

## UP WITH THE ONLINE GAMBLER, PART 1:

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*Shall we march for the right to face the odds?*

*First they came for the drug users and illegal aliens,  
and I didn't speak up because I wasn't a drug user or an illegal alien;  
Then they came for the homosexuals and redheads,  
and I didn't speak up because I wasn't a homosexual or a redhead;  
Then they came for the dim of wit and the online gamblers,  
and I didn't speak up because I wasn't dim of wit or an online gambler;  
Then... they came for me...  
and by that time there was no one left to speak up.  
— Loosely lifted from Reverend Martin Niemoller ca. 1946*

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"Speakin' of retarded," my friend Red Rodman down at the Wixom Bar opines without being asked, "what do you think, Blaine[1], of a guy makin' minimum wage spending \$100 a week on lottery tickets down at the doggone party store?! I mean how flockin' dumb is that. You're always telling me we need to be more responsible; don't you think we should ban that kinda stuff[2], man."

"Speaking of retarded," I counter (Red is basically a funloving hillbilly who doesn't take it personally unless you insult his beer choices[3], plus he won't get pissed at me while Beverly tends bar), "didn't we hammer the whole prohibition thing flat a month ago? What is it about prohibition being bad don't you understand? Just because Jim can't handle his Beam, doesn't mean we should take away your Budweiser Urine de Clydesdale. [smiling]"

"Well, sure, you're right about that, Blain'. It's not like I don't go down to the Windsor (Ontario) and Greektown casinos to blow a paycheck now and then. Not to mention destroying the brain cells with hard liquor... but don't you think it would be nice if we could prevent people from goin' off the deep end?"

"Sure," I reply, "and I think it would be nice if we were rich and good looking, too. But that doesn't mean we have to resort to violence by robbing a bank and sending ourselves to the plastic surgeon."

Red is momentarily baffled, "Who said anything about violence, I'm just talking about passing a law or somethin', nothin' extreme, it would say 'If you're poor and have a family, you can only buy so many lottery tickets per week.' How hard is that?"

"I know, do it for the children."

"Right arm! How'd you know?" says Red.

"Wild guess..."

"Red, check out the obvious. How could you even enforce a law like that? What's poor? Who's a family these days? How is the government going to know the prudent number of lottery tickets for any particular individual? What kind of penalties are you going to have? What's the priority for the police... I mean they do spend some time dealing with real crimes like theft and trespass and assault. Is the government going to hand out lottery-purchase licenses that the cops have to validate?"

"Geez, have you even thought about how much it will cost to do this nothing little 'nonextreme' ban of yours across Michigan? We'll need more judges, more cops, more jails; the lottery sellers will have to spend money to verify compliance, especially with minors. Our quality of service will go down and prices will go up. I mean, flock, flock, flock, Red, what you're suggesting amounts to a bona fide, grade-A, multimillion-dollar cluster flock of biblical proportions... AND IT'S ONLY A SIMPLE PARTIAL BAN ON BUYING LOTTO TICKETS!!

Bev throws me a cross look.

"Sorry, I didn't mean to raise my voice."

Red assures me, "That's alright Blain', you speak from the heart. I see the problem. It's like when the government steps into any role of do-gooder... minimum wage laws, handicapped parking, drug free school zones. Wow, it's quite a list when you punch the stop-and-think button. The cost-benefit ratios got to be 10 to 1 or more."

"Yes, Red, always when people cooperate with one another voluntarily, as opposed to being forced, whatever they do will be pretty much the way everyone wants it done. Nobody gets hurt. Nobody takes a bath. But you haven't mentioned my latest, deepest discovery."

"Okay, I'll bite, what's the latest, Blain'?"

"Man," exasperated, "I sold you the book for half-price..."

"The Sacred Nonaggression Principle. It's the trump card. You can talk all you want about the impracticality of prohibiting, compelling, or handing out privilege, but it's the moral stand—and only the moral stand—that will stop these offenses, like lottery-ticket bans, dead in their tracks.

"When someone says, 'We need this and such a law, and need to force people to do this and such,' all you need to say now is au contraire: 'Can't do that, because it violates the most fundamental, highest social principle that exists: the SNaP. We are sovereign human beings and we do not aggress upon other sovereign human beings. Simple as that. Case closed. Let's all go home.'

"But, you know, Rodman, I really don't want to talk about the fundamentals today; I'm tired of the abstractions."

"Ab-what-shuns? Fine with me, Blain', what's buggin' ya?"

