



The 18 Year Old and The Vote...

By "The Master Jouster"

End Notes are indicated in (red)

As I write this, the electronic media (TV & Radio) are hyping the pivotal elections to be held this fall. The prospective candidates are all(1) changing their tune(s) to reflect the results of the latest poll(s) in hopes of remaining in office for another term. Individuals who have never hunted in their lives are regaling the public with their love of being ‘afield’ with “ol’ Bow-wow” their faithful retriever while hunting duck (dove, quail, etc., etc.). If they are from the West, they are mighty elk (deer, moose, bear, etc.) hunters, great naturalists or whatever. If their constituency consists of mainly “tree huggers”, they are violently anti-hunting, pro-spotted owl, or pro-darter snail. My point, if it hasn’t become abundantly clear, is that a great many of our lawmakers are essentially prostitutes. They will say or do whatever is necessary to remain in office (drinking and eating at the public trough). I am both enthralled and repulsed watching the workings of our wonderful political system. It is both the best and worst of all possible worlds rolled into one. On the surface it would seem that there is room in this great country for the idealist, the demagogue(2) and the realist. Well, sort of anyway... There are a couple of problems that rear their ugly heads if you examine the system closely:

- 1) Not all of our electorate is terribly well informed or educated on the issues of the day.
- 2) Compounding the above, our mainstream media seems to be terribly biased toward those who would change the United States from a Constitutional Republic to a Socialist State(3) of dependent drones.
- 3) An increasingly large portion of our population is becoming beholden to the governmental dole. Human nature dictates that voting money out of your own pocket is an unnatural act. These two facts tend to skew the results of an election. Social Security(4), Medicare, welfare, Medicaid, and food stamps have taken their toll of the average American’s resolve to be a free and independent citizen.

But the title of this dissertation is "***The 18 Year Old and The Vote***", is it not? The 18 year old wouldn’t be swayed by arguments of Social Security, Medicaid, or Medicare, heck he or she won’t be ready for retirement for many years... so what’s the rub? OK, let’s take a hard look at the situation. For many years, a man (or woman) did not reach their majority(5) until

they were 21 years old, and hence had no vote until they reached this ripe old age. Enter the Vietnam War... A great hue and cry came up from the demonstrating "babes", "if we're old enough to fight, why aren't we old enough to vote?" The "powers that be" thought this over and decided that perhaps this would give them the answer to several problems. First, they were running a little short of "cannon fodder" and secondly they saw a material broadening of their constituency... an idealistic and moldable constituency! Hummm... Well, why not? A law was passed giving the 18 year old the vote, and in many states, the drinking age was lowered to at least 19 years old. Again, "what's the rub?" I can only answer for myself, but here goes.

Having enlisted in the Marine Corps (legally) at the age of 17, I could at least understand the argument (although I personally never had any interest in voting until I was at least 22). However... I have a major proviso! What they should have done is to make it legal for the 18 year old who actually served (or was serving) honorably in the military to vote! If a man(6) is called upon to serve his country in combat, he (or she) should have the right to vote... my point is that this right should be earned, not bestowed by a politician attempting to satisfy a vocal minority! When I was a young Marine at Parris Island(7), I repaired to the "Slop Chute"(8) upon graduation with my peers and we were served multiple pitchers of beer without anyone asking for our ID cards to check our age. This is the way it should have been to my way of thinking. We were out doing a man's job and we should have been treated as men. We were. No social "do-gooders" were around to protect us from ourselves... And we behaved as men. Most folks live up to what is expected of them if given a chance. They do not need the "Little ol' Ladies Aid Society" to protect them from themselves! *But*, they should have to earn these special rights and privileges... "those things we obtain too easily, we often value too lightly and they sometimes vanish into the night without our realizing where they have gone"...

When I was a young lad, my dear ol' daddy told me "Kid, a person who isn't an idealist by the time they are 16 years old has no heart... but if they are still idealists by the time they're 30, they have no head!" I have found that this observation to be essentially true! Worse, the idealists tend to vote with the "bleeding heart liberals", especially if their life experience has not been tempered in the crucible of combat or at least hard military service. Score one for the social scientists and the welfare state types. The "diaper voters" are also made to order by the "local educators". An 18 year old High School student can almost always be counted on to vote money out of his (or someone else's) daddy's pocket for a school bond vote. The 18 year old attending College or Junior College, seeing only the school environment will usually vote for "levies" out of the pocket of the property owners to fund an educational system that doesn't necessarily reflect the values of the land owner. These kids are not usually folks that have had to serve their country or work for a living... they have no yardstick by which to judge the real world. A few years down the pike, these same young'uns would no doubt vote differently... Unfortunately that doesn't help the property owner in the short term.

