

# MEDIA FAILURE: GATES AND CROWLEY NEED TO PERSONALLY LEAD



graphic by tonic .com

Yesterday morning I posted (Henry Louis Gates' Contempt Of Cop) on the legal implications of the Henry Louis Gates arrest thrust into the national consciousness by President Obama with his response to a question at Wednesday night's prime time healthcare press conference. The discussion here was outstanding, however in the major media forums of print, and especially television news and talk programming, the situation has devolved and cleaved into the all too predictable he said/she said pitting of one side versus the other. Left versus right. White versus black. Conservative versus liberal. Law and order versus criminal. Yadda, yadda yadda.

In short, what passes for media and journalism in this country today has failed the public audience it is supposed to serve. Again. A disappointing, but certainly not shocking result.

None of us, and none of the chattering media, were there at the Crowley-Gates scene, but we never really are for these moments in life and history; we still learn and live vicariously through them. By no means was Gates' conduct exemplary in the encounter, it simply was not. As far as the encounter itself, he was every bit as responsible for the escalation, and quite arguably more so, as the officer, James Crowley. By the same token, Crowley is the trained professional, who teaches other officers how to handle and diffuse situations exactly like this one, and he did not acquit himself well at all either. But that is as to the facts and interpersonal dynamics; from a legal standpoint, Gates' conduct was clearly and unquestionably completely legal. Irrespective of his conduct,

Gates' arrest was patently false and illegal; you would think some of the media's vaunted "experts" might could point that out.

The Crowley-Gates incident, however, provides a great teaching moment from both points of view, because each side made their point with classically poor conduct; we can all learn much from both. It is a perfect, and for once not tragic, vignette from which to discuss lingering and important issues of race in America. We owe both sides of the incident, Mr. Gates and Mr. Crowley, as well as the President and ourselves, the duty to take advantage of the moment and raise the discourse.

The media, and the citizens it serves, need to stop debating the legality of the arrest, because there really is no valid legal dispute there. The arrest itself was illegal. The national conversation should accept that, leave it behind, and move to the ground of what happened in the interpersonal dynamics of the two protagonists, what it meant to each other and what it means to our national collective. The dynamic occurring between Crowley and Gates takes place every second of every day between whites and blacks as well as police and citizens of all colors. Let the focus be on defusing the tension in every one of those encounters in the future through the lessons learned here.

It is time for Henry Louis Gates and Sergeant James Crowley, and the media that will cover them and feed their causes, to quit the personal posturing, step into each other's shoes and lead us to a better place. Their respective backgrounds should make them two of the most perfectly suited individuals possible for the task. If Henry Louis Gates and James Crowley are each the men they claim to be, they will start the process together and force the recalcitrant media and public to follow. Are they such men, or just the petty posturers they have each been to date?

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# BYE BYE AMERICAN PIE

✘ As most of you know by now, automobiles are personal to me. I grew up around cars, car people and car racing. And I grew up in America of the 60s and 70s. Whence I came from Baseball, Hot Dogs, Apple Pie & Chevrolet wasn't just a slogan, it was a root truth and way of life.

My parents moved west for a good climate for my father's asthma and so that he could open up a new car dealership. Years before I was born, that's what he did. The gleaming edifice at right is it after being constructed but before the stock arrived for the grand opening. The photo on the left is at the ribbon cutting. The man on the left is my father; the man on the right his partner and the little girl in the middle his partner's daughter. I was still a few years from being born, ergo I am not pictured. It started out as a Studebaker/Chrysler/Imperial dealership, but was converted somehow (not quite sure on this) to a Chevrolet dealership after my father died when I was age two. So I have roots in both of the big news items of today in autoland, the bankruptcy of General Motors and the emergence of Chrysler. The third leg, Studebaker, died long ago and was the catalyst for our move to Chevrolet. As went the sturdy Studebaker, so almost went the mighty GM.

All of the foregoing has made this a very bittersweet day for me. There is something at once both greasy and wonderful about the greater automotive business. But ask Rayne or Marcy or anyone from Michigan or anywhere teh biz iz, anyone around it for any substantive amount of time; it gets under your skin and in your blood. In a profound way. It was Americana; it was us. General Motors was bigger than The Phone Company and it was bigger than Big Brother.

✘ Today, the General, at least as we knew it,

is gone. It has been bankrupted, placed into Chapter 11 and replaced by talk of "The New GM" which will emerge. Don't be distracted by the shouting points of the minute; this is an important and transcendent day. I have had so many thoughts, on so many tangents and planes; but I cannot relate all of them in coherent and linear thought. So, I want to adopt and incorporate some thoughts by Dan Neil of the Los Angeles Times. Please, when you are done reading this post, go read Dan's full article, it deserves it.