"Gambling, Red, what you just now brought up with the poor guy buying lottery tickets."

### ***Casual gambling and industrial gambling...***

Yours truly doesn't really gamble in the serious sense of the word. I was in Vegas a few times during my motorcycle-touring era, and made a couple of hundred dollars at \$1- and \$2-minimum Blackjack tables. I have fond memories of those relatively bucolic experiences in Nevada, sitting there in The Strip (or in one of the many small towns that dot the otherwise barren moonscape of the state) nursing free Coors and ogling the Keno girls into the wee hours. With small stakes and some money management, I could basically stay at the table forever, watching and bantering with a Runyonesque assortment of people coming and going.

I use the term "casual gambling" or "literary gambling" to connote this broad category of gambling that appeals to me. Same as how I like to play golf: for the experience of being in a friendly environment where you get some thrills and antithrills, without working too hard. (Tho in golf, if you walk, there's an additional benefit of exercise.)

The other broad category of gambling I refer to as "industrial gambling," which I'll describe by a personal experience: In the mid-1980s I was working a contract (for my former boss and self-made successful entrepreneur, Jim Cline) in East Hampton, Long Island, NY. Winter was ending, so the company sponsored a day in Atlantic City, New Jersey. The bus picked us up in the morning and drove us down there. I remember looking out the window, noting that, like Detroit, this was another city the central government types—in collusion with some corporate suits, who, let's just say, stood to make a little money—had basically murdered.[4]

To my imagination, Atlantic City is a human carcass recently eviscerated by aliens who have deposited some kind of eerie multicolored, flashy, nuclear-powered floral arrangement where the heart used to be. Then, as all the extremities commence to rot in this mauled dead thing, the aliens turn the corpse slightly, to face the ocean. And near the artificial, radioactive flowers is where the busses disgorge their masses of slot-machine-handle-pulling li'l ol' ladies and Craps-Roulette-Blackjack-playing working-stiff dreamers.

We were thus disgorged, too. "So's I walks in, and I surveys the acres of whirring, spinning devices and playing-card platforms," each overseen by a dour-countenanced man, woman, or beast, plastered with identification badges. Had the bus had made a wrong turn and delivered us to the CIA cafeteria in Langley, Virginia?! The Blackjack minimum was \$10 at any table you could find open (23 years ago, \$10 would buy

you what \$20 buys you, today). I promptly lose a hundred or two, then bail, looking for some place to while away the time without spending money.

Wrong! In AC in winter, there's nowhere to run, nowhere to hide. It's still February, so too cold to appreciate a stroll on the Boardwalk. How about a library or a Christian Science reading room ensconced between the Trump Monuments to Lost Intelligence? No chance. You're stuck. And if you're not ambulatory—I remember many of the oldsters clinging to walkers and wheelchairs—you're really stuck. You can hang there in the casinos, but it's loud. And pressure-packed; no doubt millions of subliminal messages are being transmitted by the surroundings through your saturated central-nervous system, saying: "Lay down a bet, buy a drink, insert lotsa coins here, or in the words of the plant in Little Shop of Horrors: FEEED Mee!, FFEED MMeee!"

Folks, this is industrial gambling at its worst. In my case, I managed to wander around, succumbed to more losses, then just before our bus headed back to East Hampton I made a desperation effort at a Blackjack table... finishing \$50 in the black (vs. \$400 in the red). Most were not so lucky. I'm sure the house has calculated down to the penny how much each bus will be contributing to select New Jersey corporate, mob, and government coffers. Like a sheep-shearer calculates wool removal.

*You know what they say: gambling is just a special tax on the stupid.*

But state-sanctioned gambling, outside of the playground atmosphere at Vegas and other bona fide recreational resorts worldwide, is just so sadly sleazy, pathetic, and expensive. And nobody—none of the government-employee dealers or entertainers or bartenders or waitresses or bus boys, and so on—even pretends they like you. Yecchh! We don't need the state to perform any public service ad campaigns against gambling addiction: just give \$500 and a video camera to an average guy and send him to Atlantic City on a weekday. The footage will cure all but the most obstinate.

### ***The rise of skilled poker and online gambling...***

To me poker has always been a 'casual gambling' opportunity, where I meet with some friends, eat copious quantities of bratwurst and starchy fillers, drink beer, tell stories, fart prodigiously, and occasionally play a hand of cards. (Lately in my group, the actual games—like In Between and Two Card High—are so simple, and demand so little in the way of attention, you could teach them to a comatose person.)

