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THE SILENT SCREAM OF NUMBERS

By Robert C. Koehler

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As they slowly hack democracy to death, we're as alone — we citizens — as we've ever been, protected only by the dust-covered cliches of the nation's founding: "Eternal vigilance is the price of liberty."

It's time to blow off the dust and start paying the price.

The media are not on our side. The politicians are not on our side. It's just us, connecting the dots, fitting the fragments together, crunching the numbers, wanting to know why there were so many irregularities in the last election and why these glitches and dirty tricks and wacko numbers had not just an anti-Kerry but a racist tinge. This is not about partisan politics. It's more like: "Oh no, this can't be true."

I just got back from what was officially called the National Election Reform Conference, in Nashville, Tenn., an extraordinary pulling together of disparate voting-rights activists — 30 states were represented, 15 red and 15 blue — sponsored by a Nashville group called Gathering To Save Our Democracy. It had the feel of 1775: citizen patriots taking matters into their own hands to reclaim the republic. This was the level of its urgency.

Was the election of 2004 stolen? Thus is the question framed by those who don't want to know the answer. Anyone who says yes is immediately a conspiracy nut, and the listener's eyeballs roll. So let's not ask that question.

Let's simply ask why the lines were so long and the voting machines so few in Columbus and Cleveland and inner-city and college precincts across the country, especially in the swing states, causing an estimated one-third of the voters in these precincts to drop out of line without casting a ballot; why so many otherwise Democratic ballots, thousands and thousands in Ohio alone, but by no means only in Ohio, recorded no vote for president (as though people with no opinion on the presidential race waited in line for three or six or eight hours out of a fervor to have their say in the race for county commissioner); and why virtually every voter complaint about electronic voting machine malfunction indicated an unauthorized vote switch from Kerry to Bush.

This, mind you, is just for starters. We might also ask why so many Ph.D.-level mathematicians and computer programmers and other numbers-savvy scientists are saying that the numbers don't make sense (see, for instance, www.northnet.org/minstrel, the Web site of Dr. Richard Hayes Phillips, lead statistician in the Moss vs. Bush lawsuit challenging the Ohio election results). Indeed, the movement to investigate the 2004

election is led by such people, because the numbers are screaming at them that something is wrong.

And we might, no, we must, ask — with more seriousness than the media have asked — about those exit polls, which in years past were extraordinarily accurate but last November went haywire, predicting Kerry by roughly the margin by which he ultimately lost to Bush. This swing is out of the realm of random chance, forcing chagrined pollsters to hypothesize a “shy Republican” factor as the explanation; and the media have bought this evidence-free absurdity because it spares them the need to think about the F-word: fraud.

And the numbers are still haywire. A few days ago, Terry Neal wrote in the Washington Post about Bush’s inexplicably low approval rating in the latest Gallup poll, 45 percent, vs. a 49 percent disapproval rating. This is, by a huge margin, the worst rating at this point in a president’s second term ever recorded by Gallup, dating back to Truman.

“What’s wrong with this picture?” asks exit polling expert Jonathan Simon, who pointed these latest numbers out to me. Bush mustered low approval ratings immediately before the election, surged on Election Day, then saw his ratings plunge immediately afterward. Yet Big Media has no curiosity about this anomaly.

Simon, who spoke at the Nashville conference — one of dozens of speakers to give highly detailed testimony on evidence of fraud and dirty tricks from sea to shining sea — said, “When the autopsy of our democracy is performed, it is my belief that media silence will be given as the primary cause of death.”

In contrast to the deathly silence of the media is the silent scream of the numbers. The more you ponder these numbers, and all the accompanying data, the louder that scream grows. Did the people’s choice get thwarted? Were thousands disenfranchised by chaos in the precincts, spurious challenges and uncounted provisional ballots? Were millions disenfranchised by electronic voting fraud on insecure, easily hacked computers? And who is authorized to act if this is so? Who is authorized to care?

No one, apparently, except average Americans, who want to be able to trust the voting process again, and who want their country back.

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