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December 2000

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Introductory Issue

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[The Folger Shakespeare Library](#)

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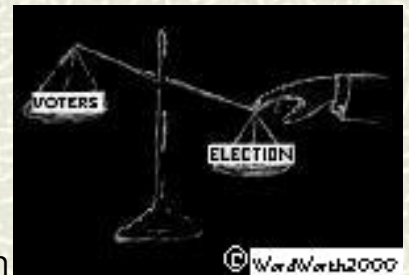
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Election 2000

by Marien Helz

Election 2000 has vividly demonstrated that there are serious problems with our election system and that the Electoral College is, at best, a scapegoat. The real problem lies with inconsistency and inaccuracy.

It is appalling that one candidate can be ahead by 10,000 votes, then behind by a handful, then ahead again because of 5000 "lost votes" being found as happened in New Mexico. The worst problem is inaccuracy of the vote counting and the inadequacy of ballots. Nineteen thousand ballots should never have to be thrown out. In this election, those ballots almost surely would have made the candidate who won the popular vote also be the one who won the Electoral College vote. The fact that fifteen thousand votes had to be thrown out four years ago should have been the wake up call. Since it wasn't, we absolutely must wake up now. The latest reports are that 180,299 ballots have been voided in Florida. The victorious candidate is ahead by somewhere around 1000. This turns the election into a travesty.



We have rested comfortably, assured that the kinds of miscounting that we have seen could only happen in a third world country where the technology is primitive. We now see that the forty-year old technology in Florida is more primitive than the far older system of marking paper ballots. The recounters have had to make arbitrary decisions about when a vote can or cannot be counted. When the "chads" (the punched out portion) are hanging on by one or two tags, it can be counted as a vote; when it is only indented, pressed in, it does not count as a vote.

All of this is intolerably arbitrary; and this fiasco in Florida impacts Henry Clay's vote in Vermont, Judith Porter's vote in Ohio, Samuel Stevens vote in Wyoming, Mary Sue Ellen Smith's vote in Alabama, and Bjorn Lindstrum's vote in Minnesota. When a national election is involved, the format, methodology, and standards absolutely must be federally and nationally determined and consistent. Punch cards should never be used. It would not be difficult at all to come up with easily understandable procedures which would yield a national ballot with spaces which states and localities could fill in below for the more localized candidates. All areas should be using voter machines.

Another serious problem that has received a phenomenal number of complaints for years, but

very little attention is the situation of having results reported from the east when the polls are still opened in the west. This can be easily solved. All it takes is 1) the realization that it is a serious issue, and 2) the resolve to handle it. Polls in the Eastern time zone should be opened from 9:00 a.m. to 10:00 p.m.; in the Central zone from 8:00 a.m. to 9:00 p.m.; in the Mountain zone from 7:00 a.m. to 8:00 p.m.; in the Pacific from 6:00 a.m. to 7:00 p.m.; and in Alaska and Hawaii from 5:00 a.m. to 6:00 p.m. This would allow everyone to vote, and the problems associated with the media reporting victories too early would be eliminated.

An issue also concerning time is the lateness of the inauguration. With transportation and communication taking infinitely less time than 224 years ago when the country began, the president should be sworn in a day or so after the new year and thereby reduce the length of lame duck tenure.

The Electoral College, cumbersome though it is, remains a good method for making everyone's vote matter. A democracy must always be run by the will of the majority, but must also protect the rights and privileges of the minority. If the Electoral College were done away with, candidates would campaign to, and politicians would pass laws favoring only those living in large cities. The rest of the country could far more easily be ignored. In an election year, places like Idaho and Wyoming would barely be considered part of the United States. What does need refining in terms of the Electoral College is the arbitrary, state by state, controls over the electors. It should be impossible for electors to cast a vote other than what was mandated by their state. There is no need for electors to be actual people at all. They ought, at this point, to simply be tallies. Electors no longer have to be people who go by coach or horseback carrying the results of the election. There are many more efficient methods to communicate electoral tallies than having specific individuals vote at a specific meeting. As it is few states have any penalties for electors who ignore the popular vote of their state and vote any way they want. There have been such "renegade" electors in the past, but it hasn't mattered because the numbers haven't been close enough to make a difference. If this election has taught us anything it is that sometime a renegade elector will, indeed, matter. In 1996, fifteen thousand votes didn't matter. This time, several hundred votes matter.

