

Letters to the WSWS

15 March 2000

I liked your recent article about poverty in California. I live in San Diego, and I can personally attest to the misery of the majority here. I know all about repairing computers. So do lots of people here. Big deal—it means nothing when you apply for jobs. After many months of sleeping in a friend's car, I got a temporary job and was able to buy it. I had to spend that much money again to do unnecessary repairs to get it smogged, insured and registered. I read in the daily paper that California won't meet its smog goals, since officials recently "discovered" that 25 percent of all cars on the road are not registered (and not smogged). One out of four drivers are too poor to obey the law, and at least that many more people have to put up with hateful bus service. The state's own statistics show that at least two out of five adult Californians are desperately poor—without dependable transportation to look for or keep jobs. We don't live in the land of milk and honey—we wash the cars for those that do.

Hungry hi-tech worker

11 March 2000

To the editors of the WSWS,

It is vital that people understand that cities are preparing for domestic unrest, so I appreciated your story.

The day after the Diallo verdict came in, there was a demonstration on 59th Street and 5th Avenue here in Manhattan. I was waiting at the corner of 60th and 5th to rendezvous with a colleague and some students that we were escorting to the demo. The police presence at the demo was formidable, but this was nothing unusual in Giuliani-ville. As I stood waiting, at least three groups of tourists walked over to the cop who was on this corner and asked him what the demonstration was about. The cop informed these people that the demonstration was being led by the same people who "messed up that business conference in Seattle last year, and we're not going to lose control of them here." At no point in any of the conversations he had with his

different audiences did he make any effort to explain what people were actually pissed off about. Not only is social order important, the armed guard can tell any story they want to tell to justify their presence.

MHP

14 March 2000

I enjoyed your review of *American Beauty* and find it expresses most of my discomfort with the film. The rooting interest was fleeting and shifty. And mostly it was, as you say, reduced to a series of effect and devices, disconnected, unilluminating of the characters or of life.

One thing you wrote caught my attention particularly, "There is something quite arbitrary about Lester's death. For it to be tragic his end would need to arise from the logic of his life. But it doesn't arise from something fateful in his unhappy condition. It arises, indeed, from his rebellion. If he hadn't attempted to change his life, it would never have happened. Where is the moral in that?"

There is no moral. It is arbitrary. It is highly existential, and, of course, ironic: get it? Lester finally drops his predatory, self-involved mode, if only for an instant, and gets murdered just as he has his epiphany. Well, like a lot of the rest of the film, one sees it as an indulgence by the filmmaker. He hasn't the wisdom or maturity, apparently, to have resisted the obvious. No one finds redemption in the film, and just as we're made to think Lester is about to, blam.

Clever, technically well-wrought filmmaking, almost totally content-free. But then again, I hated *Blue Velvet* and *Fargo* so you know I haven't much critical authority.

Excellent review.

RG

12 March 2000



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