

CULTURAL CAVIAR

Rule Reversalby Theodore Dalrymple 

September 02, 2017

Like 40

Tweet

[Multiple Pages](#)

photo credit: Bigstock

Recently two Parisian taxi drivers of African origin have told me that they wished to return to Africa, and had concrete plans actually to do so.

Several of their friends had similar plans. I asked them why, and their answer surprised me.

“To be free,” they said.

Back to Africa from Europe for freedom's sake? Here was a strange reversal indeed. Was not Africa par excellence the continent of rampant corruption, everyday oppression, and bizarre dictatorships? Well, yes and no: Such summaries rarely do justice to the complexity of human realities.

I have my own theory as to why Africa's “first dance of freedom,” as Lord Byron called it and said he longed to see, was not exactly happy: I believe that the main harm of European colonialism in Africa, especially in its later phases, in the years before independence, was primarily psychological.

The great Belgian, later Belgo-Australian, sinologist Pierre Ryckmans (better known as Simon Leys) traveled through what was then the Belgian Congo in the 1950s, a few years before independence. He was a very young man (his uncle had been the most distinguished governor-general of the colony), but he already showed the brilliance and acuity of his perception when he wrote in an article for a Belgian publication:

“I have always found taxi drivers to be the canaries in societies' mines.”

Like 40



Tweet

t

Schematically, one could say that [the Africans'] ambition pushes them simultaneously to reject and become Europe. (When I speak of Europe, I mean the Europe that they know, Europe as it is established in Africa.) They want to be like the people who humiliate them; they want to be like those whom they want to go away.... These tightly bound men cannot plan their escape other than by copying the only models of freedom and greatness that are presented to them.

When I worked briefly as a junior doctor in Rhodesia, as it then still was, under a settler or colonial regime, I noticed something else whose significance it took me years to appreciate, being far less an observer and thinker than Leys.

Black doctors were paid the same as white doctors, unlike in neighboring South Africa; but while I lived like a king on my salary, the black doctors on the same salary lived in penury and near-squalor. Why was that?

The answer was really rather obvious, though it took me a long time to realize it. While I had only myself to consider, the black doctors, being at the very peak of the African pyramid as far as employment was concerned, had to share their salary with their extended family and others: It was a profound social obligation for them to do so and was, in fact, morally attractive.

This, of course, did not prevent them from wishing as individuals to live at the European standard; but this was impossible so long as the colonial regime lasted. Once this elite had its hand on power, however, it had both the means and opportunity to outdo that standard to assuage its sense of humiliation, but the social obligations to look after the extended family and others remained. There was no legitimate way to satisfy these voracious demands other than by gaining and keeping control of political power over the country, which is why the struggle for such control was often so ruthless and bloody. When, in addition, the model of power they had in their minds was that of the colonial ruler, who were in effect salaried philosopher-kings whose prestige was maintained by a lot of ceremonial flimflam (white helmets with egret feathers, splendid uniforms, and the like), it was hardly surprising that the first dance of freedom was actually like a bestiary of bizarre rulers.

The first dance is now nearly over, and if Africa has not settled down to be a realm of political maturity and freedom exactly, there are many fewer bizarre dictators on the continent than there once were. If it is rarely advisable to oppose the political incumbent too openly or fiercely, there is nothing like the quasi-totalitarianism tempered by incompetence that was once so prevalent.

Besides, there is more to freedom than the ability without retribution to denounce the power, important as this ability



Tweet

they did not in the least feel free, rather hemmed in and almost straitjacketed by regulations, obligation, and taxation. And although France has a reputation for being an overregulated state,

it is not really very different from any other Western country. And, paradoxically perhaps, markets, in the sense of places where you actually go to buy things, are much more important in France than in some more market-orientated economies that I could mention.

The lack of freedom in their daily existence of which the Parisian taxi drivers complained is, I think, the same lack of freedom that many other people increasingly feel in so-called free societies. And this is so whether or not the regulations and obligations that hem them in or straitjacket them make us richer or poorer, safer or less safe, healthier or less healthy. Freedom is freedom, and not another thing.

