

WAS IT A MESS, OR A FRAUD?

John Kerry lost, right? Well, he says he did—he conceded to Bush only hours after the polls closed. But not everyone agrees. Citing a plethora of voting glitches, discrepancies, and “oddities” in states like Ohio and Florida, many democracy activists are not giving up as easily as Kerry did.

Lest you think that these are people who wear tin-foil hats, they are not running around spouting conspiracy theories; they’re citing official election results, like the suburban precinct outside Columbus, Ohio, that has 800 voters, but recorded 3,893 for Bush. In a town west of Cleveland, with about 13,000 voters, some 18,000 votes were cast. Also in suburban Cleveland, 29 precincts reported 93,000 more votes than they had voters. In Warren County, outside of Cincinnati, election officials locked down the building where the votes were counted, preventing reporters or other citizens from watching the count. They claim that the FBI and Homeland Security agents had warned them that they were under Code Red terrorist alert. The FBI says it never said that.

In Florida, 29 rural counties with huge Democratic majorities reported lopsided victories for Bush. In these counties, optical scanners read paper ballots, then fed the tallies into Windows-based computers that tabulate statewide totals. Vote-fraud watchdog Bev Harris demonstrated on the Tina Brown TV show, before Nov. 2, how easy it is to get inside the software in those computers and change the tallies (go to www.blackbox.voting.org)—and several analysts have shown that the percentage of registered Democrats who voted for Bush in those optical-scan counties is mysteriously higher than in comparable counties that used touch-screen machines. (Go to http://www.ustogether.org/Florida_Election.htm)

A war is raging among statisticians over the cause and significance of this anomaly,

—continued p. 2

The



LOWDOWN

■ Edited by Jim Hightower and Phillip Frazer ■ Vol. 6 No. 11 ■ November 2004

Kerry lost (probably), and was his own undoing

Reasons to celebrate and be hopeful!

Okay, my election projections were slightly off. I said that there would be the biggest turnout in many years, which there was; that there would be a tremendous mobilization of progressives, which there was; and that this would carry Kerry to victory, which—oops—it did not. In this case, two out of three is not good enough.

Still, I come away from the election with mixed emotions (I’m told that mixed emotions are what you feel when your 16-year-old daughter comes home from the prom sober, but with a Gideon Bible under her arm).

On the one hand, assuming the electoral count holds, there’s the depressing reality that we didn’t win. Indeed, there’s George W. strutting around with a Viagra-size smirk on his face and smugly saying, “Bring ‘em on!”—by which he means bring on more neocon warmongering, a greedy corporate grab for our Social Security funds, Patriot Act II, a national sales tax, more assaults on our environment and...well, Four More Years of W.

But on the other hand, we didn’t lose. Yes, Kerry lost, but he was always the weak link in this big campaign. After all, there’s not a populist bone in his lanky body, he was lackadaisical and lackluster on the campaign trail and he couldn’t connect with America’s working stiffs if he was handing out free Budweisers and Slim Jims. Yet, get this: Kerry still got nearly half of the popular vote! Fifty-five million people

voted for him—more than any other presidential candidate in history...except, of course, for Bush.

