

Letters

Relative Deprivation of the Affluent

To the Editor:

The remarkable success of Senator Gary Hart's 1984 campaign for the presidency and his efforts to appeal to young adults of the Vietnam generation through "new ideas" has raised anew the issue of generational effects in American politics. Paul Allen Beck's recent essay on the relative importance of generational and life cycle factors in presidential politics is a timely contribution to this debate ("Young vs. Old," *PS*, Summer 1984).

Unfortunately, Beck holds an excessively pessimistic view of the potential impact of generations in politics and one, moreover, which his own examples appear to contradict. These comments will be directed toward two issues which his article raises: first, the usefulness of presidential politics for differentiating generational from life cycle explanations of political behavior; and, second, the unique generational politics of the baby boom cohort.

I argue that the role of voters from the Vietnam generation is largely hidden by the broadly based appeal of presidential candidacies which must attract a range of age, ethnic, and class categories. To the extent that such appeals do engage today's young, they do so for reasons peculiar to their generational experience rather than out of a youthful rebelliousness which they will presumably outgrow. Second, the peculiar nature of the younger cohorts' complaints, which cluster around their economic vulnerability, makes it likely that they will persist into the future. This is especially true of those born immediately after World War II, for whom sheer numbers constitute a

serious obstacle to economic advancement.

The Relevance of Presidential Politics

A crucial assumption in Beck's analysis is the greater responsiveness of younger voters to anti-establishment appeals. While the rejection of traditional authority is certainly an aspect of the postwar generation's political response, it hardly represents the essence of their political contributions. As Russel Dalton has demonstrated (*Journal of Politics*, February 1984, pp. 264-284), two important categories of contemporary voters are cognitive partisans, party identifiers who display high levels of ideological consistency, and apartisans, political independents who also possess high levels of political information and cognitive sophistication. Both groups appear to be disproportionately recruited from the well-educated, postwar cohort.

This finding leads us to expect more ideological content in the younger generation's politics than simply a vague dissatisfaction with the ins. Indeed, two examples which Beck cites as exemplifying insurgent politics, the McCarthy and McGovern candidacies, were also about very specific problems such as the Vietnam War and the representativeness of the Democratic Party. In the same way, the key issue in the 1984 presidential primary season was not "ins" vs. "outs" or "establishment" vs. "insurgents" but rather the appeal of "new ideas" to a generation for whom old answers are inadequate. Gary Hart's star faded somewhat in the later primaries not because he had become the establishment candidate but rather because Mr. Mondale's celebrated "Where's the

beef?" remark raised questions about the merits of his new issues.

By the same token, much of the youthful appeal of Mr. Reagan, hardly a symbol of youth, is attributable to the perceived effectiveness of his ideas. He may well be as attractive to younger voters, and particularly young men, as Hart because he represents "new ideas" which work in a policy arena of some relevance to the postwar generation—the economy. If this state of affairs is an ironic comment on the alleged subversiveness of the baby boom generation, it also points up the limitations of presidential politics for distinguishing the effects of political generations.

Just as our winner-take-all, plurality system of elections encourages the aggregation of diverse ethnic, class and regional interests within two centrist, coalition parties, so presidential candidates are prevented by pragmatic considerations from appealing too openly to specific political generations. Moreover, the growing importance of television in presidential politics insures that campaigns will dwell on personality and media images rather than substantive, generation-related issues. If this analysis is sound, there may well be a distinctive, generational contribution to our political process which, paradoxically, an examination of presidential politics fails to uncover.

The Politics of the Postwar Generation

The foregoing discussion implies that the reason we have misunderstood the effects of political generations is that we look in the wrong places. The nonpartisan, local arena in which economic and migrational factors produce temporary demographic imbalances, thereby magnifying the importance of a particular age group, may be more suitable for examining the role of political generations. I would argue that the distinctive generational experience of the postwar cohorts expresses itself at the local level in a number of issues tapping anti-growth sentiments—rent control, population growth control, opposition to nuclear power.

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economically conservative and reflects a sense of relative deprivation over the recent performance of the economic system. The size and high educational qualifications of the "baby boom" generation have severely weakened its prospects in the economic marketplace. The uneven performance of the American economy in the seventies and eighties accentuates the effects of a labor market surplus.

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In this situation, young adults who grew up with the favorable economic conditions of the fifties and sixties feel justifiably betrayed by the growth process. At the same time, they can draw upon their collective memory of sixties protests to fashion conservative social movements based upon the growth issue. These movement activities will not be goal-oriented attempts to restrict economic growth, which would contradict this generation's fundamental objectives, but rather diffuse expressions of subconscious anger and anxiety over the economic future.

Such behavior, moreover, is not inconsistent with a vote for Ronald Reagan. The bottom line for the postwar generation is effectiveness. As long as President Reagan's economic policies work, many young people are inclined to support him. At the same time, they reserve the right to oppose unacceptable forms of growth at the local level.

