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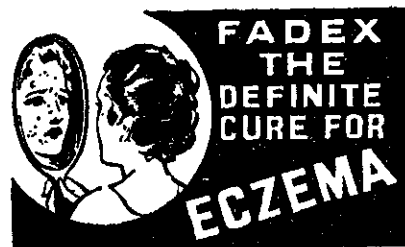
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**FADEX 2/6**

# MINORITIES CAN WIN

## America Chooses A President

(A talk broadcast by Professor Leslie Lipson from 2YA on Monday, November 4)

**T**O-MORROW the people of the United States will choose the man who is to be their President for the next four years. If you can judge the importance of an election by the number of persons who participate in it, then undoubtedly the Presidency of the United States is the most important democratic office in the world. Under the British form of Government, the Prime Minister is not elected by the whole people. Our Prime Minister is not elected by the whole people. Our Prime Ministers are members of the legislature. They are elected, like any other member of Parliament, as the representative of a single constituency. But in the United States, the President does not belong to the legislature—Congress, as it is called. The American voters in their separate districts, it is true, vote for the men who will represent their district in Congress; just as we vote in separate constituencies for different members of Parliament. But all American voters in every electoral district vote for a President as well as members of Congress. To-morrow, a President will be selected by over 45,000,000 voters.

### Complications

Yet, although the entire American electorate participates in choosing a President, the process is complicated by two features, the electoral college and the federal system. The American system of Government, like the Australian, is a federal one. In Britain and New Zealand, there exist only two levels of governmental authority, that is a central government and the local bodies. In the United States there are three levels. There is the Federal Government with its capital at Washington; there are forty-eight States, each possessing special powers which the Federal Government cannot touch; and below them are several thousand local authorities. This federal system is enshrined in a Constitution which was drafted in 1787 and which went into operation in 1789. Now at the time when the Constitution was drafted, much discussion took place on the method of electing the President. Some favoured direct election of the President by the whole people with the entire nation forming a single constituency. Others proposed instead that the President be selected by the Congress. So between the two views they reached a compromise. The President was not to be chosen directly by the people, nor by Congress. He would be selected by indirect election in an Electoral College, which the people were to choose specifically for this purpose.

### Parties Upset Calculations

That system still exists to this day. But its practical operation is now very different from what the framers of the Constitution intended. The men of 1787 hoped that the Electoral College would be a small, dispassionate group, who after calm deliberation would choose the man best qualified to lead the nation. What upset the calculation was



S. P. Andrew photograph  
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the emergence of the modern party organisation. The Electoral College is now a strictly partisan body, and its choice of a President is always a foregone conclusion once the College itself has been chosen. Constitutional theory pretends that the voters choose electors who in turn will choose a President. In actual fact, the members of the College are party nominees pledged in advance to vote for the candidate whom their party has designated.

A further complication arises from the internal composition of the Electoral College. Since the United States has a federal form of government, the College was constituted along federal lines. The College represents the people of the United States, not as a single people, but as members of the forty-eight separate States out of which the Union is composed. To each State the Federal Constitution grants the same number of members in the Electoral College as it has in both Houses of Congress combined. Let me give examples to illustrate this. Congress is composed of two Houses, an Upper House or Senate and a Lower House or House of Representatives. In the Senate each State, irrespective of its area or population, has two members—neither more nor less. Thus, New York State, with a population of over 12,000,000, has the same number of Senators as Nevada with a mere 100,000. In the House of Representatives, however, each State has a number of Representatives proportionate to its population. Thus New York has forty-five; while Nevada receives only one. In the Electoral College, therefore, New York has forty-seven members—the number equal to its forty-five representatives plus its two Senators. Nevada, on the other hand, has three members only, corresponding to its one Representative and its two Senators. Hence in the Electoral College, representation is not fully proportionate to population. The thinly-populated States of the West have more

members than they are entitled to by the number of their inhabitants. New York State has a population one hundred and twenty times greater than that of Nevada. But the number of its members in the Electoral College is only sixteen times greater than Nevada's.

### Another Strong Influence

Yet another feature of the Electoral College, besides its federal composition, influences the outcome of Presidential elections. When the people have voted within each State, the party with the greatest number of popular votes within the State wins all the members of the Electoral College assigned to that State. Thus, let us suppose that in New York, 51% of the voters favour the Democratic candidate, and 49% favour the Republican. There are 47 places in the Electoral College to be given to New York. These 47 are not divided between the parties in the proportion of 51% and 49%. Instead, all 47 places go to the winning party. In any State, therefore, a party need only win 51% of the votes in order to gain the entire membership of that State in the College. Now you can well understand that under such a system the final voting in the Electoral College may be quite out of relation to the votes of the citizens at the polls. Take the last election, that of 1936, as an example. President Roosevelt polled over 27,000,000 votes, nearly 61% of the total. His Republican opponent, Governor Landon, received sixteen and a half million, somewhat over 36% of the total. In the Electoral College, however, Roosevelt obtained 523 votes as against 8 for Landon. Mr. Roosevelt had secured a majority in 46 States of the Union; hence he received all the votes of those States in the College. Only in two States did Mr. Landon receive a majority; and these two between them only number 8 votes in the College.

### When the Contest is Close

But the 1936 election was in any case a landslide, in which Mr. Roosevelt's majority was clear. Far more surprising results occur when the contest is a close one. Indeed, it is quite possible for a candidate with a minority of the total popular votes to win a majority in the Electoral College. Thus a man can win the Presidency even though he has received less votes at the polls than his opponent. Such results have actually occurred. In 1888, for example, the Democratic candidate, Mr. Cleveland, received 96,000 votes more than the Republican, Mr. Harrison. But in the Electoral College, Harrison received 233 votes, while Cleveland had only 168.

These features of the Electoral College will help you to understand the technique of American Presidential elections. Usually each party is overwhelmingly strong in certain States. Thus the Democrats dominate in Alabama and Vermont. The Presidential campaign is most vigorously conducted in the large States which have a big block of votes

(Continued on next page)