

## INTRODUCTIONS

As I write this, we are still more than a year away from the 2004 elections, but the politicking is already going full swing. Presidential candidates are criss-crossing the country, debating, cajoling, speechifying—but alas most important of all, they are fundraising.

They head from fancy dinner to fancy dinner, in the most moneyed, privileged neighborhoods in this country—the Upper East Side of Manhattan, northwest Washington, DC, Hollywood—because that is where the money is. And campaign money, more often than not, determines who wins an election.

Hundreds of years of discrimination in this country have contributed to tremendous economic disparity between African Americans and the white majority in this country. As a result, as a community, African Americans are at a huge disadvantage when participating in a political system where money buys access to a candidate and success for that candidate.

It is hardly an accident, then, that the agenda of the U.S. Congress and our executive branch centers not on the concerns of African Americans and other underserved communities, but rather on those of the wealthy business community. Quite simply, our democracy, which is supposed to represent the interests of all, not the few, is broken.

- Why has Congress put so much energy into reforming bankruptcy laws to make it easier for credit card companies to collect from debtors, and so little into preventing the redlining that banks regularly practice, making it more difficult for African Americans to secure loans?

- Why is President George W. Bush concentrating his economic strategy on tax breaks for the wealthy, when college-educated black and Hispanic men earn on average 30% less than white men do?

- Why does Washington continue to concentrate on making criminal justice laws ever more draconian and discriminatory, when incredible racial disparities exist throughout the criminal justice system? An estimated 12% of black men between the ages of 20 and 34 are incarcerated, compared to 1.6% for white men, and black men comprise a disproportionate number of prisoners on death row.

The answer is that Washington responds to campaign donors first, and voters second. The concerns of ordinary Americans cannot compare with the wealthy executive who raises hundreds of thousands of dollars for a campaign.

For decades, the voting rights movement in this country has worked hard to rid this country of the shameful system of poll taxes, discriminatory primaries, and other mechanisms

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that have prevented African Americans and other people of color from participating fully in our democracy. The Color of Money project demonstrates, in concrete terms, how people of color are discriminated against under the current system. It is a logical and necessary outgrowth of the voting rights movement's important work.

We must continue to work hard to ensure that people of color exercise their right to vote. And we must also work to change the system so that it truly represents the democratic values of our country, so that it is our votes, not our pocketbooks, that determine our representation in Washington. Clean Money/Clean Elections campaign reform would do this, by giving candidates a practical way to run a viable campaign without resorting to collecting cash from an elite group of special interest donors. We must reclaim our democracy.

Julian Bond, October 2003

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## INTRODUCCIONES

Mientras escribo este artículo, todavía estamos a más de un año de las elecciones del 2004, pero el politiquero ya está en plena actividad. Los candidatos a presidente están atravesando el país, en debatiendo, engatusando, pronunciando discursos, pero alás lo más importante de todo, están recaudando fondos.

Van de cena elegante a cena elegante, en los barrios más ricos, privilegiados en este país—el alto barrio este de Manhattan, el noroeste de Washington D.C., Hollywood—porque ahí es donde está el dinero. Y el dinero de campaña, más frecuente que no, determina quién gana una elección.

Cientos de años de discriminación en este país han contribuído a una tremenda disparidad económica para los Afro-Americanos y la mayoría blanca de este país. Como resultado, como comunidad, los Afro-Americanos están en una desventaja enorme cuando participan en un sistema político donde el dinero compra el acceso a un candidato y el éxito para ese candidato.

No es coincidencia, que la agenda del Congreso de los Estados Unidos y nuestra rama ejecutiva se centre no en las preocupaciones del los Afro-Americanos y otras comunidades mal servidas, pero más bien en las de la rica comunidad de negocios. Esencialmente, nuestra democracia, que está supuesta a representar los intereses de todos, no de unos pocos, está rota.

