

The US Election

African-Americans, Haitians in Miami-Dade demand recount

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One of the most contested areas in the Florida presidential recount is Miami-Dade County, the state's most populous, which Gore carried by a 53 to 46 margin. Predominantly black precincts in the county saw their votes thrown out at twice the rate as Hispanic precincts and nearly four times the rate of white precincts. According to a recent analysis, had these votes been counted at the same rate as other precincts, Gore would have gained 7,000 votes.

On Friday 1,000 protesters converged on the Miami-Dade County Hall to protest the canvassing board's refusal to complete manual recount of votes. The protest, organized by local Democrats, the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), the county AFL-CIO and other organizations, included a group of middle school students who had their mouths taped shut, symbolizing their disenfranchisement. One of the speakers, attorney Donnise DeSouza, said she was turned away on Election Day by poll officials who claimed she wasn't registered. Days afterward, she was informed that she was in fact registered.

In two dozen inner-city Miami precincts, including in Liberty City and Overtown, as many as one out of every 10 ballots was thrown out because of so-called overvotes—where the ballot was punched for more than one candidate. Liberty City and Overtown, which are predominately black, are among the poorest neighborhoods in Miami and the scene of three major riots in the 1980s over police killings of black residents.

Among black voters there is a widespread feeling that they have been the victims of fraud and intimidation, organized by the Republican-controlled state apparatus, led by George W's brother, Florida Governor Jeb Bush. “The Bush brothers don't want a recount,” said Annie Brown, a county health care worker. “Jeb is crooked and so is the Secretary of State Katherine Harris. We had a vote for mayor in 1998 where the election was thrown out because of fraud, like dead people voting.

“The Republicans were shocked because so many black people showed up at the polls. Even the students at Florida A&M University helped get blacks out to vote, that's why they protested at their school after the election. Bush doesn't want to help blacks.”

Many young people voted in their first presidential election on November 7 and are outraged that their votes may not be counted. Dinia, a student at Miami-Dade Community College and data-entry worker, said, “The votes have to be recounted. Bush is trying to illegally grab the election. The minorities are against him. I'm not one of those kind of people who are going to invest my Social Security money in the stock market. I'm from a single parent home, my mother is unemployed. Just look at Miami. You can drive from Overtown to Miami Shores and the economic and social status is completely different.

“I'm also against Bush because of his position on abortion. I don't think the government should tell a woman what to do with her body. Then there's Bush's record in Texas, where he wouldn't even stop the execution of someone who DNA tests could show was innocent. What type of person is that to run the country?

“Bush also wants vouchers to take money away from

the public schools, when we need more money for textbooks and other necessities. For some of the kids in Miami, the public schools provide the only meal they get all day. Teachers also need more pay.

“The Republicans tried to get rid of the president with the impeachment campaign. Now they are using illegal means to make the Congress, the Supreme Court and the presidency all Republican.”

Another community where residents complained about mistreatment on Election Day was Little Haiti, where tens of thousands of immigrants from the impoverished Caribbean island live. A large voter registration campaign was conducted among South Florida's 150,000 Haitians, including recent naturalized citizens.

Many first-time voters in Little Haiti, who have difficulty with English and lack even a high school education, were told by polling officials that they were not allowed any assistance from Creole-speaking interpreters in the voting booth. According to county officials, a voter is permitted to have an assistant at the polls if a specific request is made. Another common complaint was that voters were being forced to hurry up in the ballot, because of state rules that require voters to complete their task in five minutes.

Anger over the elections is so widespread that when this reporter arrived Sunday outside of a church in Little Haiti, and the priest told his parishioners that I was conducting interviews, at the end of the service dozens of Haitians surrounded me to express their demands that their votes be counted. One older woman stated pointedly, “This is like a coup d'etat, like in Haiti.” Another said, “We don't want it to be like under Baby Doc [Duvalier],” a reference to Haiti's former dictator.

“My friend needed an interpreter,” a young woman said. “But they said she wasn't allowed any help. If you don't know English, you should be able to get some help. I've also got friends in West Palm Beach, and she said Haitians were stopped by the police on the way to vote.”

Jeane Jusme, a truck driver for the city of Miami, said, “This county has gone for the Democrats for years, why was it different now? On Election Day I told my boss I had to vote. He told me I had to wait until all the work was done. I just made it to the polls, but they closed at 7 p.m. and a lot didn't have a chance to vote.

“The Republicans want to stop the count. We have the right to have our votes counted. The Supreme Court is filled with Republicans, the state legislature want to choose the electors and ignore our votes. This is supposed to be a country where we have the right to vote. Now they are trying to steal it.”

Lina Cherubin, a health care worker, added, “With Bush in the White House, immigrants will have trouble. He is for the bourgeois class of people, for the rich. Bush wants to chop down the middle class.”

A young worker commented, “The Haitian community is suffering. Sick people can't get medical care. People are dying and having no funerals. There are plenty of problems like drugs among the youth. No Haitian people supported Bush. He represents the capitalists who have the money, not the minorities and the poor.

A truck driver said, “Everybody knows what's going on here. They are trying to steal the election. But nobody in power is saying it.”



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