

ART PRIZE: THE STARTING GATES



Art Prize starts in Grand Rapids tomorrow.

Art Prize is an event put together by Dick DeVos' son, Rick, as an alternative to yet another film festival. It's a large open entry contest in which the prizes are awarded by popular vote (this year, there will be juried prizes as well). It's good at bringing lots of people downtown—including busloads and busloads of kids—generating some excitement, and ... getting people to look at “art.”

Given the open entry, there is a very wide range of quality in the art work. And since the voting system is popular, there's a lot of catering to popular tastes—or those of the area. (For example, patriotic and religious artworks tend to do really well; a mosaic altarpiece won the top prize last year).

I've decided I'm going to blog some on Art Prize some this year because I'm fascinated by a truly popular art event.

One of my favorite things about Art Prize is the way even pedestrian works can accomplish one purpose of art, to get people to look at the space around them differently.

Take the horses, above, which are in the Grand River just outside of the Public (municipal history) Museum and Grand Valley State, right in the middle of downtown. While each horse is

supported by a vertical metal bar, they're otherwise constructed of branches.

The rapids in our city's name are no longer worthy of the name; instead, a series of small drops step the river down the 18 feet it falls through the city. And many of the fish that draw crowds of fishermen to the banks of downtown year-round are farmed. It's pretty tame, particularly given how low it is this year with the drought.

Nevertheless, you still see wild things in it, particularly herons shopping for dinner in the morning hours, these majestic birds lording over a pretty urban environment.



So I
like
these
horses
for
the
way
they
put

the wild back into the Grand. They also pick up a heavy horse theme from the works at the Meijer Gardens, notably the American Horse, which lots of Grand Rapids people would be familiar with. And in the Public Museum, pretty much jutting into the river a little to the left of the blue bridge, is a round glass-walled room housing an old Carousel of horses. So while the horses won't win any prize for the sheer artistry of the work, I suspect they'll get people thinking about the river itself.

We'll see how the kids respond to it when they show up tomorrow. I do know that this piece—quite literally just a bunch of chainsaw sculpted logs shaped as fishing bears put in a fountain behind the Ford museum—was a top ten hit last year, presumably because it was in a very central location, it was so accessible to all ages, and it was a brilliant use of the existing fountain.

I expect the pack of wild horses in the rather tame Grand achieve a similar effect this year.

LEARNING TO OVERCOME THE PUBLIC OPINION INDUSTRY, AT HOME AND ABROAD

There is an *American* pain and a volatility in the face of judgment by *elites* that stem from a deep and enduring sense of humiliation. A vast chasm separates the poor standing of *Americans* in the world today from their *recent* history of greatness. In this context, their injured pride is easy to understand.

In the narrative of history transmitted to schoolchildren *in states purchasing Texas-selected textbooks* and reinforced by the media, [], *Americans* were favored by divine providence.

[snip]

If *America's* rise was spectacular, its fall *is accelerating* and unsparing.

As the Administration continues to insist that the widespread protests against US symbols are merely a response to a crappy video, more and more people are rebutting that by describing the many grievances people in the Middle East have with the US. There's Fouad Ajami's unselfconscious version emphasizing pride, which I've parodied above (the italics and links are the changes I've made). Robert Wright talks about drones, Palestine, US troops in Muslim

countries. Flynt Leverett talks about some of the same issues as Wright as well as our support for dictators.

And while I agree with Wright and Leverett, I want to look more closely at something Leverett somewhat acknowledges, but which AJE host Shihab Rattansi discusses at more length in the segment including Leverett.

As Leverett notes, in countries where there are no dictators policing speech in the Middle East, the US will need to engage in public opinion much more aggressively—and ultimately, the US will need to acknowledge that its policies are not favorable to most residents of the Middle East.

But as Rattansi notes, our allies—Saudis and Qataris and others—are funding the Salafists behind the protests. These Saudi-funded Salafists are using the opportunity created by the Arab Spring and many of the same tools used by Arab Spring protestors to create the image of a PR problem that will polarize the region and with it create a demand—even among some in the US, I suspect—for more authoritarian control. The Saudis are spending money to, among other things, create a desire for less democracy. And they do that by tapping into and magnifying that underlying discontent.

And we don't seem to understand how—or frankly, have the leverage—to respond to that.

That should surprise no one. The elite in the US don't have a response to utterly parallel efforts here in the US. We need look no further than the Islamophobic sources who funded the Innocence of Muslims in the first place.

But I think a more apt parallel is the Tea Party. It arose out of a very real discontent, largely rooted in the decline of the middle class that had already been channeled from class into race. But then oil oligarchs like the Koch brothers funded it and fed it into a carefully channeled protest theater. And it has had an effect very similar to what the Salafists are

trying to accomplish in the Middle East: generating electoral support for extremist candidates who in turn embrace policies that bring the country closer to oligarchy. And now both the Democratic and Republican parties are terrified of the protest theater the Tea Party can muster. Yet rather than engaging and winning on the issues, both parties cower before Tea Party confrontation, usually letting the Tea Party lead the debate further to the right.

As we talk about how to respond to unleashed public opinion in the Middle East—now being aggressively purchased by oligarchic elites—perhaps it's time to consider what we need to be doing better here at home? We have a tough time demanding that President Morsi more aggressively take on the Salafists when both parties shy away from taking on the Tea Party, either by calling out its now completely artificial status or by winning the debate on the issues.

Of course, there's an even better issue, both in the Middle East and here. One of the underlying sources of discontent is the effects of the neoliberal policies American elites (again, of both parties) continue to push. It's not improving the lives of average people, anywhere in the world. And so in the same way our policies on drones and Palestine need to improve if we want to win over public opinion, we also need to address another major underlying source of discontent that makes it so much easier to polarize crowds and make them desire more authoritarian solutions.