Of course, it was the capital that they had managed to amass in France—no doubt slight by European standards, but great by African—that would allow the Parisian taxi drivers to feel free in the Africa to which they would return, much freer than they now felt. They had already built their houses and started their businesses, such as cinemas, taxi services, and general stores in towns that did not have them. They would deal in local products and perhaps even export them. And in mounting their enterprises, they would be far freer than any person in a Western country. Perhaps they would have to pay off an official or two, but that done, they would suffer little bureaucratic interference. As for political power, it did not interest them within quite wide limits. What they demanded of politics was noninterference.

In short, their decision was well considered and not in the slightest absurd. They would, of course, keep their French passports just in case the conditions of Africa's first dance of freedom recurred, so that they would always have a bolt-hole; but I nevertheless found what they had to say of interest. I have always found taxi drivers to be the canaries in societies' mines.



Tweet

You Might Also Like



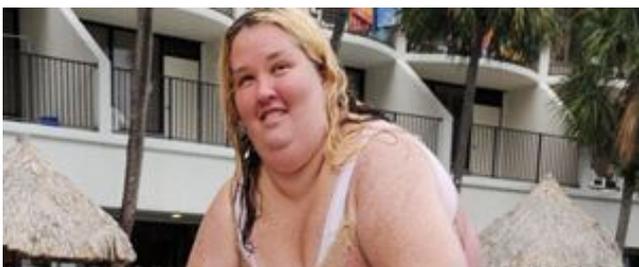
The 11 Worst Tourist Photos Ever Will Leave You Speechless



17 Epic Perfectly Timed Photos You Can't Miss



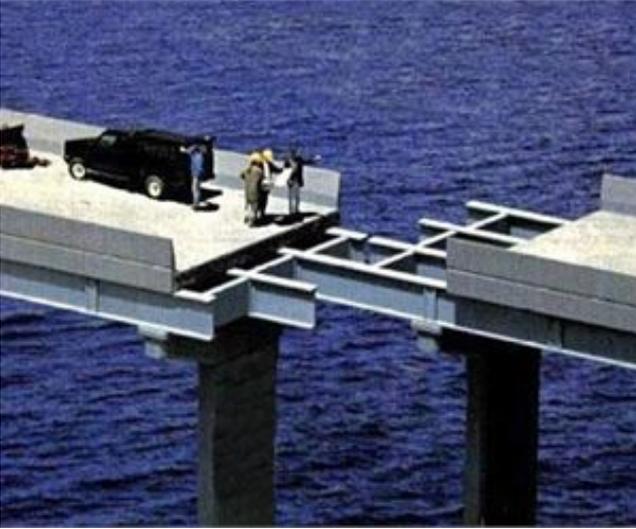
25 Good Looking Celebrities Who Got Fat



Tweet



Horrifying: 23 Gorgeous Stars Who Became Monsters



You Had One Job - Epic Construction Fails



Most Awkward Prom Photos Ever Captured



15 of the Best Construction Fails Ever



Tweet



Trump Fails To Condemn White Supremacists In Charlottesville



Cleveland Browns Kneel During National Anthem After Charlottesville

SIGN UP

Daily updates with TM's latest

Copyright 2017 **TakiMag.com** and the author. This copy is for your personal, noncommercial use only. You can order reprints for distribution by contacting us at editors@takimag.com.

The opinions of our commenters do not necessarily represent the opinions of Taki's Magazine or its contributors.

Comments Community  

 Recommend 3  Share Sort by Oldest 



Tweet

JOIN THE DISCUSSION...



Maxim · 7 days ago

Reminiscent of the Romans who went to live by choice among the Germanic tribes.

