

But this argument is partly contradicted by Uhlaner's own report of a dramatic increase in registration (from 39 to 59 percent) and voter turnout (from 28 to 59 percent) among Mexican-Americans. Uhlaner

credits aggressive registration drives. By these measures, Mexican-Americans now participate in politics more actively than blacks do. More than ever, blacks seem a constituency in search of a party.

Keeping Secrets

"The Fight to Know" by Peter Montgomery and Peter Overby, in *Common Cause Magazine* (July-Aug. 1991), 2030 M St. N.W., Washington, D.C. 20036.

Signed into law by President Lyndon B. Johnson and strengthened after the Watergate scandal, the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) turned 25 this summer. In recent years, however, contend Montgomery, associate editor of *Common Cause Magazine*, and Overby, a staff writer, the executive branch and federal courts have expanded the law's exemptions and given "the bureaucratic impulse for secrecy . . . freer rein."

In 1987, for example, the Reagan administration asked Congress to exempt the National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA) from the law, claiming that Japanese scientists were using it to obtain valuable information about U.S. space shuttle technology. That simply was not true, the authors say, and a NASA official later admitted as much. The administration "concocted the story," they assert, to keep the public from learning about decisions that led to the 1986 *Challenger* explosion. Requests made under FOIA later helped "demolish NASA's deceptions."

The FOIA exempts certain kinds of information from public scrutiny, including national-security and law-enforcement secrets, sensitive financial and business data, information protected by individuals' pri-

vacy rights, and some internal government documents. The Reagan administration extended the cloak of "national security" to cover information on trade and virtually all aspects of international activity, Montgomery and Overby say. A 1982 executive order told officials to classify documents whenever in doubt. The courts have not been much help. A federal court, for example, ruled FBI criminal history records "categorically" exempt.

Surprisingly, most FOIA requests do not come from journalists. They accounted for only six percent of the 40,500 requests at the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) last year. Most of the rest, the authors note, came from FDA-regulated firms seeking "to untangle the sometimes Byzantine regulatory process—and to dig up information . . . on their competitors."

In an effort to find out how well the law is working, *Common Cause Magazine* last spring filed FOIA requests with 21 federal agencies, asking for recent logs of FOIA requests and the agency responses. The full answer is still a mystery: Only four of the agencies met the statutory 10-day deadline for replying, and two months after the requests were filed, seven agencies still had not responded.

FOREIGN POLICY & DEFENSE

America First?

"What is the National Interest?" by Alan Tonelson, in *The Atlantic* (July 1991), 745 Boylston St., Boston, Mass. 02116.

America's victories in the Cold War and the Persian Gulf War—and its international foreign policy in general—are largely

irrelevant to the lives of most Americans, asserts Tonelson, research director of the Economic Strategy Institute. Far from go-

ing off now in search of President George Bush's New World Order, he argues, the United States should abandon internationalism and start thinking in terms of "purely national interests."

U.S. foreign policy since World War II, in Tonelson's view, has had the utopian purpose of transforming the world "into a place where the forces that drive nations to clash in the first place no longer exist." Internationalism, he says, has encouraged Americans "to think more about the possible world of tomorrow than about the real world of today." All questions of the risks and costs of foreign entanglements have been avoided, he claims, and the nation's economic and social problems have been badly neglected.

Under the policy that he champions, the United States would seek to secure and protect its "truly vital" interests, such as physical survival and the maintenance of its democratic institutions. But all other major foreign-policy objectives would be subjected to the test of whether the benefits outweighed the costs and risks. Thus, "the lack of democracy, development, and social justice in Central America—however unfortunate for people who have to live there—has never appreciably affected U.S. fortunes." The United States should no longer try to reform these countries, Tonelson argues. Its sole interest is to keep hostile foreign powers out, and it should do this with force, if necessary.

U.S. foreign policy, Tonelson says,

should *not* be "a vehicle for spreading American values, for building national character, for expressing any individual's or group's emotional, philosophical, or political preferences, or for carrying out any . . . overseas missions that, however appealing, bear only marginally on protecting and enriching the nation." Such marginal missions include: "promoting peace, stability, democracy, and development around the world; protecting human rights; establishing international law; building collective security; exercising something called leadership; creating a new world order; [and] competing globally with the Soviets (or whomever) for power and influence."

America's security, he says, should be "decoupled" from that of its allies, and "the automatic nuclear risks built into the alliances" should be eliminated. All U.S. nuclear forces in Europe, and most conventional forces, should be unilaterally withdrawn. "Strategic and economic disengagement from the Third World, which has already begun, should be allowed to continue unimpeded."

All this does not add up to isolationism, Tonelson insists. Foreign intervention would not be ruled out on principle. "[The] only rule of thumb would be 'whatever works' to preserve or enhance America's security and prosperity and—provided that Americans are willing to pay the bills—what the country collectively wishes to define as its psychological well-being."

JFK's Missiles

"Nuisance of Decision: Jupiter Missiles and the Cuban Missile Crisis" by Philip Nash, in *The Journal of Strategic Studies* (Mar. 1991), Frank Cass & Co. Ltd., Gainsborough House, Gainsborough Road, London E11 1RS, England.

When President John F. Kennedy in October 1962 made the stunning announcement that the Soviet Union was placing nuclear missiles in Cuba, he left out one uncomfortable fact: The United States had nuclear missiles in Turkey, close to the Soviet Union. Others soon pointed out the parallel, and it complicated U.S. efforts to resolve the crisis. Standard histories have it that a blameless Kennedy had ordered

the obsolete Jupiter missiles removed from Turkey months before, only to discover during the crisis that the federal bureaucracy had not carried out his order. But Nash, an Ohio University historian, says that there is no hard evidence that Kennedy had explicitly ordered the Jupiters removed.

Kennedy indeed had been concerned about the missiles in Turkey, and with