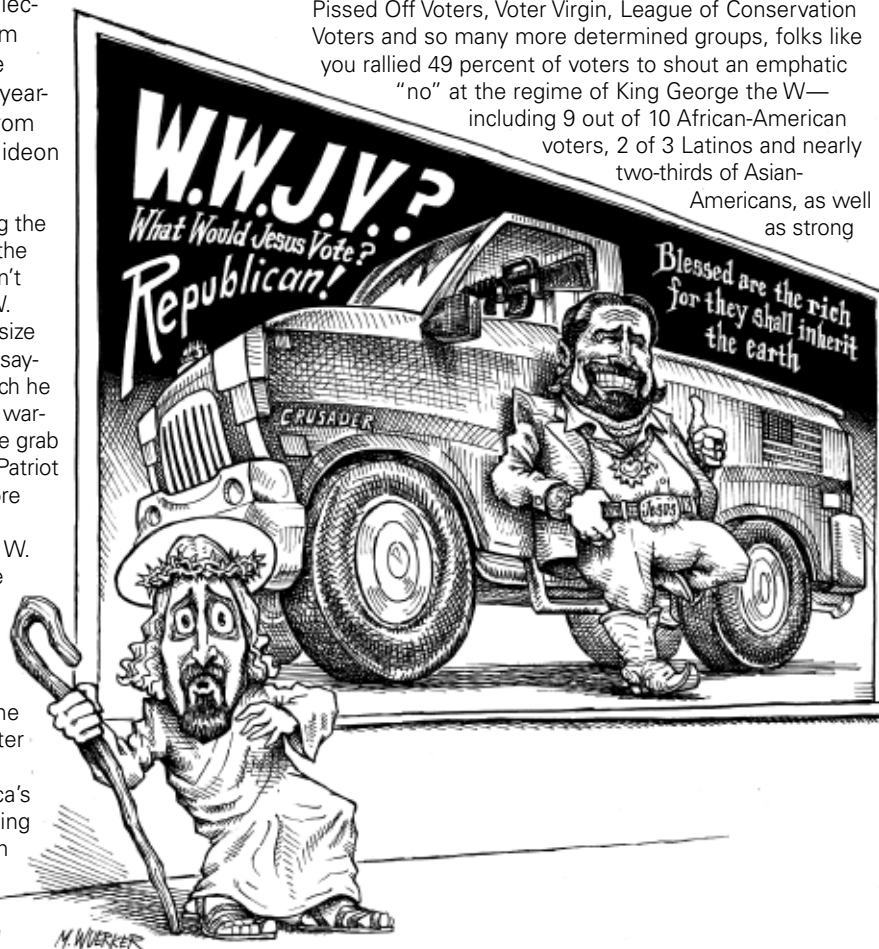
It was not the Kerry campaign or the moribund Democratic party that created this turnout. It was you grassroots agitators! Tens of thousands of volunteers, many of them getting politically involved for the first time or getting reinvented after a long lapse, provided the energy, creativity and sheer will that propelled so many to the polls.

Working through MoveOn, ACORN, SEIU, League of Pissed Off Voters, Voter Virgin, League of Conservation Voters and so many more determined groups, folks like you rallied 49 percent of voters to shout an emphatic “no” at the regime of King George the W—

including 9 out of 10 African-American voters, 2 of 3 Latinos and nearly two-thirds of Asian-

Americans, as well

as strong



but finding a machine in which the numbers were deliberately altered is going to be tough because the pro-Republican companies that make the software refuse to show it to anyone.

Six prominent members of Congress and about a million web blogs have called for a nonpartisan investigation into these and other documentable voting glitches.

Kerry might or might not have been outvoted, but for the public to have faith in our voting system, we need to know!

SUPPRESSING THE VOTE

Let's be blunt: The Republican Party made a determined effort by to keep people who tend to vote Democratic from voting at all.

I don't just mean the notorious efforts in Florida by First Brother Jeb Bush to purge the voter rolls of thousands of eligible African Americans, but also tactics employed all across the country.

On election day itself, GOP officials who presided over the election in key states like Ohio simply shorted many Democratic precincts on the number of voting machines made available. The result was that voters faced interminable waits—lines snaked around city blocks, forcing people to stand for seven, nine, or more hours for their turn at the machines. Uncounted thousands of people who have jobs and families to deal with were driven away from the polls by this deliberate logjam.

THE IDEOLOGY OF FLU-SHOTS

Even though Washington is spending billions of our tax dollars to defend "The Homeland" from a biological attack by foreign terrorists, our leaders were asleep at the wheel on the need to defend us from a biological assault that everyone knew was coming: The flu.

This is a deadly matter since flu kills about 36,000 of us every year! Yet the White House and Congress were totally unprepared when a British factory that supplied half of our flu vaccinations

majorities of people making under \$50,000 a year, union families, young voters and first-time voters. The turnout of young people was especially heartening—it was up by nearly a fourth (4.6 million new voters) over the 2000 election. And in the top 10 battleground states, 64 percent of eligible young people voted!

