



***Grassroots, Geeks, Pros, and Polls: The Election Integrity Movement's Rise  
and Nonstop Battle to Win Back the People's Vote, 2000-2008***

**By Marta Steele**

The Florida 2000 election put the Sunshine State in the national spotlight for what is arguably the “darkest day in Supreme Court History” since the Civil War, embodied in the notorious *Bush v Gore* decision. In reaction, the Help America Vote Act spread electronic voting machinery all over the country. People soon lost faith and confidence in a system that fails both accidentally and deliberately to tally our votes correctly.

When Election 2004 in Ohio repeated the Florida 2000 events exactly, only worse because more electronic machinery was involved and more discrimination, the Election Protection movement's birth pangs morphed into a rapid spread of protest at the grassroots level, drawing in people with multiple skills who ultimately succeeded by working together, organizing, and reaching out to people who were kept from voting for any number of reasons—from the evidence, apparently, being poor, African-American, Latino, Native American, elderly, a student or disabled.

Election 2008, though fraught with problems, allowed the election, not selection, of the people's choice. But no one sat back on their laurels, because there was and is lots more change needed. Instead of

spreading voter I.D. requirements all over the country, which hinder the same underprivileged groups named above, we must put democracy and U.S. citizenship at the top of the priority list—and the basic privilege that underlies them, the right to vote.

Election Protection activists are a conservative group. They want hand-counted paper ballots (HCPB) to become a nationwide method, and that includes thousands of computer scientists with advanced degrees, both in and out of academe. Other developed countries use that system without a problem, so why can't we? Certainly HCPB isn't fail-safe, but inaccuracies don't spread nationwide with the push of one button. As every PC user knows, computerization is far away from the flawless stage necessary to entrust our vote to, our most sacred right as Americans. Elections must be a force that unites, rather than a class battle between the haves and have-nots.

*Grassroots, Geeks, Pros, and Pols* explains all of the above chronologically and analytically in a way that reaches out to all of us. The audience Marta Steele writes for is the solution to the issues she raises. This is her conclusion—the more time we all invest in a system of, by, and for the people, the longer it will last. Here “by the people” is key. In two letters it brings us all in and involves us all in a project, Democracy, that, so long as we stay involved, “will not perish from the Earth.”

### **About the Author**

Marta Steele is a grassroots writer and journalist as well as academic book and journal editor. Her educational background is in classical antiquity and linguistics. A graduate of Wellesley College (BA) and UCLA (MA), she has taught English, rhetoric, ancient Greek, and Latin at the college level. She has also worked fulltime as a newspaper reporter and magazine editor. As an activist since 2001, she has focused on peace, interfaith issues, and election integrity. She resides in Washington, DC, just hours away from her daughter Liza, a PhD candidate in sociology at Princeton University.

## Q&A for Marta Steele

1. Why did you write *Grassroots, Geeks, Pros, and Pols*?

I wrote this book because I thought important history was being ignored, as corruption and ineptitude invaded the electoral realm more and more. The ongoing fight to give elections back to those who truly own it, the people, is information everyone will benefit from. I hope that it brings more people into this good fight and reminds them of its importance—their vote, the bottom line of their democracy.

2. What is the opposition's point of view?

They argue that electronic voting delivers votes quickly and efficiently, involving far fewer people than HCPB does. They say that HCPB wastes paper. The stories the Election Protection movement attempts to spread and publicize involve unrealistic scenarios. Computer scientists hacking easily into an electronic machine, demonstrating potential Election Day chaos, means nothing, because they know so much more about the mechanisms than everyday citizens do. They say that voter fraud occurs frequently because underprivileged people use it to put the people they want into office.

3. What is a reasonable outcome of the Election Protection movement?

Conscientious election protection, which will involve the people in a process that they should be in charge of anyway, at every level and in a nonpartisan way, in order to effectively activate the principles on which the United States was founded and which must endure in order for this country to survive. I see HCPB in that crystal ball, too.

4. What can we do to help?

Thomas Jefferson long ago wrote that “democracy is hard work”—work that we all must be involved in—not just left wingers with megaphones and chants and right wingers with lobbies and lots of money. If each one of us devoted ten minutes a day to governing this country in one way or another that can be as simple as making a few phone calls or talking to neighbors, we'd truly inhabit a “democracy,” a system governed of, by, and for the people.

5. Talk about your background. What qualified you to write this book?

In college and graduate school, I studied Spanish, linguistics, and classical antiquity. My fledgling knowledge of Spanish quickly brought me out into the community to work with underprivileged Hispanic populations. There's a long tradition of activism on my family tree, and so the instinct to make things right emerged in my life as an editor and in my spare time as an activist. In 2001, after the Florida election debacle horrified me, I joined a protest in front of the Fox News building in New York whose subject was media neglect of the election issues and the presence of the losing candidate in the White House.

While at the protest, I learned about the discovery by Greg Palast of the list of supposed felons in Florida who were actually prevented from voting because their names, especially common ones, were close to, or identical to those of actual felons listed legally across the country. As a writer in search of a subject (the opposite of Boccaccio's characters in search of an author) and a rebel in search of a cause, I began to follow Palast to places where he spoke about his findings and gave him as much publicity as I could. That's how I got into the Election Integrity movement, between then and now, with a few years' interruption while this country got over its 9/11 shock and paralysis. During that time, I devoted my activist energy to peace-related issues, protesting against the Iraq war with my writing and photography as well as activities including marches and demonstrations.

After Election 2004 and the Ohio debacle that reenacted Florida 2000 in so many ways, an EI group formed near me in Bucks County, Pennsylvania, and I joined, using my skills as a writer to blog on our activities and relevant events nationwide and interacting with the press and local politicians until 2008, when I moved away to Washington, DC, where EI efforts are focused on statehood, an important cause I might have gotten involved in if I had not reread my blogs and realized that they could form the germ of a book to get the word out about things the press had been ignoring. The rest is history.

