

PERSPECTIVES

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America's *uncertainty* is *certain*

The only thing this election has proved, so far, is that every vote counts. This should be abundantly clear. Your vote is critical. But here at the Emerald, America's anguish has become our own. Even the editorial board can't decide: As a country, have we ever been more divided, or have we ever been more united? And what do we do now?

Nader supporters and independents say we've never been more united — united behind the idea that our system is fine and there are just details to be quibbled about. Issues of power go unnoticed, independents cry. America is in love with global corporate capitalism, Nader says. Money equals power and speech; corporations control our government, our environment and our lives; and no one wants to challenge the state of affairs. To this view, every vote is critically important to make a stand against corruption and powerlessness.

Democrats and Republicans say our country is radically divided. We're split along ideological lines, they say. Critical issues such as abortion, gay rights, education, environmentalism and religion starkly divide the American landscape. Vast differences exist between the parties, they say, and every vote is necessary to support one ideology or the other.

Adding spin to this cycle, many people say Nader voters cost Gore the election. But a recent poll showed that only 25 percent of Nader supporters would have voted for Gore. Well, actually, even 25 percent of the more than 96,000 votes cast for Nader in Florida would make the difference right now. But haven't Nader voters done the right thing by voting for the candidate they believed in — the man who represent-

ed them? Isn't that democracy? People are undecided.

Now the election process itself is making this continental divide more unified. A few hundred votes in Florida will decide the presidency. The re-count continues and absentees have yet to be counted, so why don't the media relax and let the process happen without 24-hour reports on every exacting detail?

Unfortunately, the media can't relax. People invested in the decision have made serious allegations. In St. Louis, voters waiting in line were turned away. The ballot in Florida's Palm Beach County confused some people, and 19,000 votes were thrown out. Questions are arising about irregularities in Wisconsin and New Mexico. The outcome isn't even known yet, and people are in an uproar. Is now the time to be raising these issues?

Jesse Jackson rallied in Florida about the irregularities there. Is he only upset because Gore hasn't won? Pundits are torn about his motives and the motives of Democrats who want votes counted by hand. Bush's campaign has suggested it might demand re-counts in other close states. Democrats imply that's just tit for tat.

Floridians are getting picked on (don't they know how to vote or count correctly?), but is that only because they are under the microscope? Maybe New York or California would show worse irregularities if those states were re-counting.

Whoever wins, though, will obviously have no mandate from the public. America is split down the middle on the Gore-Bush choice. So maybe now we should work together. Maybe now is

not the time for Jackson to be fanning the controversy. Perhaps we should learn the results and then find common ground on which to run the country.

Or maybe we should dismiss unity. Doesn't unity, as many modern philosophers think, just dissolve differences? If we search for the perfect middle to make decisions, don't we end up with a total lack of flavor? And for the 19,120 impassioned Florida voters, whose votes were dismissed because some ballots had two holes punched instead of one, should they be giving in and finding common ground? Their votes didn't even count.

Actually, the results in Florida show that those votes really, really counted. Those voters should perhaps have taken the time to get a new ballot from elections workers, instead of punching two holes. Here in Oregon, thanks to the mail-in system, discrepancies like that can be clarified with a phone call to the voter.

But it all comes down to Florida. Why? Oh yes, because of the Electoral College. Actually, that's another thing this election has proved: People need to unify and discuss the electoral system, because it's not widely understood and it has America divided. Many people are outraged that the man most Americans voted for may not be the man elected. Others are staunch defenders of the system, saying it gives small states weight in the election, so they aren't overwhelmed by heavily populated urban areas.

Law experts make the issue murkier. As Neal Katyal, a presidential law expert, explained for CNN today, the sovereignty principles underlying our

Constitution demand that the vote of the people be decisive. But the Constitution says the formality of the electoral votes must be followed. And Bush is saying that as well. But the formality of the law, as Katyal points out, says a state must appoint its Electoral College delegates on Election Day. Florida did not do that. As a result, the law says the Florida Legislature has the power to remedy the situation, if necessary.

Maybe the voters who think the Electoral College threatens the will of the people should make their voices heard and get the process changed. Or maybe they should respect the Constitution as written, even if it contradicts its principles. Should Americans fight or unify?