For those that think GM has lost its importance, think it is dissociated from the status of being equated with baseball, hot dogs and apple pie, chew on this:

Surely a company, a country, that could produce such an object [the American car business and General Motors] would last forever.

...

In the midst of the deepest recession since the 1930s, it's hard not to see GM's bankruptcy as a signal moment in a larger history. If mighty GM can fail, cannot also the United States? And the answer is, absolutely.

This is the lesson of GM's bankruptcy, and it has little to do with market share and miles per gallon. It's a rebuff of the notion of exceptionalism. Any organization that fails to sufficiently safeguard its means of self-correction and reform, that forsakes long-term investment for short-term gain, that piles up debt year after year, will eventually fail, no matter how grand its history or noble its purpose. If you don't feel the tingle of national mortality in all this, you're not paying attention.

Man, I wish I had written the previous words. Prophetic and true, in every regard.

In his book "The Fifties," David Halberstam described what many regard as the moment of GM's original sin: In 1958, after a long-standing prohibition, it became permissible to discuss the company's stock price in management meetings.

From there, it was only a matter of time before the company twisted in Wall Street's wind and strategic decisions were calibrated according to dividend pennies.

I have my own theory. In 1999-2000, GM had a golden opportunity to right its ship by backing Democratic presidential candidate Al Gore. This might seem counter-intuitive, at least, since the auto industry has long postured against Democratic candidates as being pro-regulation and anti-business. Gore himself is an avowed enemy of the internal-combustion engine.

And yet, by backing Gore, who had the support of organized labor, GM would have gained enormous goodwill with the United Auto Workers, goodwill it desperately needed as it attempted to downsize in the new century.

Gore also argued for universal healthcare, a program that, had it become reality, might have relieved GM and the other domestic carmakers of that burden.

Dan Neil has always been not only a good auto beat writer, but a cogent observer of Americana. This is the type of writing talent that is being sapped from the LA Times, Otis Chandler's LA Times, at lightning pace.

From a certain historical altitude, GM's problem is fairly simple to appreciate: Call it a prosperity hangover. The

company acquired enormous momentum in the postwar boom when the United States was the world's only functioning economy. With no domestic peers and no overseas rivals, in a society frantic for mobility and flush with cash, GM became the colossal incumbent it was.

In the decades since 1962 – the peak of its market dominance – GM's singular dilemma has been servicing its own over-scaled nature as it competed against a succession of younger, smaller and more agile companies, primarily from Japan

What is Neil's conclusion? The same I have; and, again, I could rephrase it and whatnot, but he said it better first:

It will be painful, it will be ugly and there will be many losers, but GM will emerge out of bankruptcy, in all likelihood before the end of 2009. When it does, it will have shed many of its historical burdens and will still possess a talented workforce, significant physical assets and some of the best minds in the car business. A restructured GM will be a force to reckon with. If I worked for Ford or Toyota, I might be getting a little insomnia by now.

Yeah, exactly. Take a stroll back and remember what was said about Lee Iococca and Chrysler a scant couple of decades ago when they took a crash bailout. Paid back with interest. And that was Chrysler; *this* is General Motors. Is their return assured; heck no. Is the potential still there for a market killer? You bet. The only question is whether it will be realized. Let's hope that it has the vitality left to grow as big as it once was and takes the American economy with it. Or even just a solid part of such a movement. We still need GM either way.

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# BED DINNERTIME FOR BONZO GONZO

Hello Americans, it's Friday! Are you mystified, bewildered and puzzled? Well I sure as heck am. Guess who's coming to dinner? This weekend's White House Correspondent's Dinner that is. From The Swamp:

But now The Sleuth reports on a certain high-value guest who will lend some enhanced interest to the Houston Chronicle's dinner party, which is going against conventions, perhaps, but is certain to get some memos out of its guest at the black-tie fete:

Alberto Gonzales, the former attorney general in the Bush administration, which, as we've all been reading lately, went to some legal lengths to authorize harsh interrogations of detainees in the "war on terror" – such as waterboarding – and which, by the graces of the Obama administration, may escape any legal liability for any of that.

The Washington Post's Sleuth suggests that "Gonzo would be a little bashful about showing up at a place that will be jam-packed full of the new guard in the Obama administration and the very Democrats in Congress who drove him from office. But no, he'll be there all right this Saturday night. Gonzales is a confirmed guest of the Houston Chronicle, his old hometown paper.

This is a ~~perp~~-chump walk if I ever saw one. What kind of naive mental midget thinks this is a good idea for a social outing for himself? AGAG, that's who. Jeebus, the jokes just about write themselves, and I invite one and all to do

just that.