Finally, Beck's analysis raises the question of the permanence of generational conflict. Without a doubt, certain generations (or crucial social groups within them) have unique formative experiences which subsequently set them apart polit-

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ically from their predecessors or successors. The Civil War and New Deal generations seem to fit this category. The postwar generation may be another. However, the likelihood that these differences will persist is open to debate.

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Although he hedges his predictions, Beck appears to discount the sustainability of generational conflict because postwar cohorts will gradually displace preceding age groups, thereby rendering the electorate more monolithic. To the extent that insurgent politics persists, it should become more muted as the numerically inferior post-baby boom generation enters adulthood. Thus he casts doubt on the long-term rebelliousness of baby boom young adults, implying that they will either become the numerically dominant portion of the electorate or will grow more conservative as they pass through the life cycle.

This argument assumes that the decisive events which produce a political generation occur at a single point in time. However, when assessing the unique impact of the postwar cohort, we must make allowance for a crucial difference: the Civil War and New Deal generations responded to discrete political or economic events; the baby boom generation, on the other hand, carries its formative experience with it in the form of congestion effects. Whether competing for good schools, job placement, job promotion, or housing, the postwar generation will confront crowding effects due to their excessive numbers. It is entirely possible that they will remain discontented with their conditions of life well beyond the period of youthful rebellion. Hence passage out of the electorate rather than movement through the life cycle may be the only

effective way of ending their distinctive political contributions.

Donald Rosdil
University of Chicago

Beck replies:

Donald Rosdil's letter to the editor challenges my hypothesis that young voters in the Democratic primaries may have preferred Hart to Mondale because of the normal anti-establishment postures of youth rather than their distinct generational perspective. In so doing, Rosdil also presents an alternative view about how generations in politics develop. Both the challenge and the alternative view, as well as some of his other points, warrant my reply.

My objective in "Young vs. Old in 1984" was to present alternative life cycle and generational explanations for the contrasting preferences of young and old voters in the 1984 Democratic primaries. I tried to give equal time to each explanation and definitely did not suggest that the life cycle explanation was preferable to the generational explanation. Rather, because the life cycle explanation has been ignored in most analyses of age differences in voting, my intention was to caution against overlooking the possibility of rather conventional life cycle effects in pursuit of probably more glamorous generational explanations. I regret that Rosdil has misinterpreted my caution flag as a brief for the life cycle explanation or as pessimism about the possibility of generational effects—especially since my own research has favored generational explanations of voting behavior.

Because there is insufficient empirical evidence to decide between the two explanations (not to mention period effects), there is ample room for disagreement. Rosdil has made a strong argument for generational effects based on a novel view of how the postwar generation's distinctive outlooks have been shaped. The conventional view among electoral politics scholars, to which I have contributed, is that distinctive generational perspectives are developed during the so-

called formative years—a time in late adolescence and early adulthood when people are unusually open to influence from prevailing political forces.

Rosdil argues that distinct generational viewpoints also may be molded by the *continuing* conditions a particular generation faces as it moves through the life cycle. For the postwar generation, these conditions are constant economic vulnerability due to the crowding effects of the large number of baby boomers and the uneven performance of the economy they entered as adults. To move this interesting hypothesis beyond mere assertion, however, requires empirical analysis of the attitudes and opportunities of this generation, especially relative to previous and subsequent age cohorts. More specifically, Rosdil's hypothesis must be tested against Ronald Inglehart's prevailing theory that the conditions of societal affluence during the early years of this generation's life, not the restricted opportunities they faced later on, have shaped their political views.

On another point, I strongly disagree with Rosdil that presidential politics is the *wrong* place to look for age differences. The facts and Rosdil's own choice of examples belie this supposition. During the nomination process, where mobilizing core constituencies of intensely-committed voters can play a critical role in a candidate's fortunes, some candidates have great incentive to play to age

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differences. To varying degrees Gary Hart, Jesse Jackson, and even Walter Mondale pursued such a strategy in the

1984 Democratic nomination contest, and the subsequent electoral strength of each was sharply differentiated by age. I would venture to say that we have not seen the end of these age-differentiated appeals. Generational effects also can be

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manifested in the general election (e.g., the 1930s), although Rosdil is correct in arguing that they usually are buried under the aggregative, winner-take-all pressures of a larger political arena. Indeed, contra Rosdil, it is in the local arena that generational effects may be most submerged, because of the typically low involvement levels of young adults in local elections and politics.

Finally, I have serious reservations about Rosdil's attempt to combine a variety of seemingly contradictory policy views into a distinctive "belief system" of the postwar generation. How can demands for greater economic opportunity through economic growth be easily reconciled with desires to restrict and constrain growth in the name of quality of life? What common thread ties together support for rent control and population growth control, opposition to nuclear power, and economic and social conservatism? Perhaps this age cohort is not a generational unit at all but rather is highly polarized on the major issues of the day. Young voters favoring rent controls and opposing nuclear power at the local level may not be the same young voters who have joined social or economic conservative movements or have favored Ronald Reagan for president. Or perhaps what we witness is the ambivalence of a generation still groping towards a satisfac-

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tory trade-off between cherished goals such as quality of life and economic growth.

