It's All Just a Bad Dream

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By Kelly Bulkeley

OW OBSESSED are people about the still undecided presidential election? So obsessed, they do not just think about it all day — they dream about it all night, too.

I have been doing research on dreams and presidential elections since 1992. I've passed out surveys to hundreds of college students, contacted the members of various political organizations, posted requests on electronic bulletin boards and pestered my friends and neighbors. As you might imagine, I've received far more responses this year than I did in either 1992 or 1996. And what I have found offers an amusing nocturnal commentary on the waking world's political turnoil.

First, many people simply can't get the election out of their minds when they go to sleep. Numerous people have reported annoyingly recurrent dreams of ballots, voting, flashing TV news reports, counting and recounting votes and even those notorious chads. One person, a Republican who voted for Bush, recounted this dream: I was talking with someone about pregnant, dimpled and hanging types of chads, and which should be counted as a vote. This dream looped over and over again for most of the night.

A few people are having dreams that use surprisingly biting symbolism to vent feelings of frustration at the bitter electoral contest between George W. Bush and Al Gore. A 38-year-old California man dreamed: I was watching two king yampires battling it out for ownership of the human herd. A 45-year-old man from Colorado dreamed: Bush and Gore are pit bulls going at each other, while Ralph Nader walks off into the sunset.

The most intriguing finding of my research so far is that many more Democrats than Republicans are reporting election-related dreams. Most of these dreams are nightmares about the prospect of an ultimate Bush victory.

Aliens taking over the Earth and turning all humans into slaves; terrorists attacking the country with biological weapons; the dreamer falling into the ocean and being chased by a hungry shark or losing control of a car and driving off a cliff — these are some of the distressing images that are filling Democratic imaginations.

A few Democratic dreamers are using rather wicked sarcasm to express their feelings of anger, outrage and disbelief. Two nights after the election, a 38-year-old woman from Colorado reported: I remember dreaming about George Bush Jr. He was talking to his mom, Barbara. He whined like a 2-year-old saving. "But Mom-

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my, you said I could be president!" The night of the election, an 18-year-old woman from New York dreamed: I was in my room watching the news on the election and eating chips. Then George W. Bush came into my room and stole my chips! I was surprised and caught off guard.

The fact that so many more Democrats than Republicans are reporting election-related dreams may simply reflect the limited scope of my research. It may also reflect an actual personality difference between people who are attracted to Democratic political beliefs and people attracted to Republican beliefs. If so, I can all too easily imagine each side spinning such a finding

in its own drearily characteristic way:

From the Democrats: "See? This just proves that Democrats are imaginative, self-reflective, emotionally sensitive souls, while Republicans are uptight, repressed automatons with the character depth of a puddle."

From the Republicans: "No, what this proves is that Democrats are pathetically unstable lunatics who are lost in their own twisted fantasies, while Republicans are simply clear-eyed realists — focused, grounded and capable of dealing with the world as it is."

It is perhaps inevitable that partisans will see this research as confirmation of their own innate superiority. I believe that makes it all the more important to note that at least a few people are having "non-partisan" or "bipartisan" dreams, dreams that point to values and virtues beyond the vengeful desire to beat one's opponent into a bloody pulp.

The night of the election, a 26-year-old Democratic woman from New York had this dream: I'm in a busy New York City street. The polls have closed and everyone is running around. We know that Gore has lost. I see Gore, crying. He looks exhausted, disheveled. Tipper helps him walk, and I ask her, "Does he want anything to eat? Or drink? Anything?" She says, "No, sweet-

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heart. That's OK." Here is a dream that goes beyond expressing bitter outrage at the winner to show a deep sense of compassion and consideration for the loser. How many people have given even a second's thought to the emotional suffering this election has caused the candidates and their families?

couple of nights before the election, a 43-year-old woman from Pennsylvania, an ardent Democrat who was anxiously bracing herself for a Bush victory, dreamed this: I am with George W. Bush, going with him through a breakfast buffet line in a large auditorium. We sit next to each other and eat together. As we're chatting, I realize that he's really not a bad guy. The idea that he's not utterly without character brings me relief. Such an image of political reconciliation certainly has no parallel in the waking world. For the moment, the possibility of a reunited country seems to be nothing but a dream.

Kelly Bulkeley teaches in the Religious Studies Department at Santa Clara University. He is the author of "Transforming Dreams" (John Wiley & Sons, 2000) and "Visions of the Night" (State University of New York, 1999). police cars dotting the street to Gore's old high school, St Starbucks, where, it turned c also headed.

Seeing Al trudging up the cold, just 537 votes short of lights pushing his burden to trantly put my petty problet ive. I mean, the man has go Powerful Second-in-Comma ous, Happy Country to Ol Whose Monomaniacal Qu Him to the Edge of Madnes It's sad to picture Go

It's sad to picture Go crunching the numbers and his Blackberry and laptops a ing Tallahassee.

He had been egged on it button" legal strategy by Jo win Florida — my bubeleh v worked the condos!" Lieber even Lieberman seems to be

I fear that Tipper and Ka humoring Al, busily planning all parade, with recyclable fla fetti, poet laureate Jesse Jack marshal Tommy Lee Jones.

Enough. Al, babe, snap o We know you won. W. nuch thought. Jeb and Kaletter than anyone that you frent Lott, sashaying around hat unforgettable plumed beau and jeans ensemble, ki

But you lost. If voter in abulated, you would have an't be. Your crusade is wo berversely.

Wes, you won the pop-1300,000, three times the over Nixon. Yes, you've per more voters turned out for than for W. Yes, you and you have made the case that, if for rundown Votomatic materfly ballots and Republica and minorities turned away and Jewish Democrats mis for Pat Buchanan, you eas won Florida and the White

(Of course, you also wot all if you had spent a few r campaigning in your homnessee or swallowed your Bill Clinton to woo Arkans.

But you are not going move down the West Wing yourself and your Brutus have conspired to deny you And even if, by a miracl Supreme Court lets you rec da Legislature is going to s leb doesn't, Tom DeLay w
Why aren't people who

serve it more outraged to se
Because the more you
winner who somehow four
ferent weird ways not to wir
spem like a loser.