

PERIODICALS

Reviews of articles from periodicals and specialized journals here and abroad

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POLITICS & GOVERNMENT

A Tolerant People

“Trends in Political Tolerance” by John Mueller, in *Public Opinion Quarterly* (Spring 1988), Univ. of Chicago Press, P.O. Box 37005, Chicago, Ill. 60637.

As the 1988 campaign progresses, one trend seems clear: Americans are far more tolerant of the opinions of others than they were in the past.

Mueller, a political scientist at the University of Rochester, believes that Americans have become more willing to listen to extreme left-wing groups, and have not increased their distaste for any political group or opinion. Since the 1950s, he argues, there has been “a solid increase in political tolerance” by Americans.

A 1954 survey found that only 27 percent of Americans would allow a communist to speak; 89 percent thought that a communist college teacher should be fired. By 1985, 57 percent of Americans would allow a communist lecturer and only 51 percent would fire a communist teacher. The percentage of Americans surveyed by the National Opinion Research Center between 1972 and 1985 who would let atheists, “antidemocratic militarists,” and homosexuals speak or teach, or would allow books by such people in public libraries either remained constant or rose. However, Americans became less willing to allow racists to give public talks.

Rising tolerance among Americans, Mueller maintains, is largely due to domestic communism becoming “one of the great nonissues of American politics.” In 1954, *The Reader’s Guide to Periodical Literature* listed 203 items under “Communism—U.S.” or “Communist Party—U.S.”; in 1984, only three articles were published in these two categories. As anxiety over communist subversion faded, tolerance for communists and other left-wing groups (such as socialists) rose. No new domestic threats (real or perceived) have arisen since the U.S. Communist Party’s decline; thus communism’s wane has meant an increase in tolerance overall. Changes in attitudes regarding political tolerance, however, do not mirror changes in Americans’ views toward civil rights and criminal justice.

Pockets of intolerance remain. Polls in the 1970s and ’80s have shown that around 20 percent of Americans believe that *all* unorthodox groups (e.g., homosexuals, advocates of nationalizing industry) should be barred from lecturing. Moreover, subtle changes in poll questions can substan-

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tively alter results: Sixty-nine percent of Americans surveyed in the spring of 1976 said that the United States should "not forbid" antidemocratic speeches, while only 46 percent said the U.S. should "allow" them. The uncertainty of polling data, in Mueller's opinion, implies that specific questions about tolerance cannot be extrapolated to determine general attitudes toward free speech and other civil liberties.

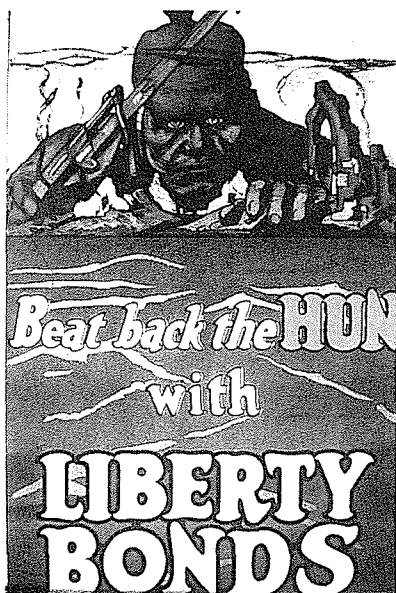
*The Quest for
Community*

"The Present Age and the State of Community"
by Robert Nisbet, in *Chronicles* (June 1988),
Rockford Institute, 934 North Main St., Rock-
ford, Ill. 61103.

When did the federal government begin to be the center of American life? The answer, says Nisbet, an emeritus professor at Columbia University: World War I. While the *economic* effects of the war were small in the United States, the resulting *intellectual* changes were vast.

Before 1917, the United States had the "most decentralized" government in the West. But upon America's entry into the conflict, President Woodrow Wilson swiftly transformed the nation into "a highly centralized, collectivized war state." Railroads, shipping lines, and munitions factories were nationalized; other corporations were severely regulated. Government propaganda was far more intense than in World War II: Seventy-five thousand "Four-Minute Men" were authorized to interrupt any gathering to speak for four minutes on the government's war aims, and "Neighborhood Watchers" scoured the streets searching for German subversives.

Congress dismantled much of the "war state" in 1919. But American



*During World War I, gov-
ernment posters and slogans
urged Americans to make
the "War to End All Wars"
the focus of their activities.
Thrift was encouraged;
homemakers, for example,
saved the tinfoil from chew-
ing-gum wrappers to aid the
U.S. war effort.*