Most states have raised the drinking age laws back to the extreme old age of 21 years... But no one has the slightest intention of raising the voting age back to 21(9). Am I missing something? Heck, if you are old enough to fight, aren't you old enough to drink? The currently applied logic eludes me but then, I'm just an ol' Marine, what do I know?

No, the politicians have a bonanza here and they aren't about to change things if no one holds their feet to the fire. Educators want the 18 year old vote, the social scientists want the 18 year old vote and the Federal Government profits mightily from the 18 year old vote. Don't look for a change if the electorate doesn't demand it!

So what's the solution? I try not to knock something if I don't have a solution to the problem. Much like the late Robert Heinlein(**10**). I feel that the vote should be earned, not inherited. In the early days of this country, the vote was restricted to the 21 year old property holding male. This wasn't really a bad idea on the face of it. Unless you have something to lose, you can't have a truly informed opinion. I think extending the vote to the gals was a step forward, and of course depriving a man of the vote because of the color of his skin is basically against the precepts of our country's founding fathers. But, I feel that the voting public should meet some minimum qualifications.

What should these qualifications be? Well, first they should make sense, and not disqualify anyone because of their social status, color of their skin, their religious preference, or their gender. It should not be dependent upon their marital status nor necessarily their political "bent". First I feel that the prospective voter should:

- 1) ***Be able to read and write English*** (unless they are blind or missing their hands, feet or whatever they use to sign documents). If you cannot read and write, I submit it would be difficult to make an informed opinion on the issues... If the individual objects to this, all he or she has to do is learn to read and write. I thought that's why we are paying for all this high powered education the kids are supposed to be getting. If they're too stupid to learn to read and write, as far as I'm concerned, they're too stupid to vote! If they're of foreign extraction, the citizenship requirements require (or used to require) the "émigré" to learn English to gain citizenship... an extremely enlightened requirement!! I realize that Southern States in the "segregationist South" often used the "literacy requirement" to deprive blacks of the right to vote. I actually think they had the right idea for the wrong reasons. Carefully and impartially administered literacy and intelligence tests would avoid the abuses of the past. If the kids aren't smart enough to pass a test indicating that they can read and write, the message is that we should clean house on the system and the educators themselves(**11**). If the prospective voter can't read or write, let him or her go learn how to do so and then come back and register.
- 2) ***Be intelligent enough to understand what they are voting for.*** Since we would have to use some sort of yardstick, I believe that the prospective voter should have to take a governmentally administered I.Q. test. In order to vote, the individual should have to pass the test with a grade that indicates they are above the delineating grade separating the person of average intelligence from that of a "moron". Average intelligence usually starts in the high 80's to the 90's(**12**). The test grade attained should be "appealable" by the prospective voter. This would avoid the possibility of arbitrarily disqualifying a voter just because the "testing authority" might find the individual offensive or objectionable. Retests should be allowed every three months, with a "change of venue" if the applicant feels that the local officials might have some personal prejudice towards him or her.
- 3) ***The voter should be a free man or woman.*** Some states allow convicted felons to vote even if they are currently serving time!(**13**) This is, of course, total bull s--t! You never allow the inmates of a "nut house" to run the asylum! I am not against restoring the right to vote to a former prisoner once they have satisfactorily finished their total sentence... probation and parole don't (or shouldn't) count. Once a person finishes their sentence (or are pardoned), they (supposedly) have paid their debt to society and

should enjoy the same rights as other citizens, but ***not before they have paid that debt IN FULL!*** Obviously a person on death row shouldn't have a vote on the legality of the death penalty...

4) ***One principle should be set in concrete.*** That principal concerns any vote on monetary (tax) issues. ***If the voter doesn't stand to be subjected to the tax being voted upon, they should not be allowed to vote on that issue.*** Case in point... most State and local school systems are funded out of the pockets of (real) property owners(14). Those who do not own property are always a bit more "cavalier" with money out of someone else's pocket than they would be with their own. The reason I include this specific issue here, is that the 18 year old is especially vulnerable to the pressure(s) brought on them by the Principals and Teachers while in High School. Kids in Junior Colleges are usually not employed and not property owners. Most States have cleverly reduced the residency requirements for state and county voting to an absolute minimum to take advantage of the "diaper-set vote". The educational staff(s) in these institutions are quick to point out to the students the advantages of getting more money for the school, and all the new goodies they can buy for the classrooms (not to mention higher salaries for the instructors). The young voters will almost unfailingly vote for greater tax levies for the local property owners. The educators of course, justify soaking the property owners by pointing out that the property owners can simply raise rents, prices for their merchandise, etc. and thus pass the taxation on to the non-property owners, ad nauseum. ***This is pure inflationary bull.*** Most prices and rents already reflect the maximum extractable "blood" from the victims. The truth is, most of the so called property owners are really homeowners. I suppose the idea is to increase your own rent (or house payment) to raise money to pay this new tax(15)?? My personal opinion is that the educational system should be financed out of the State(s) "general fund"(16) rather than on the backs of the property owners, ***that way everyone gets a chance to "help"!*** One old sage pointed out that once the "have nots" are allowed to vote money out of the pockets of the "haves", the Republic is doomed... I hope not, but his point is well taken!

