

Land without crime - but at what price?

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Body

Coming here from the District of Columbia is like visiting a different planet, particularly concerning the issues of **crime** and law and order.

Crime is virtually non-existent. When an arrest is made, however, the authorities mean business. A Dutchman living in Nigeria was arrested while on a visit and charged with possession of drugs. He was convicted and sentenced to death.

Anyone walking down the street can be arrested and fined for chewing gum. The police are also tough on littering.

Males coming through customs or immigration are ordered on the spot to visit a barber if authorities consider their hair to be too long. Immigrants who are arrested on offenses such as possessing small amounts of marijuana are deported.

People who serve the public are pleasant and efficient. Everything seems in good repair and working at top form. My Singapore Airlines plane **landed** on schedule to the minute after a trans-Pacific flight.

Singapore has no poverty. Ninety-eight percent of the people own their own homes. Health care is guaranteed by the government.

But then, Singapore is a police state. The **price** of having a **crime**-free society in which everything works is that one faces restrictions at every turn.

All media are subject to censorship. Nothing appears on television unless approved by the government as wholesome and educational. Anything having to do with sex is taboo.

The upshot of all this is that bright young people in Singapore very often set their sights on emigrating to the United States.

In exchange for strict law and order and a **crime**-free country, the average citizen of Singapore must live in fear of authorities. The **price** of stepping out of line or just being suspected of stepping out of line is high. Such a society leaves little latitude for personal or artistic expression unless one's views conform to those of the establishment.

Singapore is proof that it's still possible to eliminate many of the kinds of social problems that are troublesome in the United States. The question is whether Americans want to pay the **price** in official repression and enforced social conformity.

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It's admirable when the trains run on time and the planes take off and land on time, but the price in terms of social disorganization that America pays for personal freedom may not be high, all things considered.

Besides, as has always been said, America is an experiment in democracy - and the experiment isn't over. Maybe someday we'll achieve efficiency without having to pay the price of repression.

Notes

THE EDITORIAL PAGE; COMMENT; Singapore is proof social problems can be eliminated if you pay cost in repression; Armstrong Williams is a Washington writer, talk-show host and public relations executive.

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