“THEY HATE US FOR OUR RELIGIOUS

FREEDOM”

As anti-American (and anti-Western) protest continue to spread across the Muslim world, the White House continues to claim the protests are all a response to the film, The Innocence of Muslims. Yesterday, Jay Carney said,

I think it's important to note with regards to that protest

that there are protests taking place in different countries across the world that are responding to the movie that has circulated on the Internet. As Secretary Clinton said today, the United States government had nothing to do with this movie. We reject its message and its contents. We find it disgusting and reprehensible. America has a history of religious tolerance and respect for religious beliefs that goes back to our nation's founding. We are stronger because we are the home to people of all religions, including millions of Muslims, and we reject the denigration of religion.

We also believe that there is no justification at all for responding to this movie with violence.

[snip]

I would note that, again, the protests we're seeing around the region are in reaction to this movie. They are not directly in reaction to any policy of the United States or the government of the United States or the people of the United States.

And he said something substantially similar in a gaggle a short time ago.

There are two problems with that.

First, the evidence in Libya that the attack, at

least, was planned in advance with insider help. The Telegraph provides more details on the compromised safe houses and some of the sensitive documents taken from the Consulate.

Then there are more specific contexts, such as President Hadi's continued efforts to consolidate power in Yemen, as Iona Craig lays out. Plus, there is more opposition to US policy in Yemen than in some other countries in the region.

I've even seen credible questions about the role of increasing food costs—the same kind of pressure that contributed to the Arab Spring last year.

But ultimately, too, there's the question of why in several countries local guards have apparently allowed protestors to access the targeted compounds. While that could be a response to the movie, there also seems to be a factionalism involved.

All that's not to say this always reflects a widespread opposition to US policies in all the countries involved, especially Libya.

But it's to say that the White House wants this to be about a response to a movie, rather than a more nuanced response to some of the challenges that remain in our relations to the Middle East, including some justifiable opposition to our policies, either present or past.

I can understand doing that to get through the immediate moment of protests. But if the White House continues to ignore these underlying issues after the riots die down, it will be a big problem.

“WITH A NECK LIKE A

JOCKEY'S BOLLOCKS" TRASH TALK

Yeah, about the title. No, I am not quite sure what it means. Maybe Marcy and other sundry mystery guests will be along to explain the damn thing.

What I can confirm is that it is unequivocally the single most awesome grouping of words I have seen in a very long time. So I am rolling with it baybee!

And, you know, leave it to the Irish, in this case Michael Higgins, who was not then, but is now, the President of Ireland. And, also, who is, by my marker, a man of and among men. I would quote Mr. Higgins more, but it would not do him justice. Watch the video.

Honestly, sincerely, really unequivocally, whatever the fuck, just listen to Michael Higgins eviscerate the American ethos. It is brutal and real.

Oh, before we go any further, I have a new chapeau. I will, and you can, thank the one and only, ever lovely, Phred for this wondrous occurrence.

Y'all have known I had an affinity for CHEESE since I was a child in elementary school. It was easy then, as there was no NFL team within hundreds of miles, and the one that was there was the Rams, and it was not all that compelling. No, the team of my youth and dreams was Lombardi's Packers. Fuck Dallas, Green Bay was, and is, the people's, and America's, team. Always has been. As the only team actually of the people, it must so be. Don't pitch that crap about teams that are corporately owned, or owned by narcissistic dicks like Jerry Jones.

Knowing my affinity for the once, always, and future real team of America – the ONLY publicly owned and locally controlled, NFL team, the Green Bay Packers, our friend Phred has

blessedly provided me with an official CheeseHead. It arrived a couple of days ago, and is the most awesome thing I have been given in a LONG time.



So, I
raise
my
Ronnie
Raygun
like
head
to the
Great
Cheese
In The
Sky.

Back to Michael Higgins, necks and bollocks. Watch the video. Higgins correctly identifies the wankers in life, I love it and ratify his identification. Precisely.

Now, on to the sporting side of life. Well, normally, Marcy or I post up Trash Talk whenever we are so inclined. Sometimes, however, itinerant Roving Reporters, like Mademoiselle Rosalind, get all uppity in our grill and force us to Trash.

Oh my. The ignominy of it all.

So, without further adieu, we shall lead off with sailing. Yes, I know, this is all a bit discomfiting for the normal Trash Talk aficionados. Whatta ya gonna do Mofo? We support our own Roving Reporters here at EW. And, by the way, Rosalind ain't no idle Roving Reporter either. Nope. Rosalind Sails the Seven Seas. Or at least those off of ~~Oxnard~~ the Pacific shore. Close enough for rock and roll. Rosalind wants to jaw about the America's Cup process. Yes, yes, I was doubting at first too; but after watching her link, it is pretty awesome.

Okay, now that we have covered "Greatest Athletes of Sailing", let us move with all due haste to NASCAR.

Hahahahahahaha, just kidding. I'm not going to lead, even secondarily, with media shills that go round in lefthanded circles as a profession. Won't do it. Can't do it. Not gonna do it. But, since the Formula One Circus is on it's mid-season month long hiatus, there is no more Fast Trash worthy of discussion.

That means, as far as active professional sports, My Bloody Valentine in Beantown, Massachusetts is about the biggest story going. And a pretty ugly story it is. You would have thought that for all the money John Henry et al. spent, they could have bought some better Lackeys. But noooooooooo. Y'all got yer teams; bring it with your talk.

It is hard to bring myself to talk about pre-season NFL. In my world, the Cards are in mid-season suckology form (seriously, no Kurt Warner, no fucking go), Peyton may not be the Peyton of old, but watch out, the Donkos are coming. But, mostly in my world, there is CHEESE. Tell us what is up in your NFL world. Unless it is the Steelers (just kidding; am trying to draw out the elusive Scribe).

Okay, that leaves the Lance Armstrong mess. I came *very* close to ripping hard on Lance Armstrong last night when the news of the abandonment of his defense was announced.

