

ABOUT

Stealing America: Vote by Vote (2008)

Release Date:

Friday, August 1, 2008

MPAA Rating:

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Genre:

Documentary

Starring:

Peter Coyote,

Director:

Dorothy Fadiman

Synopsis:

The last two presidential elections both came down to a relatively small number of votes, and in both elections the integrity of the voting process has been called into question. With the upcoming election looking to be similarly close, the time has come to ask the questions: what happened in 2000 and 2004; what has changed since; and what can be done to ensure a fair and honest tabulation of votes in 2008?

STEALING AMERICA: Vote by Vote brings together behind-the-scenes perspectives from the U.S. presidential election of 2004 – plus startling stories from key races in 1996, 2000, 2002 and 2006. Unbiased and nonpartisan, the film sheds light on a decade of vote counts that don't match votes cast – uncounted ballots, vote switching, under-votes and many other examples of election totals that warrant serious investigation.

Throughout STEALING AMERICA, we hear from voters who experienced a wide range of problems, including those whose votes flipped from one candidate to another and those whose polls didn't have enough machines to serve the number of voters. Investigative journalists describe how their reportage on election fraud was sidelined. First-person citizen testimonies speak of waiting in line nine hours to vote. We hear how polling experts' requests for essential information – such as precinct voting data necessary to examine irregularities – had been rejected, while ballots were being systematically destroyed, making audits impossible.

STEALING AMERICA unveils patterns of anomalies at every level of the electoral process. Controversial partnerships perpetuate a secretive environment, as relevant facts and figures remain hidden from view. As a result, most Americans have no real sense of the threat to free and fair elections. As seemingly unrelated pieces of the puzzle come together, a chilling picture emerges of widespread, artfully crafted "glitches" that, in the final tallies, have the capacity to alter election results.

REVIEW

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Does Every Vote Count?

Darrel Manson

We're a few months from electing a new President, Congress, and various state and local offices. One of the things America prides itself on is the broadness of our franchise. True, it took women a long time to get the right to vote, and it was unjustly denied to many people of color for many years, but now we all get to have our voice heard through the voting booth. Or not.

Stealing America: Vote by Vote makes the case that there are far too many votes that don't count. Looking mostly at the 2004 Presidential election, it raises questions as to the accuracy of the tally. It looks at many of the ways the election may have been skewed: long lines in minority precincts that discourage people from voting, caging (challenging voters based on sending registered letters that will be returned to sender), and lots of problems with voting machines (such as switching votes or not having a paper trail to audit the results). Could it be, as the film suggests, that voting irregularities in some states (especially Ohio) could have changed the election results four years ago?

The accuracy of vote counts needs to be seen as a key element of democracy. Consider the recent "election" in Zimbabwe; no one believes the results there are anything near the will of the people. No one would also say that our own elections have any of the outlandish flaws of elections in such dictator states, but the film does point out that there are many more minor flaws in our system —flaws that need to be brought to light and addressed.

Indeed, one of the complaints made in the film is how little coverage such flaws got in 2004. The only coverage they point to is not from Fox News or CNN or the major networks, but from Comedy Central (with clips from *The Colbert Report* and *The Daily Show*). The comment is made that neither party wants to raise these issues. Narrator Peter Coyote says at one point, "If the Republicans stole the election, the Democrats were willing accomplices."

Much of the film deals with comparing election results with exit polls. Until a few years ago, there was very little variation between the two, but in the last few elections, the variation has grown. I think many people are skeptical of the accuracy of polls. The fact that they aren't coinciding with actual votes could involve a variety of factors. I only took one class in statistics, and that was enough for me to understand that they are very complex. Still, the growing discrepancy could be evidence of problems.

As I watched, I was never convinced that some evil hand was at work to fix the election. But then, it's not about the election actually being stolen—just the possibility that it could be done, and a look at some of the ways that it could happen if those who vote don't make sure that their votes really are counted.

Not long ago I wrote a [Back Page article](#) on documentaries in which I tried to categorize documentary styles. I didn't list *Editorial* as a category, but that is what this film is. It is a call for people to be aware of a problem that, at its worst, could compromise our democratic ideals. It will be rolling out around the country through the fall as we get closer to the election. It wants to be a call to action. The press notes for the film include a section called "*STEALING AMERICA: Vote by Vote* Grassroots Campaign Project Description." Its goal is to inform people, and even more to involve people in the effort to make sure every vote counts. As the film makes its way around the country, it will serve as "the grassroots campaign's main organizing tool" along with the film's [website](#).

Your vote is important —important enough to make sure it gets counted.

