

How Carter stole the 1976 vote

by Felice Merritt and Barbara Boyd

The 1976 presidential election hinged, just as the 1980 contest promises to hinge, on the results in a handful of states. In 1976, analysis showed that the results in the Electoral College would have been changed by a shift in the results in as few as two highly populated states. A number of Republicans, joining with supporters of Lyndon LaRouche, examined those results and determined to challenge the outcome of the presidential election, believing that it had been decided by widespread vote fraud.

A well-funded and well-organized get-out-the-vote drive, targeting the almost entirely Democratic voters in minority districts of urban areas, coupled with so-called registration reforms such as postcard and same-day registration, created the capacity to affect election outcomes by fabricating relatively small margins of fraudulent votes. Postcard registration permitted the enrollment of millions of new voters. Many of them, subsequent investigation discovered, were “ghost” voters. They did not exist. Same-day registration permitted tens of thousands to be herded from poll to poll, casting multiple votes. The sum of those votes, it was determined, decided the election.

The case of New York

Although Jimmy Carter, according to the official election results, carried New York State by more than 230,000 votes in 1976, a lawsuit filed by New York Republicans and by LaRouche campaign managers showed that this large margin as well was composed of fraudulent votes.

The New York City Board of Elections received 600,000 postcard registrations from new registrants for the November 1976 general election. Of that number, approximately half were not verified in any way whatsoever. The director of the Board of Elections ordered county officials in New York *not* to send out nonforwardable first class letters to 280,000 applicants to verify their existence and their addresses, claiming she had neither the time nor the staff to make such checks. Tens of thousands of new registrations were nonetheless accepted by the Board of Elections as many as 12 days *after* registration was officially closed. The voting rolls were filled with invalid, duplicate, and fraudulent regis-

trations.

A Bronx County newspaper reporter wrote that she had registered 10 times and on Election Day succeeded in voting 10 times. A Westchester County sheriff's sampling of postcard registrations found 20 percent invalid registrations. Random checks in all New York City boroughs revealed similar rates of invalidity as well as 5 to 6 percent duplicate registrations. A check of Bronx registrations showed hundreds registered at the addresses of abandoned buildings and vacant lots.

In the midst of such chaos, the director of the New York City Board of Elections instructed election inspectors: “Do not turn anyone away from the polls.” She then issued public service radio announcements encouraging “everyone who registered to come out and vote.” Almost half of them did, resulting in a minimum of 250,000 fraudulent votes being cast in New York State in 1976.

Coordinated through a national Operation Big Vote, local political leaders, poverty officials, social service directors, ministers, and others targeted the minority populations. Then New York City councilman Ramon Velez described how he and his political machine (centered around job training programs, CETA, and drug rehabilitation programs) pulled in 100,000 new postcard voter registrants.

One of the biggest “go-getters” in the big vote operation, Velez said, was the Bronx methadone program SERA, which sent 400 of its members out into the streets to register people. “These guys were clean, rehabbed and not on methadone,” he said. Believing that Carter could get an edge in the vote in New York State, he put his machine on full mobilization. “In the last five days before the mail registration deadline, we registered 20,000 people.”

Velez pointed out that vote fraud is possible “only if a well-organized group is running it.” He explained various ways in which bogus registrations can be multiplied throughout the city. “In the South Bronx people can register and give their address at least once in every one of New York's five boroughs. In the South Bronx people can register and give their address as a burned-out building.” At the Board of Elections there was so much confusion that “the Board couldn't and didn't bother to check things like that.” One of Velez's associates described sending volunteers down to the Board of Elections to process the postcard registrations collected by the organization. No verifications were performed on any of the registrations. After the election, investigators found block after block of burned-out houses and vacant lots with five or six registered voters at each location.

In areas of New York City with a less-organized machine, other discrepancies in election results pointed to similar tampering with votes. In more than 25 percent

of the sample precincts chosen at random by investigators, voting records indicate that significantly fewer voters signed in at the polls than total votes cast on the voting machines. Voting machine mechanics report only one explanation for such a discrepancy—unauthorized votes cast on the machine.