I made argument to Dave Zirin of the Nation and TJ Quinn of ESPN that there was no way to believe Armstrong if, unlike Roger Clemens, Armstrong was not even willing to play out the string of his potential remedies (in the legal domain, this is termed "exhausting one's remedies") supporting his innocence.

I am glad, largely thanks to Zirin, I did not angrily post that last night or this morning; I have reconsidered, a bit, after longer contemplation. Not by a lot, but by enough to discuss. I STILL think if you truly believe in your innocence, and/or have the balls and money to do so, you never stop saying so and defending on that line. That way, it is *pack fair and*

square, and nobody can say you weren't there to fight.

Don't kid yourself, there is a qualitative difference between Roger Clemens and Barry Bonds, and Lance Armstrong. Not only were there no competent, legally admissible, positive tests for the former two (as there were none for Armstrong); there were, more importantly, and unlike with Armstrong, never, at any time, any teammates who inculpated them (and, no, sorry, Andy Pettitte did NOT do so for Clemens).

Armstrong may not have had positive lab tests, but there were a boatload of former teammates and cycling adjuncts that were ready to testify against him and that is pretty harsh as an evidentiary picture with a jury looming. What does it mean without a trial and cross-examination? I don't know for sure, and neither do you or anybody else, because the one person who squelched that knowledge was.....Lance Armstrong. And, yeah, that does mean something to anybody that is not an apologist.

The above having been said, it is hard to argue with Armstrong's posit that further contesting was a waste of time. The appearance is quite right that Travis Tygart and USADA had it out for Lance Armstrong and that the cause was lost, and the fix in, from the start.

The thing that sticks in my craw is, and I understand more than a little about litigation of parallel prosecution matters (remember, the Armstrong case WAS ginned up by the same ethically questionable Federal investigator, Jeff Novitzky, as plied the Bonds and Clemens cases). Anything with Jeff Novitzky involved should invite a LOT of questions, always. Jeff Novitzky is the worst kind of crusading federal menace, the out of control power mad special agent.

You have to wonder if there is not a good reason there were no meaningful convictions resulting from the Bonds, Clemens and Armstrong cases which were the linchpins of Novitzky's

persecution. A persecution which originated with the overblown BALCO cases. There is left, in the wake, a legacy of leveraged persecution and failed prosecution; the common thread of which is Jeff Novitzky. There may be something to be drawn there.

But that is what we have now. When Jeff Novitzky and the DOJ cannot get a head on a criminal stick like Roger Clemens or Lance Armstrong, they show their pettiness, in this case Novitzsky, by moving to prosecution against Armstrong by authorities without such due process niceties as actual proof beyond a reasonable doubt. The USADA, was a perfect vehicle to gut shoot and eviscerate Armstrong. Make no mistake, if Novitzky could have done that to Bonds and Clemens, he would have. It is not right.

All of the above having been stated, upon information and/or belief, it is still depressing, and instructive, that Armstrong chose to not exhaust his remedies and play out the legal string. And, again as someone who has seen the devastating and wrong results that can occur from ultra-aggressive parallel prosecutions, such as we have just seen from Novitzky, DOJ and USADA, there can be a point to where it is no longer viable to fight in the face of the onslaught.

I see no reason that Lance Armstrong is wrong in that assessment here; however, his legal team had already worked up the defense. There would NOT have been all that much more legal expense necessary to expend to play out the string.

There was, however, a LOT of embarrassment in the form of ten or more former teammates and/or doctors formally testifying against him. That would have been even more devastating to Lance Armstrong, Inc. And that is why Lance pulled the escape hatch lever when and where he did. You cannot blame him, but you sure as hell cannot exculpate him, it is an effective legal admission.

By doing as he did, Lance Armstrong has insured that he will remain a duality in the sporting conscience – both the persecuted innocent and the epitome of cowardly guilty – both at the same time. Curiously, I kind of bite off on both as being valid. Neither may be individually right; neither will likely ever be proven wrong. So be it, and let the record so, conflictingly, reflect. The one thing you will never take away from Armstrong is what he has done to fight cancer. That sticks, and this may have been the best path for Armstrong to continue his work. If so, then it was a fair call for him to make.

Well folks, that is Trash for today. I am sure there is more (hey, if ya got some Little League world Series shit, bring it). Maybe you are in to polo, water polo or, ugh, soccer; whatever, if you want to yammer, this is your forum.

Rip This Fucking Joint!! (Oh, hey, is Bobby Keys one badass blowing bitch on the sax or what??)

PUSSY RIOT AND THE SPECTACLE OF PROTEST

Joshua Foust has been criticizing the attention paid to the Pussy Riot trial in controversial ways.

Before I explain where I believe he's wrong, let me assert that the most effective protests in the US in recent years came when gay service members and veterans chained themselves, in uniform, to the gate of the White House. That protest was by no means an isolated event. Thousands of people were organizing to pressure the government to repeal DADT, and DADT wouldn't have been repealed without that underlying organization. The protest offended a number of DADT repeal supporters, mostly because wearing uniforms violated restrictions against

protesting in uniform, but partly because participants in the protest were branded by some as self-promoters. Nevertheless, because the protest muddled with the symbols of power—the White House, the military, and proudly out service members—it made it far more risky for Obama to continue treating DADT repeal activists like he treats all others pressuring him on politics, by ignoring them.

When I talk about the spectacle of protest, this is what I'm referring to. The spectacle is not primarily about the number of celebrities—or even people on Twitter—responding to it (though of course the spectacle does increase the likelihood it'll go viral). It has to do with reprogramming symbols of authority in ways that undermine how they've been used. The White House protest, IMO, made sustaining DADT a slight on those men and women in uniform chained to the gate. The protest (and the subsequent charges) basically shuffled the symbolism tied to the White House and military in ways that might have been very risky for Obama.

