

 **HE STOLE THE 2000 ELECTION**

With a villain like Bush, it's difficult to focus all the spite he has earned on one single reason why he does not deserve your vote. Nearly everything he has done, both before and during his White House squatting manifests a uniquely repulsive character. Yet one reason screams out to be recognized as the best one for rejecting him in the voting booth: his claim to the White House is fraudulent.

Let's start with one undisputed fact: nationally, Shrub lost the year 2000 popular vote to Al Gore by over 500,000 Americans. In other words, if the office of the President were decided in a directly democratic manner, Dubya would still be stuck in Texas snuffing death row inmates. Granted, this is legally irrelevant. Like it or not, the U.S. Constitution established an Electoral College system to select the President, not a system of popular vote. While the system may seem archaic, it is nonetheless the rule of law, and nobody would argue for trumping it without a Constitutional Amendment. Right?

Actually, one group did argue this: the George W. Bush 2000 campaign. The polls leading up to the November election made it seem likely that while Georgie Boy would win the popular vote by a razor-thin margin, he would lose the Electoral College. The Bush team's strategy for this contingency was to manufacture a massive "popular" campaign of outrage to overturn the results of the election. As reported November 1, 2000 by Michael Kramer of the *New York Daily News*, the mass rebellion would be stoked by paid advertisements and a right-wing talk radio onslaught. The broadcast blowhards would inveigh against the "unfairness" of the Electoral College, which was described in another pre-election *Boston Herald* article as "an antiquated relic" by Republican sources.

The Republic anti-Electoral College campaign would go further. "Local business leaders will be urged to lobby their customers, the clergy will be asked to speak up for the popular will and Team

Bush will enlist as many Democrats as possible to scream as loud as they can.” For the last part, the Bushistas even came up with a catchy slogan: “Democrats for Democracy.” A Bush aide added, “And I think you can count on the media to fuel the thing big-time. Even papers that supported Gore might turn against him because the will of the people will have been thwarted.” Most important, members of the Electoral College would be pressured to do the right thing and switch their vote for Dubya. In summing up the entire proposed operation, a Bush aide succinctly stated: “The one thing we don’t do is roll over—we fight.”

(Lest you believe the *Boston Herald* article was part of some liberal media plot to smear the Shrub campaign, the plan was never denied by any member of the campaign, and was cited with gleeful approval before the election by the right-wing GOP-linked website Newsmax, which labeled as “obvious” the unfairness of the Electoral College system.)

Oddly, when Gore defeated Dubya in the popular vote, the massive talk-radio campaign against the trumping of the people’s will never happened. Instead, a campaign rallied against Gore and his VP pick Joseph Lieberman (who were quickly referred to as “Sore-Loserman”) for daring to challenge the results of the Shrub “victory” as granted by an infallible Electoral College.

Gore (to his credit) never risked provoking a Constitutional crisis by challenging the legitimacy of the Electoral College. Instead, the Gore campaign focused its challenges on the official voting results in Florida, where a supposed win by Dubya granted 25 electoral votes toward his Electoral College majority. (270 votes were needed, and Bush finished with 271 to Gore’s 266.)

At face value, the 2000 Florida election stinks. The Governor of the state then was Jeb Bush, Shrub’s brother, who is still in office. The Secretary of State, whose job was to certify the results and ensure the election’s integrity, was Katherine Harris, a right-wing hack with ties to both Bush brothers. (She was co-chair of the Bush 2000 campaign in Florida.) The official margin of victory in Florida: 537 votes out of nearly six million. Even without any further evidence, such results would have deservedly met with snickers and skepticism had they been announced in some backwards banana republic.

Further worries were soon noted. The most infamous example was the “butterfly ballot” in Palm Beach County. Presidential can-

didates were listed on two pages in the county, with Pat Buchanan's name listed in between Bush's and Gore's in a manner that confused many voters, who weren't sure which hole was for Buchanan and which for Gore. The upshot: Buchanan received a total of 3,424 votes in the county, or 0.79% of the total. Statewide, Pat won a mere 0.34% of the vote, and Palm Beach, a haven for retired liberal Jewish voters, was an unlikely hotbed of support for the ultra-conservative commentator with a penchant for anti-Semitic rhetoric.