8 ^ | v · Reply · Share ›



Specialist Ed → Maxim · 7 days ago

Precisely. This is not all that different a phenomenon than what many Mexicans do in the United States. I can't tell you how many Mexicans I know in the trades that are paid decently in the US and own vast ranches down in Mexico. Most are content to live in merger homes in questionable neighborhoods, in the US, and of course, send their children to school here, While planning to move back to Mexico and retire like kings at 40. They have no real ties to the US, other than milking the cash cow.

29 ^ | v · Reply · Share ›



Marcos Brazil → Specialist Ed · 7 days ago

Exactly. Like blind men, they cant see and enjoy the culture.

5 ^ | v · Reply · Share ›



Burgess Shale → Specialist Ed · 7 days ago

A common phenomenon among the 'imports' in all those countries where they can prosper. Unfortunately we who reside here don't get to benefit from our 'wealth'.

9 ^ | v · Reply · Share ›



DrEvil → Burgess Shale · 6 days ago

I wouldn't exactly view working as some Aztec leaf blower boy or cab driver as prospering. Sure, they can save their dollars and when they go back home due to the value of the dollar in relation to the peso live well by native standards but hey are not suddenly becoming rich.

^ | v · Reply · Share ›



ClarenceDeBarrows → Specialist Ed · 6 days ago

As one born and raised in California a bunch of years ago I find it particularly disgusting.

8 ^ | v · Reply · Share ›



potkas7 → ClarenceDeBarrows · 6 days ago

Was it the act of being born in California that made it disgusting, or is there some larger point you'd like to try and make?

^ | v · Reply · Share ›



hfh1 → Specialist Ed · 6 days ago

And squeezing it dry for the natives.

1 ^ | v · Reply · Share ›



DrEvil → Specialist Ed · 6 days ago

The good areas of Mexico are just as expensive as the good areas of the US. These people do live like people in the US



Tweet

deposited in a bank. They are then able to build a house in perhaps a better town than the one donkey town they came from. But no one is living in some hacienda like a kang. If that were possible then you'd have Americans living in some hacienda there, at least as another 2nd home. A hundred acres of scrubland there or even in Texas is worth nothing. You can buy that in NYS for a \$1k an acre and it's better land.

1 ^ | v · Reply · Share ›



Specialist Ed → DrEvil · 5 days ago

There are thousands, if not millions, of Americans with second homes in Mexico. "King" may have been an overstatement. How's, "living very comfortably, on a ranch in Mexico by age 40?" This is not conjecture, I know guys in the trades that own ranches in Mexico, that are working until they're paid off and retiring there, very shortly. It's not just the cost of the property, and your money goes much further South of the boarder with respect to property, it's the cost of living as well.

2 ^ | v · Reply · Share ›



Maxim → DrEvil · 2 days ago

I do know from personal experience that, a few decades ago, at least, it was possible to live very well in areas of Latin America on an income that would have been near the poverty line in the U.S. And American property values are now grossly inflated.

^ | v · Reply · Share ›



WarPigg → Specialist Ed · 5 days ago

This was also very common among the Filipinos in the US Navy...retire after 20, go and live in Olongapo City like kings

2 ^ | v · Reply · Share ›



Childress → Maxim · 7 days ago

By the 4th century, the Roman Empire had become an oppressive and bureaucratic nightmare state.

Examples: Constantine introduced laws which made certain occupations (e.g., butchers, bakers) hereditary. He also issued a decree under which 'coloni' were forbidden to leave their land, essentially converting them into serfs, and laying the foundations for the entire social structure of medieval Europe.

There's a passage of Ammianus Marcellinus in which the late-imperial historian converses with a romanised Greek who had lived among the Huns. The Greek found their society less regimented, and blessedly free of lawyers.

12 ^ | v · Reply · Share ›



DrEvil → Childress · 6 days ago

You can do that in the US. Just find some real Podunk type area and move there and



Tweet



DrEvil → Maxim · 6 days ago

Yeah, in some Romanised area where they built baths, aqueducts for fresh water and other amenities essential to civilised living.

