

# The Delray Democrat

## When Will We Ever Learn?<sup>1</sup>

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“If you don’t vote, you don’t count.” Vernon Dahmer Sr., president of the Mississippi NAACP, murdered by the Ku Klux Klan on January 10, 1968

I was too young to vote in 1968 but I fear I might have been foolish enough to stay home in any case. Nixon was a dog-whistle racist and Wallace was a flat-out racist and Humphrey was the lead author of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and had been a liberal icon for decades. What would seem to have been a simple choice was muddled by Humphrey’s support of the Vietnam conflict when he became Johnson’s Vice President.

I turned 21 in 1972, and never have I been more certain of my vote than when I cast my ballot for George McGovern, the most decent and progressive candidate nominated for the presidency in my lifetime.

In 1980, however, I was equally certain, this time that Jimmy Carter was too conservative to earn my vote, so I wasted it by voting for the fourth-party candidate, environmentalist Barry Commoner, helping in a small way to elect Ronald Reagan.

I learned. In 2000, I voted for Al Gore, even though my politics were far more closely aligned with Ralph Nader. I was living in New York, so I had a “free vote” – a vote for Nader would not have prevented Gore from winning the state, but I was furious that Nader stayed in the race even after it became clear it would be a nail-biter.

There are many reasons Trump won in 2016 and 2024 (not the least of which was sexism, which is as American as apple pie), but a big one was the fact that many Democrats did not understand that [there is no such thing as not voting](#). “You either vote by voting, or you vote by staying home and tacitly doubling the value of some Diehard’s vote,” as [David Foster Wallace](#) explained.

Here’s the fallout from the losses in 1968, 1980, 2000, 2016, and 2024. And remember, that with the exception of 1980, these were extremely close races.

Despite being in office only six years before he resigned in disgrace, Richard Nixon appointed four Supreme Court justices and Gerald Ford, appointed to serve out the remainder of Nixon’s second terms, successor appointed one more. This flipped the liberal Warren Court (many of whose justices had been appointed by Dwight Eisenhower, at a time when Republican presidents made appointments base of competence rather than politics).

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<sup>1</sup> [The Delray Democrat](#), June 2025, page 4.

Ronald Reagan appointed three more Supreme Court justices, each of whom voted to stop counting votes in Florida in 2000, effectively selecting George W. Bush as president in a nakedly partisan decision that is among the most reviled in Supreme Court history. Bush in turn appointed John Roberts, who wrote the decision gutting the Civil Rights Act, and Samuel Alito, who wrote the decision reversing *Roe*. Imagine if Al Gore had not been prevented from filling the open seats.

Trump's three appointees provided a majority for the opinion on executive privilege that elected Donald Trump a second time.

All told, since 1968, Republicans have appointed 15 of the last 20 Supreme Court justices, while Democrats have appointed only five (two by Clinton, two by Obama, and one by Biden).

Let us hope that the Democrats who stayed home in 2024 have learned something, and let us further hope that we continue to have elections in which they can put those lessons to use.