That wouldn't stop Team Bush from arguing precisely that. "Palm Beach County is a Pat Buchanan stronghold," Ari Fleischer would quickly proclaim to explain the discrepancy (in the first of many seemingly delusional pronouncements). When questioned about this claim, Jim McConnell, Buchanan's Florida coordinator, told Jake Tapper of *Salon*, "That's nonsense." He estimated the number of Buchanan supporters in the county at no more than 500. McConnell explained the Buchanan campaign did no advertising in the county, as "the percentage of people down there who would be receptive to our message is much smaller than in other parts of the state." On the suspiciously high totals, he declared: "Do I believe that these people inadvertently cast their votes for Pat Buchanan? Yes, I do. We have to believe that based on the vote totals elsewhere." How many legitimate votes did he believe Pat received in the area? "I think 1,000 would be generous." This jibes with the statistical evidence.

Showing more integrity than Dubya, Pat Buchanan stated on the *Today* show, "I don't want any votes that I did not receive and I don't want to win any votes by mistake."

Of course, some of the Buchanan voters were likely confused Shrub fans as well. So let's give him the benefit of the doubt, and assume (generously) that a quarter of the 2,400 votes above Buchanan's (generous) 1000 were actually for him. That still would give Gore a net total of 1,800 votes, than enough to switch Florida's Electoral Votes to Al and push him into the White House.

But that is only part of the math. As it turned out, the faulty design lead to 6,607 discarded ballots, "overvotes" by voters who chose both Buchanan and Gore. There were also 1,631 overvotes for Bush and Buchanan (less than a quarter of the Pat-Al total) for a net difference of slightly fewer than 5,000 votes. Adding to that the 2,908 overvotes for Gore and Socialist David McReynolds

(whose name appeared below Gore's on the opposite page) gives nearly 7,900 votes that probably should have gone to Gore, but did not.

That Al Gore lost thousands of votes—and thus the White House—over a ballot design glitch should outrage anyone who believes in fundamental democratic rights, but the American press treated it as an acceptable snafu. And yet, this was only the beginning of the deception surrounding the 2000 Florida election.

The most comprehensive investigation of the 2000 Florida election was by journalist Greg Palast, an American who, ironically enough, was working in Britain for the UK *Guardian*, the *London Observer*, and the BBC at the time. While most of the American press was downplaying the Jews-for-Buchanan fiasco, Palast rolled up his sleeves and researched an even more sordid scandal.

In the months before the election, Katherine Harris ordered 57,700 voters purged from the voter registries, claiming they were felons with no right to vote. The purge list, however, was inaccurate. For example, on one of the scrub lists, Palast uncovered 325 names with conviction dates in the future. Office clerks in the Secretary of State's office were told to blank out the dates of these time-travelers before they sent the lists to county election supervisors. The compiled purge lists had over 4,000 blank conviction dates.

Even without the Back-to-the-Future felons, the making of the list was a bogus enterprise. Suffixes such as "Jr." and "Sr." and middle names or initials were removed from the matching criteria in compiling the names to validate the list. Partial matches of first or last names (the first four letters) counted as a match, even in reverse order: for example, an "Anderson Christian" could wipe out a "Chris Anders." Meanwhile, DBT ChoicePoint, the private firm hired to compile the list, didn't bother to match address histories, though they had the information. Though DBT had 1,200 databases and four billion records to check the list against, none were checked. Only four criteria were used for verification: the partial name match, date of birth, gender, and race.

Why did race make the short list? Looking at the evidence, David Bositis, a voting demographics expert from the Washington's Center for Political and Economic Studies, declared it an "obvious

technique to discriminate against Black voters.” 46 percent of convicted felons are African Americans: therefore, a list of felons with a racial classification would have a near majority of blacks on it. Bositis concluded that the program “must have had a partisan motivation.”

African Americans have an interesting voting pattern when it comes to presidential elections. In the 20 years since Reagan and Bush Sr. took over the White House, they have as a group come to distrust the Republican Party. As a result, over 90% of African Americans vote for the Democratic ticket (it was 93% in Florida 2000). In setting the criteria for the final purge list, the Secretary of State’s office had hunted down the black vote, removing voters who would have damaged the election hopes of Jeb’s brother.

How flawed was the list? At first, DBT ChoicePoint boasted to Palast that it was “85 percent correct.” If this is true, that would still have been enough to alter the outcome of the election. However, Leon County officials chose to independently verify the list, and could only confirm 34 out of 694 on the list. Using these sample data and statistics, Palast concluded that the list was in error over 90% of the time.

To be fair to DBT, they were merely following the instructions of Katherine Harris’s office. Under oath, ChoicePoint VP James Lee revealed that the state of Florida, not DBT, gave directions for compiling the list that the company warned would cause eligible voters to be erroneously included. Kat Harris, simultaneously in charge of both voter rolls and Shrub’s Florida election campaign, ignored their warnings. Not that ChoicePoint, a company with tight ties to the GOP, complained too loudly on receiving an inflated multi-million dollar contract for intentionally shoddy work.