The four requirements listed above should be the minimum requirements to vote assuming that we are going to retain our current system. The voter would only have to qualify one time... once qualified, always qualified... provided no fraud could be proven in the initial qualification process.

If allowed my "druthers" however, I'd take it one step further. I feel that anyone who wants to be a voter in the United States should have to earn the right to vote! I know I'm gonna' catch a ration of garbage over this one, but before you pass judgment, consider the following. I am not suggesting that any of the other rights we enjoy in this country should have to be earned, just the right to vote. All citizens should have the right to the same justice system they enjoy now, all citizens should have the right to buy and sell property, the right to free speech, etc. In other words, the Bill of Rights guaranteed in the Constitution would remain in tact. But if you want to be able to vote in order to influence the future course of our country, that right should be earned. People now often take the right to vote so lightly that voter participation in excess of 50% is considered to be phenomenal... this is actually an abysmal showing. The citizens of many countries would kill for the right to vote on their own destiny.

OK, ***how*** would you earn the right to vote? In my opinion, earning the right to vote should entail some sacrifice on the part of the prospective voter or it will remain meaningless. I feel

that the right to vote should be based on service to our country. Any of the following would be considered qualifying service:

- 1) Honorable service in any of the Five Uniformed Services(**17**) of the United States. This service should be of a duration of no less than three (3) years.. Service in the local hometown **Reserve or National Guard Unit, would NOT count**. This would have to be three years of **full time active duty**. An Honorable Discharge(**18**) would be required.
- 2) Three years of honorable service in any of the Governmental Law Enforcement Agencies of the United States (FBI, Secret Service, Border Patrol, U. S. Customs Service, BATF or U. S. Marshall's Service, etc.).
- 3) Three years service as a firefighter with the U. S. Forest Service... (Smoke Jumper, "wet bag person", etc.).
- 4) Three years service in the Peace Corps **actively assigned to a foreign post** (I have some reservations about this one, but then you've gotta' make a few concessions I suppose). **This** one would obviously have to be closely monitored!

There are individuals having various physical handicaps that would normally preclude service in the above organizations. In all fairness to these folks, I would allow service in any of the foregoing organizations in a capacity commensurate with the ability of the prospective voter (administrative, supply, fiscal etc.). Obviously regulations would have to be changed to allow the handicapped individuals to serve in an appropriate capacity in the Armed Forces and/or some of the law enforcement agencies.

The point to this exercise is that the "service" must be inconvenient to the individual's overall plan(s) for his or her future... the service must involve some sacrifice or the vote would revert to the meaningless status into which it has currently evolved. There would be ***no educational deferments, no physical deferments*** (unless the individual is a "vegetable"), and ***no excuses***. No person could run for public office unless they were qualified voters. An individual who passed up the opportunity to qualify as a voter in their youth would be allowed to rectify this oversight later in life if they were otherwise qualified. ***The service requirement for voting would of course, be in addition to the literacy and intelligence requirements mentioned previously!***

So there you have my plan for the reform of the electorate. Would the result be a less gullible, more informed and responsible group of voters and politicians? We'll never know, of course. Can you imagine elected officials deliberately cutting the size of their constituency for any reason? How about announcing to the world that "morons"(**19**) will no longer be allowed to vote? Can you imagine the expense of having the literacy exams turned out in "street jive" to preclude the charge of racial bigotry... the cost would set Clinton's seven year plan to balance the budget back to an unreachable goal... ahem...

So this whole discussion has been tongue-in-cheek and not for serious consideration? Quite the contrary, I meant every word. The voters **should** be able to read and write. No we **shouldn't** allow clinical morons to vote. I **do** think that the vote should be something worth working toward. I truly believe **all** of these things, but I'm not naive enough to think **any** of them will come to pass... But maybe, **just maybe**, someone will be smart enough to

reconsider the 18 year old vote. I would not deny the vote to any **actively serving** member of the Armed Forces, neither would I convey this privilege upon someone simply for reaching their 18th year. If these 18 year old "Citizens" are astute enough to vote, why has virtually every State revoked their right to drink? Aren't they mature enough to know when and under what circumstances it's prudent to consume alcoholic beverages? Is there still something lacking in maturity and judgment here at the tender age of 18? I'm afraid that's for someone with more insight than I to decide! I can be excused for having my own opinion I suppose...

