

While the country's communities of color are extremely diverse, representing a wide spectrum of cultural and socioeconomic backgrounds, it nevertheless remains true that prior and ongoing barriers to quality education and employment increase the chances that Latinos and African Americans will be economically disadvantaged and therefore possess less disposable income to spend on campaign contributions. According to the U.S. Census Bureau, Latinos, African Americans, and Asian Pacific Americans are more likely to live in poverty than non-Hispanic whites. The poverty rate for non-Hispanic whites is eight percent, but for African Americans is 23%, and for Latinos, 21.4%, and for Asian Pacific Americans, 10%. Latinos earn less than non-Hispanic white workers, and are more likely to be unemployed, as are African Americans.⁹

With fewer financial resources, is it any wonder that communities of color are vastly under-represented in and lack access to the halls of Congress, state legislatures, and other governmental bodies? Many cannot afford to contribute to candidates, and if they do, they cannot contribute the large amounts necessary to buy the television advertisements and help of pollsters and consultants, crucial to modern campaigning. In the words of George Orwell, some people in this country are "more equal than others."

A POLL TAX BY ANY OTHER NAME IS STILL A POLL TAX

The concept of structural barriers to democratic participation is an old, all too familiar one in this country. The Declaration of Independence famously declared slaves to be equivalent to 3/5 of a person, and only white men of property were permitted to vote in the new union.

Even after African Americans gained the right to vote after the Civil War, they faced new impediments. White-controlled legislatures gerrymandered election districts, making it more difficult for African Americans to win elections. Many states also instituted poll taxes and literacy tests as requirements to vote, and these were enforced selectively against the black population. There was even a system adopted called the "white primary." In the South, which was primarily Democratic, the primary election was far more important than the general election. The Democratic Party declared the primary the internal election of a private organization, one that was allowed to exclude blacks.

According to the U.S. Department of Justice, "the net effect of these efforts was the disenfranchisement of nearly all black citizens and the removal from office of nearly all black legislators in the former Confederate states by 1910."¹⁰

It wasn't until the 1950s that the courts and Congress began to address some of these structural barriers to participation. In 1960, the U.S. Supreme Court, in *Gomillion v. Lightfoot*, struck down an apportionment scheme in Alabama that discriminated against African Americans. In 1964, the 24th Amendment of the Constitution was enacted, which banned poll taxes in federal elections. That same year, in *Reynolds v. Sims*, the Supreme Court established the principle of "one person, one vote" as fundamental to equal representation without regard to race, sex, or economic status. The following year, Congress approved

the Voting Rights Act, which prohibited the abridgement of the right to vote on account of race or color. And in 1966, in *Harper v. State Board of Elections*, the Supreme Court struck down the use of poll taxes in state elections.

All of these changes were important and necessary in strengthening the nation's democracy; however, structural barriers to equal participation have not been eliminated. And while much of this discrimination occurred against African Americans, given this nation's history with slavery, Latinos and Asian Pacific Americans also faced bias, especially with legal barriers constructed to prevent them from becoming citizens and, consequently, denying them the right to vote. Now, with the ever changing face of America, and many waves of immigration, these groups and other members of racial and ethnic minorities find themselves subject to similar barriers to full participation in this nation's political system. These communities suffer the consequences: school systems lack necessary resources; it is often tough to get financing to buy a home; their air and water is often dirtier. Meanwhile, the areas where generous campaign donors live are well served by the government with pristine parks, quality schools, and safe streets.

One need look no further than the 2000 elections in Florida to see the ways in which people can continue to be excluded on the basis of race and ethnicity. After the contest between George W. Bush and Al Gore came down to ballot-counting in Florida, African American and Latino leaders called attention to many practices that discriminated against people of color. Thousands of voters claimed they were unfairly deterred from voting. The NAACP held hearings soon after the election and collected hundreds of pages of testimony that included accusations of intimidation, people being turned away from polls, and interpreters being barred from helping non-English speaking voters.

"The bottom line is this," the Advancement Project, a national organization committed to building a fair and just multi-racial democracy in the United States, has noted, "even though the most overt forms of disenfranchisement have been outlawed, structural disenfranchisement continues to perpetuate inequity and exclusion."¹¹

In this way our current system of campaign financing can

Clean Money campaign finance reform meets the "Fannie Lou Hamer Standard," developed by the Fannie Lou Hamer Project, a national advocacy organization dedicated to strengthening U.S. democracy through bringing justice and equality to the campaign finance system (<http://www.flhp.org/FLHPStandard.htm>).

Fannie Lou Hamer (1917-1977) represents many leaders among people of color with great political talent who, because of the many structural barriers to civic participation, do not have equal access to democracy.

The Fannie Lou Hamer Standard

The Fannie Lou Hamer Standard (also known as the "political equality standard")—named after the legendary African-American voting rights champion who led the Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party delegation to the Democratic National Convention in Atlantic City in 1964—provides a way to see immediately what constitutes real reform and what doesn't. It is a standard based on the sacred principle of political equality.

1. Political equality means, according to the Voting Rights Act, equal opportunity for everyone to participate in the political process, regardless of race, gender or economic status and access to wealth.

