Election 2000 Essay, Research Paper

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Unless you have been hibernating in a cave somewhere off the coast of Madagascar for the past six and a half months, you know about and/or have experienced the historical year 2000 presidential election. Since day one there has been mass coverage not only of the candidates, but also of their families, friends, and business associates. One periodical that did an excellent job of covering the facts about this election, especially between November 8th and November 19th, was the New York Times. The editorials and op-editorials in this newspaper were powerful opinion pieces that questioned political position, the Separation of Powers, and the responsibility of the candidates. These editorials and op-editorials finally gave the nation an inside look on what was going on behind the scenes and what was really happening during the election.

First I would like to discuss the responsibility of the candidates. What exactly is responsibility? Does Vice President Al Gore or Governor Bush display this quality of leadership? According to the New Lexicon Webster s Encyclopedic Dictionary of the English Language, responsibility is the state or quality of being in control or having to give satisfaction and through the eyes of Mr. Leon Panetta, neither candidate is truly worthy. After reading Mr. Panetta s article, I sensed that there seemed to be an aura of pettiness surrounding this campaign. That both candidates were taking issues and situations to the extreme. Basically, that no one was ready to take the role of the defeated. In turn a nation full of people are suffering from the egos of two men who want to be the leader of the country, but aren t giving satisfaction to the nation. Therefore are these two men living up to their responsibilities, or are they only being selfish and looking out for themselves?

Leon Panetta, former White House chief of staff under President Clinton (1994-1997), writes in his November 14th op-editorial that, ASo far both (Al Gore and George W. Bush) have allowed their campaign organizations to engage in continuing campaigns to convince the public of fairness of their positions. Deploying lawyers, spokesmen and campaign managers this way may satisfy the appetite to fight, but not the responsibility to reconcile a serious national dilemma.@ This statement alone displays that Panetta has a problem with the way the candidates and their campaigns were behaving. He goes on to say that having a national election of over 100 million votes boil down to a few hundred Acontroversial@ ballots in Florida is outrageous. He also feels that Aa scorched-earth litigation process to the bitter end@ makes sense to the lawyers and the campaign officials it really makes no sense for the nation. It was also apparent to Panetta that the US was divided over who should win, but he felt that a post-election battle would only make it difficult for the winner to govern the nation.

Since the federal court decided not to interfere with Florida and its laws, both Bush and Gore faced a crucial choice according to Mr. Panetta. He concluded that they (Gore and Bush) could litigate each election decision that was not acceptable, but challenging those close votes would not stop at Florida, they would have to challenge Wisconsin, Iowa, New Mexico, and any other state that disputed results. He also feels that this is all twaddle and that the two should come together and agree to a course of action that would bring this election to closure as justly and dutifully as possible.

The op-editorial also goes on to speak about how an agreement between the candidates would not satisfy the campaigns or the lawyers and possibly some voters, but it would be the right thing for the nation because both sides were fighting a legal and propaganda war that they were losing. Moreover the candidates weren=t the only people losing, the nation was also at a loss because there was no one to govern and in Panetta=s eyes the presidency is about putting the nation=s interest first.@ As a true test of the responsibility of candidates and their campaigns, Panetta concludes with a call of action. He states, ABoth of these candidates have campaigned on the basis that they would make the tough choices if and when the time came. That time is now.@

On the other hand, in the November 18th edition of the New York Times editorial page, the courts instead of the candidates are being questioned and how much the public owes them and how much power one person can have. Florida=s secretary of state, Katherine Harris, was directed from prematurely certifying the presidential election results. The state=s highest court scheduled a hearing to consider the legality of the hand counts and Ms. Harris=s claim that she has the authority to ignore all late returns. The editorial also goes on to explain how the public owes a great deal to the state Supreme Court for its commendable speed and shrewdness in stepping in to maintain the status quo until all legal issues were resolved. Also how it would be stupid to continue the hand counts and exclude the results, that way the American electorate would be sure that the outcome of the presidential election was based on a full and fair count, even though under imperfect conditions.

Ms. Harris=s claim of authority would not be the last word on this election because the Supreme Court would not wait to Aresolve the legality of the late hand counts until after certification.@ Since the court allowed the counties to proceed with manual recounts, one would have to accept that notion that these counts were legal. Because they were, it seemed clear that the secretary of state’s decision to reject those votes was improper under Florida law.

It seems that whoever wrote this editorial had a slight problem with Ms. Harris and how she reacted with the courts. For some strange reason it seemed as if she felt that she had supreme power and no matter what the courts said she would have her way. In this editorial there is no apparent change in the opinion of the writer, he/she had a strong conviction about the election, the courts, and Ms. Harris that did not sway in any way, shape, or form throughout this piece.

To determine ahead of time that such returns will be ignores, however, unless caused by some Act of God, is not the exercise of discretion. It is the abdication of discretion. This was the opening line to an editorial in the Times on November 15, 2000. Originally given by Judge Terry Lewis, the statement was understood to mean that Katherine Harris was using her authority in so arbitrary a way as to permit the delay of final vote tallies only in the case of an act of God, such as a hurricane. But, Ms. Harris, who seems to be on a power trip, directed the counties to explain why the hand counts were necessary and need. This was an attempt to maneuver to rule that manual counting is unjustified and in doing so cut short the exercise before Vice President Gore picks up additional votes. According to the editorial, that would subvert the spirit of Judge Lewis s decision and undermine public faith that the outcome of the election has been fairly determined.

The editorial also states that Judge Lewis s decision was a model of common sense and a rebuke to the partisan misreading of Florida statutes by Ms. Harris, who has blurred her twin responsibilities as chief arbiter of the state s election laws and her role as a Bush supporter. Again showing how power driven the women really is. The article continues on by saying that if both parties will respect it, the judge s ruling points to a path out of a battle over the validity of totals in those places where Mr. Gore is saying that the original machine count missed some of his ballots.

Later in the editorial the author discussed a two- part consensus that should have been reached by both parties involved in the election. The part that stands out the most is the second part, which states everyone should stop filing law suits to impede the counting. Any effort by Ms. Harris now to stop the hand count before it is completed would be peremptory and purely partisan. It would defeat Judge Lewis s responsible effort to insure that victory in Florida is not declared before all votes are carefully and fairly counted. Along with this consensus, there was the idea that there should be a hand count in every county, Republican or Democratic, where local officials feel one is warranted, and Mr. Gore and Mr. Bush should prepare the nation and themselves to accept the results.

In conclusion, as I stated earlier, unless you’ve been hibernating in a cave somewhere off the coast of Madagascar for the past six and a half months, you know about (if not experienced) the historical year 2000 presidential election. With all the mass coverage that was going on during this time only one newspaper seemed to stand out on top with facts was the New York Times, especially between November 8-19, 2000. The editorials and op-editorials were powerful opinion pieces that questioned the system of politics, Separation of Powers, and the true responsibilities of candidates.