(Because of the controversy, DBT have left the business of ensuring voting integrity. Their replacement? Arthur Andersen, the upstanding accounting firm that vouched for Enron’s books.)

Not all names on the list were removed from the voter rolls; a few counties rejected the scrub list. One notable example was Madison County. Linda Howell, the county election supervisor, had a personal reason to suspect the lists were flawed: she was erroneously included on them. In other areas, voters could appeal their inclusion, though some counties didn’t bother to inform those affected of their loss of voting rights. (“I don’t think

that it's up to U.S. to tell them they're a convicted felon," explained Etta Rosado of Volusia County, which neither confirmed the information nor informed people they had been dropped from voter rolls.) Palast and the BBC concluded that at least 22,000 votes for Al Gore were lost through the voter purge operation.

Palast also discovered that at least 50,000 Floridians were illegally disenfranchised from voting by Governor Jeb Bush's office. These citizens, convicted felons from other states who never lost their voting rights, were denied their civil rights in defiance of court rulings. As 80% of all registered voters cast ballots, and 90% of the targeted demographic (out-of-state ex-cons) vote Democrat, Jeb's operation cost Al Gore at least 30,000 votes.

As a high percentage of these voters were African-American, the program was another racially targeted hatchet job inspired (at the very least) by political pragmatism. De facto Jim Crow didn't end there. Counties with a high percentage of black voters tend to be poorer; they had older voting equipment with much higher error rates. In some cases, the quality of the equipment wasn't even the factor. Accuvote is a machine that ensures paper ballot errors are corrected before the voter is through. In Leon, a primarily white county, the machinery reduced spoiled ballots to one in 500. Nearby Gadsden, a black-majority county, had the same machinery, but, for some reason, the reject mechanism wasn't activated, and one in eight ballots was spoiled. And these examples pale beside shocking news reports of white Highway Patrol officers setting up intimidating checkpoints near voting sites in a heavily black district of Broward County.

Writer Dave McGowan noted on his website other curious reports. In Volusia County, a precinct originally reported to the state that Bush had received 2,813 votes—in a county with 412 total ballots cast. Incredibly, Gore's vote total was even more suspicious: it was reported as -16,022, thus reducing his statewide vote total. At least in this case, the error (described as a "computer glitch" in *USA Today*) was discovered and corrected, but it calls into question the accuracy of the entire vote-counting process. In another Volusia County incident, sheriff's deputies investigated why an election worker left the ballot collection area with two uninspected bags. The *Washington Post* reported with a straight face that he was "merely taking home dirty laundry." The *UK Times* reported that as many as 17,000 ballots in primarily

black areas were pre-punched for rival candidates, thus disqualifying the ballot when opponents were selected (which may have something to do with the abnormal number of rejected ballots in mostly African-American areas). All these mainstream news reports are disturbing but have yet to be thoroughly investigated. Even without these examples, the 2000 Florida election results would outleaze any swampland swindle.

You'd think that all the evidence cited would've had supported compelling arguments that something was fishy in Florida. And yet the Gore campaign (to its great shame) ignored all the evidence. Evidently the Gore lawyers believed it was a loser bet, as if issues such as evidence of voter disenfranchisement and fraud are technicalities in a presidential election. Instead, they argued that, even with the Jews for Buchanan and the twin voter ethnic-cleansing programs of Jeb and Kat, Al Gore would have won the election if the ballots has been counted right.

This argument by the Gore campaign also met with obstruction by Team Bush, the office of Katherine Harris, and the U.S. Supreme Court (see Reason #25). Meanwhile, important facts were ignored while terms such as "hanging chad" and "dimpled ballots" became part of mainstream currency and the Bush campaign moaned about "recount after recount." The will of the Florida public was rejected in December 2000 for the highest of offices, and this led to an invalid election result. At the very least, there could have been a revote in Florida, either in Palm Beach County or statewide. This is a normal way to settle legitimately disputed elections, with a precedent in presidential elections: because of faulty voting machines, a revote was held in one Maryland county for the 1972 election, eight days after election. The revote was included in the state's final totals and certified by Congress. If Dubya truly desired to restore dignity to the presidency, he would have demanded no less himself.

None of this was meant to be. The end result is a national disgrace: a phony election illegitimately putting into office a sorry excuse for a man. The theft of the presidency is a fundamental betrayal of democracy. For this reason alone, Bush deserves to be rejected in 2004, to restore basic legitimacy to a government that is supposed to be of the people, by the people, and for the people.

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