Q & A with Director/ Producer Dorothy Fadiman

STEALING AMERICA required lifting the debris from the truth to reveal the light beneath…a light which can help to rekindle the spirit of democracy through fair, clean elections. — Dorothy Fadiman

Q: What attracts you to documentary filmmaking?
A: I am keenly aware that film as a medium, including documentary film, holds the potential to open people's eyes, taking them beyond their usual ways of seeing the world. As a filmmaker, I use this opportunity (as carefully as I can) to introduce audiences to new realities. With **STEALING AMERICA**, for example, I learned that most Americans think elections are basically fair. After watching this film, audience members will discover more than they might have ever imagined about voter disenfranchisement and the fact that voting machines are vulnerable to manipulation. Hearing these stories told in the first-person by those who suffered through them, viewers will learn about and experience the shadow side of our current electoral process.

Q: What inspired you to make STEALING AMERICA?
A: I was working at the polls as a volunteer in Florida on Election Day, 2004. I kept hearing about citizens who voted for one candidate, then watched in astonishment as another name lit up on the electronic screen. Throughout Election Day, I witnessed voters reporting this problem to election observers at the polls and on voter hotlines. I was struck by the frustration I observed, fueled by an increasing sense of suspicion as voters realized they could not trust the voting process. Right then and there, I decided to make a film about the impact of this particular phenomenon. These voters were feeling left out of the democratic system—literally disenfranchised—by the way these machines were (mis)behaving. As victims of this vote switching "malfunction," voting citizens had no idea how their votes would be counted once they were cast.

Initially, I planned to make a film only about people's reactions to the vote-flipping phenomenon in Florida. Soon after I returned to California and began preproduction, I learned that the phenomenon was happening not just in Florida, but in precincts across the country. I spent many days filming in Mahoning County, Ohio, where 20-30 machines were flipping votes throughout election. These interviews and observations led to my growing awareness about the lack of computer security and the vulnerability of our voting machines.

Making **STEALING AMERICA** became a mission. Why? It can all be distilled into the words with which I open the film:
"The right to vote...is the primary right by which other rights are protected" —**Thomas Paine**

Q: Can you give us an example of a particularly challenging situation that you encountered during the making of this film?
A: There is always the question as to whether approaching someone for an interview about a personal experience will be regarded as an intrusion or an opportunity for that person to tell their story. I faced this question in deciding whether or not to interview Ohio State Senator Bob Hagan, whose vote flipped from one candidate to another while he was voting. State Senator Hagan confided this odd event privately to one of his close friends, who then told me. I had to debate letting him know that I knew, since he had not yet "gone public" and had only shared his experience privately. I decided to call him and told him I knew his vote had flipped. Luckily, he was relieved and eager to talk. Bob said to me, "Thank you! I have been wanting to talk to someone in the media about this since Election Day two years ago…but didn't have the opportunity before now."

Q: How did you capture the frustration people were feeling on Election Day?
A: I needed to go to people on the ground. Election volunteers from Ohio, for example, described the ways that they fought for voters' rights at the polls. They spoke passionately about how they demanded more machines to serve the huge crowds. People stood in line, waiting for many hours to vote. As the volunteers give the details of their experiences, I hope that the viewer will feel the human drama their fellow citizens faced as they tried to break through organizational and political barriers to defend voters and voice their own complaints.

When I show conflict in a film—internal or external—I try to do it without editorializing. I let the people tell the story from their own experiences. I don't over-dramatize the conflict, or make the narrator try to tell the audience what to feel. I want the viewer to decide.