It has been a long week, and I was stuck in court much of the day. I will be looking at a couple of things now that I am settled in, but in the meantime consider this an open thread for a little relaxation, breaking news, trash talk, etc. Oh, and by the way F1 Circus afficionados, this weekend is the Gran Prix de Espana.

And because there is no trash without football trash, it seems the National Favre League may be back in business. Oh and one of the Deetroit Lions is promising playoffs.

"I won't make a prediction about how many games we're going to win, but I will say this: We will definitely make the playoffs this season. Believe it or not we weren't far off last year. Almost every game we could have won, we were one play or one player short. Except for Tennessee on Thanksgiving, they just came out and beat us to sleep. They manhandled us, but nobody else did."

Playoffs?!?!?!?

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## THE VALUE OF THE HOMETEAM

✘ Sports are a fickle thing, they bring out the best and the worst of people. Professional sports franchises often come, in a way, to define their cities. Pittsburgh, home of the Steelers. Boston, home of the Red Sox. Detroit, home of the Red Wings. But what is their intrinsic value? What does it mean when they leave? The City of Phoenix may be about to find out:

Less than an hour before the National



Hockey League commissioner planned to broker a deal to sell the Phoenix Coyotes and strip team owner Jerry Moyes of his duties Tuesday, Moyes filed for bankruptcy to sell to his own buyer.

Moyes, as part of a Chapter 11 reorganization filing, agreed to sell the team for \$212.5 million to a BlackBerry wireless magnate who plans to move the team to a yet-to-be determined location in southern Ontario, Canada.

The move is not a certainty. Already, the NHL and Glendale, which leases Jobing.com Arena to the Coyotes, have objected to Moyes' tactics. And other investors could outbid BlackBerry executive Jim Balsillie's PSE Sports & Entertainment LP.

But the Coyotes, who have played in metro Phoenix since 1996, habitually have lost money in the desert, first when they shared an arena with the Phoenix Suns in downtown Phoenix and most recently in Glendale.

Moyes, who since 2001 has invested more than \$310 million in the team, declined to be interviewed. Earl Scudder, his financial and legal adviser, said Moyes had no option but to file for bankruptcy because that was the only way to void the team's lease with Glendale.

There are so many threads here it is hard to know where to start. The arrogance of an owner. The bankrupt state of a national sports franchise. And not just any hockey franchise either, one run by the Great One, the greatest hockey player ever, Wayne Gretzky and playing in one of the newest most state of the art single sport dedicated stadium in the league. Oh, and hey, does the line "no option but to file for bankruptcy because that was the only way to void the team's lease with Glendale" not sound an

awful lot like the mantra of the Obama Administration and the auto manufacturers trying to shed those pesky dealership agreements?

So, apparently the market value of the Phoenix Coyotes is 212.5 million – if the team is shipped off to somewhere in southern Ontario, Canada. I don't know the value if they stay in Phoenix, we may find that out soon. What is the value of the team to the city above and beyond that and how should it play into consideration in BK Court? Now, with the Coyotes and Phoenix, this is somewhat of a theoretical exercise compared to big time franchises like the Steelers, Red Sox etc., but there is *some* value there. Should that be considered?

What do you do about the stadium lease? The presumption is that can be blithely voided. This stadium is a huge issue:

The move shocked Glendale, which contributed \$180 million for the \$220 million arena that opened in 2003. For the city's hefty investment, the team signed a 30-year agreement with an early-termination penalty of more than \$700 million.

There are only so many ice capades shows and big enough concert acts to fill a joint the size of Jobbing.com Arena. What becomes of the city's investment and the property that resulted? What about the fans that have been loyal to the Coyotes, are they owed anything. In all honesty, Phoenix is a Suns, D'Backs, Sun Devils and, for the time being anyway, Cardinals town. The Coyotes were always an afterthought, but still, there are more than a few. This has happened to more established franchises to a degree before, to wit the Seattle SuperSonics most recently.

I fully understand that I have asked more questions than I have answered, but there are some perplexing ones in play here. I am interested in the thoughts of people from different regions and perspectives. Oh, and hey,

to our Canadian friends, do you really want the Coyotes back? After all, Phoenix stole them from Winnipeg to start with. What comes around goes around, eh?

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## THE NEW JOURNALISM



graphic by allthingscahill

Sometimes tectonic shifts are underfoot and society fails to recognize the acts and effects. Such is the case with journalism and its daily outlets, newspapers and television. Newspapers are dying left and right, those that are not are struggling to stay alive and relevant. The most recent glaring example is the Boston Globe.