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NATURAL BORN KILLERS

Thorns and thistles were not part of the original landscaping plan for the Garden of Eden. Only nice plants were to be put there, plants that were "pleasant to the sight and good for food" according to *Gen. ii, 9* in the Bible.

Unfortunately, as we've read, the young couple moving into the development (a.k.a. Adam and Eve) provoked the landscape designer, who didn't like being played for a fool. As punishment, the finished planting sustained a few unpleasant revisions.



Lilies, white and richly perfumed, remained in the garden. Peaches and plums kept their place as well. However, tucked in among the magnolias now grew some criminals of the plant world.

Here and there evil-smelling vegetation sprouted, assaulting Eve's delicate nostrils. Bloodthirsty spines formed along branches, reaching out and tearing at Adam's fig leaf. Poisonous mushrooms lurked in the understory tempting passersby while the tendrils of *Jumanji*-like vines slithered along the ground looking for something to choke. The young couple had to step carefully amidst the new botanical order that ranged from mere vandals to petty felons and finally to flora capable of committing murder in the first degree. So much for not following instructions.

CRIMES AND MISDEMEANORS

Some parts of the world fared better than others. For instance, Zones 4 and 5 received none of the worst of the nightmares. Winter temperatures that flirt with twenty degrees below zero aren't always kind to the forsythias but they're our saving grace when it comes to plants like the Japanese legume *Pueraria thunbergiana*, better known as kudzu. In North Carolina, this perfect nuisance grows more than a foot each day running rampant through gardens and covering trucks, poles, even houses in its path. Impervious to weed killers, many of which it finds delicious, and an ocean away from its native country where insect predators keep it under control, kudzu smothers entire sections of the Mid-Atlantic States.

We also sidestepped *Amorphophallus titanum* (one of many bulbs referred to as a Voo Doo Lily).

Growing naturally in various tropical locations in Asia as well as on purpose in some greenhouses, this plant has two main characteristics. First, it produces a strange and spectacular flower, the largest of all plants. Secondly, along with the flower, it produces a stench described by neighbors as that of rotting flesh. The odor isn't fatal - it just seems like it - and is another reason to rejoice if you live in cooler zones.

Even Australia has its problems. With its cuddly koalas and strangely wonderful kangaroos, the land Down Under seems like it would be a great place to live, but then you learn that its natives are some of the most aggressive and deadly snakes and spiders in the world. Neither were they spared murderous plants including the earth's most poisonous mushroom.



GARDEN THUGS

In comparison, the northern U.S. looks like a haven, escaping most of the nasty plants that found their way into the revised garden. Things change though and in the meantime, certain low-lives subsequently wormed their way into our area code. Some of them arrived here as part of exotic collections. Others hitchhiked via migratory birds or gradually acclimated to our growing conditions. Though collectors of unusual plants may embrace these newcomers, for the most part the following list of immigrants would be best placed in the Addams Family Arboretum.

One menacing shrub that's capable of assault and battery is *Aralia spinosa* (Devil's Walking Stick) which has large piercing triangular thorns up and down the length of its stems. Tall and gaunt, the shrub looks like a collection of wicked sticks stuck in the ground in winter and is a native of the Southeastern section of the United States. While its appearance improves somewhat in summer when lacy green foliage and bracts of small white flowers disguise its evil nature, razor-sharp points remain ready to puncture the flesh of anyone who comes near.

Another flowery felon shows no outward signs of violence but is ranked at the top of the untouchables. Introduced to the U.S. from Europe where it's sometimes grown as a huge and dramatic ornamental, *Heracleum mantegazzianum* (Giant Hogweed) is wanted by the federal and state governments both of which classify it as a noxious weed. Towering over humans, its 24-36 inch flowerheads float twelve to fifteen feet above the ground. Frequently found in wet or marshy conditions, it's well left alone. Though its clear watery sap usually has no immediate effect on the skin, huge black and purple blisters form when susceptible victims next go out in the sun.



A repeat offender that tempts humans and animals alike with its beautiful flowers, is *Datura stramonium* (Jimsonweed), a tropical annual that has naturalized and is now found all over the U.S. and Southern Canada. Growing up to five feet tall, it has long trumpet-shaped white or purple flowers and prickly fruits. Though certain cultures consider Jimsonweed to have medicinal value and desirable hallucinogenic properties, all parts of it contain toxic chemicals capable of felonious poisoning.

