

WHAT IS A VOTE?

INTERVIEWS BY MICHAEL McCUSKER

"These American Presidential elections are extraordinary games in which the greatest zest and party bitterness the whole nation takes part, although there is no real difference between the parties except that of 'ins and outs.'"

—WINSTON CHURCHILL (1928)

Once again the NCTE asks the questions of coastal citizens:

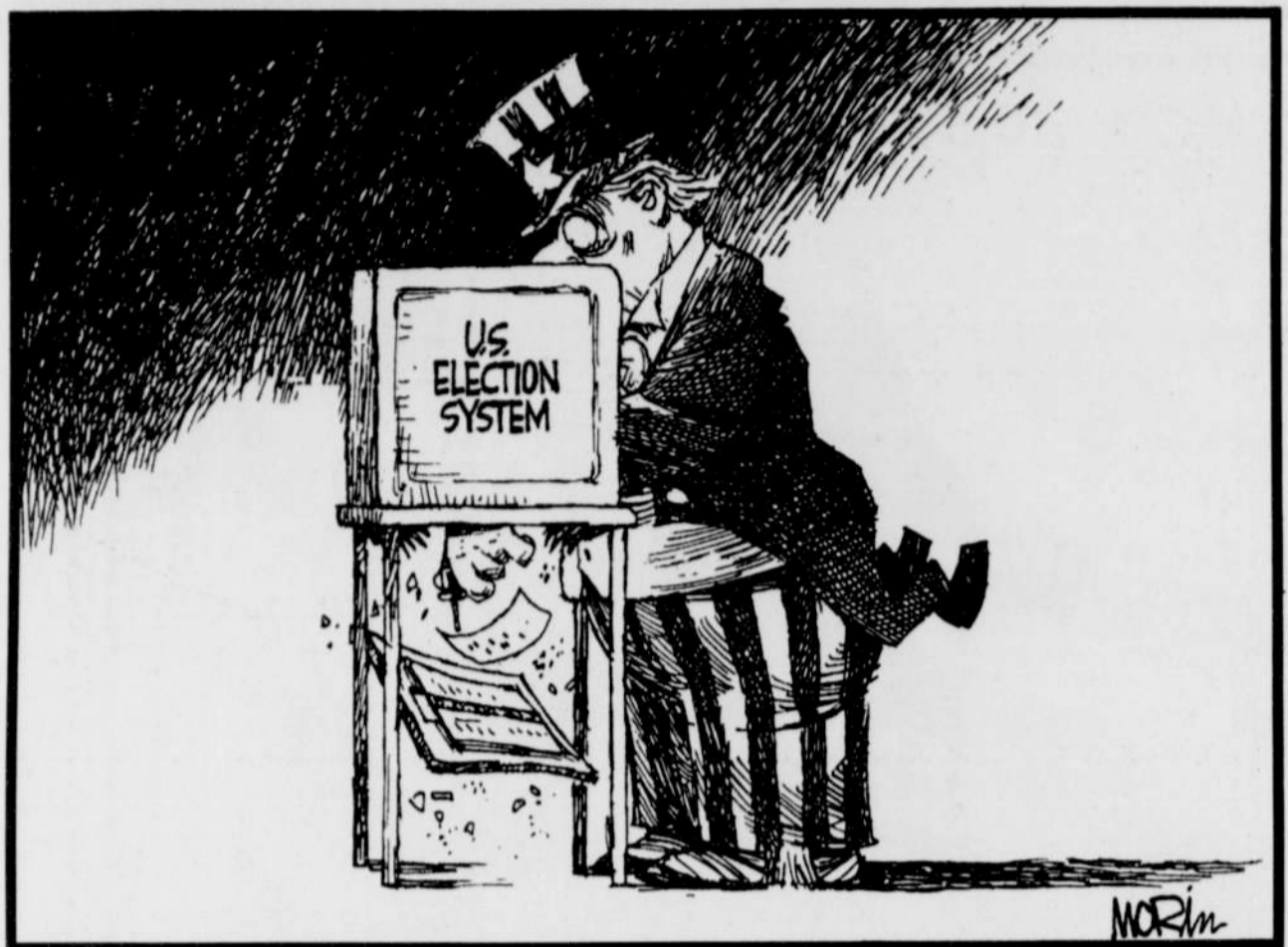
Do you think the extraordinary election of 2000 was legitimate and fair?

What do you think might be the consequences of the election?

Although a few dismissed the questions as of little use but historical curiosity almost everyone else asked emphasized the need for intense and long-term scrutiny of the election. There is no doubt the election will be disputed until the end of U.S. history; some fear it portends a beginning of the end of our history as a democracy.

Asked about England's recent elections for Prime Minister, a British actor said to an American, "Unlike your country's election process, in England the candidate who receives the most votes wins."

And so, indeed, the major question: What is a vote?



MORIN

CAROLYN DUNN

(She is a poet living in Astoria; she is also a librarian.)

In more than forty years of voting I have never had the sorrow of witnessing such sleazy, blatant disenfranchisement in this country. Oh sure, a few southern states *might* be a little slippery in their procedures, but it was just one of those "family" things, nationally, that had to be endured until the offenders died off, or came to their ethical senses. We have in the 2000 election (*bestowing?*) learned that waiting won't work when it comes to defending and practicing democratic principles.

When argument is silenced and there is total distrust of "the people" (1 citizen/1 vote), democracy has perished. When there is a Presidency not even by aging movie stars but by ethically-arrested, power-hungry oil men, the management (not *leadership* but *management*) is top-down instead of bottom-up, and democracy has failed.

