

Post-DNC: Election Protection

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Column: Rosalea Barker

Stateside With Rosalea Barker

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The most important event I went to during either convention was the press conference held at the Denver Press Club to discuss "threats to our electoral infrastructure". Included in the materials I picked up at the press conference was a DVD of **Stealing America: Vote by Vote**, a 2008 revamp of the documentary directed by Dorothy Fadiman that was first reviewed on Scoop [here](#) in 2006. All quotes in this column are from the DVD.

Despite my opinionating being published on Scoop, which has been at the [forefront](#) of coverage of the issue, I've not been "in the choir" when it comes to questions about the outcome of the 2004 election. That's partly because by nature I'm a trusting person, and partly because I have a vested interest in not having my belief in the non-partisan nature of technology challenged. In 2002, I was thrilled to see that my county election officials had chosen to use electronic voting machines and said so.

Back in November 2000, I'd watched in disbelief as election officials handed out corn strippers to the folks canvassing (counting) the vote so they could shave hanging chads off the back of the punched cards used in that election. The shaving was done in order to stop the counting machines from clogging up or misreading the vote. Good riddance to punched cards! Also, an organization I belong to and trust—the League of Women Voters—supported the provisions of the 2002 Help America Vote Act, which made money available to county election officials to buy electronic voting machines.

In this day and age, when technology is so all-pervasive and well-tested, what could go wrong? The thought that someone—anyone—in the United States of America might tamper with something as fundamental to democracy as the counting of votes simply wasn't in my universe of thought. Furthermore, it seemed to me that to undermine people's faith that their vote would be counted was likely to suppress the vote and that would produce the same desired effect as any alleged manipulation of results by electronic means.

After watching **Stealing America: Vote by Vote**, I've changed my mind.

I'm still not very likely to be persuaded by the arguments of partisan activists, as there is a great deal more at stake than just who won a particular election, but this film acknowledges that by its selection of people interviewed. Former Associate Editor of the Wall Street Journal, and Assistant Secretary of the Treasury in Reagan's administration, Paul Craig Roberts says:

"We can never sweep under the rug disturbing questions, either because we don't want to face them or because we think it may advantage one political party and disadvantage another. Once that starts, the truth recedes even more."

One of the disturbing questions about the 2004 election results is the complete reversal of results for Bush and Kerry between exit polls and final vote tally. Early exit polls showed Kerry would end up with 51 percent of the vote and Bush 48 percent; the final results showed the opposite. That discrepancy of 6 percent *"is so far outside the margin of error of that poll that statisticians across the board will give you general agreement that it could not occur as a matter of chance or statistical aberration,"* says Jonathan Simon, a political survey research analyst with the Election Defense Alliance.

And where was the media in reporting all this? *"Frankly, I put off writing about the election because, like everybody else in the country, if there's a real problem, why isn't it in the newspapers?"* says Bob Koehler, a journalist with Tribune Media Services in Chicago. Well, there you go! I recognize that thought immediately—it was my own. But I'm just an opinionator. How can it be, I now ask myself, that professional journalists get their story ideas and leads solely from what other journalists are already writing about?

What is journalism? Is it merely some kind of super-pressured peer group that demands conformity to such an extent that the How? What? Where? Who? Why? basics of Reporting 101 no longer apply? I don't care where news consumers are on the political spectrum, they deserve better than to have a topic so intrinsic to the functioning of democracy brushed under the carpet and ignored because no one in the main media markets wants to take the first investigatory step.

As the narrator of **Stealing America: Vote by Vote** says, *"Until we as citizens decide that the most fundamental aspect of democracy is free and fair elections, everything we believe in, everything that guarantees our right to earn a living and protect our children, everything our fathers and forefathers died for, is being slowly and invisibly taken from us."*

"It's time to wake up. What you stand to lose is everything."

You can see clips of **Stealing America: Vote by Vote** at <http://www.stealingamericamovie.org/> You'll also find screening times, ways you can become involved in election protection, and how to buy a DVD of the film, which is showing only in limited release.

And a book I recommend buying, written by one of the presenters at the Denver news conference, is Steven Rosenfeld's [Count My Vote: A Citizen's Guide to Voting](#). It includes a handy state-by-state voting guide giving information on registration, voter ID requirements, early voting, voting machines, and officials to contact.

Black Box Voting also has available its free [Tool Kit 2008: Pocket Guide to Election Protection](#), part of that group's focus this year on "helping citizen volunteers effectively watchdog the general election". Donations are welcomed.

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