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Black Box Voting

Why can't the left face the stolen election of 2004 & 2008 vote rigging?

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Online Journal Guest Writers

October 22, 2005 (freepress.org)—If some of its key publications are any indicator, much of the American left seems unable to face the reality that the election of 2004 was stolen. So in all likelihood, unless something radical is done, 2008 will be too.

Misguided and misinformed articles in both TomPaine.com and Mother Jones Magazine indicate a dangerous inability to face the reality that these stolen elections mean nothing less than the death of what's left of American democracy, and the permanent enthronement of the Rovian GOP.

As investigative reporters based in Columbus, Ohio, we witnessed first-hand, up close and personal, exactly how the 2004 election was stolen, and how it will most likely be done in 2008. In the precinct in which Harvey Wasserman grew up, and in the one where Bob Fittrakis now lives, we saw the well-funded, profoundly cynical and deadly effective mechanisms by which the Bush-Cheney-Rove-Blackwell GOP machine switched a victory for John Kerry to an easily-repeatable defeat for democracy.

That Kerry and the spineless Ohio and national Democratic Parties have been complicit is a crucial part of the problem much of the left also seems unwilling to face. But if you live in Franklin County, Ohio, and watch the Republican and Democratic Parties run joint pickets against progressive candidate, and cut backroom deals allowing incumbents of either party run unopposed, you may miss the full scope of the disaster.

And until the left faces the rot that defines the Democratic Party, there is no hope for a fair election in this country. In other words: those who think the White House can be retaken in 2008, but refuse to face the theft of the vote in 2004, should prepare to be ruled by the likes of Jeb Bush, now and forever.

Before we go into the sordid details, we have to ask: exactly what is it about Team Bush that makes people think they could not or would not steal an American election? Do they lack funds? Do they lack expertise? Is there something in the Machiavellian/mobster moral code of Karl Rove and the Bush Family that would prevent them from doing here what they've been doing throughout the Third World for so long?

CIA meister Poppy Bush long ago perfected the art and science of stealing elections. US manipulators have interfered with and tipped elections for decades. Why should Ohio be any different? Especially when all the world knew control of the most powerful office on earth would be decided right here.

Lets do the bookends: before the voting, Ohio's infamous Republican Secretary of State J. Kenneth Blackwell clearly and vehemently denied poll access to teams of international observers from the United Nations and other international election observers.

Since the election, he has effectively stonewalled and sabotaged all recount attempts, to the point that no credible accounting of the Ohio election has ever been done. To this day, at least 100,000 votes remain uncounted, electronic voting machines remain unaudited, key hardware and data files have been trashed,

paper ballots have sat unguarded for anyone to pilfer and tallies in dozens of key counties remain filled with statistical impossibilities.

In our *How the GOP Stole America's 2004 Election & Is Rigging 2008*, we list more than 180 bullet points on how this theft was perpetrated. It was a brilliant, cynical and masterfully executed campaign of death by a thousand cuts.

In Florida 2000, the means of the crime were limited to a few instances of intimidation, butterfly ballots, computer manipulation and a corrupt Supreme Court. But four years after, in Ohio, dozens of sometimes subtle, sometimes blatant tricks were designed to steal a few thousand votes here, a few thousand more there, until victory was in GOP hands. Unless they are exposed and blocked, every one of these scams can and will be duplicated throughout the United States in 2006 and 2008. The question is: will the left follow mainstream Democrats with sheep-like acceptance as every election goes the same way from here on? And if so, why bother even staging more votes in this country at all?

Starting with Russ Baker at TomPaine.com, the indicators are grim. Last January, Baker penned an absurd, ill-reported piece of nonsense called "What Didn't Happen in Ohio." Baker traipsed into Columbus for a few days, interviewed the usual faux Democrats, and left with a Big Story: "The Election Was Fair."

If Baker had done any meaningful research he might have seen the dozens of other instances of intimidation, irregularities and fraud that went unmentioned in his glib paragraphs. Instead he relied on Bill Anthony, chair of the Franklin County Democrats and Board of Elections.

Bill is a pleasant, affable African-American with no commitment or fight for democracy or even the Democrats. He has appeared on Bob's local radio show and with Harvey on others. On one of them, Bill admitted that the Franklin County BOE knew there would be problems with voting machines, and asked Blackwell for paper ballots well before the 2004 election. Blackwell, Anthony said, turned them down. The result was the now infamous chaos at the polls, with inner city voters stuck in the rain for hours. Just what Blackwell wanted.

But did Bill Anthony fight Blackwell's absurd ruling? Did he make it a public issue prior to the election?

Not a chance.