But roughly 10 years ago, the 20-somethings of the world were latching on to poker as a skilled competition and becoming passionate advocates of the game... which was beginning to show up on ESPN (and probably nudging out golf and baseball as a contest of exciting action). In 1998, the poker-themed movie, Rounders, starring Matt Damon and Edward Norton debuted. It was a huge hit, and kicked off a whole culture of would-be poker gunslingers couching their observations and ideals in tones of Zen-like reverence.

"It's immoral to let a sucker keep his money.  
—William "Canada Bill" Jones"

Which expresses a mantra for those who take the contest more seriously. Is poker distinct from gambling?

Some say poker and gambling are different because in gambling you play against the house (dealer), while in poker the house simply acts as a game service provider. Also in poker, theoretically at least, every player has an equal chance to win, whereas the house typically has a substantial odds advantage against the player in casino games.

Since the turn of the century and with Grand Theft Ollie[5] and the wonders of the Internet, poker participation has skyrocketed. One of my bestest activist friends in the Free State used to spend earnest time playing in the online poker rooms of the Internet casinos of the world. And he was doing pretty well before the federales stepped in on September 30, 2006, with the Unlawful Internet Gambling Enforcement Act (UIGEA). UIGEA makes it illegal to accept money for online gambling from US customers. (In April of 2007, Rep. Barney Frank initiated legislation, the Internet Gambling Regulation and Enforcement Act (IGREA) to undo the draconian prohibition of UIGEA—and facilitate regulation and taxing of Internet gambling. Two years later IGREA is still in limbo.)

In researching what the feds have done to deny (and now try to horn in on) our personal financial freedom of choice in cyberspace—our right to be stupid or smart, willy nilly—, I have come across a veritable Horror

File of prosecutorial aggression... AGAINST CITIZENS OF OTHER COUNTRIES, as well as our own. What Constitution?

### **Back with Red at the Wixom Bar...**

"Red, sorry to have wandered off there. But I've been looking into the recent federal prohibitions on Internet gambling—by the way, Michigan is one of 10 states that ban online gambling (Jennifer Granholm will spank you if she catches you, naughty boy)—and it's scary what the G-boys are doing to ordinary citizens... even citizens of other nations!"

"Like what?"

"They basically kidnapped this guy, David Carruthers, from Scotland who runs online casino businesses and expressed an opinion that Internet gambling should be regulated and taxed, not banned."

"No way. Are they torturing him in Libya or something?"

"Nearly as bad: house arrest in St. Louis... for nearly three years! Without trial, away from his family in Europe. His only "crime," from what I can tell, was expressing an opinion differing from the rantings of the Prosecutocracy. Sorry, Red, I'm getting all verklempt here... I'll catch you another day." [6]

And I left my tab, "See ya, Bev," then ventured out onto the one-horse Southeast Michigan town's streets, dodging pining ghosts of the 2007 Ford-Wixom Plant shutdown. (To be continued.)

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[1] One night long ago, Red and I were in our cups and introduced me to one of his Honkytonk Angel girlfriends. He tried to say Brian but it came out "Blaine," and it stuck. Sigh.

[2] Like a lot of my plainspeaking acquaintances, Red doesn't really say things like "doggone," "flockin'," or "stuff." But this is a family Web column, so I'm using euphemisms.

[3] I once told Red that Budweiser was beer that had been passed thru a Clydesdale, and he wouldn't talk with me for a month.

[4] As in my column about a visit to the Detroit Institute of Arts, I want to refer to the marvelous work of Jane Jacobs, *The Death and Life of Great American Cities*.

[5] Grand Theft Ollie is my term for the massive wealth transfer by the largely hidden money power (i.e. the Oligarchy) from the vast majority of stealing-averse normal humans in America, particularly. The latest act in this centuries-old human train wreck is the blatant takeover of the American government and looting of the treasury by the Oligarchy's money men (Ollies).

[6] The reasons offered for passing UIGEA were, naturally, "morality and protecting children," but consider these estimates: the legal bricks and mortar casino businesses in America pull in nearly \$100 billion per year (legal bricks and mortar gambling worldwide has to be five to ten times that value) while online gambling revented roughly \$30 billion worldwide in 2005, nearly doubling its receipts in 2001. You don't suppose siccing the Gestapo on online gambling businessmen has anything to do with the Internet's emerging financial threat to the "in-person" gambling industry, do you?

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