ROC '96

(End notes for The 18 Year Old and The Vote...)

- 1) This is, of course, a generalization. There are many unwavering candidates who remain true to their beliefs, for better or worse from year to year. Even if I don't agree with them, I must applaud their devotion to their cause(s).
- 2) Demagogue... defined as "rabble rouser", fanatic, or revolutionary according to the current dictionary.
- 3) While continuing to call it a Constitutional Republic, of course... this prevents the uninformed from figuring out that they've been "hornswaggled".
- 4) Social Security was started as a **supplement** to a citizen's own effort(s) to provide for their own retirement. It was never meant to be his or her retirement. The average retiree uses up the amount of money they actually contributed to the Social Security fund within just a couple of years of retirement. The Government uses the money contributed to the fund to pay for other programs (robbing Peter to pay Paul so to speak). They do not leave it in a fund to draw interest as is done in a normal retirement plan. When the initial money an individual has contributed to the fund is exhausted, they are essentially on the public dole, and hence at the mercy of those that have been elected to office... You fill in the blanks yourself! For your information, Medicare falls under the Social Security System.
- 5) Majority, in this context is defined as "legal age".
- 6) During the days of the "draft", ladies were not subject to conscription into the military, although many served voluntarily.
- 7) Parris Island, South Carolina is the East Coast Recruit Training Center (Boot Camp) for the U. S. Marine Corps.
- 8) The term "*Slop Chute*" in the Marine Corps is slang for the base saloon/beer hall... a sacred location for the tired and thirsty young Marine.
- 9) Idaho's drinking law had been lowered to 19 during the late insanity, but Washington (our neighboring State) had a minimum drinking age of 21. The local Washington young'uns used to cross the border to Idaho, get a "snoot full" and drive the few miles back to Washington. Washington was not amused. Under pressure, Idaho raised the drinking age back to 21 much to the distress of the "diapered set".
- 10) Robert Heinlein was a Naval Academy Graduate who was invalidated out of the Navy with Tuberculosis in the 1920's. He went on to become a famous Science Fiction Writer noted for

the wit and thinly disguised political commentary in his writings. Read "Starship Trooper" as a representative work.

11) Here's where the educators are gonna' foam at the mouth. I spent 5 years as a High School teacher, so I do not speak in total ignorance, I've seen how the system works!

12) The scores differ somewhat from system to system. I'm primarily interested in separating the morons (and below) from those of normal intelligence. Any legitimate I.Q. test would work as long as the same test is given to everyone.

13) Check out Massachusetts on this one! The inmates of Walpole Prison almost elected some inmate "clown" to office when I was stationed there in the 1970's!

14) "Real" property owners are those who own real estate... i.e. land, homes, farms, ranches, apartments etc. I am not speaking here of automobile, boats or farm equipment.

15) This is the equivalent of holding yourself out at arms length by your bootstraps for morning exercise.

16) Here we're talking State Income Tax vs property tax...

17) The 5 Uniformed Services are usually considered to be the Army, Navy/Marine Corps, Air Force, Coast Guard and U. S. Public Health Service... Sometimes the U. S. Coast and Geodetic Survey is considered one of the Uniformed Services. I would allow service in any of the above to qualify.

18) A "General Discharge under Honorable Conditions" would *NOT* count. An Honorable Discharge (at least in the Naval Service) requires higher Conduct and Proficiency marks, thus ensuring a greater effort on the part of the individual seeking the right to vote to keep his or her nose clean during their service! The right to vote should not be easy to attain!

19) This is a "straight line" that is almost impossible to pass up, but in the interest of decency, I will refrain...

This Musing was originally posted July 2, 1996. While several elections have come and gone since then, my opinions have not changed. The current push to allow "felons" to vote may or may not be a misnomer (I have not read the proposed legislation). The current (devious?) idea would be of course, to broaden the voter base for selected candidates (Hillary Clinton?). I would submit that allowing a person convicted of a felony and having served his/her "total" time should be acceptable, otherwise there would be no way to ever again work your way out of a hole and be a citizen again, having paid their debt to society. Those having been granted parole, work releases, etc. would not count, you'd have to serve your entire sentence! Crimes of moral turpitude might be considered to be permanently disqualifying (child molestation, etc.). Any crime that involves treason or plotting the violent overthrow of the Government would be permanently disqualifying.