The Boston Globe has been published for over 137 years and, over that period, became one of the grand ladies of the news press. You would think that the purchase of, and partnership with, the Globe in 1993 by the New York Times would place the Globe in a position of strength in even these perilous times. Not so. From Eugene Robinson in today's Washington Post:

Despite the whole Red Sox vs. Yankees thing, employees of the Boston Globe were mostly relieved in 1993 when the paper was bought by the New York Times Co. for an astounding \$1.1 billion. If the era of local family ownership had to end, nestling beneath the wing of one of the world's great newspapers seemed the best alternative. And if the Times was willing to pay so much, it must have been serious about putting quality ahead of the bottom line.

That was then. Now, after several rounds of painful cutbacks and layoffs at the Globe, the Times is squeezing a further

\$20 million in savings from the Boston newspaper's unions – and threatening to shut down the paper if the demand is not fully met. The economics of our industry are cruel and remorseless, but still it's alarming to witness what looks like an act of cannibalism.

To be fair, the Globe is reportedly on pace to lose about \$85 million this year. The New York Times Co. is hardly in a position to swallow a loss of that magnitude, given that the company's flagship newspaper is waging its own fight against a rising tide of red ink.

So that is the background for the discussion I want to have. My proposition is that it is not just the financial status of the major newspapers in decline, it is also, and even more significantly, the quality of content. Quite frankly, the traditional press has become deficient in both content *and* quality. I am not sure that it has ever been so apparent as in the last two to three weeks on the issue of the complicity of the United States government in a demented torture regime.

We started this discussion in earnest a little over two weeks ago when Marcy Wheeler scooped the world by revealing that Khalid Sheikh Mohammed Was Waterboarded 183 Times in One Month and Abu-Zubaydah 83 times. Marcy didn't get handed the information by a governmental press flack and she didn't print it as a result of a leak from some coddled and conflicted secret source with an agenda. Nope, she did it the old fashioned way, she earned it by doing the tedious grunt work of reading the memos and documents. The very work the traditional press shirked. Perhaps they couldn't fit it in between their martinis and cocktail weenies.

Marcy's scoop out in front of the rest of the media world was not isolated; she did it again yesterday in relation to John Conyers, head of the House Judiciary Committee, along with Jerry

Nadler, Howard Berman and Bill Delahunt writing to the National Archives to demand Zelikow's dissenting memoranda *and* related material. In fact, the only two news sources even close to Emptywheel on the story were Spencer Ackerman at the Washington Independent and Zach Roth at TPM Muckraker, two other internet based sources. And Emptywheel not only reported the letter and contents, she was spot on with the legal analysis of what it really meant:

That's because if the memo isn't there, then not only is it suggestive of criminal intent, but it also violates the Presidential Records Act.

That is precisely right, and precisely what wasn't reported by our old friends the traditional press, who were late on the story and lame on the analysis. The first main paper to hit the story, the Washington Post, finally got something up on their website last night and datelined for today, May 5. The Post came in long after Ms. Wheeler had posted, and published an article containing no cogent analysis and rehashed from months ago tidbits that the coming OPR report may make disciplinary referrals for Yoo and Bybee. Thanks for nothing WaPo, we already knew that. This is the same sugar coated type of nothing I commented on in relation to the secret source love poem Mark Mazzetti and Scott Shane wrote Sunday to assist the Condi Rice/Porter Goss rehabilitation tour:

I am a little disturbed by the sanitary descriptions and deference Mazzetti gives it even now. The stories of "the dispute and concern" in the Bush administration are left standing as some kind of reasonable discourse. It wasn't. It was the discussion of a group of children that murdered the neighbor's dog for kicks and didn't want to admit it. It should be treated as what it is, not sugar coated and given the patina of reasonable discourse.

The reporters have become the village they were designed to report on. Self puffed on their own importance and place. The working press is a critical part of society and a necessary hedge on government. The fourth estate is important; they better wake up and get their butt in gear, because right now they are just getting it kicked.

So the new paradigm involves dedicated and dogged blogger journalists competing head to head with the biggest, best and brightest of the traditional press. It is not an unusual occurrence when a blogger like Marcy Wheeler takes the old newsmen to the cleaners, it is now such an everyday event that we no longer even notice. Pretty soon they will even be winning the Pulitzers and other lofty prizes of journalism, and rightly so.