For a quickie reporting job, Anthony is a dream. He's well spoken, charming and convincing. As an African-American with union connections, he would seem the perfect liberal source.

In 2003, Anthony endorsed the Republican mayor's former press secretary for the Columbus School Board. He then supported two Republican candidates on a "Reform Slate" aimed at ousting the Board's only progressive Democrat, an African-American.

Bill Anthony is just one of a legion of what are known throughout the state as DINO---Democrats in Name Only. The Ohio Democratic Party is a national embarrassment. Its chair, Denny White, was not long ago a Republican, and will soon be one again, once the party is fully disemboweled, a job very close to done. Throughout Ohio, DINOs piously cover this piece of fraud and that piece of theft with glib "I hate Bush" rhetoric. The pity is, out-of-state reporters actually take them seriously.

Mark Hertsgaard is a well-respected author and reporter and a long-time friend of Harvey Wasserman, and of election critic Mark Crispin Miller. He has contributed some very valuable work over the years. But he's done himself---and the voting public---very wrong on "Recounting Ohio" in the new Mother Jones.

Mark is smart and thorough enough to leave open the possibility that Ohio's election was, indeed, stolen. But he also falls prey to the DINO trap, failing to cover far too much of what happened here while taking seriously centrist Democrats who are known locally to have no credibility.

So Mother Jones questions the significance of the firing of a Democratic election official who blew the whistle on computer manipulations by Triad, an obscure Republican voting machine company. But Triad was involved in counting the votes in nearly half of Ohio's 88 counties. Questions are still being raised about Triad, including: "How did they get all these contracts in the first place?"

Mother Jones correctly points out that seven times the number of votes by which Bush took Ohio were cast on Republican-controlled machines. But the magazine fails to follow up with mention that those votes have been tabulated on proprietary non-transparent software---a fact we pointed out in our own article in Motherjones.com many months prior to the election.

Mother Jones also discounts the fact that a phony Homeland Security alert in Warren County landed the vote count in an unauthorized warehouse rather than the official secure location, and that reporters were barred from the vote count. That count, which went hugely and suspiciously and very importantly for Bush, was observed by nominal Democrats. But so were other highly dubious vote counts around the state, as they had been in Florida 2000, which Mother Jones argues adamantly was indeed stolen.

The irony of this is that the same issue of Mother Jones leads off with a dead-on story about Ohio and national Democrats who are sabotaging the campaign of the aggressively electable Paul Hackett for a key US Senate seat. And another MoJo piece bemoans the fact that national Democrats seem adept only at losing.

Yet here the back of the book is a story discounting evidence compiled by a legion of independent, grassroots election rights advocates, while favoring phone interviews with the very Democrats being denounced in the front of the book.

Above all, the core of evidence that the election was stolen in Ohio 2004 comes from some 500 sworn statements and signed affidavits taken by people of all political parties, including two Republican hearings officers, in the weeks after the election. Anyone truly committed to finding out what happened here needs to start with that huge body of evidence.

As MoJo points out, none of this has been made easier by the "abandon ship" of the biggest DINO of all, John Kerry. Kerry had \$7 million in the bank earmarked to "count every vote" and was apparently losing by just 136,000 Ohio votes with more than 250,000 still uncounted when he turned tail and conceded. Even Blackwell's corrupt, virtually meaningless first fake recount dropped Bush's official tally by 18,000 votes.

The Democrats have since attacked the election protection movement here through a lawyer named Daniel Hoffheimer who comes from none other than the stalwart Cincinnati Republican law firm of Taft, Stettinius et. al. MoJo quotes another Kerry/DINO lawyer Michael O'Grady, counsel to the state Democratic Party, who argues that for Ohio to have been stolen, the entire GOP would have had to be "conspiratorial," while the Democrats were "dumb as rocks."

In fact, that's an assessment many activists in Ohio heartily endorse, though you might add the word "inert" to the description of the Democrats.

O'Grady claims, for example, that an impossible vote count in three southern Ohio counties that gave Bush his entire margin of victory can be explained by a feminist outpouring for an African-American court candidate who ran zero campaign in those counties. But the presumption is that those same feminists somehow didn't bother to vote for Kerry over George W. Bush. No local student of that election could begin to take such an assessment seriously.

Or how about the quote from Chris Rakocy, a "tech specialist" about those notorious touchscreens in Mahoning County where voters who chose Kerry saw Bush light up. Rakocy says that problem was "only" on 18 of 1,148 machines, and that it was corrected early.