In this last "election" we were told who would be our President. It was decided for us. The devil take who could not vote, who was intimidated, who was fooled into thinking they'd voted for their choice when in actuality they had not, or whose vote was never (*never!*) counted. We were, it seems, as the nation's people, not "able," not to be trusted, not worthy of our own governing principles and procedures. And who took this decision upon themselves? Why, our highest court of law. The third leg of our democratic stool — the one leg which our nation's founders designated as exempt from partisan politics, and therefore a strong safeguard against the chicanery and errors of such politics. That leg groaned, cracked, splintered, gave way, fell to the ground.

If we can keep the stool up while we get that leg restored and in place, and go ahead and repair the other two with real campaign finance reform and 1 person/1 vote legitimization, we just may have a solid structure on which to seat a true, working, bottom-up democracy.

JOHN GOODENBERGER

(He is an historic building consultant, teaches architecture to 5th through 7th grades at Astor, Lewis & Clark and Astoria Middle Schools, and coaches track and long distance running at Astoria High School)

My feelings about the 2000 election are, of course, disappointment, especially the way it was handled by the Supreme Court. It is difficult to believe the decision was not biased.

On a personal level, to a large extent my life is no different. I carry it on whether there is a President I support or don't support.

On a national and international level, George Bush is an embarrassment.

A friend of mine was going to keep a scrapbook of all the stupid things Bush says and does, but it became a full time job and he had to quit to get on with his life.

I think that's what we all must do — get on with our lives. Not that we ignore Bush or forget the circumstances of his election. But we must get on and continue to fight for the things we believe in.

MASON MEYER

(He is a movie theater employee)

I think the 2000 election was illegal. The illegal ballots in Florida should have been thrown out. The people who wanted a recount so their votes would count should have got it. The whole state should have revoted and the Feds should have made sure everybody's vote counted.

The Supreme Court betrayed the country. Scalia in particular should have recused himself for conflict of interest with his lawyer son representing Bush's campaign. Scalia is Bush Sr.'s product because he appointed him to the Court. The other four Supreme Court Justices just basically went along with Scalia.

I think the way the Supreme Court voted was an act of treachery. Anybody on the Court who believes the people's vote doesn't count is a traitor.

The people of this country were denied their right to elect their President.

ANNE MacGREGOR

(She is a sandwich maker and "produce doodadder" at Astoria's Community Store, as well as a story teller on KMUN.)

I was one of those people who voted for Ralph Nader, so I have a little response for the people who say we cost Gore the 2000 election: I say the same as Ralph that if Gore had mounted any kind of campaign he might be President.

We don't have an elected President. What does that mean as far as setting precedent? That's the main thing. Now anybody can be President without being elected. So what does that mean legally?

With Bush as the first example, will it matter any more who is President? He is just a mouthpiece, and if we can get a President without electing him, what does that mean for the future. Does an election mean anything anymore? Are we even going to have another election?

I think we're at a crossroads. I would like to know what it really means for the future.

AGNES FIELD

(She is an artist, poet and chairwoman of the North Coast Women's Political Caucus.)

First of all I think it will always be debated if George Bush won the election. I don't think he did, but the fact is, he is in the White House. I feel strongly that he is in the White House because a lot of working people voted for him — 60% of non-college working white men voted for Bush. And the reason they voted for him was primarily because he kept repeating simple phrases over and over again, as if they were mantras:

"Less government in your life!"

"Less taxes!"

"Family values!"

And he constantly stressed "Education."

These are the issues that appeal to working people and these are what helped make him President.

I think it was an election of values and styles rather than substance. Gore came across as an intellectual bureaucrat.

There were many other issues that hurt Gore, such as Clinton's behavior in the White House.

For me personally, George Bush in the White House has galvanized me. I have not been involved in politics for about ten years. Like many people I have been wrapped in my life, my family, my art. There have been many strong issues but not enough to get me out and do something until now.

When you take a look at where we are and what is happening in this country: — We have 11,000,000 people with no health insurance; 500,000 homeless people; 1 in 5 children still live in poverty; and the income polarities in Oregon alone,



& BREW PUB, CANNON BEACH

DEMOCRACY WRACKED

One has the uneasy feeling that what will intrigue future historians most about the American republic is how easily it fell. Consider that day last November when a mob of Republican congressional aides and hired operatives stormed a municipal building in Miami, Florida, and halted a court-ordered ballot count — thereby effectively deciding a Presidential election. The obscure New York congressman in charge of this pocket coup picked up a phone, spoke the words "Shut it down," and the whole structure of American democracy collapsed like the empire of the Incas when confronted by Pizarro and his band of freebooters. What happened? How had the vital center been so hollowed out?

To be sure, our idea of the Supreme Court as a bastion of sacrosanct constitutional authority... had long been whittled back down to our acceptance of it as a gang of shoddy political hacks. Yet this still begs the question. For all the rabby "We will survive" pronouncements of the news media, most of the American public had already moved on — the whole election no more than an episode in the endless circus of spectacular murders, trials, sex scandals. Within weeks, jokes about chads were imbedded in our potato chip commercials. How was it that Americans so readily surrendered the faith of their fathers? How is it that we now seem quite willing as a people to as soon accept, say, Singapore's "Asian model" of democracy (save for its curbs on automatic weapons)?

We sit amid the wreckage of a political system crushed by money, smothered in cynicism, mediocrity, sheer animosity.

—KEVIN BAKER (HARPER'S, MAY 2001)

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