The grassroots were on fire with progressive activism in this campaign, and the fire will not be dampened even by four more awful years of Bush—indeed, it'll spread. As a result of people's efforts, the progressive force now has more skills, talent, connections, experience...and determination than ever. These people didn't "lose"...and won't go away.

Moral values

The political pros and pundits, of course, instantly concocted a new conventional wisdom to explain what happened on November 2. Now their catchphrase is "It's the morality, stupid." Since Bush and his little buddy Karl Rove cynically played the gay-marriage card to produce four million new "morality" voters for the GOP ticket from evangelical Christian churches, the political cognoscenti have concluded that progressives are simply out of touch with the values of today's mainstream America. To compete, argue these wise ones, the Democratic party must start wearing religion on its sleeve and its candidates must learn to profess their "morality," as George does so well.

Morality? Bashing gays? Lying about everything from your National Guard service to weapons of mass destruction? Taking from the poor to fatten the wealthiest? Launching a war that may have already killed 100,000 people? Assailing and jailing those who dissent? Helping polluters ravage God's green earth? No, thank you.

But, yes, we progressives must be more open and assertive about

putting our own moral values into political play. I'm talking about the morality upon which this great country was founded: a deeply spiritual commitment, still held in the hearts of America's mainstream, to fairness, justice and opportunity for all. These are the moral values of the Golden Rule, values that have long been preached in churches and taught in schools, values that have driven our people's historic pursuit of egalitarianism, values that can unite us today as we try to become red-white-and-blue rather than red versus blue.

You might be thinking what about those four million evangelical churchgoers who just gave Bush his margin of victory. They are mostly working-class people, yet they voted for a guy who is the exact opposite of fairness, justice and opportunity. For chrissake, they voted against their own economic self-interest—are they dumber than a load of turnips?

No. Like so many Americans, evangelicals are a political mish-mash. On the cultural side, they can be ultraconservative theocrats—antigay, antichoice, antiliberal and so on. But going to church—even to the far-right political pulpits of Pat Robertson and Jerry Falwell—does not neuter your egalitarian values.

In fact, these values are even more Biblical and Christian than the cultural "morality" so apocalyptically preached by the Robertsons and Falwells. Like George W., I grew up in a Methodist church in Texas. My little church would've considered itself "conservative," but I recall many a sermon that began with Jesus's words in Matthew 19:24: "It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God." I recall that the greatest sin of them all, "the root of all evil" according to Jesus, is "the love of money." I recall the vivid and passionate retelling of the time Jesus threw the money changers out of the tem-

ple—threw them out for charging interest far less than the usurious rates bankers now levy on our Visas and MasterCard, by the way. I recall Mary's song in Luke 1:52-53: "He hath put down the mighty from their seats and exalted them of low degree; he hath filled the hungry with good things, and the rich he hath sent empty away." I recall that Jesus fed the masses that day on the mountainside at the Sea of Galilee, not just those few who could afford the price of fishes and loaves. I recall the hellacious fate of Dives, the rich man who would not give even the crumbs from his table to the beggar Lazarus. And I recall that Jesus flatly said, "You cannot serve both God and Mammon."

Such godly alarm at the disparities between the rich and the rest of us are central to the teachings of the Bible. In the good book, Jesus talks about economic justice more than almost any other subject, and the apostles make clear that the most important ethical/religious test is how we treat the least wealthy and least important among us.

This is a strong and spiritual morality—a code of living for individuals and a nation—that touches nearly all people. It's a treasure trove of egalitarian values and symbols that has been tapped politically over the years to achieve broad progressive goals for the common good by a string of successful Democratic presidents, including FDR, HST, JFK and LBJ. Everything from the New Deal to the 1960s civil rights legislation was grounded in it.

Kerry, however, failed to reach out to people with a message embracing this morality of the common good. He largely went missing on a range of timely and engaging issues that would have positioned him on the moral side of the people's eternal fight against Mammon, the money-changers, the mighty...