The analogy to Kony is inapt

Which is just one of many reasons I believe Foust's analogy between Pussy Riot and Kony 2012 is totally inapt. Here's how Foust makes that analogy.

In a real way, Kony 2012 took a serious problem – warlords escaping justice in Central Africa – and turned it into an exercise in commercialism, militarism, and Western meddling. Local researchers complained about it, and a number of scholars used it as an opportunity to discuss the dos and don't of constructive activism.

In Russia, Pussy Riot's newfound Western fans are taking a serious issue (Russia's degrading political freedoms and civil liberties) and turning it into a celebration of feminist punk music and art.

I agree with Foust's assessment of the Kony 2012 campaign, and I told him on Twitter that I think it could discredit online activism in general, particularly formal campaigns.

But that doesn't make these two unlike movements the same. First, Foust claims both "commercializ[e] political action." Except that—as far as I know—there's not one organization focusing attention on Pussy Riot; it's not a formal campaign. As distinct from Kony 2012, no one entity is pushing Pussy Riot as an embodiment of its ideology and preferred solution (there is freepussyriot.org, but as far as I've seen, it's not driving the social media conversation on this and their twitter handle has fewer than 15,000 followers). And while Foust might argue all those who focus on Pussy Riot are primarily feminists or hipsters hijacking the Russian opposition movement, not only is there plenty of counterevidence to that, but it would still ignore the organic nature of the focus on Pussy Riot.

Moreover, to suggest that Pussy Riot is like Kony 2012, you'd have to ignore that Pussy Riot is an integrated part of Russia's opposition scene (a point Foust acknowledges), one that many Russian dissidents support. That is, the agency of the Pussy Riot protest starts in Russia, not in the US. It's really no more Foust's role to decide whether and how people should respond to Pussy Riot than it was Invisible Children's role to dictate what the response to Kony should be.

Foust misunderstands the spectacle of feminism

Then there's Foust's uneven understanding of how spectacle plays here. He gets at least part of what Pussy Riot was aiming to do.

Pussy Riot are clearly not expressing hatred of Orthodox Christianity, but they are protesting the Church's close relationship to Vladimir Putin and his regime. Hating Putin is not hating religion, unless Putin is now religion

in Russia.

But then he seems to entirely miss that Pussy Riot—not people on Twitter in the US—have created the spectacle here.

Focusing on the *spectacle* of Pussy Riot actually obscures the real issues that prompted their trial in the first place. Pussy Riot are not peasants grabbed off the road and put on trial for being women — they are rather famous (at least in Russia) political activists who got arrested for political activism.

After all, these women are famous—and they are therefore somewhat (though that is all relative in Putin’s world) protected from the worst that Putin might do to them—because they have created a series of spectacles, spectacles that were problematic enough that the Russian state chose to prosecute them, creating the spectacle that has generated Western attention. That spectacle serves as a mockery of Putin’s power, one with the bravery to laugh as they are sentenced. Indeed, their mild sentence is akin to what the government tried to do with the DADT protestors: an attempt to reassert authority, but not too much, because doing so would betray a weakness precisely on the symbols they’ve mobilized. If Putin sent Pussy Riot away for 7 years, it’d be a tacit admission—while the whole world is watching—that both his performed virility and his feigned religion are just acts, acts he can’t have questioned.

More significantly, Foust seems to misunderstand what role feminism plays in all of this (though he left this bit out of his Atlantic piece). Foust suggests the only reason people are paying attention is because the members are, “pretty girls in a punk band with a naughty name.” But of course, the reason they’re famous enough to have that attention comes from a bunch of stunts in which they wore masks, obscuring both their individuality but also their beauty (and masks

are playing a big part of the response). Moreover, to make this argument, he seems to ignore the heightened attention that Kasparov's arrest at the verdict has gotten; Kasparov may be a famous genius, but he's not physically attractive.

Foust's most telling statement, however, came when he tried to mock—complete with scare quotes and another use of the word “girls”—a comment from Chloe Sevigny.

It wasn't thousands of people rallying in the streets of Moscow for political freedom that got Le Tigre into Russia, it was three girls in a punk band showing up in her twitter feed. And she responded by going to a poetry reading in Manhattan.

[Chloe] Sevigny, in a white eyelet dress and flats, read a letter Ms. Alyokhina wrote long before the trial began, describing being cold and tired in detention. “It seems like it really won't get any worse,” Ms. Sevigny-as-Ms. Alyokhina said, with feeling. Ms. Myles read a letter the group wrote to Prime Minister Dmitri A. Medvedev.

“There's a Joan of Arc-type resonance,” she said afterward, “that they're standing up to patriarchy. It's poetry in and of itself.”

Just so we're clear: the band members of Pussy Riot are not analogous to Joan of Arc, who was burned at the stake by the English after leading French troops into combat.

[snip]

Amidst the “confront patriarchy” literature — I didn't realize Russia's

biggest sin against freedom was its male chauvinism

Ignore for a second that Foust misstates the analogy (Sevigny did not say Pussy Riot's acts were akin to leading a battle, she said they were akin to standing up to patriarchy), it's hard to understand how someone in this day and age equates "patriarchy" to "male chauvinism." I suppose Foust believes it is mere "chauvinism" when elected representatives tell "girls" they have to bear the children conceived of rape?

If you don't understand that patriarchy involves a larger system of power, one that affects both women and men, and one that creates precisely the kinds of silences that Putin uses to undercut his critics, then you're also not going to understand why the spectacle created by Pussy Riot—one that mocked both the literal mobilization of the Patriarch to reinforce Putin's power as well as the virility that is a key element of Putin's image—will have a resonance that is different from attacking Putin's corruption. It is fundamentally about mocking Putin's authoritarianism.

