



Greg Palast

The Rolling Stone journalist talks about the 2016 vote, the subject of his film, "The Best Democracy Money Can Buy"

PHOTO COURTESY OF GREG PALAST/"THE BEST DEMOCRACY MONEY CAN BUY"

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For the past month, people around the world have pondered the meaning of the phrase "President Donald Trump."

During this period hate crimes have multiplied, street resistance has swelled, tear gas has flowed, and prominent white supremacists have been nominated for top positions in the U.S. government.

On television, one prominent Trump supporter cited Japanese internment as a positive legal model for what he hopes will happen to Muslims under "President Donald Trump."

But for the next week at least, Americans would do better to consider not the effect of the phrase, but its fundamental accuracy.

Donald Trump lost the popular election by more than 2 million votes, yet is projected to win more votes in the electoral college – an arcane institution once designed to empower the elites of slave states.

And a week from today that electoral lead remains in question – not only because of so-called "faithless" Republican electors who could change their vote on the 19th of December, but because the popular election is not actually over until Dec. 13 – the deadline for counting the very last vote.

Over the past week, election experts have patiently explained that many states declared Trump their winner without counting all of their votes, including over a million votes from communities of color who traditionally vote Democratic.

This revelation has led to a small but

organized outcry in defense of voting rights, as charges of Jim Crow mingle with open references to "Muslim registries" and Japanese internment.

On Nov. 25, Green Party Presidential Candidate Jill Stein took the lead, filing for a re-count in Wisconsin after raising over \$5 million dollars to pay everything the state charges her. On her website, Stein said this money was raised in less than three days and came from more than 130,000 people giving less than \$50 each. The latest count puts her total in excess of \$6 million.

Stein has also filed for recounts in Michigan and Pennsylvania. Under federal law, all these recounts must be completed by Dec. 13, ahead of the the electoral college vote.

Rolling Stone journalist Greg Palast said problems like these are not new. Palast, a former private investigator, is a firebrand when it comes to critical election analysis. He has studied voter suppression for the past 16 years, broke the story on Florida's voter suppression in 2000, and has a history of documenting political corruption, corporate crime, and the colorful characters who make them possible.

In his new film "The Best Democracy Money Can Buy," Palast investigates the election fraud of 2016 and excavates its past, establishing continuity from the KKK to the Civil Rights Movement to thousands of people waiting in line to vote.

Palast answered questions for Street Roots to explain the current recount and why the movement for civil rights includes both Standing Rock and the ballot box.

Stephen Quirke: *How instrumental was your election coverage to the Green Party's current campaign to count the votes? How did Jill Stein contact you?*

Greg Palast: There's a lot of stupid going around. Like, "The election was stolen by Russians!"

I'm a journalist with 16 years on the ballot-bending beat for Rolling Stone and BBC TV. I think Jill Stein asked me to break the news because I'd get the story right, I'd have credibility, and I'd immediately put to rest the idea that she's on some crazy hunt for Putin's fingerprints in the software.

S.Q.: *You've covered issues with election fraud since 2000. What's different this time?*

G.P.: In 2000, for BBC and The Guardian, I discovered that Jeb Bush threw 56,000 African-Americans off the voter rolls because they were, supposedly, ex-cons, criminals. All were innocent – but that made his brother Dubya our president.

In 2016, Trump's henchman, Kris Kobach, Secretary of State for Kansas, pulled off a similar stunt, accusing voters of color of voting twice (in two states in the same election). It was just a list of common names (James Brown, Maria Hernandez), but it cost about 1.1 million voters their vote, mostly minorities. It's just a variation of the faux felon purge – but involved 30 states, including swing states Michigan and Pennsylvania.

What's the same is that, in both 2000 and 2016, only the foreign press is interested in

racial vote suppression in America – and you.

S.Q.: *State-wide recounts are currently happening in Michigan and Wisconsin, with limited local recounts happening in Pennsylvania. What's the status of these re-counts, and what issues are they looking for?*

G.P.: "Recount" is really the wrong name. It should be simply called "the count." Because the nasty secret of American democracy is that several million ballots just never get counted: A million "provisional" ballots – into the dumpster. A million absentee ballots – into the dumpster – and for cockamamie reasons like using the wrong envelope.

And then there are the ballots kicked out by machines uncounted, "under-votes" (blank ballots) and "over-votes," as when the machine thinks someone voted for two presidential candidates, zero vote gets recorded. Now, I know Detroit schools are bad, but everyone knows there's just one president, and you (are allowed to) only vote for one. The problem is the machines – which, in poor cities like Detroit, are garbage bins with counters on them. Votes gets trashed by the tens of thousands.

So the Stein recount spends most of its energies on counting the votes that *didn't get counted in the first place*. And they may have to fight in court over each one – for example, provisional ballots filed by students in Wisconsin with the "wrong" ID.

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