

“MADE IN AMERICA” IN THE 21ST CENTURY

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In Trash Talk, bmaz wrote about a “lunchpail” Superbowl, pitting two teams named after people who make things against each other: the Steelworkers versus the Meatpackers. And the game ended appropriately, with a team owned by the people of a small city, having gone to a monstrous stadium as much a tribute to one arrogant man as it is a sports venue, taking home the trophy named after the man who put their city on the map. We can rest easy as Jerry Jones and the other greedy bastards threaten to lock out their players, knowing that the spirit of the game will be in the hands of the people of Green Bay.

All of which was the perfect background for this ad, as much a tribute to a city and a way of life our elites would like us to forget as it is an ad for a car. The visuals are amazing—not just the great monuments of Detroit, but (at :16) the juxtaposition of the disaster porn that our media have lapped up in the last couple of years—“a town that’s been to hell and back”—with the American flag—“the finer things in life.” (It was perhaps a better tribute to our national anthem than the one Christina Aguilera gave.) And, then, with Joe Louis’ fist punctuating the image, followed quickly by Diego Rivera’s tribute to industry, the ad laid out its creed in a working man’s voice.

You see, it’s the hottest fires that make the hardest steel. Add hard work and conviction and the know-how that runs generations deep in every last one of us. That’s who we are. That’s our story.

All culminating in a synthesis of the grit of Eminem and the uplift of gospel.

Yeah, there's an irony at the heart of the ad: as the tagline "Imported from Detroit" suggests. We've been sold to the highest—the only—bidder, for scraps. And it took the genius of a metrosexual Canadian-Italian to reclaim the dignity of America's industrial base.

Made in America isn't as simple as it used to be.

Back in the 70s, as our industries were first struggling against the challenges of globalization, the unions had a campaign—Made in America—that appealed to the pride and perhaps parochialism of average Americans as reason enough to buy a product.

As the last few decades have shown, it turns out that Made in America wasn't reason enough.

This ad, I think, tries to reclaim that idea, to appeal to the dignity of the men and women in flyover country so often maligned by "experts" who know little about what they write.

Now, it's probably not the [story] you've been reading in papers, the one being written by folks who've never even been here and don't know what we're capable of.

Who knows if the ad will work? Who knows whether it'll sell cars; who knows whether it'll convince a region barely regaining confidence after a terrible trauma to believe?

But whatever the cynical calculations behind this ad, whatever the value of the Chrysler 200, someone needed to tell this story.