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Dear Colleague:

"New York is a good place to visit, but who would want to live there?" A source of unease in this country--among older people and conservatives in particular, but surely not limited to them--is the feeling that the entire United States is about to become New York. The excitement, the rich mix of peoples, the commingling of wealth and poverty, high culture and low culture, pizza and sushi, are what you see and experience not only in New York, but in Madison and (who knows?) in Dubuque, Iowa. Where can one go to put up one's feet? Where can one be pleasantly bored, munching potato chips, rather than be constantly challenged? Not long ago, even New York pretended to be a mere overgrown friendly village. Witness the laidback style of the old (pre-Tina Brown) New Yorker. "Last night, we dropped in on the plumber's convention at the Waldorf-Astoria..." Yes, the old New Yorker reassured us, there was the Waldorf and there was Times Square, but at the end of the glitze and the glamor, one could always return to the Village, or to one's brownstone on a tree-lined street. No more. The new New Yorker reflects the new reality: tension, sparkle, the heights and the depths, appear on every page of the magazine, as they do in every quarter of the city.

OK, so they are in every quarter of that great world-city. But in Iowa? In Nebraska? Again, the question arises, where can one withdraw to? where is that broad billowing quilt of windmills and waterholes, silos and farms, that can absorb and defuse metropolitan confusion and excess? Nostalgia for places to live in and rear kids--family farms where boys are named Joey--arouses nostalgia. Guilty nostalgia, for Iowan farms and Nebraskan ranches evoke one people's (white people's) past. They are culturally incorrect. There remains wild nature. But we are now too sophisticated to accept even wild nature as culture-free. Moreover, nature cannot be the rallying flag for all of heterogeneous America because it excludes the gays. Its evocations of biological life--of seeds and fruits, roots and lineages, ancestors and offspring--make the homosexual feel uncomfortable; they exacerbate his feeling of isolation, his sense of being a tourist, a voyeur rather than a full-fledged contributor to life. Only in a world of total artifice, all images and glitter, intense sensation without issue, the present without tomorrow, can he feel at home. Pink, significantly, is his color.

Best wishes,

*Y. In*