All of the foregoing having been said, I want to remind people of the effort we have underway to gear up the work, effectiveness and exposure of Marcy Wheeler. Two weeks ago, Jane Hamsher started the Organic Blogging Project to do just that. The folks that read here have been nothing short of remarkable in their response, having raised in excess of \$64,000 to date. But I want to renew the call to action at this point and make sure that everybody knows this is not just another standard (even if laudable) "pledge week" effort to help pitch in for a blogger. This effort has as its goal to create a new working investigative dynamic to pick up where the normal pros have dropped off.

Marcy Wheeler, Emptywheel and Firedoglake are The New Journalism. Support the future and start something new. This is an opportunity to invest in the startup and be a part of something transformational. As Muhammed Ali would say, shock the world!

Get in on the action here.

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# THE CLARION CALL OF GIDEON'S TRUMPET

✘ A few days ago, on March 18, fell the 46th anniversary of a momentous day in American jurisprudence, the day the decision in *Gideon v. Wainwright* was rendered. Prior to *Gideon*, criminal defendants in the United States had a right to be represented by counsel, but not the right to have counsel appointed if they could not afford their own attorney. It was a watershed moment of enlightenment that is worthy of a fresh look.

Clarence Gideon was wrongly charged with breaking and entering a pool hall that had been burglarized, all based on a false accusation. Gideon was a poor man who lived in a rooming house and literally had but \$25 to his name. From Wiki:

He appeared in court and was too poor to afford counsel, whereupon the following conversation took place:

The COURT: Mr. Gideon, I am sorry, but I cannot appoint Counsel to represent you in this case. Under the laws of the State of Florida, the only time the Court can appoint Counsel to represent a Defendant is when that person is charged with a capital offense. I am sorry, but I will have to deny your request to appoint Counsel to defend you in this case.

GIDEON: The United States Supreme Court says I am entitled to be represented by Counsel.

Gideon was forced, therefore, to act as his own counsel and conduct a defense of himself in court, emphasizing his innocence in the case. Nevertheless, the jury returned a guilty verdict, sentencing him to serve five years in the state penitentiary.

From his prison cell at Florida State Prison, making use of the prison library and writing in pencil on prison stationery, Gideon appealed to the U.S. Supreme Court in a suit against the Secretary to the Florida Department of Corrections, Louie L. Wainwright. He argued that he had been denied counsel and, therefore, his Sixth Amendment rights, as applied to the states by the Fourteenth Amendment, had been violated.

But what the Supreme Court gave in *Gideon* is under an attack that is destroying one of the tenets of the modern due process guarantee in the American criminal system. In a chilling opinion piece in the March 10, 2009 Washington Post, former Vice-President Walter F. Mondale, who as Minnesota Attorney General participated along with AGs from 21 other states in *amici* support of Gideon's demand for appointed counsel, details just how far the nation has regressed:

Yet states across the country routinely fail to appoint counsel to people who are genuinely unable to afford representation on their own. A report published by the Brennan Center for Justice at NYU Law School last fall, "Eligible for Justice," found that if Gideon were to face criminal charges in Florida today, he might well be denied a public defender. Under Florida law, he could be disqualified for counsel if he has assets exceeding \$2,500 (excluding a house), a car valued above \$5,000, or had posted bail of more than \$5,000, even if none of those assets permitted



him to pay the retainer – often several thousand dollars – that defense lawyers routinely charge.

...

Sadly, Gideon's chances of getting counsel would be worse elsewhere. In New Hampshire, he could be found ineligible for counsel if he had a home valued at more than \$20,000, even if he could not sell the home in time to finance his defense and even if selling it would leave him homeless. Courts in Virginia could deny him counsel because of the amount of money possessed by family members, even if Gideon had no power over that money.

Of course the right to counsel is under attack, what essential due process right under the Constitution isn't? We talk almost daily about illegal wiretapping, datamining and other invasions of privacy, illegal detention and torture, manipulation and intimidation of the press, parallel proceedings and intimidation of family members to circumvent individual's right against self incrimination. All under attack thanks to an increasingly hungry authoritarian state, war on terror, war on drugs and a perpetuated state of fear. It is a war on the bill of rights; a war on the citizenry.

There is plenty every day on the more hot button Constitutional attacks, today let's remember Clarence Gideon and what his story stands for. As the New York Times related last November, public defenders in every federal state and local jurisdiction are overworked, underpaid and unappreciated. In seven states, public defenders' offices are refusing to take new cases and/or suing to have their caseloads reduced; citing overwhelming workloads that they say undermine the constitutional right to counsel for the poor.

Mondale puts the bigger picture in perspective:

Many European countries provide such

representation to indigent civil litigants. The backtracking that we are experiencing in the area of criminal representation undermines these efforts to move forward in the civil area. Our justice system depends on the idea that everyone is to be treated fairly, but a lack of resources is affecting the progress the Gideon decision brought to our criminal justice system and is blocking progressive efforts to extend the right to counsel in certain civil cases.

