students who joined the "Freedom Summer of 1964" in Mississippi. As Rita Schwerner, Michael's wife, pointed out, "It is only because my husband and Andrew Goodman were white that the national alarm has been sounded," acknowledging the often-overlooked Black lives lost. Sixty years later, what has changed in the valuing of Black lives versus white lives? And what challenges persist? Or, as Chief Justice John Roberts argued for the majority in *Shelby County v. Holder*, is America fundamentally different now than when the Voting Rights Act of 1965 was enacted?

Question #3 - In Chapter 5, Holder describes gerrymandering and the impact of *Shelby County v. Holder* as a backlash to President Obama and an attack on democracy. How does gerrymandering affect the fairness and integrity of elections, and what are its implications for

NOTES

The 19th Amendment (1920) enabled the vote for most white women. Black Americans (1965), Native Americans (1924 but some states barred voting until 1962), Hispanic/Latino Americans (1965), and Asian Americans (1952). For many of these communities, it wasn't until the 1975 extension of the Voting Rights Act that prohibited discrimination against "language minorities" that truly expanded voting access to many minority citizens.

RESOURCES

[The Root: How Racism Tainted Women's Suffrage](#)

[Not All Women Gained the Vote in 1920](#)

[SHE RESISTED: Strategies of Suffrage](#)

[When the Suffrage Movement Sold Out to White Supremacy](#)

democratic representation? Are you aware of gerrymandering in your state? What are the detrimental effects of voter suppression following the Shelby County v. Holder decision, and how has it impacted voter turnout and equal access to the ballot box?

CLOSING (approximately 5 minutes)

Say: As we close our meeting for today, let us reflect on our conversations and consider ways to bring our faith into action for a just and fair election. For our next gathering, please read Chapters 6-8.

Close the meeting with the Benediction by Bishop Woodie White or a prayer of your choosing.

RESOURCES

[Redistricting Report Card](#)

[Voter Suppression](#)

[Gerrymandering & Fair Representation](#)

Bring back small groups to close the session together.

Session Three: Chapters 6 - 8

WELCOME (approximately 10 minutes)

Say: Welcome to our third session! Before we begin, let's begin with a word of prayer.

You may ask a participant to lead the group in prayer. If no one volunteers, you may lead the group in your own prayer or open with the prayer below.

Pray: God of Mercy and Justice we invite your Holy Spirit into this space. We ask that you dwell in this fellowship. We ask that you open our eyes and open our ears so that we may come to know more of who you are. We thank you for this time. In Jesus' name, we pray. Amen.

Remind everyone of the Communication Guidelines created during the first session or Eric Law's Respectful Communication Guidelines.

THEOLOGICAL GROUNDING (approximately 25 minutes)

Read: Mark 6:14-29

Say: Our passage for today is located in the middle of Chapter 6 in between examples of Jesus' ministry:

- v. 1-6 The Rejection of Jesus at Nazareth
- v. 7-13 The Mission of the Twelve
- v. 14-29 The Death of John the Baptist
- v. 30-44 Feeding the Five Thousand
- v. 45-52 Jesus Walks on the Water
- v. 53- 56 Healing the Sick in Gennesaret

Ask: Why does Mark place the story of John the Baptist's death between the mission and ministry of Jesus? How does the leadership of Herod Antipas contrast with that of Jesus, and what lessons can we learn about leadership and governance?

Pause for discussion.

Ask: A closer look at verses 14-29 depicts “King” Herod at his birthday party, in what resembles a political parody. Herod, called “King” despite not holding the true title, is surrounded by influential leaders meant to serve the people. Yet, no one dares to oppose Herodias’ wishes, resulting in John the Baptist’s life being taken on a whim for entertainment. How does this passage illustrate the dangers to society when checks and balances of power fail, and consequences for those who speak truth to power are silenced or punished?

Note: A few points to mention, if not mentioned by the participants.

- v. 14 “King Herod” Herod Antipas was the son of Herod I the Great (Herod when Jesus was born) and was a tetrarch of Galilee and Peraea. He wanted to be King but was never given that title.
- v. 16-17 Beginning of a flashback, connecting Jesus to John the Baptist.
- v. 18 John the Baptist speaking out against the marriage of Herod and Herodias (Leviticus 18). Herod was first married to a Nabataean princess; he divorced her to marry his brother’s wife (Herodias.)
- v. 21 The guest list for his birthday party is the inner circle of power. Courtiers- the court nobles, the officers-military, the leading Galileans- business/commercial leaders.
- v. 22 Salome, daughter of Herodias with her first husband (whom she divorced) the half-brother of Herod Antipas.

