



JASON BRENNAN:

- Protégé of Freedom Center Director David Schmitz
- Author of *Against Democracy*
- Apologist for anti-government violence

Why should you be concerned about, or even interested in, Jason Brennan and his books? Here's why:

Georgetown professor Brennan, whose Ph.D. thesis "Freedom Center" director Schmitz oversaw back when the FC was the "Freedom Program," has close and ongoing ties with the FC, whose website recently listed him as "Research Professor" at the FC (and its Department of Political Economy and Moral Science), as Brennan's personal website confirms.

In a 2016 book, *Against Democracy*, Brennan divides the American electorate into "hobbits" (the apathetic), "hooligans" (the ignorant but opinionated), and "vulcans" (apostles of cool reason). He argues that we would be better off if the "vulcans" formed an epistocracy (rule by the knowers) and either disenfranchised the rest of us, reduced the value of our vote to some fraction of theirs, or some variation on the theme. Indeed, at one point, he writes, "[the] decline in political engagement [by Americans since the 19th century] is a *good start*, but we still have a long way to go...Most people, ideally, would not worry about politics at all" (pg 3).

Obviously, this attitude provides a rationale for voter suppression – even demands it. What might otherwise be seen as a mere power grab is transformed into an act of civic virtue, defending the intelligent and well-informed against the follies and malice of the ignorant and ill-informed – i.e., you and me.

In his latest book, *When All Else Fails* (2019), Brennan ventures onto even shakier ground. Its thesis is that we civilians have the "right" to kill government agents engaged in what we see as illegal or simply unjust actions. At times, Brennan attempts to restrict this "right" to emergency situations – e.g., a police officer is about to shoot an unarmed victim, or oneself. Elsewhere (e.g., pg 12 or pg 39), however, he talks of assassination as "permissible" – e.g., to stop an "unjust war."

Obviously, it is a very short step from this kind of talk to justifying (say) a coup against a government one sees as "illegal" or "unjust." Brennan's repeated protestations in *When All Else Fails* that he is not calling for social change or revolution (perish the thought!) ring pretty hollow, given that there is nothing inherent in his argument that prevents it from being extended beyond acts of self-defense or the defense of other individuals – or the occasional assassination (done for the best of reasons, of course – at least in the mind of the assassin).

Given (a) the extent of voter suppression in this country, where the Republican Senate majority leader recently turned things on their head (again) by calling efforts to make it easier for people to vote a "power grab" (!), and given (b) rumblings on the far right about what sounds very like a coup if Trump is not re-elected, the views expressed in Brennan's books cannot be seen as mere academic philosophizing. Whatever Brennan may say about his "intentions," in the current social and political context his views, as stated in his books, take on a much more sinister coloration – one worth attending, and objecting, to.

--- Patrick Diehl