

The Vote Collectors: The True Story of the Scamsters, Politicians, and Preachers behind the Nation's Greatest Electoral Fraud

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While false claims of voter fraud have become common in recent years, the 2018 congressional midterm for North Carolina's Ninth District featured the rare case of actual fraud, with illegal ballots from rural Bladen County causing the board of elections to reject the outcome and call for a new race. Charlotte-based journalists Michael Graff and Nick Ochsner delve into the irregularities of that election in their thorough and compelling *The Vote Collectors*.

Graff and Ochsner know the community in question well, and their book begins by showing how local politics in Bladen County are. It goes inside the small gatherings where retail politics are discussed over collard green sandwiches and introduces key players, from preacher and GOP nominee Mark Harris to McCrae Dowless, the entertaining and quotable ex-con who knew the county's voting patterns as well as anyone, and whose exploitation of them almost gave Harris a victory—until the fraud was discovered.

Graff and Ochsner's narrative moves like a novel, tying its story to the county's past. It covers a sheriff's election from a few years earlier showing how racism drove many voters to switch parties in that election. But the book also flashes back to the Reconstruction era to describe the troubling racist history of Bladen County itself, which drove migration patterns and voting patterns, and which still connects to key county individuals in contemporary times. This history results in important context, casting the book as the tale of a troubled region that birthed a fraudulent election.

The worthwhile political history *The Vote Collectors* chronicles an unusual election and shows the importance of remembering the past.

JEFF FLEISCHER (November / December 2021)

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