We desperately hope a close election, an ideological split and discontent with the system would encourage people to get involved in the political process. But will it? Maybe not. Perhaps people will forget as soon as the really great Christmas sales begin. And history doesn't bode well for more involvement. In 1960, President Kennedy won by only 118,574 votes. In 1964, fewer people voted than in 1960. In 1968, the same thing. So maybe nobody cares. We don't know.

Actually, the Emerald editorial board is divided on all of these issues. We are unified only in our confusion. Apparently, so is the rest of the country. So here's democracy for you: No newspaper can tell you who's right and who's wrong. We all need to decide together what America does next.

This editorial represents the opinion of the Emerald editorial board. Responses can be sent to ode@oregon.uoregon.edu.

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"Our democratic process calls for a vote on Election Day; it does not call for us to continue voting until someone likes the outcome."
 — **Bush campaign chairman Don Evans**, ABC News, Nov. 9, 2000

"I want to be very careful that we don't do anything that politicizes what is a very important moment in American history..."
 — **Attorney General Janet Reno**, speaking about the political process, ABC News, Nov. 9, 2000

"I cannot believe someone would vote for Gore and say, 'I made a mistake. I should have voted for Buchanan.'"
 — **Reform Party candidate Pat Buchanan**, speaking to Matt Lauer on NBC's "Today," Nov. 9, 2000

"You don't have to be snippy about it."
 — **Vice President Al Gore**, retracting his concession to Texas Gov. George W. Bush on the phone on election night, New York Times, Nov. 9, 2000

"Bush keeps saying he trusts the American people. Well, their judgment was that they preferred Al Gore to him."
 — **Dennis Goldford**, a political scientist at Iowa's Drake University, The Miami Herald, Nov. 9, 2000

Florida waiting to exhale



CAPTAIN SENSIBLE

PAT PAYNE

It was a damn close-run thing, the most damned close-run thing you'd ever see in your life. — Field Marshal Arthur Wellesley, Duke of Wellington, describing the Battle of Waterloo, 1815.

Right now, the country is going through its own "damn close-run thing." Florida still has not been decided. As I write, Florida is embroiled in a re-count triggered automatically by the razor-edge margin between the two candidates. At last count only 233 votes stood between Texas Gov. George W. Bush and Vice President Al Gore.

Once again, our TV media jumped the gun — twice. Florida served as a test of the cardiac health of Tom Brokaw, Bernie Shaw and other news anchors Tuesday night and Wednesday morning. After early projections declared Florida for Gore, the major networks retracted the call. Hours later, they declared Florida for Bush, giving him the presidency. In a normal election, that would be the end.

This is not, as you have undoubtedly noticed, a normal election. People were getting sloshed in Austin, Texas, for an hour celebrating the "victory" of their governor before Gore, smarting from losing his home state to Bush and concerned about irregularities in the Florida ballot, retracted his concession and demanded a recount.

And so the race hangs in free-fall.

There are shades of 1948 at play here: The Chicago Daily Tribune ran an early edition

calling New York Gov. Thomas Dewey the winner of the presidency. Needless to say, incumbent Harry S. Truman trounced the governor when all was said and done, and one of the most enduring photos of that election is Truman triumphantly holding up a copy of the gaffe after winning. Neither Bush nor Gore will be hefting videotapes, I think.

But the larger question is why did the television media screw up so dramatically, even pulling print media with them? I could just say, "Well, duh, it's television" and leave it at that. But I've got inches to fill. My pet theory about television journalism in situations like this is the "gunslinger" model.

Look at it this way. There is a showdown with at least two hombres, each with a hand on his gun. The idea is to shoot first or the other guy will. It's much the same in television news, from what I see. They want to get the story out first to have the honor of the scoop. This leaves precious little time for fact-checking. When it seemed Gore was going to carry Florida, the first showdown happened. A bigger shoot-out was when Bush seemed to have won the presidency. It appeared that they wanted to be the first to report the winner and so ran with the story without even waiting to see whether the result would stick.

At this point, mind you, barring Buchanan (whom I believe should be thrown bodily out of the country) I couldn't care less just who gets the top spot. After an enervating and vicious campaign between three candidates, a Neanderthal could win in the election and everything would be copacetic. This has been an ugly and vicious race. It has been a race that more than any other deserves all the war metaphors that politicians have conferred on the pursuit.

I'll be glad when this "close-run thing" is done. Unfortunately, at the rate we're going, that won't be until Inauguration Day.

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