Do something!

Regardless of the outcome of November 2, these groups are laying the foundations of grassroots progressive change all across America. Reach out, get involved—*Do Something*.

Progressive Majority: 1025 Connecticut Ave. NW, Suite 205, Washington, DC 20036

Ph: 202-408-8603, www.progressivemajority.org

League of Independent Voters: 226 W. 135th St. 4th Fl. New York, NY 10030,

Ph: 212.283.8879, www.indyvoter.org.

Common Cause: 1250 Connecticut Ave., NW, Suite 600, Washington, DC 20036

Ph: 202-833-1200, www.commoncause.org

Democracy For America: P.O. Box 8313, Burlington, VT 05402

Ph: 802-651-3200, www.democracyforamerica.com

and the Bushites. The workaday majority, whether they're in evangelical churches or not, heard barely a peep from the Democrat on such truly populist matters as:

- The arrogance and avarice of CEOs, from Enron to Halliburton.
- The spread of poverty in this land of unprecedented plenty.
- The callous abandonment of small farmers and rural towns.
- The relentless greed of corporate globaloney.
- The class divide, on everything from whose neighborhood gets polluted to who goes to war.

A campaign on values and morality was clearly Kerry's to win, even among evangelical working families. But he defaulted on them...so, they defaulted on him.

What now?

Keep building, keep pushing. As Fred Harris, the great populist Democrat and former senator from Oklahoma, put it years ago: "You can't have a mass movement without the masses."

We're close to that. We're gaining. But we can't get there without candidates willing to compete on our best populist issues, wrapped tightly in our nation's finest egalitarian values. These values appeal not only to the 55 million Americans who went with Kerry this year, but also to millions of Bush's voters—and to many millions more of the 40 percent of people who still were not moved to vote this time.

We can build not only on our accomplishments in this year's presidential campaign, but especially on the tremendous (and grossly under-reported) grassroots victories by progressives in other campaigns. For example, Bush is now claiming that his election is vindication for his war in Iraq and a mandate for more

of the same, yet a majority of Americans oppose that war—and of the seven Democratic senators who voted against it and were up for election this time, all of them won!

One of them, Russ Feingold of Wisconsin, was considered especially endangered. In addition to his "no" vote on Iraq, he was also the only U.S. senator to vote against the USA Patriot Act. His own staff urged him not to cast these principled votes, arguing that he'd be trashed in his reelection bid as antiwar and soft on terrorists. Sure enough, his GOP opponent, a multimillionaire businessman and former Army Ranger, did just that, dumping a million bucks of his own money into such TV ads against Feingold. Yet while Kerry (who, you remember, ignominiously voted to let Bush go to war) was barely carrying Wisconsin, Russ won 56% to 44%.

Then there's Howard Dean's group of grassroots candidates. About 100 Deaniacs ran for assorted local and state offices with the official blessing of Howard and his supporters. A third of them won, including the new mayor of Salt Lake City and the new governors of Montana and New Hampshire. Half of the Dean-backed winners had never run for office before. Another terrific group, Progressive Majority, is focused on recruiting, training and nurturing a grassroots "farm team" of candidates, grooming them to be the next generation of national leaders. In all, 41 percent of their candidates won legislative, congressional and other seats. PM prioritized the election of candidates of color—and 57 percent of them came out on top. Just as important, PM was not afraid to lose, backing good candidates who didn't make it but now are more experienced and skilled—and ready to win next time. This is true movement-building.

There's more good news. Thanks to grassroots targeting, Democrats gained control of at least seven state legislative chambers: the house and senate in Colorado, the senate in Oregon and Washington state and the house chambers in Montana, North Carolina and Vermont. In addition, Democrats now hold the governorships in Arizona, Indiana, Iowa, Kansas, Louisiana, Missouri, Montana, New Mexico, North Carolina, Oklahoma, Tennessee, Virginia and Wyoming—all "red" states.

