

trusters.”

To solve the mystery, Putnam first discounts some obvious suspects:

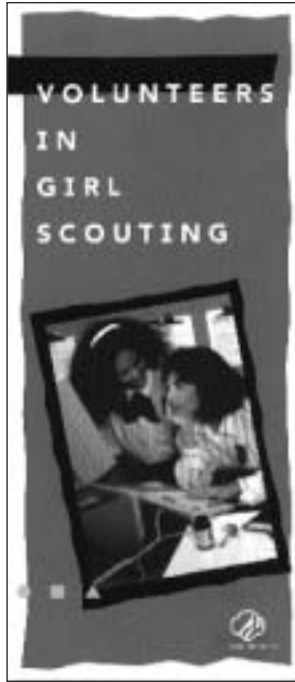
- *Mobility and consequent rootlessness.* Census data show “that rates of residential mobility have been remarkably constant over the last half century.”

- *“Overwork” by Americans.* While the proportion of those telling pollsters they feel “always rushed” has jumped in recent decades, studies indicate that average Americans have actually *gained* free time. In any event, workaholics seem *more* involved in the community than others, not less.

- *The movement of women into the paid labor force.* Working women belong to slightly *more* voluntary organizations than housewives do—albeit to different sorts (more professional associations, fewer PTAs). Moreover, housewives have reduced their civic engagement more than working women have. However, civic engagement has fallen far more steeply among women than men. Putnam’s interim verdict: not proven.

- *The decline of marriage.* True, married men and women are about a third more “trusting” and belong to as many as 25 percent more groups than comparable single folk. But the decline of marriage is probably only “an accessory to the crime . . . not the major villain,” Putnam says.

A very significant clue, he contends, is this: “Americans who came of age during the



Not all the news about civic involvement is bad. One success story: the Girl Scouts, with 827,000 adult volunteers in 1993, up from 674,000 in 1970.

Depression and World War II have been far more deeply engaged in the life of their communities than the generations that have followed them.” They belong to many more civic associations, are far more likely to trust people, vote at a higher rate, and read newspapers more often. “It is as though the postwar generations were exposed to some mysterious X-ray that permanently and increasingly rendered them less likely to con-

nect with the community,” he observes.

That mysterious force—and the main cause of America’s civic rot—is television, the social scientist–detective concludes. An analysis of data on people who are similar in virtually every other respect—education, income, age, sex, etc.—shows one factor to be strongly linked with lower levels of social trust and membership in groups: spending lots of time in front of the television. Heavy TV viewers (unlike omnivorous readers) tend to be loners, not joiners, and also to be “unusually skeptical about the benevolence of other people.” With the average American now watching the tube about four hours a day, it is perhaps not so surprising that so many are inclined to go bowling alone.

Finding Religion on the Left

“Why We Need a Religious Left” by Amy Waldman, in *The Washington Monthly* (Dec. 1995), 1611 Connecticut Ave. N.W., Washington, D.C. 20009.

When liberals fought for civil rights or against the Vietnam War, religious figures such as Martin Luther King, Jr., and the Berrigan brothers were important leaders. What a difference a few decades make.

“As conservatives have successfully used religion to make political inroads, liberals have become increasingly antagonistic to mixing religion and politics,” notes Waldman, an editor at the *Washington Monthly*.

Many liberals think religious leaders should remain silent on political issues. They associate religion with intolerance and hypocritical evangelism, and resent the Catholic Church’s opposition to abortion (while ignoring Pope John Paul II’s “liberal” stands on the death penalty, materialism, and helping the poor).

But the estrangement from religion is not entirely the secular liberals’ fault.

During the 1980s, Protestant and Catholic clergy and laity passionately opposed U.S. aid to the Nicaraguan contras and the repressive government of El Salvador—and their campaign had an impact on Capitol Hill. But the churches, Waldman notes, have not fired up “the same passion about issues confronting Americans at home,” such as conditions in America’s inner cities. Domestic policy, observes Sister Maureen Fieldler of the Quixote Center, a Catholic social action organization in Maryland, “doesn’t hold the glamour of Central America. You can’t go on a dele-

gation to the inner city.” Some members of the religious Left are involved in helping the inner-city poor—so deeply involved that they simply have no energy left over for political activism.

Secular liberals, Waldman argues, should help the religious Left to raise its voice again. The fact is, she says, that many of liberalism’s central values—“whether help for the downtrodden or support for peace—derive from the Judeo-Christian tradition. Liberals who disdain religion are inadvertently acting like embarrassed adolescents who shun their own parents.”

FOREIGN POLICY & DEFENSE

Foreign Policy as Social Work

“Foreign Policy as Social Work” by Michael Mandelbaum, in *Foreign Affairs* (Jan.–Feb. 1996); “In Defense of Mother Teresa: Morality in Foreign Policy” by Stanley Hoffmann, in *Foreign Affairs* (Mar.–Apr. 1996), 58 E. 68th St., New York, N.Y.

The Clinton administration took office in 1993 with a distinctive vision of post-Cold War U.S. foreign policy: that its purpose should be to promote American values by saving lives in such places as Bosnia, Somalia, and Haiti. Instead of basing foreign policy on American national interests and spelling out clearly what those interests now are, the administration tried “to turn American foreign policy into a branch of social work,” contends Mandelbaum, a professor at Johns Hopkins’ Nitze School of Advanced International Studies (and a 1992 Clinton supporter).

Three “failed military interventions” in the administration’s first nine months “set the tone and established much of the agenda” for Clinton’s foreign policy, Mandelbaum says. The plan “to lift the arms embargo against Bosnia’s Muslims and bomb the Bosnian Serbs” failed. In Somalia, an effort at nation building was abandoned when 18 U.S. Army Rangers died at the hands of a mob in Mogadishu. Then a U.S. ship carrying military trainers to Haiti turned back in response to demonstrations in Port-au-Prince.

Each of these abortive interventions, Mandelbaum notes, “involved small, poor, weak countries far from the crucial centers that had dominated foreign policy during the Cold War.” The goals were noble, but their connection to U.S. interests was

strained at best. The American public simply would not support them. (The public might, however, have been persuaded to back intervention in Haiti, he says, had it been presented simply as a U.S. “good deed in the neighborhood at manageable cost.”)

Despite occasional administration claims to the contrary, Mandelbaum argues, it remains possible to clearly define America’s national interests after the Cold War: maintain the military balance in Europe and in the Asia-Pacific region, prevent the spread of nuclear weapons, and encourage free trade—“the one [goal] the administration [has] best promoted and explained.”

Hoffmann, a Harvard historian, is also critical of the Clinton administration but disputes Mandelbaum’s central argument. The distinction between interests and values “is largely fallacious,” Hoffmann maintains. A great power has “an ‘interest’ in world order that goes beyond strict national security concerns,” and its “values” largely shape its definition of “order.” Unfortunately, he says, the Clinton administration “has been much too timid in defining and defending a foreign policy based on values and other requirements of world order,” in Haiti and elsewhere.

Some “carefully selected interventions in foreign domestic crises” are justified, Hoffmann contends. When there is a chance of stopping “genocide or war crimes on a colos-