



## MY BEST SHOT

by Lisa Ross

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### FLORIDA GIVES HISTORY TEACHERS LAST LAUGH

Americans are back at school, sitting for a national SAT on geography, government and history, thanks to Florida's statutory strangeness and Ralph Nader.

In spite of dire warnings of crisis and turmoil from some pundits who want the bell to ring already, Democracy is undergoing its most intense examination since Watergate.

And, contrary to Mr. Nader's bitter post-election deconstruction, the system is passing with flying colors, as the election process creaks forward, testing the national patience, but never straining our capacity to endure riveting and numbing non-stop CNN coverage reminiscent of a certain white Bronco chase.

Refreshingly, the TV talking-head marathon is not about mass murders, sordid affairs or impeachment, but about a Presidential election and an hour-by-hour living lesson that every vote counts. On one dizzying day, in the space of a few hours, reports showed Gore ahead by two votes in Cedar County, Iowa, and losing New Mexico by 17.

Imagine voluntarily signing-up for a course on the Electoral College—lots of Americans did. By a five to one margin, the number-one ranked story among visitors to the MSNBC.com political site over the weekend after the election was "Making Sense of the Electoral College," a system that was making less and less sense even to some Electors.

Kim Cox, Chair of California's Electoral College, called for an end to the body he heads just as people were beginning to figure out how it worked.

Some of the more perverse among us figured out the line of succession down to Lawrence Summers—imagine, President Lawrence Summers—Secretary of the Treasury and fifth in line in the remote event that the election is not certified by January 20.

That's because next-in-line after the absented

Vice-President, House Speaker Hastert, wouldn't want it, 98 year old Strom Thurmond couldn't do it, Madeleine Albright can't take it (she's foreign-born), leaving Mr. Summers knee deep in it.

And, we learned that Florida, whose motto forever more will read "keep counting," will determine, for the second time in history, the outcome of a Presidential election under cloudy circumstances. The ghosts of US History teachers past got the last laugh as millions paid attention to the history unit most likely to have been slept through, the Presidency of Rutherford B. Hayes, who many believe stole the job from the popular vote winner Samuel Tilden after an election commission deal over a Florida ballot count dispute.

We now know the names and locations of at least five of sixty-seven Florida counties, and that thousands of people living in West Palm Beach regard their vote as more than a "chad," which we learned is the name of the tiny paper rectangle that can block holes, making a choice unreadable by voting machines.

We also discovered that there's more than one way to count ballots, and that the very people who were targeted by a Presidential campaign centered on Social Security, Medicare and prescription drug benefits could determine this historic decision by yelling the loudest about confusing butterfly ballots, manual counts and electoral fairness.

And finally, that the acquiescence of Ralph Nader's followers to "follow their hearts" rather than their reason, may end up denying the popular vote winner the election by stymieing the electoral college result, makes a serious case in point about the pent-up power of rogue candidacies under the Electoral College system.

This is a week of large and small history examples, petty and profound Constitutional debates, strange and familiar geography lessons, and enough irony to fill political columns galore. But, above the somber intricacies of Florida's election process and the startling impact from the Nader candidacy, the time-honored homily that every vote counts will never sound the same.