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Reflections from the Postmodern Eye

by

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I just read that 1998 was the warmest year on record. I think last year I read that 1997 was the warmest year on record. I think I remember reading that the 1990's was the warmest decade ever, but I also remember reading that the 1980's was the warmest decade ever - that is, before the 1990's. Oh well, I guess it doesn't matter. I'm sure the first decade of the new millennium will be the warmest decade ever. People living in northern latitudes of the U.S. think this is good because of the longer golf season, but many island nations and coastal cities don't agree.

I read that the stock market is good. "They" say investing in private prisons is a good bet, because inmate populations keep increasing at roughly 50,000 to 80,000 people a year, even though violent crime rates are dropping. Go figure. The prison rate doubled from the 1970's to the 1980's and once again the rate has doubled from the 1980's to the 1990's. We have about 445 per 100,000 people in prison, or all totaled we have around 1.8 million people behind bars. The U.S. is number one with respect to the number of people in prison; we are also number one with respect to homicides, drug consumption, national debt, managers per employees, CEO salaries and income inequality.

Too bad for Tennessee. All the tornadoes in January. I heard that we just doubled the record for the most tornadoes in the month of January. I remember reading that 1998 was the record for the most tornadoes ever recorded. Maybe 1999 will be even better. "They" tell me it is nothing to worry about. I read that each time someone's house is destroyed by a hurricane or tornado our GNP grows. I also read our economy improves with each new cancer patient. Each time a tree is felled, oil or natural gas is pumped out of the ground, minerals are mined, lands are tilled, and waste is generated, our GNP goes up. We are growing, and this is very good for our economy.

Bill Clinton told us in his State of the Union address that we need more money for the military. Things are really bad out there with Iraq and their chemical weapons and everything. It seems we need more money to keep bombing Iraq until someone new comes along that needs some bombing. The situation sounds a lot like an Orwell novel I once read.

I heard Bill Clinton say he was really concerned about terrorism. I wonder why so many people would want to hurt the U.S. My mother-in-law always says with respect to our helping the rest of the world, "damned if you do, damned if you don't." As one Congressman said during the impeachment hearings, "America is God's country." I wonder who owns the other countries of the world? [End page 62]

I read that the Russians are burning furniture to stay warm this winter, and apparently they are a little short on food, too. I heard our leaders have assured them that the "invisible hand" will work things out just fine. I guess the same goes for people in Indonesia, Malaysia and Brazil. They have to learn to have faith in the global economy; after all, it works fine for "US" and our "post-colonial" brothers. The 1998 U.N. Development Report stated that the wealthiest 20 percent of the world's population (1.2 billion) consume 86 percent of all the goods and services produced in the world while the bottom 20 percent share 1.7 percent of the worlds goods and services. I'm glad I'm in the top 20 percent.

Worldwatch says that 11 percent of the earth's 4,400 species of mammals are in danger of extinction. Two-thirds of the 9,600 species of birds are now in decline, and I read that 11 percent are on the verge of extinction. I also read that one-third of the species of fish are on the brink of oblivion. Some scientists assure us that this is perfectly natural and others suggest alarmingly that we are undergoing the greatest loss of plant and animal life in 65 million years. While the rest of life on this planet may be dying off, humans are doing quite well. Did you know that it took until the year 1900 for us to reach 1.6 billion people and now at the end of the 20th century we have 6 billion of us, with some of us doing quite well while many others are, I hear, a little hungry.

Some people think Bill Clinton shouldn't lie about his sexual escapades, and they want to impeach him. I wonder if Thomas Jefferson would have lied about having a child with one of his slaves? Do you think Garfield would have lied about having an affair? What about Franklin Roosevelt? Do you think he would have lied to the public about having an affair with Lucy Mercer Rutherford? What about Mrs. Roosevelt. Do you think she would have confessed to having a lesbian relationship with Loreana Hickok? I wonder if JFK would have admitted to smoking pot with, and making love to, Mary Pinchot Meyer in the White House? I wonder if Nixon, while lying about Watergate, would have dared to lie about his affair with Marianna Liu?

It seems appropriate that the Academy of Criminal Justice Sciences' 36th Annual Convention should be held in Disney's Coronado Springs Resort, a Disney property named after that dauntless Spaniard who searched vainly for the seven cities of gold that Disney has been busily erecting ever since his failure. Disneyland is a perfect spot for digging into the squalor of economic disparity, racism and violence. Disney is a great place for academic pawns and practitioners to plan the future for the economically disenfranchised through the development of greater surveillance to marginalize even further the obsolete lower class.

In a world where all claims to reality are on equal footing, crime rates fall but prison populations increase, people gorge while others starve, animals and plants die while humans multiply, and issues of [End page 63] criminal justice are discussed in utopian virtual-reality landscapes like Disney, I'm compelled to recollect a Lou Reed song in which he cites the trenchant insights of his painter friend Donald, "stick a fork in their ass and turn'em over, they're done."

Editors' Note: If you would like to comment on Professor Seis's commentary we will be entertaining replies for possible printing in the next issue. Please e-mail sunycrj@cnsunix.albany.edu if this commentary disturbed you, fascinated you, made you mad, or somehow changed the way you see the world. Please indicate in the subject of the message that you are replying to Dr. Seis's article.

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