

Christmas 2015 in Town and Country
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Fall



Winter



Summer



Spring

In my two prior Christmas letters, I described how democracy in the U.S. was turning into a plutocracy. This political shift gathered so much force in 2015 that widespread reaction has finally taken place. Since Reagan's presidency, neoliberalistic dogma has dominated politics in the U.S. even though the term neoliberalism is largely unknown and unused by the public at large. Here is Robert McChesney to tell you why: "...in the United States... neoliberal initiatives are characterized as free market policies that encourage private enterprise and consumer choice, reward personal responsibility and entrepreneurial initiative, and undermine the dead hand of the incompetent, bureaucratic and parasitic government, that can never do good even if well intended, which it rarely is. A generation of corporate-financed public relations efforts has given these terms and ideas a near sacred aura. As a result, the claims they make rarely require defense, and are invoked to rationalize anything from lowering taxes on the wealthy and scrapping environmental regulations to dismantling public education and social welfare programs. Indeed, any activity that might interfere with corporate domination of society is

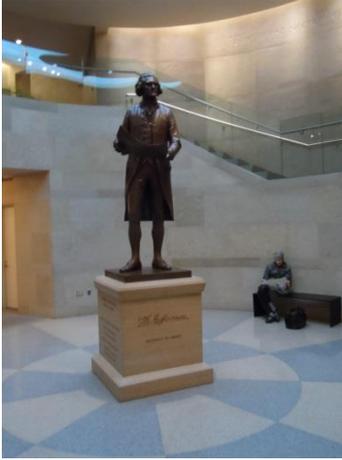
automatically suspect because it would interfere with the workings of the free market, which is advanced as the only rational, fair, and democratic allocator of goods and services. At their most eloquent, proponents of neoliberalism sound as if they are doing poor people, the environment, and everybody else a tremendous service as they enact policies on behalf of the wealthy few. The economic consequences of these policies have been... a massive increase in social and economic inequality, a marked increase in severe deprivation for the poorest nations and peoples of the world, a disastrous global environment, an unstable global economy, and an unprecedented bonanza for the wealthy.” As I have sent all of you on this list my talk on *Plutocracy or Democracy: A Report on Inequality* last summer, I need not go further with this now. But the coming year is an election year. Any hope for amelioration? Not much, even if Bernie Sanders wins. He would have to win with a tsunami of backlash against the billionaire money lenders who now own the temple of government, i.e. most of Congress, not to mention the Supreme Court.

We no longer have a two party system, as Noam Chomsky points out, We have only one party – the party of business. Hillary won’t bring back the Glass/Steagall Act because her SuperPac funds come primarily from the Wallstreet Big Banks. Only Bernie has no Pac money, but he has, via 650k+ small donations, received 33M dollars to Hillary’s 37M during this last quarter. That happens to be an astounding record and is a barometer of the growing discontent amongst the 99% of the population whose combined wealth doesn’t equal that of the 1%. So, maybe we can bring back democracy and squash this growing malignant plutocracy in the coming years. It is possible, and I’ll leave this topic with the following mantra: vote for progressives and Bernie, send progressives and Bernie money, vote for progressives and Bernie, send progressives and Bernie money, vote for progressives and Bernie, etc., etc.

Turning to more pleasant events: Last February, I had my first taste of state political activism. Visited Richmond during the VA legislative session, attended the Sierra Club’s alternative energy support meeting, and learned that already one third of Norfolk’s basements flood if a heavy rain and high tide coincide. The tide causes the sewer water to flow back into the basements. Viewing Jefferson’s VA capitol buildings was the other highlight.



VA Capitol designed by T. Jefferson



Returning from Ft. Myers, Fla. after visiting Diane's brother, Butch, we stopped off at Brookgreen Gardens near Myrtle Beach, S. Carolina. Brookgreen is huge with zoo, museums, gardens, and Anna Hyatt Huntington animal sculptures. While the profuse display of nude human figures done in Victorian Greek classical tradition on view in the museums soon became boring, the animal sculptures done by AHH were electrifying. Remington doesn't do horses any better. The centuries old live oaks and landscape sculptures were fine, too, all worth going to see. See below.

Jefferson and Diane





The third annual Gras lectureship in the Humanities featured Fritjof Capra. He has just co-authored another book, *The Systems View of Life: A Unifying Vision*, which sums up his thinking of the last forty years. Using H.Maturana and F.Varella's autopoiesis interpretation of life as already "conscious" in its playback activity, Capra asserts that the dialogism of culture just continues what microorganisms started a long time ago. He provides a continuity principle between culture and nature. He offers us a new grand narrative far more rewarding than the two dominant discourses now prevailing (religious fundamentalism and neoliberalism or market fundamentalism) which have become structures of evil. Just look around at the wealth inequality and mass refugee crisis due to these two fundamentalisms. Human existence should be an open ended social and environmental conversation, not an authoritarian top/down dictatorship run by a wealthy elite for their own benefit.

On a more personal note: My brother, Alfred, who lived out in San Diego, died at the age of 89 in early December. He lived a full life. According to wife Helga, he fell on the way to the bathroom, then sat down on the edge of the bed. Sitting down next to him, Helga asked "Are you ok?" He answered "I'm fine" hugged and kissed her, and then fell backward and died. What a great way to take leave as we all must, eventually. My other brother, Wally, died at the age of 19 from seven machine gun bullets in the chest on Bougainville, as point man on his patrol squad. How nice it would be, if we all, globally, could take leave like Al and not like Wally.

So, starting with 2016, let me reiterate that we should be the conduit through which the world of the past undergoes change and improvement for the next generation. A significant human existence contributes to a more truthful, more beautiful, and more ethical world than it inherited from the past. Don't let the greed and power lust of the Koch Brothers and their ilk bring the journey of the universe to a tragic close for us humans.

Love to all Vernon

P.S. Vote for progressives and Bernie, send money to progressives and Bernie, etc. etc.