

The D-Files

Reports from Durant, Oklahoma

Report #7: Mean People Rule

Have you seen the bumper sticker that says “Mean People Suck”? I saw it not infrequently around Oklahoma City and Dallas and have even seen it here in Durant. It actually makes me feel good when I see these bumper stickers. It indicates the possibility of hope for humanity. Unfortunately, I see many more “My kid can beat up your honor student” and “Fear This” bumper stickers than those of the more hopeful variety. Recently, however, I saw a bumper sticker that really irritated me. It looks just like the “Mean People Suck” sticker but with one important change. This new sticker says “Mean People Rule.”

Unfortunately, the reason that this bumper sticker irritates me so much is that it happens to be true. I happened to be listening to KRLD, a news/talk radio station in Dallas (AM 1080), when I saw “Mean People Rule” for the first time. I saw it while I was listening to reports from East Timor. East Timor is one of the many, many places around the world where mean people do indeed rule. That sucks.

One question immediately comes to my mind when I see aggressive bumper stickers like “Mean People Rule”; what does the owner of such a message really want me to think about them? Do they just think its funny or do they want me to fear them? Is the bumper sticker a form of intimidation? Or am I just taking this all too seriously?

When I learn of a fourteen year old boy who killed himself because he was bullied every day for the first four days of this new school year I remember the boys that bullied me. If I am not mistaken the genesis of each of the school shootings over the past few years involved marginalized kids being bullied and ostracized. Mean people were ruling their lives so they lashed out. I lashed out in fourth grade. After months of bullying I tried to punch Walter DeDeo, my own personal bully, in the face. I missed. He didn't miss, punched me in the eye and then I got in trouble for starting a fight. I wasn't stupid. I figured out how the world worked in fourth grade: Mean People Rule.

Because of this one small event in my early life I still have a significant degree of sympathy for all those boys who have acted out in such a shocking and inappropriate manner. I sympathize with them because the only difference between me and them is that I never actually killed anyone. However, this certainly wasn't for lack of thinking about it. When I saw that “Mean People Rule” sticker all those feelings returned. I wanted to cut the bastard off and then jump out of my car and accost him. I wanted to smash all of the window in his pickup truck and watch his reaction. When he expresses surprise and shock and asks what the hell I'm doing I would simply remind him that, “Mean People Rule! Screw you buddy! What are you going to do about it?” In a perfect world he would then “lash out” at this insult to his person and property, I would beat the crap out of him and then he would be arrested for starting the fight in the first place. In a perfect world.

Of course this isn't a perfect world. In this world all I could do was get angry and frustrated. And stay well clear of the Mean People Rule-mobile. I wouldn't want to do anything that might upset Mr. Mean. It makes no difference why you are being bullied, your race, gender, ethnicity, sexual preference, the way you dress, whatever. What you quickly learn is that mean people can and do get away with being mean. I suppose it is because most of us have been in a situation similar to mine. We tried to defend ourselves, to get even, to get back at the mean person and, literally or figuratively, it blew up in our face. We lost again. Lesson learned. Stay away from bullies and don't get involved.

After a few bouts with bullies I can easily understand why a kid, or an adult for that matter, would decide to switch from conventional weapons (rules, words and fists) and escalate to “nukes” (guns and bombs). Let’s see what good ‘ol Mr. Bully thinks about sucking some lead? Kids aren’t stupid. They, like me, quickly learn the rules of the game; might makes right (aka Mean People Rule). So in order to make the bully stop you must become a bully yourself and then escalate the level of violence. This one act must become the “final solution” to the problem. The bully cannot be allowed to ever threaten you again. If you couldn’t stop the bully before with rules, words or fists before what makes you think that putting the “fear of God” into them will last for more than a few minutes? When given the chance the bully will be back. You must end it once and for all.

To me this is clear logical thinking. Why else did the Allies cause the total destruction of and demand the unconditional surrender from Germany and Japan during World War II? To keep it from even happening again.

Recall the movie “Falling Down” with Michael Douglas? Here an adult has had enough and acts out against everyone who has ever hurt him. He goes too far but I would guess that this theme is not that uncommon in many folks fantasies.