

NEVADA CURRENT

Let's Do the Timewarp Again

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Saw an ad the other night that made me wonder if perhaps I had time-traveled. It was a GOP attack ad on the Nevada Congressional Democrats – Dina Titus, Susie Lee, Steven Horsford, Catherine Cortez-Masto.

The ad wasn't about them. And it wasn't about reality. It was run by a group called Citizens for Sanity, which Mother Jones says is made up of three former Trump aides who now work for Stephen Miller. You know, the guy for whom putting immigrant children in cages was a feature rather than a bug.

The ad was about immigration. And it asserted that immigrants – which make up a pretty large percentage of Las Vegas' population – were violent and scary to YOUR FAMILY.

This was news to me. I thought the scariest thing for my family – which is me and two teenage daughters – was the fear of them dying in childbirth, or having a white man become so obsessed with them that he stalks them and makes their lives hell. Or going to school and being shot by another young man who is able to buy weapons of combat and have them delivered to his house.

But no! This ad insisted that IMMIGRANTS are SCARY and might MURDER you. And your kin. IMMIGRANTS! People who speak different languages. And come from countries close to the equator in the Western Hemisphere.

Aside from the rather strange tactic of running anti-immigrant ads in Las Vegas (where, let's face it, all but less than 1 percent have family origins in another country), this ad does not bear out in statistics – which show that immigrants are half as likely to commit crimes as people who were born here. This from the conservative Cato Institute.

Of course, truth is not a thing in these ads, or for the people running them. I do believe, though, that the people running these ads do truly think that immigrants are violent criminals. Because that's how they feel. And their feelings – and what the guy living next door to them with six AR-15s says – is how they define truth.

For those who say it hasn't always been this way, I say: welcome to my column, GenZers and younger Millennials! Because when this ad came on the screen during the NLCS, I fully expected a picture of Willie Horton to pop up at any moment.

You don't know Willie Horton? Those of you who were sentient in 1988 were bombarded with the attack ad engineered by George H.W. Bush's campaign strategist Lee Atwater, who would recant his ways a few years later as he was dying of a brain tumor. Atwater got help from Bush campaign media advisor Roger Ailes, who... did not recant his ways.

This ad was devastating. Because it appealed to the ingrained racist beliefs of almost every white person in the country in 1988. A BLACK MAN! Who harmed WOMEN AND CHILDREN! And didn't even cut his hair or beard!

Notice the subtle sexism in this ad, too. "Stabbing a man and repeatedly raping his girlfriend." Like Horton was harming the man, whose property was being raped. And whom the man couldn't protect, because he was "harmed" or, perhaps, "dead."

Oh, the emasculation.

So, it seems we are, in many ways, back in 1988. Except the part where we're actually back in the 17th century.

I started wondering what it might be like if we DID go back to 1988. Because it feels a lot like 2022. 1988 was just the beginning of our trip down dystopia lane.

In both years, we were in the middle of a multi-year viral pandemic. This CDC data shows that between October 20, 2021 and October 20, 2022, 847,217 people died of COVID in the U.S. I was unable to find how many people died of AIDS in the same time period, but overall about 500,000 people died between 1981 and 2000 in the U.S.

The average price of a home in 1988 was \$112,000. In 2022, it's \$322,000. And the housing market was healthier in 1988.

Mortgage 30-year interest rates in October 1988 were over 10 percent. In October 2022 they're about 7.25 percent.

Part of the reason the housing market was healthier in 1988 was that the U.S. still had the Glass-Steagall Act in place. That, GenZ and Millennials (I seriously doubt you were taught this in school), was the Roosevelt-era law that put very strong walls between banks and investment firms and other common sense reforms to avoid another Great Depression. Or, as you Millennials might remember from your childhoods, the Great Recession. Or, as some of us GenXers refer to it – the post-Reagan/Clinton eras.

College in 1988 averaged about \$1,000 a year at public colleges and universities, and averaged less than \$10,000 per year at private universities. Today, it averages \$25,000 to \$75,000 a year – public and private.

Oh, and let's not forget gun violence. In 1988 there were... (checks notes, scours the web) one mass shooting in the U.S. And look, it had to do directly with a man obsessed with a woman.

In 2022 – so far, there have been 562 mass murders. That’s almost two mass murders – death of 4 or more people – a day.

Then there’s the rather charming statistic, “people who used to work for the president who have been indicted.”

According to Politifact, 33 people in the Reagan administration had been indicted before or around 1988. About half were charged with corruption and influence peddling at the Dept. of Housing and Urban Development. The other half were connected to the Iran/Contra Affair.

With Trump... we’re still counting. There is Igor and Lev. And Roger Stone. And Michael Flynn. And Steve Bannon. And Paul Manafort and Rick Gates. And George Papadapoulos. And Allen Weisselberg. And, of course, Michael Cohen. And the Trump business, itself. His kids haven’t been criminally indicted. Yet. But they are part of the New York AG’s suit alleging tax evasion and fraud.

But could it also be... Lindsay Graham? Christina Bobb? Anthony Ornato? Mark Meadows? Rudy Giuliani? John Eastman? Cleta Mitchell? Evan Corcoran?

Donald Trump?

The hundreds of people who have been arrested for Jan. 6 who were there because Trump called them to fight?

The point is... both in 1988 and in 2022 the country was dealing with the aftermath of the corruption of its previous presidential administration. But in 1988, there were only a handful of us (and I was in college) who were like, “Man, this guy is the most corrupt president we’ve ever had – rivaling only Nixon.” Most of the country was like, “Oh, Papa Reagan! We love you!”

But this is where I have an iota of hope. Now, more of the country is looking at Trump and the state of our country in abject horror, while a small but loud handful of crazies believe in the sanctity of their president.

And that’s because of another thing that changed just before 1988. The Fairness Doctrine was repealed by the FCC the year before, paving the way for Roger Ailes to do his Willie Horton routine on a network scale.

I will concede that it’s easier to be queer in 2022 than in 1988. Most people don’t blink an eye at marriage equality. And most people are against having it rescinded by the Supreme Court.

And in 1988, I could have had an abortion at will. Today, my daughters have to be mindful of what state they live in.

All of this really does lead me to hope, though. We are on the brink of disaster, but I think a lot of people realize that and are trying to pull us back. I think. The problem is, if we do go over the cliff,

it won't take us back to 1988. It will take us to a time we've never experienced before in our history.

And that, not immigration, is scary.