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THE FEAR OF THE CRIMINAL

2230 2 May 88

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Yesterday a wild murderous Indian (Amerind, Native American) was stopped dead in his tracks. Dead: killed. We don't have many wild Indians here on Cape Cod, never did have. At least till King Philip's War, our Indians were good Indians. Nice. Wampanoags, Squanto for instance. (S: The first English-speaker here was not white: he met us when we got off the boat, the Mayflower.)....Yes, I sound patronizing, but I don't feel patronizing. I feel sad: a 27-year-old stop-killed while trying to commit murder. And I feel mad: a dead kid who'd been high on drink & drugs, Cape Cod awash in both. It might do you some good to hang in with my ruminations:

1. The weapon the young man was trying to kill with was a car he'd driven at high speed in an unsuccessful effort to escape the police; the weapon that killed him was a 9mm 13-shot S&W (semiautomatic, though our police are loth to admit it). When the 27-year-old finally stopped, the 25-year-old cop walked up to arrest him. Whereupon the 27-year-old gunned it, U-turned, & tried to run down the cop, who got off 10 rounds, one through the windshield & into the heart. UNTRUE: No good Indian but a dead Indian. TRUE: Better that dead Indian than that cop dead. ALTERNATIVES: The cop couldn't think of any, nor can I. Thank God, I say, for semiautomatics--in the right hands.

2. Today many of our local Amerinds were on the demo warpath, literally drum-beating against "injustice." I should've thought they'd've laid low, embarrassed that one of their own had shamed them. But instead of downplaying, they wanted to upplay the incident. They had it figured that if the cop weren't white-racist, their friend wouldn't be dead.... Now, tell me: If you were that cop, would the race of the guy running you down have made any difference to your behavior? If, eg, he were white, would you've let him run you down? Or fired fewer rounds? But I feel some sympathy for "the oppressed" when some public event triggers an irrational response from them....The Cape Cod Indians, historically, were overwhelmed by Brits who were out not to overwhelm anybody but only to do their thing: a tragedy more than a crime, as Amerind Vine deLoria says in his books. As for the Cape Cod Indians today, they have all the rights anybody else has, & insist on some special privileges, such as unlicensed hunting & fishing. They are (to use an expression foreign to their culture) not "high achievers," but that is their choice. Yet, understandably, they resent their historical fate & their present circumstances, mainly lower middle-class.

3. We Cape Codders fear drunken Indians driving cars, drunken anybody; & dopeheads, so also pushers & smugglers & growers & governments that don't try harder to stop their growers & smugglers. That's the specific meaning of "the fear of the criminal" in this Thinksheet's title: objective genitive, the public fearing the criminal. This fear is now endemic to Cape Cod, but elsewhere in America in many places it is epidemic. Eg, cop-killing in NYC has risen to one per week (the increase due to the world of crack), & in LA the public is caught in street-gangs' crossfire. The jokes about the public's rising fear have taken on the tinge of gallows humor. Federal & lower agencies throw up their hands & say "It's out of control!" Meese recommends demand-side attention (though he's supply-side in his eco-thinking): Nancy says "Just say no," & that's just fine with Ed.

4. The Thinksheet's title can mean also--subjective genitive--the criminal's & potential criminal's fear of getting caught & then getting more than a slap on the wrist. In any society, the military are to deliver the public from fear of the outsider & the police are to deliver the public from fear of the insider. Capital punishment is 100% effective against the criminal whether or not it puts the fear of society in other criminals--but things aren't bad enough yet to undo the taboo against it.