# MONDAY: BUELLER? BUELLER?

It’s Monday in more than one way. Monday has become synonymous with the weekly return to the rat race of school and work, the bruising grind of life. It’s the blues after a relaxing weekend, but even worse after a horrific weekend like the one we just left. But it also means a new day, a chance for improved direction assuming we note well where we’ve been and mark well where we want to go.

This weekend marked the 30th anniversary of writer/director John Hughes’ movie, Ferris Bueller’s Day Off. This film seems like a frothy bit of fun after yesterday’s gun-riddled hell chased by corporate-owned electeds’ hypocrisy. Yet it’s a really important work if one wants to know what’s going on in the heads of so many Americans who continue to support the death-dealing Congresspersons who refuse to ban assault rifles.

Ferris Bueller’s family is a fictional snapshot of white middle-class suburbia in the mid-1980s. Assuming the main character Ferris and his closest friends are 17 or 18 years old in 1986 (when this film was released), they’d be 47-48 years old now, members of Generation X.

Look at this next segment, which follows the first one above. Take careful note of the dialog. While Ferris is an idealized middle-class suburban white teen, much of this dialog reflects the thinking of real teens of that era. This is why Hughes’ movies remain so popular today; they reflected the audience back at themselves in a way that was non-confrontational while poking fun at their culture.

Over time, this movie was more than a mirror of culture. Ben Stein, who played the deadpan economics instructor, parlayed his increased profile to become a proponent of neoconservative socioeconomics as well as a TV game show host.

What better way to gain ready access to the public's mind than as comic relief. The reaction to Stein's character teaching economics legitimized the general public's reaction to econ – it's just boring and repetitive filler, no need to pay close attention.

Ferris' fluffy wisecrack about European socialism and fascist anarchism takes on a more ominous perspective thinking of former Defense Secretary Rumsfeld's snark about "Old Europe," or the willful blindness of tuned-out whites towards fascism's rise in the west over the last three decades. It's just the Donald they support in throwing over the GOP, not an -ism, right?

Which came first – the Bueller family's materialism and its cultural validation by this film, or the materialism Hughes and his script depict? It's difficult to separate them over the distance of 30 years. Many white straight suburban middle-class men in their 40s identified with Ferris and have now become leaders of business and government. They're either wealthy enough (read: blessed/cursed by materialism) to see the world as Ferris did, not as it is in actuality.

The most important line of the film, its tag line, demanded action:

> Life moves pretty fast. If you don't stop and look around once in a while, you could miss it.

And yet, did any character in this film truly look around? As much as I appreciate Hughes, he built an incredibly homogeneous world – it's clean, safe, white 90% of the time, males have 80% or more of the dialog, and there's no doubt that these suburbanites will succeed even if it means they don't get to go to the school they want, exactly when they expect to do so. What exactly would these characters see if they did as bid? Departures from homogeneity are only opportunities for a laugh – like the parking tower attendants (who aren't white) who "borrow"

Mr. Frye's car, or the ostensibly gay maitre'd whose behavior is treated as an annoyance to be blown off, or 'Boy In The Police Station' in trouble because of drugs (played by real-life drug abuser Charlie Sheen) who counsels Jeannie Bueller to relax.

Jeannie's anger and frustration at the unfair double standard between her life and her older brother's is brushed off. The last person from whom anyone should take advice basically tells her to *chillax* and focus on herself, to stop looking like a whore. And she validates his advice by getting all giggly because of his attention. This is feminism in the late 1980s, in the eyes of a white male – what has this kind of projection done, 30 years later, to Generation X women and their daughters?

What has it done to all of us to laugh off Bueller's rule-evading lifestyle? What would that character end up doing as an adult – did he end up in finance like his dad or real estate like his mom, selling subprime home mortgages to individuals or bundled in tranches, disregarding what the fallout might be to everyone else, laughing it off as good fun because he finally got his second BMW/Porsche/Hummer?

In retrospect, Bueller's vanilla Chicago suburb is shocking, distressing to look at now. Has this same image also become embedded in the minds of Gen X men who run corporations and government? Does it shape even the mixed-race former senator from Illinois now in the White House who is only slightly older than the Gen X folks impacted most by this film?

Here we are, decades later, in a world now owned and shaped by the best-of-breed Gen X. They're traditionalists and work addicted compared to Baby Boomers and Millennials. Thanks to them in no small part, we've been foreclosed upon, shot at, marginalized, told to suck-it-up-comform-comply-because-Freedom-and-the-American-Capitalist-Free-Market-Way-uber-alles. Images of a safe suburban teenhood have been replaced with quarter-after-quarter superhero films featuring

GUI-based homogeneous spandex-covered male archetypes protecting the American Way, because the Gen X white men running today’s film studios can’t even handle the risk of contemporary suburbia on the screen.

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As much fun as Hughes’ Bueller has been, he represents a narrow, distorted perspective from the rear-view mirror. His innocuous 1980s Midwest suburb was at best a wish, when the truth is Monday morning in street in front of Pulse nightclub in Orlando.

Take a look around. Really, where’s Bueller now?