Ginkgo biloba isn't poisonous, but its fruit should be arrested for petty aggravation. With a reputation for saving the brain cells of our aging population, along with beautiful leathery fan-shaped leaves that flutter on elongated petioles, this picturesque tree is a native of Asia that

could charm its way into anyone's yard. Male trees never produce fruit but mature female trees will. Their yellowish oval fruits are sometimes abundant and when the ripe fruit falls to the ground, it becomes a disgusting mushy mess that can take your breath away.

Strangulation is the specialty of *Convolvulus arvensis* (field bindweed). Entangling its neighboring shrubbery, this European aggressively twines counter-clockwise about its victims, throttling their stems and eventually wrestling them to the ground. Though its arrow-shaped green leaves and morning-glory like flowers look innocent enough, this noxious weed should be promptly pulled out of the ground before it puts your small fruit bushes and delicate roses on death row.

Speaking of death, wild mushrooms have become a staple of many trendy restaurants but unless you want to push up daisies, keep your distance from *Amanita phalloides* (Destroying Angel or Death Cup). Native to Australia, this fatal fungus is spreading on both the west and east coasts of the U.S. Now found in New York State, Ohio, Maine and Canada, it takes just over a week to kill those who consume it. Containing both amatoxins and phallotoxins, this homicidal Aussie immigrant accounts for the vast majority of the world's mushroom-poisoning cases.

PARADISE LOST?

Notwithstanding this short list of imports, Zones 4 and 5 still sit amidst greenery that has a maximum of beauty and a minimum of danger. Naturally, that can change. Global warming, though it to date shows little inclination towards coming here, may change its course and suddenly make Buffalo as arid as the Kalahari Desert. Biotechnology could always take the wrong turn, changing lilacs into herbicidal maniacs. We might even find ourselves confronting descendants of Audrey II, the giant meat-eating houseplant who kept barking "Feed Me!" in *The Little Shop of Horrors*.

For now, Western New York is about as close as a place can get to the original First Garden. So, enjoy it while you can, and may all your thorns have roses.

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*Wayne Johnson,
President of Johnson's Nursery
in East Aurora NY,
was a consultant on this article.*







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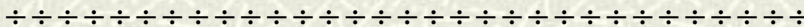
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A
 JOY
 IN
 WINTERS
 FIRST SOFT SNOW
 IS THE
 SYMBOL OF NEW LIFE
 A TREE THAT'S GREEN A CHILD
 WHO'S NEW
 IT GIVES US
 PROMISE THROUGH THE TIME OF COLD
 IN THE DAYS OF SMALL SUN AND DARKNESS
 THAT THE
 SNOW WILL GO
 AND WITH THE MELTING, FLOWERS WILL COME
 TO PROVE THAT THIS WAS JUST A RESTING
 NOT A STOP
 THAT IN THIS SEASON WHEN WE HOLD ON TO THOSE
 WE BELONG TO
 BOTH
 HERE
 AND FAR WE
 HAVE PEACE
 AND HOPE
 AND LOVE



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January 20 for the February Issue

The greatest love stories have always been tragic: Antony and Cleopatra, Romeo and Juliet, Troilus and Cressida, and on and on. A great love story that wasn't tragic, however, was the love story of Armin and Adah--two people who were born shortly after the twentieth century began and who died shortly before it ended. Yet, despite their fifty-six years together, their story was, after all, tragic also. We are all mortal, and therefore, even a story of love "until death do us part" is grounded in tragedy, and perhaps ends in the greatest of all tragic loves.

March 20 The First Installment of Banwell Goddard's Novel

Father Heart is a historical work about Philip Hathaway Clark who was born in 1846. His father didn't want him; his mother wanted a girl--desperately. His birth was to be the salvation of a shattered marriage. Instead, it culminated its dissolution. With his mother imprisoned for saving her children's lives, Clark was an orphan at the age of eight.

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Word Worth's Favorite Sites*

The Folger Shakespeare Library

Nestled into a quiet part of Washington D.C., away from the scurry and bustle of this very busy city, is a serenely lovely building. Shakespeare's contemporaries called him "Gentle Shakespeare." This building dedicated to him evokes that quality, and it is surely one of the loveliest libraries anywhere.

*Word Worth has no connection with, nor control over, the content of the sites which it notes as favorites. These are simply sites that we like and want to share with others. The ones that we select as site of the month will appear on this page which will be added to month by month. We tend to choose sites that are of interest to all age groups, but, as always, parents should maintain control over the sites that children log on to.

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