6. How does it feel to write modern history?

I've worked as a journalist, both hard copy and Internet, on and off for years, in the form of features, reviews, news, and commentary. What is news coverage if not day-to-day history? To write my book, along with others' books, I read a plethora of news articles circulated on the Web by Progressives, since the mainstream was ignoring us and I felt that someone had to record these events in a continuous manner. I chose 2000 as the birth of public indignation at wrongheaded electoral practices and the years 2000-2008 as a time when the EI movement slowly but surely began to function from coast to coast and strongly impact election-related issues nationwide. 2000 marked the placement of the losing candidate into the oval office and 2008 righted eight years under the wrong presidency with the tenure of a chief executive who was truly the people's choice. So much history was made during those years that must get out to the people, and so many important and far-reaching events (which should be marked by holidays) were agented by dynamic, highly resourceful heroes whom people should read about and remember.

7. Can you relate your background in classical antiquity to your more recent interest?

Nietzsche said, in a work addressed to classicists, that without an understanding of the past we will never understand the present, and without an understanding of the present we will never understand the past. I lay claim to no great depths of understanding in either area, but do consider the *Iliad* the greatest antiwar opus ever, with its frequent, heartbreaking contrasts between the graphic details of war and violence and the poet's brief forays into each victim's past—bucolic, peaceful, detailing families and lineage. The origins of voting were in ancient Greece, as I explain in my Conclusion. So were the origins of democracy and, before we come down too hard on the ancient Greeks for allowing only propertied white males to vote, and excluding women and

slaves, we should consider the battles fought in more recent history, some of them ongoing, to assure all of the citizens of this country the franchise. That's what my book is all about.

## TESTIMONIALS

“Dedicated , idealistic, original thinker”—Rev. Robert Moore,  
Executive Director, Coalition for Peace Action, Princeton, NJ

“She is a super perceptive connection-maker”—George Davis,  
owner, e-Marginalia.com

“When Marta ‘covers’ an event, for the combined purpose of  
experiencing it and then writing about it, she astutely captures the  
essence and the essential parts of what has transpired”—Steve  
Sawmelle, writer/editor

“Thoughtfulness, intelligence and insight . . . enable  
Marta to communicate with purpose and precision”—Maureen  
Haggerty, Principal, Maureen Haggerty Associates

“Sympathetic, . . . enthusiastic, . . . very intelligent and  
articulate, . . . has a passion for writing . . .” students of Rhetoric  
course, The College of New Jersey

“She has the ability to penetrate to the essence in a way that is  
extremely unusual . . .”—Professor Norman Austin, Distinguished  
Visiting Professor of Classics at Florida Atlantic University

“A master of language and a passionate advocate of what's  
Right . . .”—Danny Schechter, filmmaker, author, blogger

“Erudition, curiosity and a sense of wonder . . .”—Patricia  
Sammon, author

“An excellent, eclectic, erudite read”—Laurie J. Manis, social  
worker

## **Praise for *Grassroots, Geeks, Pros and Pols***

"Marta Steele intricately documents the first eight years of what has been called the worst decade in U.S. voting history with an eye toward the depths of corruption of the Bush administration and the escalating fight that ultimately awarded the White House to the most worthy contender. Focus is on the people--the minority that generated one layer of evil ingenuity after another--and the majority, who are capable of defeating it once and for all, but the work needed is grueling and nonstop. Steele's emphasis on "we the people" as the solution is a rallying cry we must all attend to."

- Rob Kall, OpEdNews

"Marta Steele is a woman obsessed. She may be widely known as an exceptional writer and editor but her passion, in her heart and soul, is as a voter, as citizen who believes in the bedrock power of the ballot. As a writer and researcher of thoughtful reports on Op Ed News and other outlets, she is now blowing the whistle that must be blown on threats to democracy that have been underreported."

- Danny Schechter, Author, Filmmaker and Blogger

"While *Grassroots, Geeks, Pros, and Pols* has the heft and footnotes of an academic treatise, it's a fun read. Suggestion: take a double of Felipe II with you into this zoo of miscreants, and savor the dark humor of one method of vote heist after another. Here is the line-up of ballot burglars who think democracy is a safe to be cracked. Bless Marta Steele for setting off the burglar alarm."

- Greg Palast, Author most recently of *Billionaires & Ballot Bandits: How to Steal an Election in 9 Easy Steps* (2012)

"A key breakthrough of this book is that it shatters the notion that the United States may meddle in international elections but would never use such tactics at home. It should be no surprise that the Bush family, with patriarch George Herbert Walker Bush's directorship of the CIA, is so tightly linked to the rise of electronic voting and improbable election results.

The Bush family ascendancy corresponds to nontransparent voting in America. The more we've privatized our software and hardware and called them "trade secrets," the better the Bush family candidates have done. Their presidential victories would be denounced by election observers in Third World countries: they flout the statistical odds, with official exit polls falling outside the margin of error and even predicting victories for their opponents.

This book does more than any other to expose the evils of electronic voting. The endnotes alone amount to a giant step forward in revealing the crimes of privatized e-voting."

- Bob Fittrakis and Harvey Wasserman, [freepress.org](http://freepress.org)

**Published by CICJ Books  
1021 E. Broad St. Columbus, OH 43205**

**To request a review copy, contact**

The Columbus Free Press  
1021 E. Broad St. Columbus, OH 43205

614.253.2571

[truth@freepress.org](mailto:truth@freepress.org)

**To interview the author**

press@wordsunltd.com