2. Political equality means "one person, one vote," not one dollar, one vote.

3. Political equality means, in the words of President Abraham Lincoln, "government of, by, and for the people"—by which he meant all the people, not just those who can raise, or who can afford to give, big-money campaign contributions.

William C. "Willie" Velasquez - "Su Voto es Su Voz"

Willie Velasquez (1944-1988) raised a battle cry for political activism that still resonates today when he coined the phrase "su voto es su voz," "your vote is your voice." As a founder of the Southwest Voter Registration Education Project and the Southwest Voter Research Institute (now called the William C. Velasquez Institute), Velasquez and his colleagues registered Hispanics, Native Americans, and low-income citizens across the country in unprecedented numbers. In large part due to these organizations founded by Velasquez, voter registration grew from 2.4 million registered Latinos in 1974 to nearly 8 million in 2000.

Velasquez devoted his life to projects and activities that assist the politically disenfranchised in becoming more involved in the political process. Recognizing that the vote alone will not guarantee political empowerment for Latinos, the William C. Velasquez Institute in the 21st century is also harnessing its research capacity to promote more equitable redistricting schemes for state legislatures and Congress, as well as to educate the public on the merits of the Arizona "Clean Money" campaign finance program and how it is a model for state campaign finance systems throughout the Southwest.

These reform proposals, along with robust voter registration and education programs, provide a means for the Latino community to more fully participate in and be represented by the electoral process and moves the nation as a whole towards Velasquez's vision that *su voto es su voz*.

be seen as yet another barrier to participation, essentially a poll tax by another means. John Bonifaz, executive director of the National Voting Rights Institute (NVRI), and Jamin Raskin, a law professor at American University coined the phrase "wealth primary" to describe this phenomenon. "Those who cannot compete in the wealth primary cannot find representation in government," states the NVRI website.¹² If you can't afford to write a \$1,000 or \$2,000 check to a candidate, you are being excluded from access and influence as effectively as if Congress re-enacted the poll tax to charge people for their right to vote. It's that simple.

THE CLEAN MONEY SOLUTION

Just because our current campaign finance system requires people to pay to play doesn't mean that there is not another way. Under the Clean Money, Clean Elections approach, already law in five states—Arizona, Maine, North Carolina, New Mexico, and Vermont—candidates who agree to abide by strict spending limits and to raise no private money can qualify for a full and equal grant of public funds for their campaigns.

Typically, Clean Money systems require a candidate to collect a large number of very small contributions (say \$5) within his or her district, which helps the candidate prove broad popular support. Once candidates meet these requirements, then they qualify for a full and equal public grant to run their campaign. Because the system is voluntary, a Clean Money candidate often runs against a privately funded candidate who may raise more campaign cash than is available in the initial Clean Money grant. To keep such contests competitive, Clean Money provides additional matching funds up to a certain limit. Such matching funds are also available for Clean Money candidates when a third-party group uses independent expenditures to boost an opposing candidate.

Clean Money systems are still in their infancy, in place for statewide elections in Arizona and Maine only since the 2000 election cycle. Nevertheless, in Arizona, there are already promising results showing that the system gives a boost to candidates of color. From 2000 to 2002, Arizona saw a substantial increase in the number of Latino and Native American candidates. Thirty-seven candidates from racial and ethnic minority communities ran for office in 2002, compared to only 13 in 2000. Of those 37 people, 21 opted for public funding.

The Clean Money, Clean Elections system helps eliminate the "wealth primary" for candidates of color by providing an alternative to privately financed elections. Where there is public funding available for races, there is no need for a candidate to have money or be connected to money to be competitive. The currency of the election is no longer cash, but rather the broad support a candidate can muster. Ordinary voters matter again—the principle of "one person, one vote" is upheld.

###

WEB PAGE PREVIEW: WWW.COLOROFMONEY.ORG

You can conduct research about your own neighborhood by visiting our interactive web page at www.colorofmoney.org. Make a "Color of Money" report or presentation about your community. You can:

- *Find out how the campaign finance system excludes people of color in your state.* See where the money is coming from in your own state. Look at the top contributing zip codes and sort them by race and ethnicity. Compare neighborhoods that are predominantly non-Hispanic white with those that are predominantly people of color, and see how levels of wealth and poverty affect the results. Compare your state with other states.

- *View maps of top contributing metropolitan areas that show how campaign money comes from areas where neighborhoods are predominantly non-Hispanic white.* Explore the demographics of a top contributing metropolitan area, such as Washington, DC, New York City, or Los Angeles. View color maps showing where the campaign money comes from compared to where people of color reside. Separate maps show details on the African American, Latino, and Asian Pacific American communities.

- *See how your zip code ranks.* See how your zip code compares to other zip codes nationwide in terms of campaign giving, racial/ethnic makeup, and wealth and poverty rates. Sort zip codes nationally to compare wealthy zip codes to poor ones, and predominantly non-Hispanic white zip codes to those that are predominantly people of color.

- *Examine different election cycles.* You can search for statistics for the 2002 elections, the 2000 elections, or both elections combined.