



Didn't vote? Don't worry; it doesn't make a difference

When my Republican friends and my Democratic friend ask me in amazement why I voted as I did (a straight Libertarian ticket), I tell them, "because my vote doesn't matter."

For those of you who didn't vote on election day and don't vote on a regular basis, don't worry. In most elections you're in the majority. We've seen voting rates decline for decades, but is it so awful not to vote? We hear the rhetoric that it's our duty as good Americans to vote. I prefer to say that it's my privilege as a American NOT to vote.

The virtues of non-voting This summer I had the pleasure of taking a political science course from A&M's own Dr. Edward Portis. At one point he began discussing voting patterns and the declining voter turnout in the United States. Suddenly during his lecture he told us something that shocked the majority of the class.

He looked around to see if anybody outside was listening and then whispered to us, "I don't vote! And I haven't voted in years!" It was stunning to say the least, but less so after he explained why he didn't vote.

In all honesty, your vote doesn't matter. As Dr. Portis said, when you take the number of votes you have, 1, and divide it by the total number of voters in a given election, let's say 80 million for this last election, you get the fraction that your vote counts (one-80 millionth). The insignificance of a single vote is mathematically obvious.

Later in the class, a student astonished at Portis' revelation, asked "Where would we be if everybody in this country felt like you?" With a gleam in his eye, as he knew he was about to make a fool of the person, he said, "Look, if everybody felt like me, (dramatic pause), then I'd vote! Because then my vote would mean something." Of course he didn't directly answer the question because the thought of everybody in the country not voting is virtually absurd. Half of the voting-age people in the nation went through the ritual yesterday.

Sure, there's a case for arguing that on a state-by-state basis your vote may influence the electoral college a little more. But as Portis told us, statisticians have computed that there's more of a chance of your being fatally injured on the way to the voting polls than your



Timm Doolen
Columnist

vote turning a major election. "You're taking your life into your own hands," he said with a little snicker.

Less is best To me, low voting turnouts seem to be an optimistic indicator that our country is doing just fine as it is. The legitimacy of a government derives from the consent of the governed. So when the average person doesn't vote, he is exercising his right, as an American in an extremely stable democratic country, not to vote. Not voting is a form of passive consent from the average person that says things will be OK no matter who wins.

On the other hand, is a high voting turnout necessarily an indication of good things? In Germany in 1933, 88.8 percent of the electorate swept the Nazis into office. As columnist George Will wrote: "Did that high turnout make the government especially legitimate? Was it a sign of the health of the Weimar Republic (which, in all reality, collapsed soon after)? No, it reflected the unhealthy state of politics at the time: elections determined which mobs ruled the streets and who went to concentration camps."

A distant cousin of concentration camps (in the minds of some), jury duty, is an impediment for many to vote. I voted yesterday because as students we are exempt from jury duty. But later in life, when I have to weigh jury duty against my right to vote, my personal comfort may seem a little more important than my unheard voice in our government.

When does it matter? Does a vote matter in state elections and local elections? On the state level in Texas, you're still dealing with millions of voters neutralizing your single vote. Locally, your vote means slightly more, but local elections rarely stimulate the average citizen to vote, and I find it hard to remember a local election of which the outcome significantly affected me.

What about block voting? Votes in the

hundreds or thousands? That's still very small in comparison to the millions, and it's a rare occasion when any organization can amass enough votes to make a true difference in the election.

Silly reasons to vote. Some people say voting entails a right to gripe after an election. But just because I didn't cast a ballot doesn't mean that I shouldn't be able to criticize my government. After all, free thought and expression is something that our Constitution, which has had to be amended four times to ensure voting rights, was founded upon.

Some say a high voting turnout is beneficial in stressing the importance of democracy in America. If people don't vote, it's not necessarily because they don't believe in the ideals of democracy, just that some things are more important to them on election day. Not wanting to stand in lines to vote, or going fishing may be more important to them on that day than casting a ballot. Many people care more about something personally trivial, such as their birthday, than whom they voted for Nov. 8.

Is voting sending a statement to the candidate? Sending a telegram of support to the candidate would do him much more good than voting for him.

I am not saying you shouldn't vote. If you vote to make yourself feel good about yourself and your country, go ahead.

Yet if you try to tell me an individual vote makes a difference, I'll disagree. You may be voting to "affirm your right as an American citizen to vote" or reap the self-fulfilling satisfaction of "casting your voice in the future of America," which I think is great. But if you have the mistaken notion that your vote is going to turn an election, or make any real difference, you're fooling yourself.

So if you didn't vote, don't feel badly or guilty about it. As Dr. Portis enjoys his teaching vacation in England this year, I'm sure he has kept up with the American presidential race. After seeing the unsurprising predictability of yesterday's election, and the width of the margin between the candidates, he was probably bored at how amazingly right he was once again.