Also, in various red states that Bush won, the electorate passed all sorts of blatantly progressive initiatives this go-round. For example, George W. won't even consider raising the federal minimum wage, but in Florida a whopping 71 percent of voters chose to hike their state's wage floor a dollar an hour above the national level, and the voters of Nevada did likewise by a two-thirds majority. And while Bush drastically underfunds his own education law, Nevada just voted to require its legislators to fund K-12 education before anything else, Arkansas voted to put its lottery money into education and North Carolina chose to put money collected from fines into its public school system, as well as to require a more equitable distribution of state money among the rich and poor school districts.

Other successful initiatives: Maine voters rejected a cap on their property taxes; Montana voters okayed the use of medical marijuana; Colorado voted for a program to promote renewable energy; and Washington State voted to ban nuclear waste dumping. And if you're looking for positive trends in campaign financing, check out the record number of "Clean Candidates" elected in Arizona, Maine and North Carolina. These are candidates who are willing to forgo accepting any corporate,

was shut down because of contamination. This means that millions of Americans will not get the shots they need this winter—and many will die as a result.

Washington ideologues tied our nation's health to just two of the many corporations that make flu shots, neither of which are even in the U.S. Other nations are not facing a flu-vaccine crisis because they wisely get their medicines from many sources.

Well, sniff the politics, U.S. drugmakers don't find flu shots a profitable enough business, so what could we do? Hello, gooberheads—it's time to admit that the profit motive does not always serve the public interest, especially on health care issues. When corporations fail to meet the need, government must.

OUR APOLOGIES

Our October issue was inexcusably late. Some of you received it after the Nov. 2nd election, which was dispiriting to you and truly embarrassing to us—I apologize to you.

We had two problems. The first was me. I've been crisscrossing the country practically fulltime since mid-July, traveling to more than 60 cities like some modern day Paul Revere, trying to rally a big turnout of grassroots voters.

As a result, I've been writing the *Lowdown* in planes, trains, and taxis.

This write-and-run method seriously slowed our monthly production schedule, causing all of our summer issues to be somewhat delayed. Then came the mad political blitz of the final campaign month, which caused our October issue to be three weeks late coming out of my pen.

That still could have been within the delivery margin—but we had breakdowns at each of four stages in our production process, totally wrecking our schedule.

Again, my apologies. The good news is that my travel is now back to normal and we've upgraded our production system, so we're getting back on track—and on time. Thanks for understanding.

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The LOWDOWN

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I've been chastised by Wal-Mart!

Imagine my distress.

The largest corporation in the world apparently was stung by one of my recent commentaries. I had pointed out that Wal-Mart, which touts itself as a model of "free-market" success, actually has built its market muscle in large part by milking us taxpayers, having squeezed more than a billion dollars in subsidies from state and local governments, giving it a competitive advantage to clobber local businesses.

In response, Sarah Clark, director of corporate communications at WallyWorld, fired off a missive to media outlets that carried my Wal-Mart commentary. She asserted that it was "full of inaccuracies."

Was the key figure of one-billion dollars in taxpayer giveaways to Wal-Mart inaccurate? No, she didn't dispute it.

Rather, Wal-Mart's chief PR flack said that the company is a generous corporate citizen. "In the past ten years," Ms. Clark informs us indignantly, "Wal-Mart has paid \$4 billion in property taxes alone..." But wait—it owed those taxes! This was not a "contribution," but a debt. Other businesses pay property taxes, too, yet they don't get a billion bucks in special subsidies.

Then Ms. Clark notes that her company "generated \$52 billion in sales taxes." But wait again—that's not Wal-Mart's money. It's money that local consumers paid to finance public services. This money is also the result of sales that the monopolistic giant took from local businesses. Wal-Mart doesn't expand a community's buying power—it just redistributes purchases from other stores to itself.

But Ms. Clark presses on, claiming that "Wal-Mart has remitted \$192 million" in wage taxes. Once more, however, this money is not a voluntary contribution from a good-hearted company—it's taken out of the employees' wages, as required by law.