Once you concede that this spectacle is one created by these "girls" to delegitimize an authoritarianism that is fundamentally patriarchal, then criticizing the spectacle that results amounts to exercising an authority of really dubious origin.

The teaching opportunity

Now, ultimately, I think Foust is right to want people to look beyond just Pussy Riot to other victims of Putin's repression and I wish he had focused his writing on that effort.

Pussy Riot are part of a larger movement within Russia to demand political freedom, one that Putin's regime thugs are literally, physically beating back. American celebrities are right to be outraged about Pussy Riot's treatment, but it's a shame that so few seem to

have investigated what happens to the activists who *aren't* Western media darlings for their all-women punk bands with sexually suggestive names.

But I think his obsession with the celebrities involved (something I don't remember being a big part of Kony 2012) obscures the multiple kinds of agencies here. First, he dismisses (and has been, on Twitter) those who have responded to Pussy Riot's story independent of Madonna's or Sting's or Sevigny's interventions. If people respond to the spectacle Pussy Riot create directly, do the things celebrities have said that piss Foust off so much matter? And if they do, does insulting them for following Pussy Riot but not necessarily these celebrities encourage or discourage them from learning more?

On Pussy Riot and Plastic People of the Universe

When Foust and I first argued about this on Twitter, I argued (and he conceded) that an apt analogy was the Plastic People of the Universe trial in Czechoslovakia in 1976 that led directly to the formation of Charter 77 and the renewal of the Czech opposition. Foust claimed,

People thought they mattered but they never really catalyzed opinion

Without engaging too much in the historical accuracy of that statement, several things clearly arose out of that moment: the dissidents from the Prague Spring became active again, found a new way to conceive of their movement, which led to a practice that continued until such time as one of the people who reacted most directly to the trial became President of a free country. Moreover, the moment generated the same kind of celebrity focus—led by authors rather than actors, but also by rock stars—that helped raise the profile of the dissidents, probably making them somewhat safer from state repression. The focus also made it easier for these dissidents to use Radio Free Europe to

find ways around censorship in their own country. And that celebrity focus created a Czech dissident sub-industry that, if nothing else, made Czech literature and culture fashionable which in turn led to people who weren't celebrities at all engaging in the Czech cause (even if many of them came in through the problematic gateway drug of Milan Kundera).

The celebrities who were a part of that movement, though, were just a part of it—a catalyst, perhaps. Ultimately they may have made the dissidents inside Czechoslovakia stronger, but that was a mere tool the dissidents themselves used to persist for the next 13 years.

Now, the time is not 1976 anymore. There are many things, both positive and negative, that make media environment in which Pussy Riot works different from Plastic People and the dissidents who responded to their trial. And Putin is far stronger both domestically and internationally than the Czechoslovak client state was in then 1970s; the West, too, is in a far weaker position to criticize. So—like all contingent historical events—there's no telling how Pussy Riot will play out.

But what has happened here is that some dissidents in Russia chose to use spectacle as a tool to criticize Putin, a spectacle they and their supporters successfully magnified when he then prosecuted them for the underlying spectacle. Spectacle is a tool these women have chosen and used successfully. There's no telling whether it will be more successful than the efforts of individuals exposing corruption who die in secret. Most optimistically, it will become one moment in the larger protest movement Pussy Riot is very much a part of, like a bunch of activists chaining themselves to the White House were just one element of the movement that successfully repealed DADT. Perhaps it will make some in Russia more courageous. Perhaps it will mobilize more activists internationally.

But ultimately this spectacle came not from an

NGO in San Diego, it came from dissidents in Russia who are paying the price for creating it. So I'm not sure why criticizing Americans for responding to spectacle in the way the people who created it might have wished really helps Russians.

MEMO TO THE CLUELESS NEPOTISTICALLY SELF UNAWARE FLEXIBLE BAG OF MOSTLY WATER KNOWN AS LUKE RUSSERT

Has there ever been a more self unaware little ball of unworthy entitled Beltway nepotism than Luke Russert? I ask that as an honest question, because it is quite possible the answer is no. The story of Luke, son of Tim, is mostly public record.

Let's take a look at the latest from L'il Luke, humbly entitled:

Luke Russert: Like Me, Paul Ryan Is
Driven By Personal Loss

Well, golly, you just know it is going to be an intellectual and cognitively aware barnburner piece from that, no?

Of course it is, because that is the searing literary talent of the one and only Luke Russert; progeny of the Wonder of Whiteboard, Tim Russert. Let us inspect Luke's Hemmingwayesque prose:

I peppered the congressman with
questions about the health care law and

budget priorities for an interview a colleague would use on Nightly News. When we were done, we exchanged pleasantries and he got up to leave. After about 15 seconds, he came back in the room and asked me, "How old was your dad when he passed from heart disease?" I told him, "58." He said, "Mine was 55. My grandfather and great-grandfather both died from heart issues in their 50s, too." He then asked me if I was into fitness and inquired about my workout regimen. He told me to run more and that I needed to work up a sweat at least five days a week. We both joked about how preventative fish oil supplements had a bad aftertaste.

Oh, what personal pathos these two poor sons have seen. Luke, son of Tim, product of St. Alban's Academy in Washington DC, was left with a mother who worked for Vanity Fair, an estate and mansion on Nantucket Island fit for a king and a sinecure at NBC.

Bootstraps baby, bootstraps.

And L'il Luke's brother in hardscrabble upbringing, Paul Ryan? This common man of the people was born the son of a respected lawyer in a Wisconsin town known as Janesville and:

Mr. Ryan, the youngest of Paul M. and Betty Ryan's four children, was born in 1970 and grew up in Janesville's historic Courthouse Hill neighborhood...

Like Luke Russert's traumatic childhood, Paul Ryan suffered such various hardships as being voted Prom King and "Biggest Brown-Noser" in high school.

Oh, the pain they must have suffered, the poor dears.

