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Allen's P. C. B. Est. 1888

The framers created a situation under which many states could decree that only the propertied could vote. When that idea and "poll tax" requirements were beaten down, polling places were located where millions of poor, ill minority citizens could not get to because they lacked transportation or couldn't leave their jobs.

Nothing in a neighborhood polling place could be more sacred to deprived citizens than casting their first ballot — primarily because the mail ballot made it possible for them to do so.

So spare me this balderdash about how this country must return to a respect for what "the framers" intended!

I find especially offensive the complaints that mail ballots were cast by "uninformed, uneducated" citizens. In the 1950s, some states had laws requiring "literacy tests" for those seeking to vote. That was implemented in ways in which white registrars could deny the ballot to blacks who couldn't answer "correctly" such questions as "How many bubbles in a bar of soap?"

The question arises as to who is smart or wise enough to vote in any election. Are the poor non-degreed people of Oregon who voted Democrat Ron Wyden into the Senate possibly dumber than the college-educated Oregon women who voted for Packwood so many times?

Were the poor, poorly educated black Texans who once voted Barbara Jordan into the House of Representatives less worthy of the ballot than are the privileged — and non-privileged — white people in Louisiana who voted last week to give Pat Buchanan the nomination?

Everyone I've heard deploring the mail ballot would be incensed if anyone accused them of harboring the racist and sexist views of the framers. Yet they peddle those views almost mindlessly.

We either treasure democracy or we don't. If we do, the more of it the better. So I say of the motor voter law and mail ballot: "Welcome and hooray!"

Carl Rowan is a columnist based in Washington, D.C.

Let's hear it ⁷⁶⁴ for Oregon's mail ballots

WASHINGTON — The political mentalities of the 1770s and 1950s are bursting out all over now that Oregon has had a successful mail ballot to fill the seat of disgraced Sen. Bob Packwood.

I hear cries that the mail ballot cheapened the election, robbing the vote of the sacred majesty that the framers of our government intended.

I hear complaints that the mail ballot permitted (even encouraged) uneducated people "who don't even know the names of their congressmen" to vote.

We're told that it allowed all people to vote without expending the small amount of energy and sacrifice of going to a neighborhood polling place and that this undermines the bonding notion that "the vote is a precious thing."

This is swallowed by some as the sentimentality of patriotism, but it is, in fact, undemocratic gibberish that should not override the fact that the Oregon election lifted the percentage of voters to about 65 percent of those eligible, a figure that made democratic participation almost as high as in European countries. It saved Oregon about \$1 million. And it produced results that any Republican could applaud.

So we are to deplore this election as a violation of what "the framers" intended? I remember that the framers counted black citizens as three-fifths of a vote. And women as zero percent of a vote. Naturally, neither my wife nor I are much impressed by a reminder of what the framers believed about the semi-slave status of African-American males, or women, the chattel of the political power brokers.

CARL
ROWAN



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