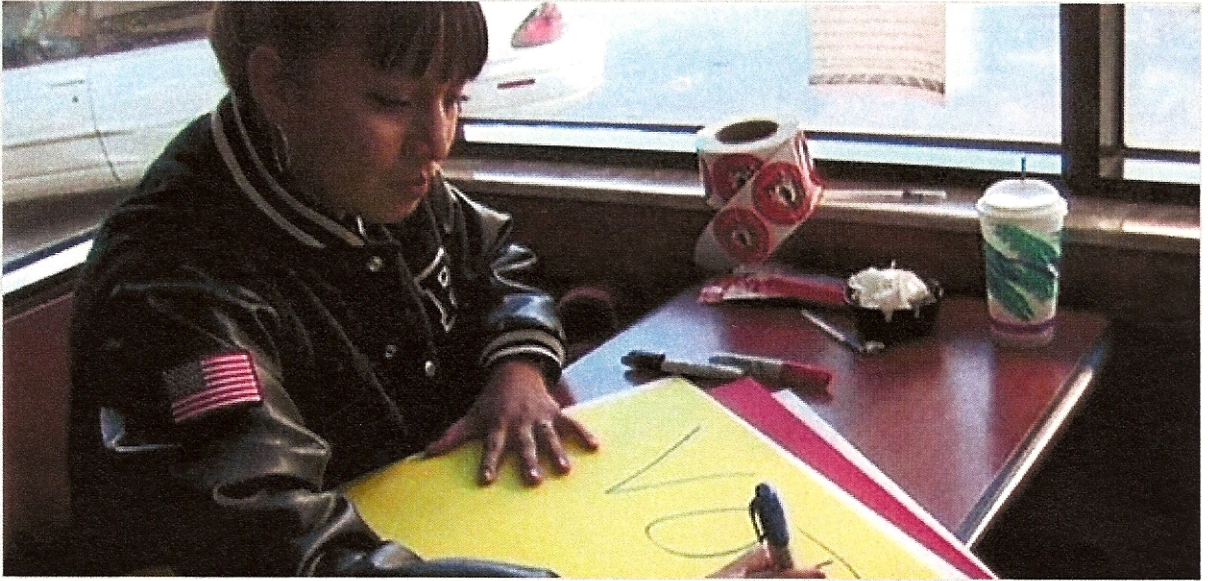


The New York Times

Television

TELEVISION REVIEW

Sure, Every Vote Counts, but Only if That Vote Is Counted



Alan Jacobsen

A scene from "Election Day," which looks at the 2004 election.

By NEIL GENZLINGER
Published: July 1, 2008

All that slick, heavily financed campaigning at the top of the ticket in a presidential election year makes it easy to forget that the whole democratic system sinks or swims on mundane things like this: "E, F, G, J, H."

That is the alphabetic sequence that Jim Fuchs, a Republican committeeman in Chicago, reads off with dismay as he examines a polling-place something-or-other on Nov. 2, 2004, in "Election Day," a ground-level look at the Bush-Kerry election on Tuesday on PBS's "P.O.V." series. It's not quite clear what he's looking at, but it is clear that it has been incorrectly assembled, possibly confusing voters; Mr. Fuchs quickly has it replaced.

Mr. Fuchs, who spent the day keeping an eye out for irregularities in Democratic Chicago, is one of an assortment of people the film follows from the predawn hours until the polls close on the day of the election. The documentary's director, Katy Chevigny, set videographers loose all over the country that day, and the resulting vignettes are full of glitches, some less innocent than others: long lines, lost voter registrations, shortages of ballots, general confusion and understaffing.

The film isn't as dispassionate as it strives to be; its choices of focus include an Indian reservation and a group concerned with voting rights for ex-convicts, and several times it lets its subjects indulge in aimless complaining about the economy that seems off-topic. But the overall collage is interesting, and a bit disheartening. Four years after the ballot mess in 2000, there were still far too many ways for the simple act of voting to go awry.

P.O.V.

Election Day

On most PBS stations on Tuesday night (check local listings).

Directed by Katy Chevigny; Maggie Bowman and Dallas Brennan Rexer, producers; Penelope Falk, editor. Co-produced by P.O.V. and Independent Television Service.