The smooth stylings of Luke Russert's searing reportage continue:

Much has been written about Ryan's notorious P90X workouts and physical discipline. At one point he was a personal trainer in Washington to help pay the bills. Aside from the obvious health benefits, from many personal conversations I've had with him since that day in Baltimore, I believe Ryan keeps himself so physically fit in order to downplay the anxious feeling all children of heart disease victims have – the dreadful thought you could be next.

I can attest that this feeling spurs you to accomplish as much as possible because the idea that you're on earth for a limited time is imprinted in your mind daily. Ryan was elected to the House at 28, was Chairman of the House Budget Committee at 40 and now is his party's presumptive nominee for vice president at age 42. He's already accomplished in 42 years what most politicians would hope to do in a lifetime.

Yes, what bloody hell these two tortured souls must have faced. Previous to reading the poignant words of Luke Russert about the woe and tribulations he and Paul Ryan (who has effectively never been out of government employ) commonly faced in life, I used to occasionally think maybe my life could have been better somehow. If, you know, only....

I used to think there was a lot of suffering in the world. At least until I read Luke Russert and Paul Ryan's common brotherhood of upbringing hurt. But, relatively, in light of all the real suffering Russert and Ryan went through to be where they are today, I was one of the luckiest guys on the face of the earth.

For all the downtrodden out there, just be glad you have not suffered the "personal loss" of Luke Russert and Paul Ryan. We can all learn something from these bottom to the top, self

reliant, American success stories of will and perseverance.

Well, or better, we can call out these two smarmy, self serving, holier than thou, nepotistic fucking pricks for what they really are. One represents the death spiral of American journalism, and the other the grim reaper for the morals and social safety net our fathers, mothers, grandfathers and grandmothers fought, died and worked so hard to insure. Yeah, those really are the stakes.

So, you might think ~~Tiny Tim~~, er Luke's, tale of two forlorn, down on their luck, dandy pimperlins is over. Oh, no, there is a moving coda from Boy Wonder Russert:

So while Ryan is no doubt inspired by his faith, family, party and desire to shape the country in the ways he sees as best for the future, it should not be lost where much of his drive comes from – personal loss.

Personal loss. Yes. Of course. Like Russert and Ryan have some lock on fucking personal loss.

Please. Just get the fuck out, you simpering weenie naif. We all suffer personal loss, it is not yours to carry as a mantle of significance. We all have lost, or will lose, mothers, fathers, sisters, brothers and friends. What grandiose hubris you project with your sniveling, self serving tripe on behalf of yourself and Paul Ryan.

Get over yourself you candy ass punk; neither you, Ryan, me, not likely many, if any, of those actually able to read this article, are suffering the worst life has to offer. We are all fortunate sons and daughters, and you should just shut the fuck up.

If only the foregoing palpably, cloying, asinine bullshit were but the worst of the situation. But, sadly, it is not. No, the deeper problem is that this is the gilded hollow future of

journalism. At a time when print media, beat writers and old school journalism is dying like the plague has set in, this, L'il Luke Russert, is the harbinger of what's to come. How can you tell? Well, because the "senior talent" NBC ensconced in the hallowed throne of L'il Luke's father is the hollow and shallow dipstick known as Dancin Dave Gregory.

The suck up, Beltway Stockholmed Gregory is enough to make you puke, but he is par for the course for television networks that care more about scamming and plundering their viewers than playing to their common intelligence. NBC bastardized and cocked up the the London2012 Olympics big time; but that was just annoyance in sporting entertainment. It may have been craven, but it does not hold a candle to the intellectual and informational fraud they pull on their viewers via their news and political reportage every hour of every day.

L'il Luke Russert, and his suck up wet kiss to his soul mate in personal loss Paul Ryan, is but a symptom of the disease. It is a race to the bottom of the barrel, and with wet behind the ears, nepotistically installed, inbred Shetland ponies like Luke Russert, NBC and NBCNews.com are leading the field.

[Flexible Ugly Bag of Mostly Water]

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**I GUESS STEVE KING
WOULD CEDE THE ALL-
AROUND GYMNASTICS
GOLD TO RUSSIA'S**

VICTORIA KOMOVA?

At around mid-day, IA Congressman Steve King said the following:

"The argument that diversity is our strength has really never been backed up by logic," King told The Huffington Post. "It's unity is where our strength is. Our Founding Fathers understood that. Modern-day multiculturalists are defying that."

Not long after Steve King made that ridiculous comment, Gabby Douglas—who trained in IA for the last two years—became the first African American woman (in fact, the first non-white; no Chinese women have even won this) to win the gymnastics all-around gold.

The best gymnast in the world.

This evening, Chuck Grassley did what every other member of Congress has been doing during the Olympics: bragging about athletes to whom they can claim any ties. (All Chuckisms original)

Congrats to GabbyDouglas for GOLD in gymnastics. She a Virginian But she came to Iowa to live to train. I bleve like Shawn johnson

Gabby moved to IA, of course, so she could train with Chinese immigrant Liang Chow, who first moved to IA to coach University of IA's gymnasts in 1991 and became a citizen in 2002. Gabby is the second young woman Chow has trained to Gold in Grassley and King's state (he coached Shawn Johnsen as well).

Today, the US is the best in the world, at least for one glorious Olympic event. And we owe that strength precisely to our diversity.

I suppose Steve King wants to give that medal back?

Update: See also this great post oln how hard Gabby's mom worked to make this possible for her. It really conveys how inaccessible these expensive sports can be to potentially elite athletes because of economics.

BOLSHEVIK WINS GOLD FOR US

Here's how WSJ described Missy Franklin, who just won a gold in the 100-meter backstroke only 11 minutes after swimming a qualifier for the 200-meter freestyle, this morning.

Missy Franklin, Olympic Radical

[snip]

She's the latest incarnation of Mary Lou Retton, Mia Hamm and Michelle Kwan.