This month marks the 46th anniversary of the ruling in *Gideon v. Wainwright*. It is crucial that the states rededicate themselves to providing competent defense counsel to all people facing criminal charges who cannot afford to pay. The federal government, too, has an important role in providing the states with technical assistance, monitoring their compliance and enforcing the constitutional right to counsel. The promise of *Gideon* is ringing hollow, both for defendants, who count on competent counsel for their freedom, and for our society, which counts on the courts to achieve fair and reliable results. We cannot move forward until we stop the erosion of *Gideon's* promise to criminal defendants.

Fritz Mondale is right to sound the call of *Gideon's* Trumpet. We all should. Due process is not a natural force of nature, it is the work of a conscious and determined society; you have to want due process, fight for it and struggle to insure its application in the most heinous cases and circumstances that test your will. The Founding Fathers planted the seed, it is time to stop leaving the fruit withering on the vine.

You live in towns, cities, counties and states that have public defender programs. They work hard and are underpaid. Give them a kind thought

every now and then and vote to increase their budgets and capabilities. It is your Constitution at work.

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## TWO BIFFOS CELEBRATE ST. PADDY'S DAY



Given that today is St. Paddy's Day, I thought I would remind you all of the cutting edge journalism I provided last May when I reported from the home of Barack Obama's Irish forebears, Moneygall, County Offaly. (Obama's hometown paper is just now catching up and they don't even have such a swell photo, taken by my father-in-law with the bustling metropolis of Moneygall in the background.)

As I reported then, Offaly is not only mr. emptywheel's home county, but also the home of Ireland's Taoiseach (pronounced "Tea-shack"), Brian Cowen.

There's a slur used for Offaly men in Ireland (Cowen is, as I understand it, sort of proud of it): BIFFO, or, "Big Ignorant Fucker from Offaly).

As luck would have it, the BIFFOs running both countries of which I am a citizen got together today and—just now catching up the cutting edge reporting I did last May—they spoke of their mutual ties to Offaly.

PRESIDENT OBAMA: Hello, everybody. Happy St. Patrick's Day.

I just want to say that we are incredibly honored to have the Taoiseach here, and his entire team. This is an affirmation of one of the strongest bonds between peoples that exist in the

world. You know, when you think about the history of Ireland and the enormous impact it has had on our own history, and the fact that you've had people from Ireland who have shed blood on behalf of this country's independence and its freedom, that it has had probably as much impact on our culture and our traditions as any country on earth.

The bond and the friendship that is felt between the United States and Ireland is something that I think everybody understands, but as the Taoiseach just mentioned, we can't take for granted and we have to continually build upon.

And so this visit gives us an opportunity to talk about some of the very important bilateral issues that we face; also to talk about some of the global issues that both the United States and Ireland want to take leadership in. We are grateful for the lasting friendship that exists between us.

I, personally, take great interest on St. Patrick's Day because, as some of you know, my mother's family can be traced back to Ireland – and it turns out that I think our first Irish ancestor came from the same county that Taoiseach once represented. So we may be cousins – (laughter) – we haven't sorted that through yet. But even if by blood we're not related, by culture and affinity, by friendship and mutual interest, we are certainly related. And this gives us an opportunity to just continue to strengthen the incredible bonds that we have between the two countries.

So thank you so much.

Q Will you visit – President, will you visit –

PRESIDENT OBAMA: I hope so.

TAOISEACH COWEN: Can I first of all thank President Obama and Secretary of State and all his team for the wonderful welcome here to the White House. As President Obama has said, it's a great tradition here in the United States for a warm welcome for Ireland, and we deeply appreciate that welcome. And as I said, in area of contribution, since I came to America over this weekend, this relationship is based on substance, it's based on a very engaged America working with a contemporary, modern Ireland, helping to shape our history at home and helping us to contribute so much more by reason of our unity of purpose and our common values. And it is a great day for the Irish in America today, and I'm very conscious of that.

More than 44 million of our 70 million diasporas of the world are residing in the United States of America. And all of us, my own family, have reason to be very grateful to this country. After all, it's gone down the generations further as we've progressed – and thankfully go home and marry childhood sweethearts and end up with Taoiseachs coming over here to meet a man whose forebears, as he said, was in my electoral district (inaudible). But since we're not related – before coming to Ireland, the only thing I can say to him is he's not going to share a slate with me over there, because I can't compete with this man even in Ireland. (Laughter.) Because he would be very, very welcome.

