

Radiation

I was talking with a neighbor this morning. We were standing outdoors just across the street from a small, vaguely unkempt house which featured a yard full of oversize, handcrafted, chrome and fabric lawn ornaments. They were quirky to say the least but had a certain charm precisely because they were so quirky. Quirky fish, quirky birds and what might be described as quirky aliens. Is quirky aliens a redundancy? Anyway, as my gaze moved from side yard to side yard I spied a bed of tulips, tulips of fabulously loud colors, tulips that could help one understand how the entire Dutch economy used to be based on tulips. These were spectacular. What's more, their blooms were the size of grapefruits. No kidding, grapefruits.

My neighbor asked absentmindedly how they could have grown so large. Without giving it a second thought, as if the answer were self evident I replied, "It's the radiation." Let me explain. When I was growing up in the 1950s the world was just entering the nuclear age. The U.S. and the Soviet Union were in the middle stages of an arms race. H bomb detonations in Siberia and the Pacific were not uncommon. At least once a year the newspapers carried a front page photo of the latest above-ground test (ah, the good old days when you could just launch that poison into the air and let it fall where it may). There was still a great deal unknown about the possible side affects from this radioactively charged atmosphere but one thing we were sure of is that it caused MUTATIONS. As time progressed we believed that radiation was the cause of EVERY MUTATION.

We knew this was true because the movies of the day said so. Some of them were actually good films with poignant stories like "The Incredible Shrinking Man" and some were preposterously titillating (at least for a seven year old) like "The Attack of the Fifty-Foot Woman". "Godzilla" was a classic as was "The Blob". But classic or stinker they all knew one thing to be true. Whatever horror was confronting the viewer, whatever mutation might be featured, it was caused by radiation. Was the victim way too tall? Radiation. Was the victim way too small? Radiation. Did monsters climb out of the sea and trash Tokyo? Radiation. You name it, radiation caused it.

Now, before we go any further and lest you think this is a nostalgia column, I will get to my point. Shift forward to 2010 but retain the mind set that says everything wrong with America must be caused by the new radiation. Yup, it even rhymes with radiation. The current menace beyond all menaces is the ADMINISTRATION! Ask virtually any Republican you happen to meet and she or he will make it very clear that whatever has gone horribly wrong is the fault of that Obama fellow and his clique of way too smart Liberals.

Is the economy a wreck? Blame the Administration. Are there terrorists in our midst? The Administration, again. Are death panels being formed to kill Grampy? You got it, the Administration. It doesn't seem to matter what the evil or at whom it is directed. If you're looking for the cause of anything (anything bad) you need look no further than the Administration.

Identifying this phenomenon has helped me a lot in trying to understand why so many people in Congress can be against everything that comes from the White House. Once you understand that the 21st century Administration is the equivalent of the 20th century Radiation it makes sense. We knew that nothing good could come from floating deadly poison on the jet stream. It was true by definition. Republicans just know that nothing good can come from Liberals. It is true by definition. You don't have to bother yourself with specifics, details or the fine print. Heck, you don't even have to read. You already know that Administration = Bad.

It occurs to me that a lot of Republican leaders (I use the term loosely) are of my generation, that they were subject to the same frightening, mono-themed menace, that I was. But most of them learned to love and invest in everything nuclear from power plants to tactical weapons. Their menace became profitable so it should not surprise me that they would have to transfer their fear to something new, something they can see is not like them. And since life without a bogey man is hardly a life worth living they went where the menace was most obvious.

To a moneyed gentleman from the South or the West nothing is more dangerous than a Liberal Black Professor in the White House. Makes sense, I suppose. But I do kind of miss that fifty-foot woman.