Pause for discussion.

BOOK DISCUSSION QUESTIONS (approximately 50 minutes)

Question #1 - In Chapter 6, Holder describes the Trump presidency as a period when many of the checks on presidential power failed, with the Supreme Court, attorneys general, and the Senate not holding him accountable. What are the dangers of a broken system of checks and balances, and how can we address and fix these issues to ensure accountability and uphold democratic principles?

If you have a large group, break up into smaller groups for the Book Discussion.

Question #2 - Chapter 7 begins with a profile of Chris Hollins, an accomplished individual who was faced with a life-altering choice to make: take on the task of a seemingly menial and high-stress yet possibly rewarding position such as County Clerk, or distance himself from the fray and messiness of ensuring security and access to democracy. In understanding this framework and how Eric Holder explains this story, in what ways does democracy require sacrifice and commitment by its participants? How can you stir up that understanding within your local community?

Question #3 - In understanding the actions from the Texas State Democrats as bold and impacting, what do you believe keeps our elected officials of goodwill from taking “out-of-the-norm” approaches? What about the faith community?

CLOSING (approximately 5 minutes)

Bring back discussion groups to close the session together.

Bring back small groups to close the session together.

Say: Next week will be our final gathering. Please read Chapter 9 to the conclusion.

Close the meeting with the Benediction by Bishop Woodie White or a prayer of your choosing.

Session Four: Chapters 9 to Conclusion

WELCOME (approximately 10 minutes)

Say: Welcome to the last session of Pages for Progress!
Before we begin, let's open in a word of prayer.

Ask for a volunteer to lead in prayer or use the prayer below.

Pray: God that knows us by our name, we thank you for gathering us together. We thank you for this group that has been dedicated to reading and meeting to make a change on this land. We ask for courage to not just know with our minds but to live out our faith. We pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.

Remind everyone of the Communication Guidelines created during the first session or Eric Law's Respectful Communication Guidelines.

THEOLOGICAL GROUNDING (approximately 25 minutes)

Read: Luke 10:25-37

Ask: The passage starts with a legal expert asking Jesus about inheriting eternal life. Luke frames the dialogue around interpreting the text (hermeneutics) with the question "What must I do?" versus understanding how we acquire knowledge (epistemology) with "How do you read?" Jesus acknowledges the lawyer's theological understanding but highlights the importance of practicing what one knows rather than just knowing. How can we avoid the pitfalls of possessing knowledge without taking action, and how can we effectively put our faith into practice?

Pause for discussion.

Ask: The parable of the Good Samaritan is widely recognized and addresses a question posed by a lawyer.

Jesus tells a story set in first-century Judaism, where rules and boundaries dictated how Jews should interact with Gentiles, including Samaritans, and how priests should engage with Israelites. These boundaries reinforced existing power dynamics and privileges. How does this parable relate to the history of voting rights and the broader struggle for democracy?

Pause for discussion.

Ask: The story of Mary and Martha is often interpreted as a lesson on "salvation by faith, not works," cautioning against the idolatry of constant activity. Jesus' rebuke to Martha can also be seen as a reminder of the Sabbath—a time for renewal and refreshment. Given that the pursuit of justice can be a long and exhausting journey, what keeps you grounded in your faith, your sabbath during this work? What sustains you in your efforts for justice?

Pause for discussion.

BOOK DISCUSSION QUESTIONS (approximately 50 minutes)

Question #1 - In Chapter 9, Holder argues that one of the ways to save the Senate is to abolish the filibuster. In May 2005, the then-Senator Biden stated, "Getting rid of the filibuster has long-term consequences. If there is one thing I have learned in my years here, once you change the rules and surrender the Senate's institutional power, you never get it back." Is there a danger in getting rid of the filibuster?

If you have a large group, break up into smaller groups for the Book Discussion.

Pause for discussion.