And we look forward to an excellent discussion, as I said, on issues of mutual interest. And we are deeply grateful and appreciative of the wonderful access that our country is

accorded on this great day for Ireland. And he reminds us, of course, that we are not simply an island nation, but a disperse global family – and nowhere is that more celebrated than is this great country.

PRESIDENT OBAMA: Just one last point that I would like to make, and that is although I think it's wonderful that he visited the Oval Office and Washington, what you're really missing out on is the South Side Irish Parade in Chicago – (laughter) –

To all the BIFFOs and other Irish at heart, I offer you my new favorite St. Paddy's Day greeting: May you be graced with trolls who will help you find the only Beamish on tap in Boston.

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## **GETTING THEIR KICKS: THE AMERICAN-SAUDI GO AROUND COME- AROUND**

Despite a decent amount of negativity roiling around the socio-political scene lately, on a fine Saturday night right here in the ole USA, this gives me a lot of heart somehow:

Then, with a scream of revving engines, it begins: a yellow Corvette and a red Mitsubishi go head to head, racing down the road at terrifying speeds, just inches apart. Shouts go up from the sidelines, and another pair of racers shoot down the road, and another.

This may be the most popular sport of Saudi youth, an obsessive, semilegal

competition that dominates weekend nights here.

...

For Saudi Arabia's vast and underemployed generation of young people, these reckless night battles are a kind of collective scream of frustration, a rare outlet for exuberance in an ultraconservative country where the sexes are rigorously segregated and most public entertainment is illegal. They are, almost literally, bored out of their minds.

"Why do they do it?" ... "Because they have nothing else to do. Because they are empty."

Despite all the shrieking of the military-industrial class, the iron curtain fell and the cold war subsided because of information, lifestyle and ethos penetration into the supposed enemy. Thing was, they were not the enemy, they were people just like us. And so the walls came down. The Rolling Stones, Beatles and Beach Boys had as much, if not far more, to do with the victory as military might (not to mention the start of the internet and satellite teevee).

The United States government and tunnel visioned world press were too slow to figure out what was really up the first time, and lo and behold, they are biting off on the same steel fisted bunk again. It is cultural progression that is softening the underbelly of yet another clash of the civilizations. Who'd a thunk it? Who will realize it?

Then the car leaps forward, accelerating furiously, and breaks into a sudden skid, spinning around, nearly colliding with a concrete barrier and leaving thick black marks on the pavement. A stifling smell of burnt rubber hangs in the air.

It is not the bombs. It is La Bamba.

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# LOUISIANA GUBERNATORIAL SITCOM



Graphic by Twolf

I tell you what, those Republicans may not have squat for rational ideas, but they sure have some humor. Heck, it was less than two days ago we were watching ~~Crockett and Tubbs~~ Steele and Boner in "DC Vice". Fear not intrepid viewers, these jokers are bringin da funny all over. Our latest episode involves that wacky character Urkel Jindal, Governor of Louisiana. From Yahoo/Politico:

Louisiana Gov. Bobby Jindal announced Friday that he will decline stimulus money specifically targeted at expanding state unemployment insurance coverage, becoming the first state executive to officially refuse any part of the federal government's payout to states.

In a statement, Jindal, who is slated to give the Republican response to President Barack Obama's message to Congress on Tuesday, expressed concern that expanding unemployment insurance coverage would lead to increased unemployment insurance taxes later on.

Wow, the fine folks in Louisiana must find this hilarious since most governors are constantly scrapping to get their states funding they are in dire need of. And, as you may have heard, there are needs in Louisiana, part of Katrina ground central. Too bad they no longer have



Dollar Bill Jefferson around to keep that stimulus money on ice.

What the hell though, life must be a hoot in a state run by a guy named Piyush who changed his name to Bobby because he identified with a character on the Brady Bunch. Personally, I don't get it. He looks like Urkel to me.

[Awesome graphic by Twolf!]

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## **DOWN ON THE BORDER: STATE OF WAR IN MEXICO**

Via Laura Rozen comes reference to a chilling piece by Sam Quinones in Foreign Policy on the drug smuggling violence that has escalated to a total state of war rivaling levels in Iraq.

There are so many hot spots for attention these days – Iraq, Afghanistan, Pakistan, Gitmo, not to mention the ops that are being run on US citizens by their own government as a result of the Bush/Cheney decision to gin up a military rationale for surveillance domestically – that it is easy to forget what is going on just across the border. Easy, at least, until you take in Sam Quinones' tale:

That week in Monterrey, newspapers reported, Mexico clocked 167 drug-related murders. When I lived there, they didn't have to measure murder by the week. There were only about a thousand drug-related killings annually. The Mexico I returned to in 2008 would end that year with a body count of more than 5,300 dead. That's almost double the death toll from the year before—and more than all the U.S. troops killed in Iraq since that war began.