- ¿Por qué el Congreso ha puesto tanta energía en reformar las leyes de bancarrota, para hacer más fácil a las compañías de tarjetas de crédito cobrar a los deudores, y tan poco para prevenir "redlining" (la practica ilegal de negar préstamo para comprar vivienda o seguro de propietario, basado en la comunidad o vecindario en donde uno desea comprar vivienda), haciendo más difícil para los Afro-Americanos obtener un préstamo?

- ¿Por qué el presidente Bush concentra su estrategia económica en rebajar los impuestos para los ricos, cuando los negros e hispanos con educación universitaria ganan en promedio 30% menos que los blancos?

- ¿Por qué Washington se empeña en hacer leyes de justicia criminal más severas y dicriminatorias, cuando existe una increíble disparidad racial por todas partes en el sistema de justicia criminal? Se calcula que el 12 por ciento de hombres negros de la edad de 20 a 34 años están encarcelados, comparado al 1.6 por ciento de hombres blancos, y un número desproporcionado de hombres negros prisioneros se encuentra en la fila de la muerte.

La respuesta es que Washington responde primero a los donadores de campaña, y segundo a los votantes. Las preocupaciones de los norteamericanos corrientes no pueden compararse a

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el ejecutivo rico que recauda cientos de miles de dólares para una campaña.

Por décadas el movimiento al derecho de votar en este país ha trabajado duro para eliminar de este país el vergonzoso sistema de impuesta de votación, las discriminatorias elecciones primarias, y otros mecanismos que han impedido participar completamente en nuestra democracia a los Afro-Americanos y a otras personas de color. El proyecto "The Color of Money" demuestra, en términos concretos, cómo la gente de color es discriminada bajo el actual sistema, y es una lógica y necesaria consecuencia de ese importante trabajo.

Necesitamos continuar trabajando duro para asegurar que la gente de color ejercite su derecho de votar. Y también debemos trabajar para cambiar el sistema para que verdaderamente represente los valores democráticos de nuestro país, para que sean nuestros votos, no nuestros bolsillos, que determinen nuestra representación en Washington. "Clean Elections" (Elecciones Limpias y Transparentes) harían esto, dando a los candidatos una manera práctica de dirigir una campaña con posibilidad de éxito sin recurrir a recaudar dinero de un grupo élite de donadores con intereses especiales. Tenemos que reclamar nuestra democracia.

Julian Bond, Octubre del 2003

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In the Color of Money project, we see how Latinos and other racial/ethnic minorities are systematically excluded from the political system, simply because they are less likely to be able to afford to give the campaign contributions that are the oil that greases the election machine.

One out of eight Americans is Latino. Latinos, like other communities, are characterized by both diversity and homogeneity. There are Mexican American and Puerto Rican families who have been in this country for generations and others that have recently arrived, Cubans who arrived after their island's revolution, war refugees from Central American countries, and economic immigrants from the Dominican Republic. Recent trends show masses of new immigrants from the Andean countries of South America, likely a consequence of the U.S. government's war on drugs.

Despite their diverse countries of origin, Latinos in the U.S. share a common experience of systematic political, economic and social exclusion. The poverty rate for Hispanics is 21.4%, while the rate for the white majority is eight percent. Latinos are less likely to have access to health insurance and suffer from a greater incidence of preventable illnesses, such as diabetes, cardiovascular disease, tuberculosis, and breast and cervical cancer. Discrimination against Latinos persists in employment and housing. Latino children are less likely to have access to quality education.

This country has always offered an answer for the underserved: Get involved. Vote. Make your voice heard. And as every year passes, the Latino community becomes better organized and more powerful in our nation's affairs.

But the Latino community's voices would be amplified if we had real, comprehensive campaign finance reform. Clean Money campaign reform evens the playing field, by reducing the importance of private money donations in elections. Candidates who agree to abide by spending limits and meet tough qualifying conditions, raising a large number of very small contributions from in-district voters, receive equal public grants of money to run their campaign. This makes it possible for a candidate to run a viable campaign for office without having to rely on wealthy donors.

Clean Money campaign reform would not solve all the problems of the Latino electorate, but it would help make the system more fair, more responsive to their needs.

Antonio Gonzalez, October 2003

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