

Political film evaluation project

Family



RECOUNT A POLITICAL MOVIE EVALUATION Submitted by FILM ANNOTATION

The film Recount shows democracy in action during the 2000 U. S. presidential elections. It depicts politicians pushing democratic processes to limits for party interests. Since the film has Vice President Al Gore's campaign strategist Ron Klain (played by Kevin Stacey) as its main character, the pro-Democrat bias is manifest. Throughout the film, Democrats were heroes, while Republicans were their political nemesis. Thus, in a pre-election scene, top campaign manager of Bush utters the Republican war-cry: "The stains of Bill Clinton will be washed away, and honor and dignity will finally be restored to the White House." At the opening scene in the Democrat campaign headquarters, Klain casually repeats the party line of "respect the democratic process no matter what may be the outcome." But, as crisis mounted, Klain would concoct the strategies for machine recount, and later on hand-recount to include the tally of dimpled chad ballots unread by machines due lack of puncture pressure. By law, the recount is legal since Bush's winning margin over Gore at the end of the election was a mere . 5% of the electoral college votes. The Democrats therefore sued for a machine recount in Florida, since the state's electoral votes determine the winner of the presidential elections. Amidst twists and turns, the Democrats' legal moves were successful, and even won a Florida Supreme Court decision to hand-recount all ballots in the state. Meanwhile, the Republicans were shown to have over-played the 3rd Amendment game through anonymous death threats, objections to every ballot count and a violent riot in Miami. Finally, they brought the case to the U. S. Supreme Court which ordered the final halt to the Florida recount. Feeling the hard blow of the 2000 election, Gore still supported democracy, stating " I have to

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end this war when I know I can't win; even if I win, I can't win." FILM

ANALYSIS The film *Recount* depicts the most controversial 2000 presidential elections, displaying how the constitutional right to vote is translated from concept to reality. The right to vote is anchored on the principle of democratic participation by the citizenry, but actual exercise of it has complexity. Admissibly, there is evidence even today of continuing low turnout of voters, high partisanship with politicians “ exploiting the politics of fear, misusing politics of faith, misleading the American people. . . degrading the nation's image in the world” (Time, May 2007). Based on Jake Topper's book on the Florida Election 2000, Danny Strong wrote the film's screenplay which evoked mixed reviews as “ a conscientious script, yet insufficient to rouse righteous spirit even as, . . . our republic gets banana'd.” (Recount Reviews). Jay Roach who had directed thought-provoking film documentaries teamed up with Danny Strong to deliver what was commented on as “ an astute and deliciously engrossing film”(Recount Reviews). The film is the Democrat's story of the 2000 presidential elections. It gives focus, however, to strategic moves of party leaders from both the Democrat and Republican camps. Ron Klain (portrayed by Kevin Stacey) plays the pivotal role throughout the film, although there is the abiding presence of Vice President Al Gore in scenes in which Klain receives calls from Gore who stressed respect for the law and the courts above party interests. In the film, however, there is evidence of extreme partisanship in both camps. The influence of the two parties extended to the inner chambers of government, as in a scene in which a Republican lobbyist dictates the moves of the Florida Secretary of State who has the responsibility to set deadlines and declare the winner of the state presidential elections. In the U. S. Supreme Court

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hearing, the film showed inserts of the names of justices and the administration which appointed them. This hinted at the foreboding decision they would issue on the Bush versus Gore case. The High Court ordered a stop to the Florida recount, stating that this “ cast a cloud over the legitimacy of the elections.” However, it added to say that Court’s decision applies only to this single case. An objective viewer need not be caught by the Democrat bias of the film. Without aiming to do so, the film does deliver the message that politicians of any political color and the citizenry alike can be subject to undue partisanship at odds with the higher demand to select the best leaders of the land irrespective of party affiliation. And while the film did not focus on other election issues except the recount, questions do arise on other issues. The US electoral college voting is unique in the world, and is a control mechanism to avoid the reckless character of purely popular voting and not give Congress full power to select the President (History Central. com). However, it is worth noting that Russia has a more direct presidential electoral process. Also, ballot counting machines must be updated, while standardized norms on computerized election must be set since present laws, as noted by the film, are vague and contradictory. Historically in 1789, George Washington became the first President of the United States by only 6-out-of -13 states by electors, the rest by direct voting by the people (Wikipedia. com). Through the years, the indirect electoral system evolved, and a presidential candidate must bring in the right combination of states for him or her to win the 270 out of 538 electoral votes. The film Recount provides an extensive educational experience on the U. S. election process, and herein we find the supreme example of a losing candidate Al Gore who nobly accepted defeat since “ he didn’t want

Americans to doubt America” (Time). OPINION The film Recount cannot be but biased to the Democrat view of the controversial 2000 presidential election, as this is the Democrat’s story of it. However, I doubt if the Republicans will want to come up with their own version of the events. After all, they won the elections and will naturally allow the aftermath to lay to rest. Since the film was timed for exhibition during the 2008 election, we can only guess how this filmic portrayal of the 2000 presidential elections contributed to vindicating the Democrats bid to offer a leader who truly believes and respects the principles of American republican democracy. In the final event, Recount is not for Democrats, but for the truth. WORKS CITED HBO Movies. Web. 29 Apr. 2010 <http://www.hbo.com/movies/index.html>. Pooley, Eric, “ The Last Temptation of Al Gore. “ New York Times 28, Aug., 2007: 22-30. “ Recount Film.” Web 29 Apr. 2012 http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Recount_film. “ United States Presidential Elections.” Web 30 Apr. 2012 <http://www.historycentral.com/elections/HistoryCentral.com>. . “ United States Presidential Election History.” Web. 28 Apr. 2012 <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/UnitdStates-presidential-wlection#History>.