Question #2 - In Chapter 10, Holder advocates for abolishing the Electoral College through the National Popular Vote Interstate Compact. Considering the information on the provided website and the status of your home state, has it adopted the NPVIC? If not, what are the

reasons behind this decision (consider the demographics/population)? (As of April 2024, the National Popular Vote has been enacted into law in 18 jurisdictions, with 209 electoral votes. It will take into effect when there are 270 electoral votes.) [Status of National Popular Vote Bill in Each State](#)

Pause for discussion.

Question #3 - On July 29, 2024, President Biden proposed significant changes to the U.S. Supreme Court, including an enforceable code of ethics, term limits for justices, and a constitutional amendment to restrict justices' decisions on presidential immunity. Holder, in Chapter 11, also recommended an 18-year term limit for Supreme Court Justices. What are the potential risks associated with maintaining lifetime tenure for federal judges? (Article III Section 1 of the U.S. Constitution provides lifetime tenure for Supreme Court and federal judges (The judges, both Supreme Court and inferior Courts, shall hold their Offices during good Behaviour..."))

Pause for discussion.

CLOSING (approximately 5 minutes)

Say: Today is our last meeting to discuss, "Our Unfinished March." The purpose of Pages for Progress is to put into action what we learned from our reading. Look at the resource page, "Action Steps to Take During the Election Season" and consider working on putting your faith into action with these action steps. Thank you for being part of this group study. Let's continue to meet to encourage each other to put faith into action.

Bring back small groups to close the session together.

Close the meeting with the Benediction by Bishop Woodie White or a prayer of your choosing.

Action Steps to Take During the Election Season

1. Develop a Voting Plan:

Take the time to research your state's voting procedures, including registration deadlines, early voting options, and Election Day logistics. By creating a detailed plan, including how you'll get to the polls and what you need to bring, you can ensure that your voice is heard. Share your plan with friends and family, encouraging them to also take these steps. Your preparation can make all the difference in ensuring that your vote counts.

2. Host a Book Club on Voting Rights and Election Protection:

Gather a group of friends, family, or community members to explore the history of voting rights and the crucial role people of faith have in protecting democracy. Choose books that educate and inspire, fostering conversations that deepen your commitment to justice and civic responsibility. This book club can empower you and others to take meaningful action during elections, grounded in knowledge and faith.

3. Host a Gathering to Discuss the Threat of White Christian Nationalism:

Organize a discussion with your community to address the rise of white Christian nationalism and its implications for democracy. By bringing people together to share knowledge, experiences, and strategies, you can collectively resist this dangerous ideology. This gathering is a powerful step towards building a more inclusive and equitable society, where democracy thrives for everyone.

RESOURCES

[Sacred Votes: A Guide to Election Participation, Justice, and Social Transformation:](#)

[Creating Change Together Toolkit](#)

[Building Power Together Toolkit](#)

4. Attend a Board of Election Meeting and Other Local Government Meetings:

Show your investment in your local community by attending Board of Election and other government meetings. By gathering with a group of like-minded individuals, preferably over 50 people, you demonstrate the power of collective action. Your presence sends a strong message that you care about the direction of your community and are committed to holding leaders accountable.

5. Learn About the Laws in Your State Regarding Offering Food and Drinks on Election Day:

Educate yourself on the laws in your state concerning providing food, drinks, or other assistance to voters in line on Election Day. Understanding these regulations ensures that you can support others legally and effectively. Your knowledge can help keep voters comfortable and encouraged to stay in line, ensuring that every vote is cast and counted.

6. Register and Sign Up for Certification as a Poll Chaplain:

As a poll chaplain, you can offer spiritual support to voters, creating a calm and encouraging atmosphere at the polls. By praying for and with people in a value-centered way, you help reinforce the sacredness of the democratic process. Your presence can make a significant difference, providing comfort and strength to those exercising their right to vote.

7. Be a Connector Across Class, Race, Gender, and Orientation:

Bridge divides in your community by connecting people across different backgrounds to build a strong, values-based voting coalition. Your efforts to bring together diverse voices can create a formidable force in the election landscape, ensuring that everyone's interests are represented. By fostering unity, you contribute to a more just and equitable society.

8. Engage in an 8-Week Prayer/Meditation Gathering:

Dedicate time each day to a prayer or meditation gathering focused on protecting the integrity of the ballot, transforming hearts, and fostering healing and civility. This practice not only strengthens your spiritual resolve but also unites others in a shared intention for a peaceful and just election season. Your collective prayers and meditations can be a powerful force for positive change in the new Congressional session and presidential administration.

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