But when it comes to the Olympics and the world of elite swimming in 2012, that first impression is a deception. Franklin, the 6-foot-1, soon-to-be high-school senior from Centennial, Colo., isn't just an athlete who questions the conventional doctrine of Olympic stardom: She rejects it entirely. **Missy Franklin, America's new love, is a Bolshevik in swim goggles.**

[snip]

One standout is Franklin's devotion to remaining an amateur. Before these Games, she has resisted all temptation to cash in on her talent and swim professionally. "I really, really want to swim in college," she told the Journal earlier this year. She has turned down roughly \$100,000 in prize money and several multiples of that in endorsements. [my emphasis]

It is now radical for a young woman to forgo Wheaties money so she can get a free college education and continue living a relatively normal young adulthood. A 17-year old passing up instant cash is a Bolshevik.

Remarkably, Missy Franklin somehow managed to find some kind of motivation to win gold for something other than money.

Imagine that: a young American striving for personal excellence and her country, rather than money? We're definitely going to have to purge the Olympic program after this scandal.

Update: I realize now having watched the qualifier it was in freestyle, not backstroke.

FEAR & LOATHING MIX WITH BEAUTY & GREED IN THE OLYMPIC CAULDRON



The Summer Olympics are here! Yay! The Olympics, especially the summer ones, have become so commercialized,

politicized and oversold, on so many levels, that it is hard in some respects to get too excited about them. That said, there is still a powerful beauty and lure in the physical prowess of the athletes, the competition, the joinder of nations from around the globe, the spectacle and the always awesome pageantry of the opening and

closing ceremonies. To whatever extent the games ever had "purity", there is much less of it now; but there is still a lot of sporting, and viewing, value.

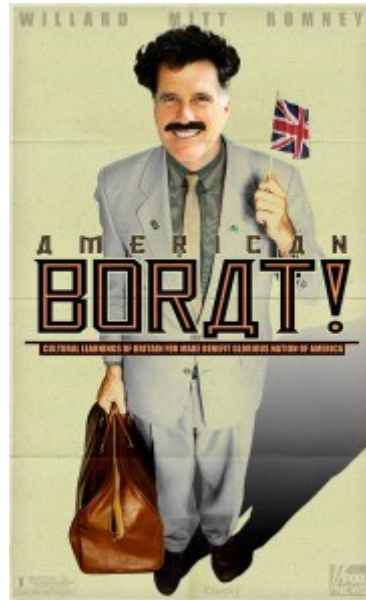
Not long from the posting of this article (well it will be two full hours for me and those on the west coast, which is totally bullshit), the opening ceremonies will commence. We Yanks in the States cannot of course, due to the fucking craven greed of NBC, see the opening ceremonies live. If that were the only unmitigated greed by NBC and the other purveyors of the Olympics.

I have always loved the opening and closing ceremonies. One of the most beautiful things I have ever seen was the closing of the 1994 winter Olympics at Lillehammer, with the moving tribute to Sarajevo by lamplight in the dark. Powerful stuff. As was the simply incredible, even if long, opening ceremony in Beijing last time around. I have seen a little of the gig on a bootleg feed from London; it is good, but nowhere near the over the top opulence of Beijing and some of the others. I am anxious to hear what you all think, and let this be a forum for just that, and all other things Olympic.

There are also a few other notes to be made. America's own Borat, Mittens Romney, brilliantly blurted out that London was not ready for the Olympic experience and that such was "disconcerting":

Thursday was supposed to be the easy day, when Mitt Romney would audition as a world leader here by talking about his shared values with the heads of the United States' friendliest ally.

Instead, the Republican presidential candidate insulted Britain as it welcomed the world for the Olympics by casting doubt on London's readiness for the Games, which open Friday,



saying that the preparations he had seen were “disconcerting” and that it is “hard to know just how well it will turn out.”

The comments drew a swift rebuke from Prime Minister David Cameron and, by day's end, a public tongue-lashing by the city's mayor as the Olympic torch arrived in Hyde Park.

“I hear there's a guy called Mitt Romney who wants to know whether we're ready,” Mayor Boris Johnson cried out to a crowd of at least 60,000. “He wants to know whether we're ready. Are we ready? Are we ready? Yes, we are.”

Cameron, responding to the candidate with a note of irritation, said that “of course it's easier if you hold an Olympic Games in the middle of nowhere,” an apparent reference to Salt Lake City. That city held the 2002 Olympic Winter Games, which Romney organized. The prime minister and the mayor are conservatives, making their scolding all the more embarrassing for the candidate, an otherwise sympathetic ideological ally.

Gots to love the Brits for giving Romney the

stiff upper lip. Mittens is truly the American Borat. At best. At this point, it is fair to say they loathe Mittens. But there is not just loathing out and about in London town, there is fear too.

The fear in London is of, what else, terrorism. And it is not an unfounded fear either. England, but London particularly, is a very integrated and multi-cultural place. I found Jason Whitlock's thoughts compelling:

There is less fear in England, and perhaps that is why I'm scared.

The threat of terrorism never leaves my mind.

The locals promise rain is inevitable here. The idyllic setting we've enjoyed in the days leading up to Friday night's opening ceremony will be disturbed by the reality of London's relentless summer drizzle, the locals swear.

The world's tumult is relentless here, too. It is, perhaps, just as inevitable that these Olympic Games will be touched by terrorism. London is not isolated. You can fly from the Middle East to Heathrow Airport in less than five hours. London's great strength, its diversity, makes it easy for extremists to hide in the open.

But the fear of terrorism is not just in London, is it? We in the States have just been touched by the suffocating force of that in Aurora Colorado. Where does crime end, and terrorism begin?