The U.S. district court that considered this evidence ruled that significant irregularities had been shown in the election results. However, it ruled, no criminal intent on the part of election officials or Democratic Party workers had been shown, and so declined to overturn the election.

The case of Ohio

Polls taken over the last two weeks indicate that the presidential race in Ohio will be extraordinarily close. In 1976, Jimmy Carter squeaked by Gerald Ford with a margin of 5,000 votes, or less than one vote per precinct. In Ohio the coalition of Republicans and LaRouche supporters joined forces to challenge the election results in federal court, claiming vote fraud conducted through the Carter/Mondale campaign organization. Again, the crucial vehicle of the fraud was the registration and voting of thousands of fictitious persons rounded up by trade union and minority organizations to gain a critical Carter margin.

Analysis of Carter's Ohio vote shows that 400,000 of his votes, or 50 percent, came from the urban centers of Cleveland, Cincinnati, Youngstown, Toledo, and Akron—all centers of activity for Operation Big Vote. Under former Ohio secretary of state Ted Brown, the Operation Big Vote postcard and universal registration drives were resisted, with the state maintaining stringent legal requirements statewide for personal registration with a Republican and a Democrat each present. This state law was violated with abandon by Democratic election officials in these urban centers. Court testimony showed thousands of illegal registrations obtained by the appointment of deputy registrars from the ranks of AFL-CIO and UAW officials who conducted their registration drives in union halls—hardly a bastion of Republican vigilance over registration procedures. As well, large numbers of new voters were signed up in Cincinnati and Cleveland in neighborhoods characterized by block after block of abandoned buildings.

The submitted court testimony in Ohio included numerous examples of vote fraud in the urban centers where Jimmy Carter gathered his vote:

Cleveland: In Ward 11, Precinct K, a ward characteristic of Cleveland's inner city, investigators found that 40 percent of the votes were cast by nonexistent voters in a heavy Carter victory. When investigators sent out a sample of 3,200 letters to the addresses listed by voters on registration roles in the city, 10 percent were returned as nondeliverable at the address given by the voter. As

investigators pulled registration cards to construct the random sample that they would use to demonstrate the overall invalidity of the statewide vote, they also discovered many registration cards missing from the books altogether. Many of these missing cards were subsequently discovered piled on the desk of Virgil Brown, the Democrat heading the Cleveland Board of Elections and a leader of Carter get-out-the-vote efforts.

Toledo: A sample of letters mailed to the registered addresses of voters here resulted in an 11 percent invalidity rate. Investigators, in the process of confirming the random sample utilized in court, attempted to interview persons recorded as voting on Election Day and found a surprisingly high proportion stating that although they were registered, they had not in fact voted. The cause of this phenomenon was an AFL-CIO, UAW get-out-the-vote effort which ran from the precincts where union officials kept minute by minute lists of those who had voted and then called prospective voters from phone banks in the late afternoon to determine whether or not they would, indeed, vote. Those persons who stated their firm intention not to vote were then voted by the trade unionists. Many nonvoters who found votes recorded for them stated to investigators that they were called by the union phone bank.

Cincinnati: Black organizations tied to Operation Big Vote in this city bragged about their registration of 50 persons per day from inner city wards consisting of vacant lots. The results of this activity were preposterously high Carter margins in certain inner city wards—margins that are statistically impossible. For example in inner city wards 17 and 18 of this city, Jimmy Carter garnered 98 percent of the vote.

The random sample of the vote conducted by investigators for the court case concentrated on the five Ohio cities where Carter received 50 percent of his statewide vote. The sample determined that there were 13,401 fraudulent votes cast at a minimum in these cities with 23,157 votes that were irregular but not determinably fraudulent. Statistical analysis of these fraudulent votes demonstrated that they were three to one in favor of Carter.

As in New York, the Ohio federal court ruled that while there was massive evidence of voting irregularities and fraud, the U.S. Labor Party and Republican litigants had not demonstrated criminal intent by the Democratic voting officials involved, and on that basis the court case was dismissed. The Ohio secretary of state made an emergency request to the Ohio state legislature for half a million dollars to conduct further investigations; Brown's request was met in the Democratic state legislature with a threat to cut the entire budget of the secretary of state's office if Brown continued his probe.