

## **PANEL'S REPORT IS FLAWED**

*USA Today*

June 8, 2001

So the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights wants one more Justice Department investigation into whether the Florida election was fairly conducted, based on no evidence of wrongdoing and a tarnished report, leaked before it was shown to Republican members of the commission.

It would be far more appropriate to investigate the commission itself, which has been used for several decades as a partisan political toy and personal megaphone for its rather radical chairwoman, Mary Frances Berry. How quaint that the leaked executive summary of the report, which charges "disenfranchisement" of African-Americans, beats up only on the Republican governor and secretary of State while not mentioning that the vast majority of the irregularities cited occurred in majority Democratic districts, with Democrats in charge.

Does America need some serious fact-finding about its election system, keyed to the 2000 election? Yes, indeed, but not in a legal setting to play a blame game. It is a topic worthy of serious, scholarly, non-partisan study, perhaps with foundation support.

Among the many questions I'd like to see explored are these:

\* Is there anything that can be done to prevent the television networks from barging into the election process with their deeply flawed "projections?" (Early calling may depress turnout in later-voting states.)

\* Should ex-felons be given the right to vote? (A serious question, raised in the commission's report.)

\* Can the election polling system be reformed? (Fewer and fewer people respond to pollsters'

questions; exit polling can't measure the rise of absentee ballots.)

\* On the matter of African-American voting: What are the best ways to ensure that blacks do not make the sorts of voting errors that cost them dearly in the 2000 election? (Rising black turnout is to be celebrated, not squandered, but uneducated and disorganized voting is certainly not "disenfranchisement.")

\* If all of the charges about disproportionate irregularities were true, what would be the national effect? If blacks, mostly Democratic, are much more likely to be ineligible to vote than whites but there are eight times more whites, disproportionately Republican, than blacks, who ends up benefiting in a national vote count?

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