Whether due to disagreement or ambivalence, it is not clear that a distinctive postwar generation belief system has yet emerged. The postwar generation still may be open to influence, well beyond the conventional "formative" years for many of its members. What happens in politics, especially how it defines the political agenda, may play a larger role in determining this generation's political orientations than social or economic conditions per se. Viewed from this perspective, the 1984 presidential contest may prove to have been a significant watershed. Present signs are that it has brought about a pro-Republican surge in the partisan preferences of the electorate, led by the postwar generation. If this surge endures and partisan preferences are translated into deep seated party loyalties, then many of the current uncertainties about the political postures of the different age groups within the American electorate, especially the young, may be resolved by partisan realignment.

Paul Allen Beck
Florida State University

Black Enrollment

To the Editor:

This is a letter in response to the Preston-Woodard article on the decline of black political scientists (Fall 1984).

This article is timely and most commendable given the alarming fact that black enrollment in the profession is on the wane. There may be several reasons why this trend has become a phenomenon recently. Some of the problems that blacks face in the profession are historically obvious. Many blacks have been misled with an erroneous assumption that political science has no material rewards to offer and that salvation lies in business schools, where they find it even harder to make it, as the article suggests.

Another problem, as the article points out, is with the types of tests or exams, both verbal and quantitative, which many minorities, including blacks, cannot comprehend or grasp adequately. Unfortunately, most colleges or places of work religiously follow, and base their decisions almost solely on, these tests/exams which do not adequately reflect a student's worth.

There is also the problem of anomie in non-black-dominated colleges. This state of affairs arises when the black student feels too distinct in a class. Although nothing may be happening to him, he feels some sort of alienation when he is the only person of his race in a class. This may psychologically affect his performance. Therefore, it is of no surprise that blacks in black-dominated colleges tend to perform far better than those in non-black-dominated institutions. It has been found that if two or three blacks end up in a class in a non-black-dominated college, each one tends to perform better.

Therefore, the APSA should use its good offices, first, to ensure that enrollment of blacks in non-black institutions of learning gathers more momentum. Not only will the blacks in these institutions improve their performance, but also more cordial inter-racial relations will be facilitated. Second, there should be efforts to shatter the myth that political science and graduate school are less rewarding than, for example, business school. It may be that the fault is in the techniques employed to attract more blacks to the profession rather than the presumed inherent dislike of the subject. Third, the APSA should convince political science departments to use alternative criteria to judge the merit of minorities who for many reasons cannot cope with the contemporary mode of aptitudinal and methodological testing.

The APSA will have done a great service if it addresses these pertinent problems that have precluded many blacks from entering and succeeding in this profession. Many of us in the profession are willing to assist the APSA in achieving these goals and objectives.

Stephen Isabirye
Northern Arizona University

Empowering Women

To the Editor:

A group of women from several countries has formed a new International Women's Political Participation Network (IWPPN), which plans to hold a roundtable discussion on "Women's Studies: Educating Women for Political Participation Worldwide" at the NGO Forum in Nairobi this summer. The discussion will be geared to complement the UN Decade for Women goals of equality, peace and development, through an emphasis on women's empowerment through education and training.

We have four discussion organizers: Mrs. Bong-Scuk Ahn, a sociologist at Ehwa Women's University in the Republic of Korea; Dr. Najma Chowdhury, a political scientist at Dhaka University, Bangladesh; Ms. Daphna Sharfman, a political scientist at Haifa University in Israel; and myself. In addition, we have contacted scholars, public officials and activists from many other countries. All of us are part of the women's studies areas in our universities or institutions, or are political activists in our countries with backgrounds in women's studies.

We are interested in receiving the names of people interested in these same issues, people in the U.S. and other countries who will be going to Nairobi, and names of other possible discussion participants to contact. Future activities of the IWPPN will depend on participants' interests.

Barbara J. Nelson
University of Minnesota

Journal Back Copies

To the Editor:

As a retired professor of political science, I have on my shelves about ten years of *PS*, the APSA quarterly, which are excess to my needs.

These are: Volume I, No. 1, through Volume XII, No. 2. These are in good shape, suitable for binding and are complete except for one issue, Volume IX, No. 2.

If you know of any library or institution which would be interested, I will be glad to donate these including shipping charges.

Gilbert G. Lentz
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To the Editor:

Could you please mention in the next issue of *PS* that I have the following periodicals for sale to the highest bidder:

Foreign Policy, No. 11 (Summer 1973)-
No. 51 (Summer 1983);

World Politics, October 1975-October
1982.

Thank you for your cooperation.

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