But Rakocy stands alone against dozens of sworn statements and affidavits confirming that the problem went on all day, and was never fixed, and may have involved far more machines than 18, and not only in Mahoning County but also in Franklin. Even at that, in heavily Democratic Youngstown (not to mention Columbus), just 18 machines could have accounted for switching thousands of votes. And, in fact, Kerry's margins in both Youngstown and Columbus were suspiciously light.

And what would Mother Jones herself do to machines that disenfranchised even one voter, no matter what the apparent impact on the ultimate vote count? Why is the magazine named for her discounting the you-couldn't-make-this-one-up reality of voters pushing one candidate's name on a touchscreen and seeing another's name light up, time after time after time? Or are we taking this---and her---all too seriously?

Then there's the song and dance from Warren Mitofsky. The father of exit polls saw his work used to overturn a stolen election in Ukraine just prior to the American vote. But when his poll-taking here showed John Kerry with a nationwide margin of 1.5 million votes, somehow Mitofsky jumped ship on his own decades of professionalism.

Exit polls funded by six major news organizations showed Kerry carrying Ohio, Iowa, New Mexico and Nevada as late as 12:20 am on Wednesday morning, well after balloting stopped even in Alaska and Hawaii. These four "purple states" gave the election to the "blue" Democrats, then miraculously switched to "red" for Bush, giving him the White House once again.

Given all that's known about exit polls---and it's a lot---the odds on one state switching like that are about one in one hundred. For four, it's a virtual statistical impossibility. Add the fact that not one, not four, but TEN of eleven swing states showed drastic shifts from Kerry to Bush and you enter the realm of, well, a stolen election.

Add huge, unexplained shifts from pre-election polls to post-election vote counts in crucial 2002 Senatorial races in Georgia, Minnesota and Colorado, then remember what happened in Florida 2000, and examine the basic Bush attitude toward democracy itself, and you've got a pattern to say the least. And an obvious prescription for one-party rule as far as the eye can see.

Except when you are dealing with America's Democratic Party in 2004 and with reportage that relies on a few phone calls and a disheartening lack of grassroots perspective. If all politics is local, as Tip O'Neill well knew, then so are all vote counts.

Our first article predicting what would happen in Ohio 2004 was published many months before the election in, of all places, MotherJones.com. We warned that electronic voting machines deployed by the likes of Diebold could give Ohio and thus the nation to George W. Bush. Wally O'Dell, Diebold's infamous CEO, pledged to deliver Ohio's electoral votes to Bush in 2004, and all evidence points to the fact that he at least helped.

What we missed in addition was the myriad clever tricks the GOP would bring to bear in pulling this off. Ohio has a long history as a test market. New products like white bread and Spam are brought here first, to see how they'll fly with America at large.

In Ohio 2004, scores of tools for stealing an American election were tried and proven out. Outside reporters have come here again and again to pull at this one and tear at that one. Almost always, they get even that wrong. And almost always, they fail to see the bigger picture.

If we have a "know it all" attitude, as is sometimes charged, it's because we were (and are) here, we saw it happen, we witnessed the seven-hour waits and the denials of the absentee ballots, and we took the testimony of the hundreds who later went under oath.

And we see more unravel every day. Conspiracy theories happen sometimes when actual conspiracies occur. The stakes involved, the players on both sides and the events that are out there plain as day are all of a piece that's simply too obvious for anyone on the ground here to miss.

Hertsgaard has the good sense to mention indictments that have recently come down on election thieves in Cuyahoga County. We know that to be the tip of the iceberg.

What matters now is whether the GOP will be allowed to repeat nationwide in 2006 and 2008 what they saw they could get away with in Ohio 2004.

Election theft skeptics tend to conclude their put-downs by urging we forget about the vote-count stuff and concentrate on coming up with candidates so good that "the election won't be close enough to steal."

Having seen what we saw here, knowing what Mother Jones is reporting about the Democratic attacks on Paul Hackett, and about the loser instinct ingrained in the Dems' DLC/DNA, we must charitably describe such a conclusion as being profoundly wishful thinking.

Someday we may indeed have candidates far worthier than Al Gore and John Kerry. But they both won the presidency of the United States, however corruptible their margins of victory.

We need to guarantee that if someone worthwhile and willing to fight ever does come along, we will have a left that's prepared to make sure the votes are fairly counted.

As Rev. Jesse Jackson put it while speaking to election protection activists here, "We can afford to lose an election. We can't afford to lose our democracy."

Who would agree more strongly than Tom Paine and Mother Jones?

Bob Fittrakis and Harvey Wasserman are co-authors of [How the GOP Stole America's 2004 Election & Is Rigging 2008](#), available at Freepress.org and harveywasserman.com. Their upcoming [What Happened in Ohio](#), with Steve Rosenfeld, will be published by The New Press in spring, 2006.