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The Electoral College - II

Lead: Despite the general disdain with which Americans regard the Electoral College, on balance it has proven to have its good points.

Intro.: *A Moment in Time* with Dan Roberts.

Content: The College tends to decrease, but of course not eliminate, the practice of fraud and corruption by reducing the opportunities for vote swindling to the few states where the vote is very close. The Hayes-Tilden disaster 1876 was utterly corrupt but the fraud was so obvious that it

ruined any claim that Hayes had to a mandate and ushered in the long reign of Jim Crow in the South. Fortunately, he turned out to be a better President than the election that gave him the White House might have indicated.

Ironically, despite the claims of those who say the Electoral College stifles the will of the popular majority, it has also made possible the election of some spectacularly successful Presidents. Lincoln in 1860 and Wilson in 1912 were minority Presidents but rank high among the best chief magistrates. Of course the College made possible Presidencies of questionable value. The most recent example was the contest in 2000 in

which a George W. Bush, a minority President, scored a bare majority in the Electoral College, but then left office among the most disdained Presidents in U.S. History.

One of the most interesting unintended consequences of the Electoral College was the manner in which it has strengthened the two-party system. Many of the founders hated political parties even as they were quick to embrace them when the political benefits of partisan organization became obvious. The vertical political integration from local to national that is required to elect a President most of the time militates against multiple parties. You have to get to 270 electoral votes to

achieve the White House, therefore two broad-based political parties tend to make this an easier slog. The Democrats in 1860 and 1968 were divided and lost the election. The Republicans were divided in 1912 and lost the election. While the Electoral College was not planned to do so, it has tended to strengthen the two-party system.

From Richmond, Virginia this is Dan Roberts.

Resources

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