To see how Wal-Mart does indeed milk taxpayers, go to www.goodjobsfirst.org.

union or other private campaign funds. In return, they receive a competitive level of public financing. This is a reform that works, literally freeing politicians from a corrupting dependence on fat-cat campaign contributors and giving regular people a real opportunity to run for office...and win.

Maine just completed its third election cycle with the public-financing option, with the result that 83 percent of its state senate and 77 percent of its house members have won election without taking a dime in special-interest money. Arizona's clean-election fund has now produced 23 percent of state senators and 58 percent of house members who're free of private-money ties. Also, ten of its statewide officials—including the governor, attorney general, and all four of the winning candidates for corporation commission—are clean. North Carolina provided the public-financing option for top judicial races for the first time this year, and the results are sterling: Candidates running without special-interest funds won both supreme court seats up for election and two of the three open court of appeals seats.

Steps forward

Rule 1: Take no step backward. I'm extraordinarily proud of what so many ordinary Americans—specifically including young *Lowdowners*—achieved in this election year. We're on the move and not about to turn back now.

Sure, I've heard from a few exasperated people saying they can't stand it, that they're depressed and tired, that they gave it their all and still we came up short.

Shake it off. America needs us more than ever. The world needs us! The BIG IDEA of our country is at stake. Our values of fairness, justice

and opportunity are under direct attack by the Bushite forces of ignorance and arrogance. For some 225 years, generations of Americans have fought, bled and died to advance the possibility of an egalitarian society, and in short order Bush & Gang are out to turn back those advances.

Forget feeling sorry for yourself, retreating into some cocoon of cynicism or making silly talk about moving to Canada (wouldn't Karl Rove just love for us to do that, leaving our country to him). Now is the time for you and me to step forward even more boldly than we were doing before November 2.

We have the power to do it. The 49 percent who voted against Bush still want him out of there and will grow steadily angrier at his ongoing thievery of our liberties, middle-class opportunities, world credibility, environment, security and general well-being. And George's 51 percent is softer than mush. Significant numbers of those who thought they were voting for a man of "moral integrity" will not stick with him as he rushes out in their name with a corporate agenda that they've already made clear they do not support—from Social Security privatization to more global trade scams. W's running around squealing "mandate" when what he got was a squeaker—some 60,000 questionable votes in Ohio were his electoral margin. Even in the popular vote, Bush got the slimmest margin of any incumbent in 88 years.

The Bushites are now breathing their own vapors—they'll overestimate themselves and underestimate us. Meanwhile, get busy:

■ **If you haven't already**, join some group that's organizing, strategizing and mobilizing. Don't just join, though...become an active member.

- **Volunteer a bit of time** and send a few bucks wherever you think it'll do some good.
- **Keep informing yourself**—this is the essence of living in a democracy. Don't be just a consumer of information—be a searcher.
- **Question all authority.** Question all answers.
- **Speak out**—to family, friends, coworkers, church members, in grocery lines. It doesn't have to be pushy, but keep pressing those you know to think critically.
- **Protest in any and all ways** you feel comfortable—write letters to the editor, call your local elected officials, get to know your congress critter, let the local media outlets know what you think, join a demonstration, etc.
- **Don't buy** from corporations that support war, offshoring, low wages, Bush, etc. Set your own standards. Join or create boycotts. Let the corporations know why you're rejecting them.
- **Connect with your progressive allies**—help organize potluck suppers, street festivals, conversation cafes, meetups, book clubs, whatever you can dream up.
- **Take over the brain-dead Democratic party** in your precinct ...then your county...then your state.
- **Create your own media** about what's happening in your community—a blog, newsletter, speakers bureau, website, etc. Expose, discuss, analyze, protest.
- **On big matters**, consider civil disobedience. Do it in a coordinated, targeted way.
- **Help someone** you like run for office—or do it yourself.

Remember: This is your country, not theirs.

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**REASONS TO CELEBRATE
AND BE HOPEFUL**

- 1 55 million blue votes
- 2 Morality according to Jesus
- 3 Anti-war senators won
- 4 What is to be done

* NEXT ISSUE: Results of the Give George W Bush a Nickname competition.