

PART THREE

A FAULTY COMPUTER MEMORY CARD TRIGGERED THE FLORIDA 2000 FIASCO

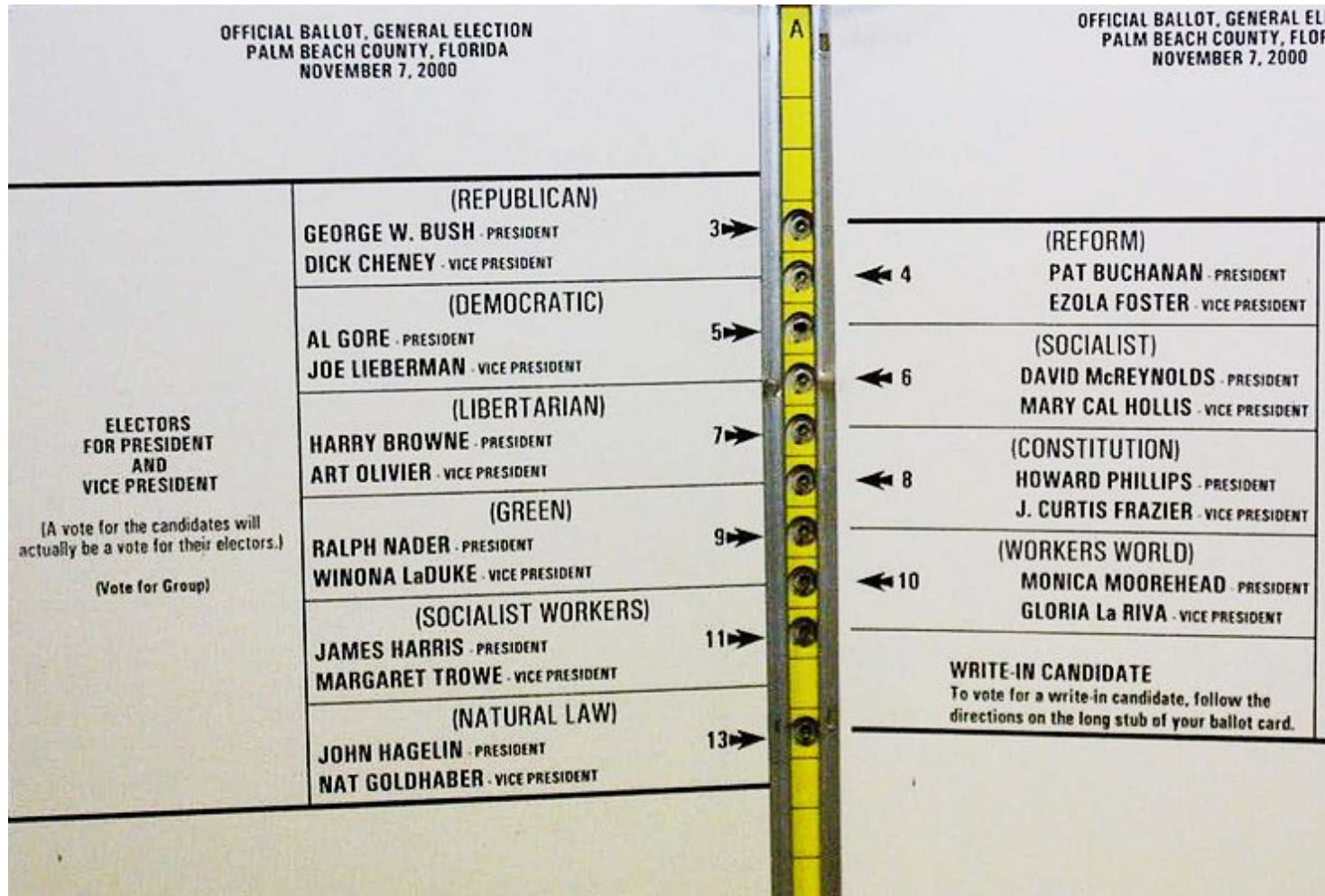


PHOTO: The notoriously confusing butterfly ballot from Florida 2000 led thousands of voters to select candidates they didn't intend. Image: [Wikimedia Commons](#) (PD).

Meanwhile, the new millennium, far from delivering a democratic promised land, presented Americans with the debacle of the 2000 presidential election, whose fate hung absurdly on “hanging chads”—the little pieces of punched-out ballot so contentiously examined during the monthlong recount. Few Americans knew (and many still do not know) that a faulty computer memory card triggered this fiasco. Late on Election Night, Al Gore’s total in Volusia County, Florida, suddenly dropped when one precinct reported 16,000 negative votes.

Fox News was immediately prompted by Florida governor Jeb Bush to call the election for his brother. On his way to a 3 a.m. public concession, Gore changed course when a campaign staffer discovered that he was actually ahead in Volusia County by 13,000 votes.

But the damage was done. Gore was cast as a sore loser in a hostile media environment. His effort to obtain a recount was described by Sean Hannity on Fox News as an attempt to “steal the election.” Meanwhile, George W. Bush invoked his duty to get on with the business of running the country. The rest, as they say, is history.

We are now in the midst of yet another election season. And as November 6 approaches, only one thing is certain: American voters will have no ability to know with certainty who wins any given race, from dogcatcher to president. Nor will we know the true results of ballot initiatives and referenda affecting some of the most vital issues of our day, including fracking, abortion, gay marriage, GMO-food labeling, and electoral reform itself. Our faith-based elections are the result of a new Dark Age in American democracy, brought on, paradoxically, by technological progress.



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