

Election 2004: What happened

FOR four years I've been struggling semantically to identify the man in the White House. Since he wasn't properly elected, I made an editorial decision not to legitimize his coup by referring to him in my columns as "president." Admittedly, avoiding awkward sentence constructions has been a challenge. And my occasional use of parenthesis around the word "president" yielded me the title of "wingnut" from the right-wing death threat mob. But the fact is, he didn't win the Florida vote, nor the presidency in 2000.

That may have changed. Starting in January, I hope to be referring to George W. Bush as "President Bush." This isn't to say the 2004 presidential election was clean. It's just to say that I haven't seen any convincing proof at this early point that it was stolen (though there is a quickly growing body of evidence suggesting inexplicable statistical anomalies regarding electronic voting trends – see www.mediastudy.com/election.html)

I also haven't seen any evidence of the "mandate" the corporate media is handing to Bush. Going by the official count of 51 percent, Bush won the narrowest "reelection" margin of any "sitting president" since the white supremacist Woodrow Wilson was reelected in 1916. If you factor in the normal 2-3 percent "vote spoilage" into the equation (votes cast, usually in minority areas, that are not counted due to mechanical error), Bush drops to less than 50 percent of the votes cast. Still, the "liberal" Boston Globe credits Bush with "A clear mandate to advance a conservative agenda." USA Today claimed in a

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headline that a "Clear mandate will boost Bush's authority." The Los Angeles Times, in an apparent act of self-contradiction, wrote, "Bush can claim a solid mandate of 51 percent of the vote."

If 51 percent of the vote doesn't quite smell like a mandate to you, National Public Radio wants you to rest assured that it is, with Washington reporter Renee Montague asserting that "by any definition I think you could call this a mandate." This line sent me scurrying for my dictionary – which defines a mandate as "an authoritative command or instruction." Fifty-one percent seems more like a fuzzy command. Most bizarre, however, was The Washington Post's assertion that Bush had just won a "clearer mandate" than he did four years ago – as if losing the popular vote by a half million in 2000 gave him a mandate to reshape America.

Mandateman's wacko minions

Backed by the pundocracy's mediated illusion, Bush has already begun to wild. For his first post-election appointment, the president-elect announced that he has selected Dr. W. David Hager to head the FDA's Reproductive Health Drugs Advisory Committee. This is the same Dr. Hager who wrote that women suffering from PMS need only to turn to the bible for help. Hager won notoriety in his private practice by refusing to prescribe birth control medication to unmarried women. Rabidly anti-abortion, Hager has also vowed to fight to ban the legal sale of certain birth control drugs which he identifies as abortifacients.

Mandateman also announced that he now intends to move ahead and end ("reform") Social Security – using our contributions to prop up the stock market while digging deeper into the deficit to pay off retirees, and to revamp the tax code – which means eliminating deductions for state income tax, thus socking it to the big Blue States with double taxation.

Other Republican wackos claiming mandates include freshly minted homosexuality-obsessed senator-elects from South Carolina and Oklahoma. South Carolina's pride, Jim DeMint, is a gutter variety hate monger who wants to ban gay people and unwed mothers from teaching in public schools. Oklahomans did themselves one better than the Carolinians on the weirdness scale, opting to elect Tom Coburn, who promised to protect the country from being undermined by a "gay agenda" while protecting the Dustbowl State from what he terms as "rampant lesbianism" in Oklahoma's schools. Taking a cue from anti-abortion murderer James Kopp, Coburn has also called for executing gynecologists performing abortions. It looks like there's madness in Dyklahoma.

Homo-Obsessive

DeMint and Coburn aren't Jesse Ventura-like electoral aberrations, however. To the contrary. They're right on-message. The Republicans swelled their numbers by turning out a dark seedy ism and phobia-crippled ignorant media-pickled base of hate-crazed misfits – with many of them obviously living in deep red states like Oklahoma and South Carolina. It's no accident that this year's presidential election coincided with Republican-led ballot initiatives in 11 states aimed at limiting various civil and human rights for gay people. This anti-gay legislative agenda represents the first time since prohibition that state legislatures mobilized nationally to pass laws to restrict, rather than protect, individual rights.

With gays, Republicans have found the ideal minority group to scapegoat whenever attention needs to be turned away from failing policies and incompetent governance. Don't worry about Islamofascist terrorists running around with new stockpiles of explosives stolen from under American noses. And don't fret about our newfound ally Pakistan selling nuclear secrets to an insane North Korean dictator. And don't worry about the balance of trade, the deficit, job losses, global warming, peak oil or your own free-falling civil rights. And certainly don't worry about your own disappearing job. Gay people are getting married in Massachusetts. Worry about that! Whenever Republicans need to turn out their base – there will always be homophobia.