1 ^ | v · Reply · Share ›



Maxim → DrEvil · 6 days ago

I believe, in the worst days under Diocletian, there were some who fled to the hinterlands, and lived as tribesmen.

^ | v · Reply · Share ›



Roffles Lowell → Maxim · 2 days ago

Wow, I had no idea you guys were over here talking about the Benedict Option....!

^ | v · Reply · Share ›



Maxim → Roffles Lowell · 2 days ago

???

^ | v · Reply · Share ›



Maxim · 7 days ago

Oh, also, first! (and second).

2 ^ | v · Reply · Share ›



David Wright → Maxim · 7 days ago

Nobody does that anymore.

3 ^ | v · Reply · Share ›



Burgess Shale → David Wright · 7 days ago

It's so yesterday.

2 ^ | v · Reply · Share ›



Maxim → David Wright · 6 days ago

Oh, come on! I saw someone do it last week. Apparently you are affirming that the "Best" people don't do it anymore, which supplies an excellent incentive for doing it; to piss off the "Best" people.

^ | v · Reply · Share ›



Ignatius J Reilly · 7 days ago

How Rousseauian: Noble Savage learns that 'freedom' is just another word for nothing left to lose -- and that the grass is greener where the green is longer! And above all, hold on to that Euro passport.

How is it that American blacks cannot partake? Seems sometimes that America is the world's 'chump' capital: Everyone who elbows their way in gets to keep that ticket home should the ride get rough. Even these so-called 'dreamers' if given a free pass (among other freebies) will be able to take their Social Security pensions south of the border when they retire and live there in a 'freedom' not available to gringos.

What we require is a dose of Equality. How about this for a starter: Just One Passport. Either commit to the whole nine yards or get the hell out!

34 ^ | v · Reply · Share ›



Dr. Rieux, aka Deplorable Duck → Ignatius J Reilly · 7 days ago

How about this for a starter: Just get the hell out!



Tweet



Callahan → Dr. Rieux, aka Deplorable Duck
· 7 days ago

I haven't traveled to Mexico in a while even though my wifey and others go to Cabo every now and then. I refuse to go. Questiondoes Mexico allow us Gringos to purchase land in Mexico or is land /home ownership still on a contrived long term lease?
And as far as these DACA "dreamers" are concerned, why is Little Paulie Ryan wringing his hands over the possibility Trump may ditch it? The previous poster makes a great point. Why do these law breakers get dual status if we cannot even purchase land in Mexico ? (Not that I want to)

Tell the little dreambots to choose which country they want to represent . I am sick and damn tired of seeing these people wave the Mexican flag within our borders . Get the hell back to Mexico if that's how you feel !!
26 ^ | v · Reply · Share ›



ClarenceDeBarrows → Callahan
· 6 days ago

Cabo ain't Cabo no more. It's, gag, Newport Beach south.
^ | v · Reply · Share ›



hfh1 → Callahan · 6 days ago

My impression is, and may not be accurate, that America, until fairly recently, did not allow dual citizenship. My guess is that Izrul broke the ice.
1 ^ | v · Reply · Share ›



Ignatius J Reilly → hfh1
· 6 days ago

Yep. A Supreme Court decision in the '70s.
1 ^ | v · Reply · Share ›



Doodah → Callahan · 5 days ago

I was going to visit Mexico until I heard it was chock full of Mexicans!
^ | v · Reply · Share ›



Maxim → Doodah · 2 days ago

So is Texaco.
1 ^ | v · Reply · Share ›



Maxim → Callahan · 2 days ago

Exactly; apparently, America is the only country in the world that isn't allowed to control its borders. O.K., Europe as well.
^ | v · Reply · Share ›



Callahan → Dr. Rieux, aka Deplorable Duck
· 7 days ago

+1000
5 ^ | v · Reply · Share ›



Burgess Shale → Dr. Rieux, aka Deplorable Duck · 7 days ago

How about, No you're not welcome here ?



Tweet