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## Film Review

# Stealing America: Vote by Vote

by Brent Simon

When is a vote really not a vote? Well, plenty of the time, it seems, sadly and frighteningly. *Stealing America: Vote by Vote* is a sort of political companion piece to Alex Gibney's 2005 documentary *Enron: The Smartest Guys in the Room*. Just as that movie shrewdly tackled the inanity and insanity of corporate culture, *Stealing America* looks at the ludicrousness of the election process, and its extreme and increasing fallibility in the digital age.

The film sheds light on vote counts that don't match votes cast and brings together behind-the-scenes perspectives from the U.S. presidential election of 2004 (where there was a disparity of 3.4 million, or 2.7 percent of the total number of ballots cast), as well as startling stories from key Congressional races from 1998 to 2006. In the shadows of another hugely important national election, it's hard to imagine a more topical, important documentary...

Narrated by Peter Coyote... as anecdotal incidents scattered like marbles seemingly reveal a larger behavioral pattern, *Stealing America* gathers energy, focus, and an angsty head of steam.

Director Dorothy Fadiman has the natural advantage of numbers and narrative on her side, so she doesn't need to really take an antagonistic stance or pump too much showmanship into her project. And she doesn't; she's the anti-Michael Moore in this regard. Unfortunately, Fadiman also has some trouble initially locating the pulse of her tale and structuring things to make the big picture clear.

In the end, though, *Stealing America* still swings a heavy bat -- the issue wins out, and carries the day, and because of that the movie's few shortcomings matter a lot less than they would were the subject matter different. Compelling interviewees like Florida State Supervisor of Elections Ion Sancho, New Mexico activist Pat Leahan, and Ohio poll worker Kim Akins certainly help matters too, giving the movie heart and conscience.

The greatest lesson of *Stealing America* is that if the country is going to more fully actualize its theoretical democracy, it will take more feet-held-to-the-fire accountability of our elected officials -- no matter their party affiliation -- in order to make honest, sensible reforms stick, so that no single party can rig the system to its advantage.