Sushi in Arkansas?

Terrorism was another hot-button issue. The pundits all assured us that when it came to the "war on terror," voters preferred Bush by wide margins. That's middle-American voters, however. Asking voters in Utah, Arkansas and South Dakota about preventing another 9-11 attack is like asking them to recommend a sushi house or tell you the cricket score.

Voters in Manhattan, by contrast, overwhelmingly rejected the administration that most New Yorkers feel was partially or fully responsible for the 9-11 attacks. These are the people who lost loved ones. These are the people who had to breathe the toxic clouds as a hole was punched in their skyline. These are the people who understand terrorism. For them it's not a video game or an action movie. Living on the front lines of the new war, living under perpetual code orange, only 16.7 percent of them opted to return "bring-em-on" Bush to the White House. And they would have burned their own city before letting Karl Rove use it as a campaign ad backdrop.

Race was another hot campaign issue. Republicans fired up their racist base with ominous warnings about "voter fraud" in the black community and warnings about Detroit

overwhelming the Michigan vote like a marauding army. At the same time they worked like Klansmen to repress the black vote along with the youth vote and the elderly Jewish Floridian vote. These Republicans have an institutional disdain for democracy and will work to thwart the process at every turn.

Idiot Democrats

The Democrats responded to this multifaceted attack with the same incompetence they've exhibited in presidential elections for a generation. Here's where the campaign went wrong: The Republicans knew they had little chance of winning over Gore or Nader voters from the last race – so they opted to write off the majority of the electorate. Instead they correctly chose to campaign exclusively within their own base, reenergizing the faithful and turning out greater number of them at the polls. Hence, where Bush won bible-belt counties 2-1 in 2000, he won them 2.5-1 in 2004 by fear-mongering to the ignorant 'read-one-book' crowd with dire threats of gay people living happy wholesome family lives in their midst. Heavens no – that can't happen!

The Democrats, on the other hand, opted for another strategy, ignoring their own base while trying to chip away at Bush's Republican strongholds. And d'uh?! It didn't work. As John Kerry slogged through the bible-belt, following on Bush's tail spewing a Republican gospel of more war, better war, kill the bad guys, defeat the enemy, more troops, more guns, less government, cut cut cut, kill kill kill, he became a nonentity. Republicans preferred the real Republican. Kerry became that putrid can of Bush Lite. He eventually degraded into little more than the "anybody" in "anybody but Bush."

The Indian novelist Arundhati Roy, on a recent visit to Buffalo, explained why she would have no interest in voting in this election, even if, hypothetically, international citizens were allowed to vote for the most powerful politician on the planet. She explained that whether you vote for Kerry or Bush, you are voting to support the war in Iraq. In the end, with the majority of Americans rejecting the Iraq War, Kerry failed to turn out his base. He was too busy pandering to Republicans.

The New "Morality" – sucking up to homophobes

Pundits, however, were quick to condemn the Democrats for not pandering enough to the Republican base. Perhaps, they argue, Democrats shouldn't concede the "moral issues" fight to Republicans. By moral issues, however, they don't mean war, greed and global injustice – they mean appeasing homophobes and anti-abortionists. As if they didn't do enough appeasement this election cycle appeasing militarists and corporate free-marketeters. If the Democrats acquiesce to homophobia and elements of a theocratic

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state where sectarian religious beliefs such as opposition to abortion are imposed on everybody, then they won't even be the "anybody" in anybody but..."

John Kerry, in his "before all the votes were counted" concession speech which he promised he'd never make, called for "coming together" with the Republicans. Kerry told his supporters that he and Bush had a "good conversation" about the danger of division in our country and the "need for unity." While he made nice with his former Yale Skull and Bones fraternity brother (both Bush and Kerry supposedly masturbated into the same coffin as an initiation rite while worshipping the Goddess Eulogia), he missed the main point. With Bush pushing through the most draconian anti-American reactionary legislative agenda in history, the danger is not division – it's unity. The danger is silence. The danger is that Democrats follow in John Kerry's footsteps and take what they think is the politically expedient route to survival by acquiescing to the Republican agenda.

Now is not the time to come together and, as Kerry put it, "begin the healing." The fight of our nation's life is only beginning. Here's to a divided bellicose America.