CHRYSLER'S HALFTIME LESSON: GOVERNMENT INVESTMENT FOR AMERICA'S REBOUND

[youtube]pGMOhOYvcw4[/youtube]

Once again, Chrysler had one of the best ads in yesterday's Super Bowl, once again using the aesthetic of Detroit disaster porn to offer gritty inspiration. And while it's not as good as the Eminem version last year, it might appeal to Chrysler's target market even more, as it generalizes the uncertainty so many people feel.

I was struck by an irony at the core of the ad, though. Eminem really does embody Detroit. Clint Eastwood, in contrast, has no such personal tie to the city. And while his gritty voice works great for the ad. His delivery of, "This country can't be knocked out with one punch" perfectly caught his performed toughness (it reminded me of his *Million Dollar Baby*, which I loved).

The one other reason to choose Eastwood for this ad, it seems to me, is the role he played as Walt Kowalski in his *Gran Torino*. That guy, an old Korean war vet struggling with the increasing diversity of his lifetime neighborhood, **did** embody Detroit, as much as Eminem does.

Yet, as written, Kowalski was not a lifetime Detroiter. Rather, screenwriter Nick Schenk based him on a bunch of veterans he met while working in a liquor store in his native Twin Cities. (h/t Wizardkitten)

> "And in all of those jobs, especially in the liquor store, I would meet a lot of guys who were vets," he said.
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> Schenk recalls asking customers with military tattoos about where and when they served.

> “Little by little, as they came in every day for their bottle of ‘medicine,’ they’d tell you a little bit more,” he said.
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> “If you were respectful — I think everyone wants to get stuff off their chest, and they’re not going to tell their wives, they’re not going to tell their kids — and so if they can find an outlet to dump it out off on, that was me. I had a lot of guys telling me stories for years,” he said.
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> Those experiences helped him shape the character of Walt Kowalski, a Korean War veteran played by Clint Eastwood.

And the Hmong community was based on the Twin Cities’ sizable Hmong community.

Gran Torino, that tale of troubled old America coming into conflict with, and learning to love, the future of America, was shot in Detroit rather than the Twin Cities because of government intervention. The film was shot during the period when film credits offered under Jennifer Granholm and cut under Rick Snyder brought lots of new, creative jobs to MI; it was one of the first big films to be shot using the credits. Walt Kowalski was a native Detroiter only because MI invested in making him one.

And so Clint Eastwood, that Bay Area native who told a story about the Twin Cities but set it in Detroit, generalized the Detroit-specific ad about resilience from last year. But both the invocation of the Chrysler bailout and the use of Eastwood remind that rebounds work best when governments invest.

One more detail: this story—as told by Chrysler—leaves out a key part of the story. As John Nichols reported this morning, Chrysler specifically edited unions out of this story.

> At the fifty-second point in the ad,

> images from last year's mass pro-union protests in Madison, Wisconsin, were featured.
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> But something was missing: union signs.
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> The images from Madison appear to have been taken from a historic video by Matt Wisniewski, a Madison photographer whose chronicling of the protests drew international attention and praise. Wisniewski's work went viral, and was even featured in a video by rocker Tom Morello.
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> Wisniewski's original video, from an evening rally at the King Street entrance to the Wisconsin Capitol, features images (at the two-minute, seventeen-second mark) of signs raised by members of Madison Teachers Inc. (MTI), the local education union that played a pivotal role in the protests. One sign features the MTI logo, another reads: "Care About Educators Like They Care for Your Child."
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> In the Chrysler ad, the MTI logo is missing and the "Care About Educators…" sign is replaced with one featuring an image of an alarm clock. Several other union signs are simply whited out.

It's an incomplete picture, because government support is not enough to bring on America's second half. But it is a key part of it.

Update: Karl Rove hates it. Always a good sign, in my book.