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# Michigan, Nation Must Look at North Carolina's "Moral Mondays"

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By Robert Weiner and Bridget Mora, Michigan Chronicle | Op-Ed

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Millions and often majorities in Michigan and states around the country are under attack by right wing governors and legislatures on voting rights, voter suppression, removal of elected officials' power, gun safety, attempted denial of insurance benefits and Medicaid coverage under the Affordable Care Act, college education, veterans' health care, women's health choices, and jobs. They should look at North Carolina's "Moral Mondays" movement. Moral Mondays, spreading rapidly to other states, aim to help ordinary citizens take back their state governments from corporate-backed extremists.

In North Carolina, Moral Mondays mean weekly large organized protests, sit-ins, demonstrations, and some nonviolent civil disobedience, all at the state legislature in Raleigh, plus accompanying media coverage. Each Moral Monday group has a distinctive local flavor and key issues. Voter suppression and education are flash points in North Carolina. Georgia and Florida protesters rally for repeal of "Stand Your Ground" laws. High unemployment and union busting are the focus in Wisconsin. What every Moral Monday group has is a coalition of diverse groups fighting for social justice for the poor, minorities, women, children, elderly, disabled, and immigrants. The organizations don't always share the same opinions, but have a common enemy in the radical politicians who underrepresent their state's constituencies and enact policies removing their rights.

Michigan is under attack by Governor Rick Snyder and an extremist state legislature who have disenfranchised voters, unilaterally taken away Detroit's constitutional electoral power and appointed an unelected manager, given \$1.8 billion tax giveaways to corporate interests, raised taxes on seniors and working families, starved public schools while pushing private schools, denied pensions' funding, passed "Right to Work" laws to slash unions' effectiveness, and assaulted women's healthcare and human dignity including with so-called "rape insurance." Now you can add the City Manager and state Governor allowing the water company to stop supplying poor people for nonpayment from financial inability but letting hugely profitable big corporations delay their water bill obligations.

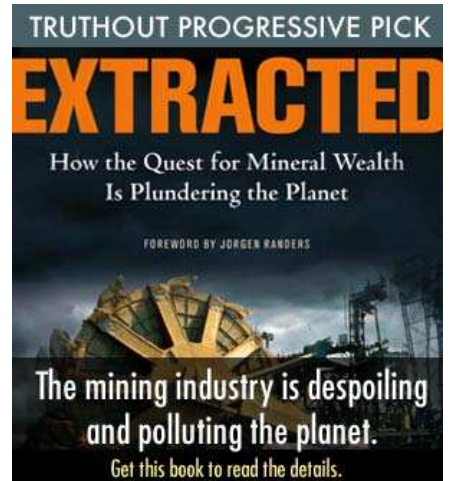
Circumventing the will of voters is a top priority of Governor Snyder, who proposed to repeal the minimum wage (and preempt a 2014 voter referendum) and disempowered Detroit's elected officials, despite a statewide referendum vote against the emergency-manager law. Reverend D. Alexander Bullock, President of the Detroit chapter of the Rainbow/PUSH Coalition, rightly called Snyder's hostile takeover of Michigan's largest city "the death of democracy in Detroit." House Judiciary Committee Ranking Member Cong. John Conyers of Detroit called the Emergency Manager Law "unconstitutional."

What's happening in Michigan is part of a national attack on individual rights by corporate-backed state legislatures and governors. The North Carolina General Assembly turned their state into one of the most right-wing in the nation. They passed draconian voter suppression, eliminated the Earned Income Tax Credit for nearly 1 million working poor, would not help 43,000 Michiganders whose unemployment benefits ended, made it difficult for students to vote, rejected



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Medicaid coverage for 500,000, drastically restricted women's access to reproductive healthcare, repealed the Racial Justice Act, slashed public education funding, and stripped high school teachers and college student voters of due process.

However, North Carolinians have fought back. They have become a national model. Moral Mondays, started just a year ago by Rev. William Barber of the North Carolina NAACP, have spread like wildfire in 2014 — into Georgia, Florida, Alabama, and South Carolina (where protests are called "Truthful Tuesdays"). It's no longer just a Southern movement: Rev. Curtis Gatewood of the North Carolina NAACP reports that Missouri and Wisconsin joined the movement, and more states are mobilizing.

Many of the right wing bills come from ALEC (American Legislative Exchange Council), a dangerous organization that pushes corporate-backed model bills in state legislatures across the US, including the infamous "Stand Your Ground" legislation justifying what has often been perceived as murder. North Carolina's House Speaker, Thom Tillis, was named ALEC's "Legislator of the Year". Michigan's "Right to Work" law was modeled on an ALEC bill.

Moral Monday organizers don't expect to change the minds of ALEC lawmakers; they work to change the landscape. Rev. Barber said, "The people have moved. Now less than one in five North Carolinians agree with them. Moral Monday is more popular than them." Brett Bursey, Executive Director of the South Carolina Progressive Network, explained that a key aim of the protests is to support moderate candidates because in South Carolina, over 70% of candidates ran unopposed.

Parliamentary tricks can be overcome by voters who replace the legislators who took away their rights. People can resist efforts to suppress the vote and make it a point to turn out in large numbers, as President Obama's campaign accomplished in 2008 and 2012.

However, voter turnout drops by a shocking 50 million in non-Presidential election years. The biggest drop-down is minorities, young people, and lower incomes—opening the door for a right wing takeover. Moral Mondays are gearing up for a "mass voter mobilization campaign." In Michigan and across the nation, massive voter turnout in support of candidates who value people – not large corporations' profits – is the best hope to recapture rights, power, and policy.

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## ROBERT WEINER

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