Timm Doolen is a sophomore computer science major and columnist for The Battalion.

Mail Call

Band's 'Dixie' rendition insulting

EDITOR:

A couple of incidents happened over the weekend which compelled me to write this letter.

On Friday night at Midnight Yell Practice, the Aggie Band played the song "Dixie." The same insult was repeated Saturday at halftime.

Is there some sort of explanation for playing a song that is a continuing reminder of the trials and tribulations that blacks suffered during the slave era?

There is no excuse or explanation for playing this song. It is an insult to me and to other blacks on campus. I would have thought that the "nationally reknowned" Aggie Band would not play this song. I sure don't want people around the country to think that all Aggies support the playing of "Dixie" by "Pulse of Aggieland."

If we accept it as OK to play "Dixie," what the hell, go ahead and fly the confederate flag, bring the white sheets out and start uncoiling the whip.

I am no two-percenter, yet I refuse to stand, acknowledge, clap or whoop this song. I will always turn my back on the Aggie Band whenever this blatant act of oppression is ever played.

This is 1988, not 1848.

Roland S. Martin '91

Racism another A&M tradition

EDITOR:

Charles Henderson, Jr. was absolutely right in his letter concerning racism here at A&M. Rampant racism is one tradition that still lives, as well as when my father attended school here. Some things just don't change.

The reason those boys yelled racial slurs at Mr. Henderson is because he threatened because of his presence at A&M. Since they are white-skinned and majority, they feel they have to strike out at anything that might threaten their existence as the group which has the most power in our society.

Since I am white, I see and hear many racist comments that would not be made if blacks were present. I can tell anyone who thinks otherwise that racism exists in every facet of this university, from the students all the way to the administration. This not only saddens me, it is also nauseating.

I could go on to list many examples, but there is not enough room for them in *The Battalion*.

For everyone who is discriminated against for his religion, race, sex, or whatever, remember — there are a few of us here at A&M who aren't that stereotypical. For those of you who practice racism, including the woman I know who just walked from her church on Sunday to proclaim, "God hate Mexicans," I can only pity you.

And finally to Henderson and the rest of the Black Awareness Committee, please be forgiving of ignorance and be sure to always use the committee as a vehicle for progressive change.

Greg Buford '90

Where were the whites?

EDITOR:

Last week I attended a function of one of Texas A&M's major student organizations. White students made up most of the participants, but there were a few black and Hispanic students present.

A couple of days later, I attended a function of a major black student organization. I was the only white person there. Why?

Shawn Mulligan

Morality best AIDS protection

EDITOR:

In Anthony Wilson's Oct. 31 column, he states: "We should face facts. AIDS is a viral disease. A cure has never been found for any viral disease, so it is unlikely that if one is found for AIDS, it will be in our lifetimes."

Among other things, Mr. Wilson argues that the only weapons we have against AIDS are education and condoms. Well I, for one, am sick of having people hand me a loaded revolver only to tell me, "It's OK because the safety is on."

The kind of education we as a society need is not how to use or where to buy a condom. What we need is to be reminded of what a sexual relationship was intended to be from the beginning of time: complete and total oneness between two people who make a solemn promise to love only each other until death.

Our present society has been bombarded with the phrase, "If it feels right, do it." What happened to "If it IS right, do it?"

Another popular phrase says, "If two people love each other, sex is all right." What happened to teaching that sex outside of marriage is morally unacceptable? We have run from moral absolutes long enough and now we're paying the price.

AIDS is not a big stick I'm waving in anyone's face saying, "If you have sex, God will punish you!" Not at all. God created sex to be a beautiful thing. We've taken it and gotten the picture out of focus. We want the pleasure without the responsibility.

Throughout all this talk about AIDS, I find it amazing that everyone is so ready to endorse condoms, but stay clear of morality.

Laura Gilliland '89

Masters' Fruit o' Looms binding

EDITOR:

Tell Steve Masters his underwear is too tight, that he should loosen his wasteband, and then maybe he wouldn't be so blue in the face and could greet people.

Steve should take a look at himself.

Does he like A&M? Does he like his life? Does he fear saying "Howdy" will convert him from a modern city-clicker into an ignorant cowpoke?

Steve, take a look at yourself. There are nice people in large and small cities. But you will not meet them since you fear strangers.

You are too pessimistic. You see a cup half-filled with water as half-empty instead of half-full. If you swell on human nature's negative side, life will be meaningless.

Steve, instead of griping, you should run barefoot to the Chicken jump in every available mud puddle, whistle at the birds, say "Howdy" along the way and drink a beer with your friends, if you have any.

Trey Barlow '90

Letters to the editor should not exceed 300 words in length. The editorial staff reserves the right to edit letters for length, and will make every effort to maintain the author's intent. Each letter must be signed and must include classification, address and telephone number of the writer.

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BLOOM COUNTY

by Berke Breathed

