

thought, would overcome the individual man's selfishness. Today, even "the higher selfishness of marriage and parenthood" is losing its influence.

"Liberalism promised progress, abundance, and above all privacy. The freedom to live as you please, think and worship as you please—this privatization of the good life was liberalism's greatest appeal. Having set definite limits to the powers of the state, at the same time relieving individuals of most of their civic obligations, liberals assumed that they had cleared away the outstanding obstacles to the pursuit of happiness." But they also unwittingly cleared away the foundations of civic life.

As today's overburdened state defaults on its assigned responsibilities, Lasch con-

tends, citizens will have to meet their own needs by, for example, patrolling their own neighborhoods. That is to the good, in Lasch's opinion, because it will help to revive the spirit of self-reliance and neighborly cooperation. Yet many Americans, living in cities or suburbs where the shopping mall offers the only "community," have lost the habit of self-help. To help them regain it, ironically, government action is needed: policies to strengthen families and initiatives, such as school vouchers, to give them more control over the professionals who so affect their lives. Indeed, Lasch says, "it is hard to see how the foundations of civic life can be restored, unless this work becomes an overriding goal of public policy."

## Stressing The Negative

"Negative versus Positive Television Advertising in U.S. Presidential Campaigns, 1960-1988" by Lynda Lee Kaid and Anne Johnston, in *Journal of Communication* (Summer 1991), Univ. of Pa., 3620 Walnut St., Philadelphia, Pa. 19104-6220.

As the countdown to the presidential election begins, Americans are bracing for an onslaught of "negative" political ads on television. That is what they got last time—and to an unprecedented extent, to hear many reporters and political pundits tell it. Especially offensive, said the critics, was President George Bush's 1988 campaign, with its notorious commercial about furloughed murderer Willie Horton. After examining 830 TV political ads aired in the eight presidential campaigns from 1960 through 1988, however, communication

specialists Kaid, of the University of Oklahoma, and Johnston, of the University of North Carolina, see a different picture.

The proportion of "negative" ads—i.e. those focused on the alleged defects of the opponent—reached its height, Kaid and Johnston found, not in 1988, but in 1964, when President Lyndon B. Johnson's campaign used the famous "Daisy Girl" commercial to suggest that Barry Goldwater would start a nuclear war. Forty percent of the political ads used in the general election campaigns that year were negative. In the 1976 Carter-Ford contest, by contrast, only 24 percent were. The proportion increased to 36 percent in 1980, when Jimmy Carter and Ronald Reagan squared off, but has hardly changed at all since. In 1988, Kaid and Johnston report, attack ads were 37 percent of the total.

Negative political ads are not all bad, the authors point out. In fact, they are more likely to contain information about political issues than the positive ones, which celebrate the supposed virtues of the sponsoring candidate.

The most surprising of Kaid and Johnston's findings, however, is this: In the



Many observers insisted that mud-slinging was the 1988 presidential candidates' main activity.

1988 election, 32 percent of Bush's ads were negative—compared with 41 percent of Democratic candidate Michael Duka-

kis's. The Republican's negative pitch that year clearly was a lot more memorable—and also, it seems, a lot more effective.

## *Rights Run Amok*

"'Absolute' Rights: Property and Privacy" by Mary Ann Glendon, in *The Responsive Community* (Fall 1991), 714 Gelman Library, The George Washington Univ., Washington, D.C. 20052.

Under the spell of philosopher John Locke and the lectures on law of Sir William Blackstone, Americans from the beginning talked about property rights as if they were absolute. In practice there was a good deal of public regulation of property. The Fifth Amendment, for example, recognized the federal government's power of eminent domain. But the extravagant rights talk had a strong influence, Harvard Law Professor Glendon notes. In the late 19th and early 20th centuries, the U.S. Supreme Court's extreme view of property rights led it to reject much social legislation, delaying the nation's transition to a mixed economy and a welfare state until the Court reversed itself in the 1930s. In recent years, Glendon argues, absolutist rights talk has reappeared in the courts and passed into common discourse, only this time the rhetoric is about privacy, not property.

The Supreme Court and lawyers in general, Glendon says, have thought of the right of privacy "as marking off a protected sphere that surrounds the individual," and dressed the new right up in the old property-rights rhetoric. Privacy emerged as a distinct constitutional right only in 1965, in the landmark Supreme Court decision, *Griswold v. Connecticut*. Justice William O. Douglas found in the "penumbras" of the Constitution, "a right

of privacy older than the Bill of Rights" protecting the "intimate relation of husband and wife" from state interference. In 1972, the Court extended the right beyond the family and elevated it to a full-fledged *individual* right. The following year, in *Roe v. Wade*, the Court decided that the right was "broad enough to encompass a woman's decision whether or not to terminate her pregnancy." But, as had happened with property rights, Glendon writes, the high court since then has experienced difficulties "in working out principled limitations on a right that seemed for a time to have no bounds."

What's wrong with a little exaggeration about individual rights? For one thing, Glendon says, "no one can be an absolutist for *all* our constitutionally guaranteed rights, because taking any one of them as far as it can go soon brings it into conflict with another." In addition, she says, absolutist rhetoric encourages conflict and discourages reasoned dialogue. It expresses "our most infantile instincts rather than our potential to be reasonable men and women. A country in which we can do 'anything we want' is not a republic of free people attempting to order their lives together." Nor is it a country in which the responsibilities that must accompany rights get the attention they deserve.

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## FOREIGN POLICY & DEFENSE

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### *World Champion For How Long?*

"The Democratic Moment" by Marc F. Plattner, in *Journal of Democracy* (Fall 1991), 1101 15th St. N.W., Ste. 200, Washington, D.C. 20005.

The liberal democratic ideal is now in the ascendancy around the world—but how long can this happy moment last? Democ-

racy's fate, says Plattner, coeditor of the *Journal of Democracy*, depends on whether a rival postcommunist movement