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*Freedom Rider  
Ohio Vote Theft, Now and Forever  
by Margaret Kimberley*

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On Election Day in Ohio, four ballot provisions that would have brought greater integrity to the elections process went down to defeat at the polls. Not only were all four defeated, but polls predicted that all four would either win, or be decided by thin margins.

Reform Ohio Now had initiated the four proposals. The proposals would have changed rules on campaign finance, established a legislative redistricting commission, allowed the option of voting by mail, and put electoral issues in the hands of an independent commission, beyond the reach of Secretary of State Ken Blackwell.

Polling conducted by the Republican newspaper, the Columbus Dispatch, has a history of accurately predicting Ohio election results. Is it possible that the Dispatch pollsters suddenly lost their touch? Anything is possible, but the decisive loss of all four proposals by unexpected margins is highly improbable.

In November 2004 Republicans used a combination of schemes to insure victory in Ohio for George W. Bush. Some of the chicanery was decidedly low tech and simple. Black voting precincts didn't receive all of the voting machines they needed. More than 60 machines sat in storage while thousands of Ohioans waited on lines for hours to cast their ballots. Inevitably, some could not spend an entire day attempting to vote.

If the Dispatch polls were wrong, they were very wrong indeed. If the outcome is to be believed, every voter who was previously undecided on the ballot proposals had to vote no and many of those expressing support had to have changed their minds. Undecided voters usually remain undecided, skipping candidates and provisions that they find confusing or just not worthy of their attention. We are asked to believe that Ohio voters behaved unlike voters anywhere in the country.

It is more logical to assume that the electronic voting machines now in use in half of the state's counties were hacked to insure victory for the status quo. If that possibility is rejected, then we reject everything that has taken place since the November 2000 vote theft brought the Bush administration into being.

## The Black Commentator – Freedom Rider: Ohio Vote Theft, Now and Forever

Since 2000 more Americans are at greater risk of being disenfranchised than at any time since the days of segregation. Provisional ballots that are not counted, substandard voting machines, and chicanery such as in Ohio that literally denied black voters the means to vote, all conspire to maintain the status quo that has established one party Republican rule.

This year the states of Georgia and Indiana passed laws requiring voters to possess official state identification in order to vote. To add insult to injury, Andrew Young, who makes a living billing himself as a trusted aide of Dr. King, has given the green light to the disenfranchisement.

Americans, even progressives, are loath to acknowledge the corruption in their political system. Even many Democrats eschewed the possibility that Ohio was stolen from John Kerry in 2004. Of course it didn't help that Kerry punked out and refused to make Bush look bad, even if the effort hadn't resulted in victory.

Ohio in 2005 may be even sadder than it was in 2004. If there was a fix, it is in for good. If electoral reform can be defeated with electronic vote hacking, then there is no hope for change without a fight.

Reform Ohio Now was right to work for a more just political system and a more accessible voting process. That organization should not shrink from demanding an investigation of the election results. They will be made fun of, they will be called sore losers and conspiracy nuts. Republicans will not be alone in calling names; taunts and jeers will also come from Democrats.

If it is true that Americans are litigious, now is the time to prove it. Law suits against the state of Ohio are definitely in order. Secretary of State Blackwell and the rest of Ohio's corrupt Republicans must be forced to testify under oath. They must be asked pointed questions about how votes are tallied and by whom.

Republicans in Ohio and the rest of the country have been diabolically clever. It will be difficult to prove fraud, but that difficulty must not stand in the way of an investigation and shouldn't keep Democrats from speaking up.

Reform Ohio Now and other progressive organizations in that state must be ready for a bigger fight. They can't give in to conventional wisdom that says the language on their provisions was "too confusing." If the losses are not believable it is with good reason. They should fight the temptation to believe in a system that is run by people who want to win at any and all costs.

The right wing agenda is clear, but the left agenda is not. What is the left willing to do in the face of right wing determination to perpetrate fraud against democracy? Ohio is one of the most important of the swing states. It will surely be a battleground in 2006 and in 2008.

On the other hand, if this year's election results are not contested, it won't be a battleground any longer. It will be yet another state consigned to the red column with little hope of change. That fate must not be on the progressive agenda.

*Margaret Kimberley's Freedom Rider column appears weekly in **BC**. Ms. Kimberley is a freelance writer living in New York City. She can be reached via e-Mail at [margaret.kimberley@blackcommentator.com](mailto:margaret.kimberley@blackcommentator.com). You can read more of Ms. Kimberley's writings at [freedomrider.blogspot.com](http://freedomrider.blogspot.com).*