But it wasn't just the amount of killing that shocked me. When I lived in Mexico, the occasional gang member would turn up executed, maybe with duct-taped hands, rolled in a carpet, and dropped in an alley. But Mexico's newspapers itemized a different kind of slaughter last August: Twenty-four of the week's 167 dead were cops, 21 were decapitated, and 30 showed signs of torture. Campesinos found a pile of 12 more headless bodies in the Yucatán. Four more decapitated corpses were found in Tijuana, the same city where barrels of acid containing human remains were later placed in front of a seafood restaurant. A couple of weeks later, someone threw two hand grenades into an Independence Day celebration in Morelia, killing eight and injuring dozens more. And at any time, you could find YouTube videos of Mexican gangs executing their rivals—an eerie reminder of, and possibly a lesson learned from, al Qaeda in Iraq.

This is neither new nor isolated. When I was younger, I used to go down to Tijuana, it was a great time. It really was easy and fun; what Chinatown was to LA, Tijuana was to San Diego. No longer is even the formerly relatively civil Tijuana docile and appropriate for casual strolling about. Long ago, back in the sixties, on our way back to Kentucky to visit my grandparents during summers, we used to cross over into Juarez. Juarez was always a little scarier than Tijuana or Puerto Penasco, but, still, it was cool. That all changed in Juarez as far back as the late 70s and early 80s; then it became off of most people's travel itinerary. Now it is all a war zone.

With war raging between Mexico's narcogangs, and with plenty of cash available from drug sales to Americans—\$25 billion a year, by one reliable estimate—cartel gunmen began to

grow discontented with the limited selection of arms found in the thousands of gun stores along the southern U.S. border. Instead, they have sought out—and acquired—the world’s fiercest weaponry. Today, hillbilly pistoleros are showing signs of becoming modern paramilitaries.

Mexico’s gangs had the means and motive to create upheaval, and in Mexico’s failure to reform into a modern state, especially at local levels, the cartels found their opportunity. Mexico has traditionally starved its cities. They have weak taxing power. Their mayors can’t be reelected. Constant turnover breeds incompetence, improvisation, and corruption. Local cops are poorly paid, trained, and equipped. They have to ration bullets and gas and are easily given to bribery. Their morale stinks. So what should be the first line of defense against criminal gangs is instead anemic and easily compromised. Mexico has been left handicapped, and gangs that would have been stomped out locally in a more effective state have been able to grow into a powerful force that now attacks the Mexican state itself.

Hillbilly pistoleros indeed. Lou Dobbs on CNN may be, and in fact clearly is, a raving belligerent maniac regarding Mexico and brown people, but that doesn’t mean there is no problem on the other side of the border, and it doesn’t mean that it is not bleeding in to this side. It is a problem, and it is here; trust me, the next part hits right in my city, Phoenix.

Americans watch this upheaval with curious detachment. One warning sign is Phoenix. This city has replaced Miami as the prime gateway for illegal drugs entering the United States. Cartel chaos in Mexico is pushing bad elements north

along with the dope-enforcers without work and footloose to freelance.

Phoenix—the snowbird getaway, the land of yellow cardigans and emerald fairways—is now awash in kidnappings—366 in 2008 alone, up from 96 a decade ago. Most committing these crimes hail from Sinaloa, several hundred miles south. In one alarming incident, a gang of Mexican nationals, dressed in Phoenix police uniforms and using high-powered weapons and military tactics, stormed a drug dealer's house in a barrage of gunfire, killing him and taking his dope.

I wish I could say that Quinones has overstated this; he has not. So far, the infiltrating drug gangs, when I did major drug cases we called them "Sinaloa Cowboys", seem to mostly prey on their own rivals and have not really started taking from the general population of Phoenix. But the fear of expansion is palpable, and is exactly what the execrable Sheriff Joe Arpaio feeds off of to pull his anti-Hispanic oppressive raids and policing publicity stunts. The sad, but predictable, part is that, of course, Arpaio is so busy running stunts with the media (he even has his own Fox reality show now) that he doesn't even come close to lifting a finger against the real violence. That is left to the Phoenix Police Department while he preens around.

You don't have to watch or listen to Lou Dobbs, no sentient being should have to do that lately, but do not discount the seriousness of the violence; and it is growing. Is it epidemic yet? No, not there yet, not on *this* side of the border anyway. However, among all the other things on our, and President Obama's, plates, this one needs to be added to the list before it does metastasize out of control. Please go read Sam Quinones' entire piece, it deserves that.