Weighty questions, and questions the American Borat, Mitt Romney, has not, and will never, answer. Romney is a two faced, say anything, flim flammer of the highest order. In terms of personal intellectual and moral honesty, Mitt Romney makes Barack Obama look like the proverbial George Washington by the cherry tree

as told by Parson Weems.

If Mitt Romney thinks the acknowledgement and preparedness of Britain and London is “disconcerting”, what the hell does he think is going on in the United States with the false flag security theater and Congressional ignorance of the degradation of American privacy and liberty that is being fraudulently accomplished by the security state in the name of the citizenry?

If even the leaders of the Congressional Intelligence Committees don’t have a clue, what in the world does Mitt Romney think he knows? What do the rest of us know? If London, with enough cameras, microphones, and prying eyes to make the NSA jealous, is so insecure that a tough guy mope like Jason Whitlock is afraid, and has terror on his mind, where are we here in the States?

So, there you have the fear, loathing, beauty and greed. All manifesting themselves before even the start of the opening ceremonies. It is a wondrously awesome, and somewhat distasteful, thing all at once.

But, for the moment, the opening ceremonies are magnificent. Enjoy and discuss!

[American Borat, by the way, is the work product of two of this blog’s most awesome friends: Twolf as artist, and Watertiger’s “Dependable Renegade” as publisher. We love both as if they were our own]

HOCKENHEIM, HIGHWAY STARS & AURORA

It is time for the *Formula 1 Großer Preis Santander Von Deutschland 2012*. There is that.

Then there is the fact Jon Lord has died. If you

do not know Jon Lord, he was a founding member of, and keyboard player for, Deep Purple. One of the more underrated keyboard players, and bands, of all time (by my book anyway). RIP

And, indescribably, twelve more souls died in Aurora, with scores more injured gravely. I would love to say something pithy, profound and appropriate. However, I have no clue what that would be.

A lot of other stuff has also transpired demanding extreme talking of the trash. The video embedded to the upper right is custom made by my daughter, Jenna, and I, from CGI runs of the Hockenheimring set to the sounds of the timeless Deep Purple classic *Highway Star*. All for this F1 Trash and wake for the Lord thread. Okay, mostly her work, but she swears even I can be taught the necessary skills. We'll see about that. With no further adieu....

Let's roll.

We are in the summer doldrums. No football. No basketball. Do they even play hockey in the States? I forget. I understand there is some kind of athletic contest coming up across teh pond. In a move that may well INCREASE the safety of one and all, in Olympic Village and the world over, actual stiff British upper lip troops will be filling in for corrupt, fraudulent and incompetent G4 Mercenary Contractors.

Other than that, there is the start of the second half of the baseball season and.....Formula One! This week is the German Grand Prix at Hockenheim.

Uh, BREAKING NEWS: My TeeVee just told me:

"For years people have been working to perfect the margarita. At last, the wait is over. Introducing Bud Light Lime Margaritas. The ready to drink margarita. With the refreshing twist of Bud Light Lime."

While I had heard of Bud Light Lime before, from Uncle Stanley McChrystal, this is something NEW and, apparently, wonderful. Or, you know, not.

At any rate, qualifying is about to go off at the German Grand Prix. Hockenheimring is a relatively flat, and traditionally very fast circuit. The video really gives a good feel for it. Although shorter than originally laid out to be, it is still nearly three miles long and presents numerous opportunities for overtaking.

At practice, the rain spoiled the fun, and especially so for the German favorite, Michael Schumacher. The Mercedes team may be further plagued by a five place penalty on the grid due to a gearbox change in Nico Rosberg's equipment. Things were brighter, however, for McLaren, who saw Jenson Button be fast with Lewis Hamilton close behind.

The skies do not look to clear for Saturday's qualifying, but the rain may hold off. [Quick addendum: watching Q3 now and the track is soaking wet. Both Alonso and Schumacher are radioing that it needs to be stopped, but the stewards do not appear so inclined. The ability of these drivers to keep their cars on the track in these conditions is simply stunning] Race day will be a crapshoot though. Updates after qualifying will be in comments below.

Which brings us to Aurora. I was still up early Friday morning when the first word of the tragedy started coming in. I thought about posting something, but was so numb there was just nothing to say. Not sure much has changed in that regard. The root facts are on the usual relentless babble stream of cable news etc. and I have not even checked in in a bit to see the latest. The one take that really stuck out to me was by David Sirota, who lives literally right by the scene in suburban Denver:

Confronting that question, of course, is mind-bending and painful – in the age of “War on Terror” agitprop that purposely defines terrorism in one specific,

narrow and politically convenient way, it's akin to the cognitive difficulty of pondering the size of the universe ... or, perhaps, death itself. It takes us out of our comfort zone and forces us to consider the causes of all kinds of extremism and violence – not just the foreign Islamic kind that we so flippantly write off as alien. Indeed, at a time when so many bloodlusting Americans cheer on our government proudly assassinating the imams who allegedly inspire Muslim terrorism, a shooting like this (if, indeed, it had nothing to do with Islamic extremism) begs us to wonder why we don't feel similarly bellicose or enraged at the inspirations fueling so many other forms of terrorism – whatever those inspirations may be.

These contradictions and omissions, of course, are why such a question will almost certainly be ignored in the now-practiced kabuki theater of horror porn – the kind where vote-seeking politicians issue meaningless platitudes, ratings-stalking reporters breathlessly recount the gory details and attention-starved pundits preen in front of cameras to prognosticate about the electoral implications of mass murder in a presidential swing state. Carefully avoiding the T-word, it is a conspiracy of distraction and reduction, playing to our reflexive desire for soothing diversions and simple answers. The conspirators expect that when the cameras eventually pan away from the cataclysm, we will slip back into hyper-sleep for another few weeks, until the next massacre hits, and then the cycle will begin anew.

Yep. About right.

There may not be much front line sports on this

weekend, but there is certainly a lot to talk about. What have you all been up to? What is on your mind? Let's talk.