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on issues affecting African Americans  
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**Voter Protection  
The African World  
By Bill Fletcher, Jr.  
BlackCommentator.com Executive Editor**

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I asked a good friend what I should write about for BlackCommentator.com this week. Without missing a beat she said: "Write about what I am working on!" I looked at her and asked what that was. Her response: "Voter protection."

Elections in the USA have rarely been clean. Electoral theft is not new. Infamous big city machines were known for throwing elections one way or the other. The 1960 Presidential election has always been shrouded in some degree of mystery, particularly with regard to the voting results from Illinois. African Americans, Chicanos and Asians have had plenty of experience with electoral fraud, having been effectively denied the right to vote for most of the period since the end of Reconstruction (1877).

Yet, in the period particularly since the passage of the Voting Rights Act (1965) and the Watergate infamy (1973-74), an assumption emerged in Mainstream America that elections were, for the most part, honest and on the up and up.

Then came the November 2000 elections.

There were several things that were striking about the November 2000 elections. One

was the audacity on the part of the Bush forces, dramatized in the recent HBO film, *Recount*. Their arrogance and boldness completely took the Gore campaign, as well as many pro-democracy groups, entirely off guard. While the Bush campaign was prepared to agitate, including through demonstrations, on behalf of their candidate, the Gore forces were paralyzed. Staff and volunteers linked to organized labor mobilized to go to Florida, but found themselves doing little more than taking affidavits from individuals who alleged that they had been deprived of their democratic rights.

The tactics that were used in both the 2000 and 2004 Presidential elections by Bush-aligned forces were quite amazing. Black voters, for instance, found themselves eliminated from the voting rolls. As reported by the journalist Greg Palast, letters were sent to the home addresses of Black active duty military service personnel who, if they did not respond, had their votes challenged. This last point is remarkable since it was the votes of those who were literally in the line of fire who were being denied their right to have their votes counted.

Added to this has been the introduction of computer screen voting. Described as making the system more efficient, the lack of hardcopy proof of voting along with numerous examples of computer glitches (and possible computer tampering) raises further questions as to whether the right to vote is being eroded.

Thus, the irony is that we have witnessed a Presidential administration that has heralded the right to democratic elections overseas (even if all they have been concerned with is that there is more than one party in the race rather than whether there has been genuine democracy), yet tactics have been implemented which they have not challenged (if not outright encouraged), that deprive entire sections of the US population of their right to vote.

The awareness of the shenanigans of the 2000 and 2004 elections has led to a very broad-based mobilization around what is being called "*Voter Protection*." Unions, community-based organizations, and other non-profits have enlisted in this battle, one which starts with increasing public awareness of the dangers of voter disenfranchisement. Further involvement in this work is of great importance, and is often missed when the focus of our electoral discussions are on the candidates alone. The political Right, fearing a loss by McCain, will do all that it can to suppress the Black vote, the Latino vote (except among Cuban Americans), older citizen vote and the youth vote. It will more than likely do this through a shrewd combination of propaganda aimed at defaming Senator Obama and encouraging fear as to who he actually is (i.e., the false allegations that he is a Muslim; does not do the Pledge of Allegiance; is actually not a US citizen), as well as through the tried and true tactics of the 2000 and 2004 elections. With regard to outright voter suppression, for example, volunteers will be needed at all poll sites to ensure that there is no voter intimidation or misinformation. This is a lot more than traditional voter registration/education and Get Out The Vote (GOTV). It is really a democracy mobilization.

In November 2000 I was deployed by the AFL-CIO to Florida for several days following the election. I watched and listened as reports came in regarding spontaneous demonstrations taking place in various parts of the state by disenfranchised voters; voters who WANTED their votes counted. I watched and listened as affidavits were completed. I watched and listened as the Bush forces made it appear that they were the righteous and that Gore was the spoiler. I watched and listened as the Gore campaign and its allies completely caved in.

I am not going through that again. We must provide the support for voters to ensure that their votes are counted, but if there is further theft it is not permissible to accept

that the election was stolen fair and square. The tables will need to be turned.

[For more information on voter protection, see: [www.vote411.org](http://www.vote411.org)]


**BlackCommentator.com** Executive Editor, Bill Fletcher, Jr., is a Senior Scholar with the [Institute for Policy Studies](#), the immediate past president of [TransAfrica Forum](#) and co-author of the **just released** book, [Solidarity Divided: The Crisis in Organized Labor and a New Path toward Social Justice](#) (University of California Press), which examines the crisis of organized labor in the USA. Click [here](#) to contact Mr. Fletcher.

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