

presents it, is an emanation of that natural human self-love—which as such attests to the natural goodness of man.”

Like other Enlightenment thinkers, writes Orwin, Rousseau rejected the classical notion that human beings are united by “a natural common good.” But there he parted company with them. Thomas Hobbes and later thinkers held that the social contract is grounded in rational self-interest growing largely from fear: we don’t harm others so that they won’t harm us. But Rousseau insisted that society grows out of mutual concern: our awareness of suffering, and our desire to avoid it. “When the strength of an expansive soul makes me identify myself with my fellow, and I feel that I am, so to speak, in him,” Rousseau writes in *Émile*, “it is in order not to suffer that I do not want him to suffer. I am interested in him for love of myself.”

In a society that esteems compassion,

Orwin says, many of the sterner, self-denying virtues get pushed aside. Compassion breeds many political ills. It feeds America’s image-oriented politics, Orwin argues, as politicians respond to growing public cynicism about politics by emphasizing their personal, caring qualities—and call upon “handlers and image makers” to get the job done. In government, too, compassion often backfires, Orwin contends: “Almost always . . . too intense or too sporadic, liable alike to mindless excess and to calculated hypocrisy, compassion is anything but a reliable basis for public policy.”

Don’t blame Rousseau for all this, though, Orwin says. He saw that “the decay of Christianity,” the rise of a commercial society based on self-interested calculation, and other developments called for a new morality. He did not think he was providing a guide to public policy. That, Orwin suggests, may have been “his greatest error.”

The Not So Indifferent Voter

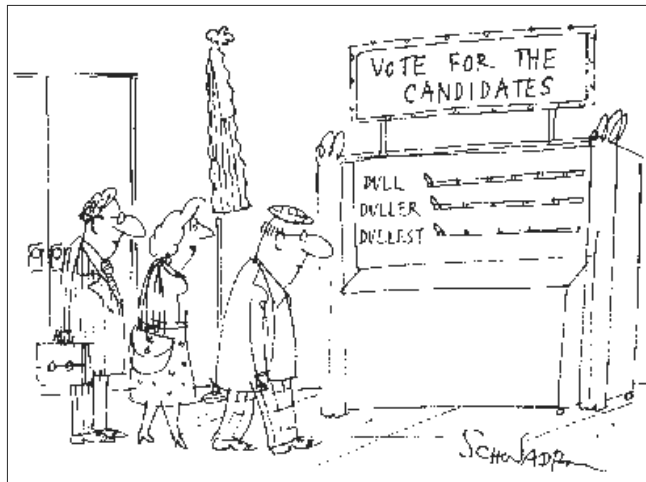
“How the Experts Got Voter Turnout Wrong Last Year” by Peter Bruce, “It’s Bruce Who Got the Turnout Story Wrong” by Curtis Gans, and “Reply to Gans” by Bruce, in *The Public Perspective* (Oct.–Nov. 1997), Roper Center, P.O. Box 440, Storrs, Conn. 06268–0440.

News stories shortly after the 1996 elections told a gloomy story. A majority of Americans did not even bother to vote. The 48.8 percent voter turnout was said to be the lowest since 1924, sparking a new round of lamentations about America’s civic decline. Hold everything! says Bruce, a research associate at the Roper Center for Public Opinion Research, at the University of Connecticut. The real story is not quite that bad.

In the first days after the election, the nonpartisan, Washington, D.C.-based Committee for the Study of the American Electorate (CSAE), the chief source for most of the postelection news stories, reported that 95.8 million Americans (later upped to 96.3 million) voted for president, out of 196.5 million people of voting age—a turnout rate of 49 percent.

Bruce points out that CSAE uses the

Census Bureau’s estimate of the voting-age population to represent the eligible electorate. But that figure includes 14.6 million resident aliens and about 2.75 million



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felons. Subtracting these ineligible voters from the total produces an electorate of 179 million. But the story does not end there. Bruce agrees with CSAE director Gans that 1.1 million aliens naturalized in

1996 should be added to that figure, along with the 430,000 military and other government personnel living abroad. That makes the eligible electorate about 180.5 million—and the turnout 53.3 percent.

There are still other ways to gauge turnout. It rises to 54.1 percent if one counts those who went to the polls but did not vote for president. It drops to 51.8 percent, if—with Gans—one adjusts for the undercount of blacks by the 1990 census

and certain other factors.

Whatever the “best” turnout figure for the last election may be, it is clear now that a majority of eligible Americans did join in the great democratic ritual. But the larger truth—the pattern since 1960 that CSAE has shown, using the unadjusted voting-age population as the standard—is still rather gloomy, Bruce says. “The trend toward a declining voter turnout . . . is real and disturbing.”

FOREIGN POLICY & DEFENSE

Foreign Policy à la Carte

“Fragmentation and Hubris” by James Schlesinger, in *The National Interest* (Fall 1997),
1112 16th St. N.W., Ste. 540, Washington, D.C. 20036.

For decades, the Soviet threat kept anxious Americans attuned to events abroad. Now that it is gone, contends Schlesinger, a former secretary of defense (1973–75), the public is losing interest in foreign affairs, and domestic special interests, particularly ethnic groups, are gaining “excessive influence over [U.S.] foreign policy.”

The Clinton administration’s proclaimed goals of expanding democracy and free enterprise abroad “provide precious little in the way of specific guidance” about the conduct of foreign policy, he says. In the absence of “a hammered-out vision of the national interest,” ethnic interests have had a clear field.

“The aggregate list is almost embarrassing,” Schlesinger writes. Greek Americans have blocked delivery of helicopters and frigates purchased by Turkey, a critical U.S. ally during the Cold War and the Persian Gulf War. Armenian Americans are seeking to keep in force a legal prohibition on nonhumanitarian aid to Azerbaijan, which has been partially occupied by Armenia. Cuban Americans have “wholly dominated” U.S. policy toward Fidel Castro’s Cuba. “It is scarcely possible to overstate the influence of Israel’s supporters on our policies in the Middle East,” Schlesinger says. Pressure from the Congressional Black Caucus strongly affected U.S. policy toward Haiti. U.S. interventions in Northern Ireland, made “with an eye on the Irish-American vote,” repeatedly roiled U.S. relations with Britain during President Clinton’s first term. The

expansion of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) “has been driven by concern over the politics of appealing to voters of East European origin.”

Just because a particular domestic group presses for a certain policy does not mean that that policy may not be an appropriate one, Schlesinger acknowledges. NATO expansion, for instance, may be in the national interest. “Yet overall,” he maintains, “these domestic pressures tend to damage our international position.” (So, he says, does the unrelated American propensity to nag other nations about their behavior.) Increasingly, Schlesinger maintains, U.S. foreign policy is seen abroad as “incoherent and capricious.”

Historically, ethnic politics, though a big part of American domestic politics, was not allowed to affect the nation’s foreign policy except “tangentially,” Schlesinger says. Today, however, politicians more and more regard foreign policy as the equivalent of another bag of goodies to pass out to ethnic constituencies.

Academe’s current enthusiasm for “multiculturalism” and ethnic identity only makes matters worse, says Schlesinger. “To sustain an effective and reasonably consistent foreign policy requires a national consensus, which in turn depends upon a sense of common purpose. The new intellectual fashions weaken and, in a sense, delegitimize the search for that common purpose.” No matter how great its power, Schlesinger warns, a fragmented society cannot function effectively as a world leader.