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Republican

Perspective

The Re-education

of Don Jones

By John Littig

In his classic novel "1984," George Orwell wrote of a totalitarian state that prosecuted "thoughtcrimes." Orwell's protagonist, Winston Smith, committed intellectual treason and was imprisoned and tortured for his crime. As a result, he rejected his lover and soul mate, as well as his quest for truth and intellectual freedom. In the end, he truly loved Big Brother; his re-education was complete.

In real life, re-education was an instrument of control applied by the Communist Chinese regime during the Cultural Revolution. Millions of suspected counter-revolutionaries were imprisoned and underwent socialist "re-education through labor." In post-war Vietnam, similar methods were used against those who had sided with the South Vietnamese and American governments.

Defensive end Michael Sam had "come out" to his University of Missouri teammates last August, and found them supportive. As the NFL draft loomed, he came out publicly in an interview on ESPN.

Sam was the 249th pick in the just-completed NFL draft. Upon receiving the glad news, he planted a very enthusiastic kiss upon the lips of his sweetheart, Vito Commisano. The joyous occasion, at the San Diego home of Sam's agent, was captured and telecast by ESPN.

Sam's selection, and presumably his public display of affection, were embraced by the media and by almost all who were moved to comment. Even President Obama weighed in: "The President congratulates Michael Sam, the Rams, and the NFL for taking an important step forward in our nation's journey"Šand so on. Sam's newly minted souvenir jerseys were in high demand.

But not everyone was delighted. The sticking point seems not to have been Sam's sexual orientation, or even the fact that he made it public, but the smooch. Adverse comments showed up on Twitter and on websites carrying the story.

Only one active NFL player seems to have publicly commented. Miami's Don Jones tweeted "OMG" and "horrible." The Dolphins promptly fined Jones and suspended him from all team activities until he completes "educational training" for his remarks. Jones dutifully issued a groveling apology.

There's a strong traffic in pro and con comments on the web, much of it supporting Jones for his original tweet.

Derrick Ward offered: "ŠSam is no bueno for doing that on national TVŠ" and "Man U got little kids lookin' at the draft. I can't believe ESPN even allowed that to happen." Ward is retired, and thus beyond the disciplinary reach of the NFL, but he reports receiving death threats against himself and his children after his comments.

But let's go back to Don Jones. Can he be the only NFL player who does not delight in Sam's very public osculation? It would be silly to think so. But his pronto smack-down and recantation surely alerted others to the need for lock-step celebration or at least tacit approval of the smooch.

Of course this is not about the fine or the suspension levied against Don Jones. It's about the re-education he must undergo. It is apparently not enough for the NFL or the Dolphins to penalize Jones for his remarks, or even to make him publicly apologize for his heresy. They must instead expunge the anti-gay-smooch thought from his brain. A la "1984."

Doesn't this all seem a bit un-American? Are our thoughts not our own? Perhaps not.

It's relatively unimportant whether Michael Sam kissed a man or a woman. And it's relatively unimportant whether you or I applaud it or disapprove of it. What's important is that any American should be free to have and to voice an opinion.

The thought police disagree.

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