

Gras 2019 Yearly Letter

Vernon Gras
1339 Massachusetts Ave SE, DC. 20003
Grasmere Farm, Sperryville, VA. 22740

Singleton's paintings are probably the finest produced by a Virginia/West Virginia artist. Besides this one in my living room, view his website at www.resingleton.com

Age and Health: As you all know, Broca's Aphasia eliminates language and words which diminish after a hemorrhage. But language and words do start to come back and I can understand everything I read now. Language seems still all there in the brain even though spelling is not always correct. Fortunately, Grammarly cleans all that up. The worst result after 1-1/2 years following the hemorrhage is that memory still doesn't stick. While words and language can be brought back, that they don't stick but often take moments to be brought back again (even if words have already been used often) is infuriating. Otherwise, my health is fine.

Politics: We can devoutly hope that Trump and the Republicans will be defeated in 2020. To have a President so openly and continually lie and treat our so-called democratic government as a self-serving business (whose only real goal for existing is corporate profit, including Trump's own) did become quite evident during his trial and exoneration. That Trump committed impeachable government offenses were quite evident to Republicans not just Democrats. But he wasn't impeached as long as he lowers taxes on billionaires and increases the wealth of the corporate class. The fact that we no longer seem governed by a democracy but by oligarchs was expressed elegantly by Senator Whitehouse from Rhode Island when interviewed by Rachel Maddow back on Jan 30. Where does Mitch McConnell's power come from that all Republicans follow his orders? Turns out that 10+ Billionaires after the Citizen's United decision can now give unlimited political donations which they route into Speakers Mitch McConnell's office who, of course, follows and does their bidding. Republican Senators are in lockstep with McConnell's desires because they do not want that spigot turned off from their re-elections. (See www.whitehouse.senator.gov/news)

We've had great speakers exposing this socially unfair wealth inequality in America (which extends also World Wide) in such writers as Robert Reich, Joseph Stiglize, and Noam Chomsky. But this wealth inequality has been clarified even more in the last year by two events. The two presentations were **Frontline's** "In the Age of AI" on **PBS** last November 5th and the recent Oscar Best Film Winner in 2019: **"Parasite"**. "In the Age of AI" is free on TV and includes 5 stories which will not only bring you up to date politically but also why money is flowing away from the majority of people into ever fewer billionaire hands. That such a rapid financial inequality has been taking place in the last 40 years affects

society, politics, media, education, medicine, and everything else. This inequality is already producing revolutions in South American countries and if we continue we could resemble the French revolution. Our values have started to resemble those European values in place up to 1789 for the prior 300+ years.

Of course, wealth then was based on land while ours is based on corporations. But the growing inequality between the landed aristocracy (who paid no taxes) and the peasants whose diminishing incomes over those centuries finally let this social injustice explode by guillotining every aristocrat the working poor could find and catch, including Louis XVI and his extravagant Marie Antoinette. The same disparity between the growing billionaire corporate stock holders (our oligarchy) and the increasingly impoverished workers brings us to the 40 million Trump followers in rural and industrial America where jobs are disappearing. Why are jobs disappearing? Turn your computer to PBS and "In the Age of AI". Jobs haven't been leaving only because of offshore cheap labor (China, Mexico, Vietnam, Bangladesh). Most jobs stayed right here in the U.S. taken by the growing number of robots. Foreign cheap labor took away only 20% of U.S. job loss; robots took 80% of the previous job loss. Fifteen years from now over 50% of our existing labor employment will be gone due to robots. Robots don't need 8 hour work shifts or costly retirement pensions. Robots work 24 hours a day and with more accuracy than humans. Understanding the ramifications of this problem is well presented "In the Age of AI". It probably was the most important TV hour seen in 2019. Obviously, the elevation of profit as the ultimate value to be pursued socially and politically as Wall Street advertises worldwide needs to be changed. And that will be difficult to do.

But some changes are taking place. For example, Virginia has finally taken climate change seriously and elected a political party (Democratic) to supplant the more profitable fossil fuel used by private utilities with less profitable fuel (for them) in solar, wind, and water energy. But reducing social and wealth inequality between people needs greater effort and that too has been pursued and made public in the Oscar winning film "Parasite". In the film, as jobs shrink and competition becomes fierce, the need just to survive by the growing impoverished workers leads to lies, deceit, and violence between two poor families needing employment with a wealthy business man's family. The title of the film "parasite" emerges when the business man asks the father (who has killed the other father because their families have killed or injured each other) to get rid of the "trash". That statement sums up how the growing billionaires view the impoverished workers. Unimportant, they should just get out of the way so that pursuit of profit will continue to achieve this ultimate value and destiny of humans. In a spasm of rage, the father murders the wealthy business-man, his friendly boss. Déjà vu - 1789?

Personal: I had meant to finish with personal observations of what I call self/world relations. Evolution and how it works is one of the still unknown intellectual problems facing us today. Natural selection is just fine. But the NeoDarwinian-Synthesis, especially R. Dawkins *The Selfish Gene*, is not believable or better said inadequate. Biosemiotics appears to be one of the best ways forward for humans to regard evolution. Semiotics was started already back in 1964 by Thomas Sebiok but didn't gather steam until the 1990s when it became Biosemiotics with the help of C.S. Peirce and Gregory Bateson. Starting in Bloomington, Copenhagen, and Tartu, it is spreading in ever more directions. Wendy Wheeler (London), who gave the 2017 Gras Annual-Lecture at GMU, is one of the new directions and a good place to start and learn. Vernon