

# Democrats discover Black Americans

**By Greg Palast**

gregpalast.com | July 19, 2004

**L**ike Christopher Columbus blinking in shock at first seeing an American Indian, John Kerry has just discovered African-American voters. On Thursday afternoon, Kerry landed at the NAACP convention, stepped off his slow-moving campaign boat and announced that he was exploring for one million missing Black voters.

Let me explain – because the New York Times won't. In the 2000 elections, 1.9 million ballots were cast which were never counted — “spoiled” is the technical term. Ballots don't spoil because they are left out of the fridge. There's always a technical reason: a stray mark, or my favorite, from Gadsden County, Florida, writing in Al Gore's name instead of checking a box.

According to data from the US Civil Rights Commission and the Harvard University Law School Civil Rights Project, about half the nation's spoiled ballots – one million – were cast by Black folk. Just as African American communities get the worst schools, the worst hospitals, they also get dumped with the worst voting machines, which eat, mismark, mangle and void ballots.

Poof! A million Black votes gone, zapped, vanished.

And the nasty secret is that for years that suited many white leaders of local and state Democratic organizations – Zell Miller of Georgia is a case in point – who feared Black voters as much as they feared Republicans.

But change is coming, and not because John Kerry and the men who think for him have changed. Change is coming because African-American leaders are getting uppity about the Democratic Party taking or leaving the African-American voter as the mood and arithmetic pleases.

Here's how Senator Kerry got the message: Two weeks ago, when I was in Chicago, Jesse Jackson asked me to join him for breakfast at the Marriott Hotel. To my surprise, he'd also invited Senator John Edwards. Jackson had made copies of my editorial for the San Francisco Chronicle on the missing one million votes ... and wouldn't let the wannabe Veep touch his bagel until he'd read every word.

## Democrats discover Black Americans / 2

Just when Edwards thought he could have a sip of coffee, Jackson required him to watch the segment of our BBC television special, "Bush Family Fortunes," with the latest analysis on the non-count of Black votes in Florida. In the 2000 race, 95,000 African-American votes were dumped in the Florida swamps, marked as spoiled.

Edwards, succumbing to hunger, caffeine deprivation and Reverend Jackson's intense interrogation, caved in and promised to take the message of the missing Black votes to the white side of his party.

Congresswoman Corrine Brown joined us. When she read the story and saw the film, she was ready to spit bullets. She was especially upset that British television covered the story while, in the USA, the Black story was blacked out.

The film clip would get the Congresswoman in hot water. This past Thursday morning, in Washington, she again watched a preview of the BBC film and then marched down to the Capitol and denounced the Republican Party for stealing the election in Florida. For telling this truth she was censured by a straight-up party-line vote in the House of Representatives and her remarks stricken. (I would note that the President's flat-out fibs about weapons of mass destruction remain on the record.)

Senator Kerry is no Corrine Brown. The man who would be President is first trying out the 'D' word in front of the friendly natives at the NAACP. But still, it's a first step: mentioning out loud the massive, systematic Disenfranchisement of the Black vote.

But the real change won't come until Kerry can say the 'D' word in front of say, a gathering of the members of his wife's country club. And until he confronts the boys holding the electoral lynching ropes in both parties.

I have a dream. I imagine John Kerry taking this message to the floor of the convention next week and proclaiming, "Three decades after Martin Luther King's murder, one million African-Americans cast ballots never counted. This will not stand!" Imagine it: At that moment, for the first time in a generation, the Democratic Party will have nominated a Democrat.

---

*The preview of the updated investigative report, "Bush Family Fortunes," is included on Punk Voter (Volume 2) CD-DVD, which will be released on August 10. "Bush Family Fortunes - the DVD" will be released in September. Greg Palast is the author of the New York Times bestseller, The Best Democracy Money Can Buy.*