

commentary

from other pens...

Since when is rioting a God-given right?

It seems almost predictable. A major sports team wins a championship, and within minutes, rocks and tear gas fill the air. In downtown Denver on Saturday, erstwhile fans were out tipping over planters and rocking cars less than an hour after the Avalanche won Denver's second Stanley Cup. The same thing happened when the Broncos won the Super Bowl, and fans rioted after a recent Colorado-Colorado State football game.

It would be comical if it wasn't so sad. In parts of the world, people storm barricades and stone the police, trying to win basic freedoms. They risk their lives, and oftentimes, no one much cares.

In this country, young men (mostly) riot when their team wins. Or the moon is full. Or the beer keg.

OK, "their team" may be a stretch. It's doubtful that most of the hooligans in Denver are actual hockey or football fans. They're just drunken hangers on looking to cause some trouble. Most of them reportedly spilled out of downtown Denver's excess of sports bars, not out of the arena.

Because if you can afford Stanley Cup tickets, after all, it's not likely you have any interest in overturning planters and Volkswagens.

The inconvenience was great after the game. It took people hours to get out of downtown, fans and sports-bar patrons alike. Dozens of hooligans were arrested, but hundreds more got away.

Members of the St. Louis Cardinals, playing at nearby Coors Field, had to be walked to their hotel by police escorts. The team bus could not move.

No one was very sympathetic to those who tangled with police. If they got gassed, arrested or their heads busted, it was their just desserts.

Since when, we wonder, has it become a right in this country to take to the streets if your team wins, tearing things up and causing trouble? — *Steve Haynes*

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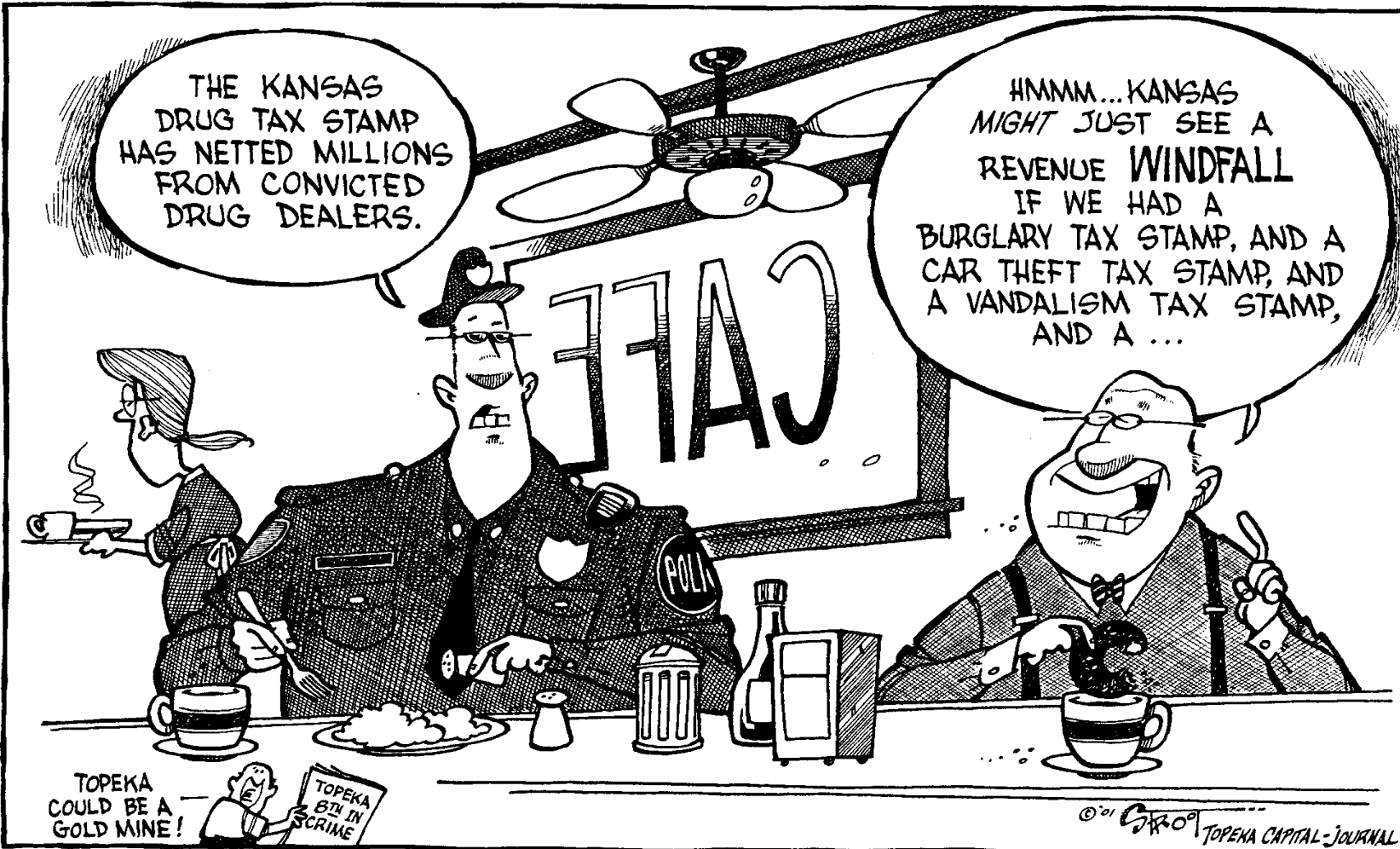
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Bed and breakfast blues

We have a couple of friends who have retired from their jobs and have turned their house into a bed and breakfast. So, naturally, my wife and I end up discussing the possibility of doing the same thing. That's a natural reaction. Whenever someone you know does something that you haven't done, you start considering it. That's why when you're selling some product that's completely worthless, the first sale is so important.

Now, I don't know whether my wife is going to push this bed-and-breakfast thing, but I plan to fight it all the way. I don't like strangers in my house at any time, and staying overnight is really asking for trouble. I'm going to hear strange noises and snippets of conversations and only imagine what's going on in there. And who came up with the concept of giving them breakfast? That's not the high point of my day, either physically or emotionally. I'll be awake all night listening to potential tribal rituals, and then I'm expected to greet these transients at the bottom of the stairs with a smile and an omelet. It's more than a coincidence that the emergence of bed and breakfasts is concurrent with the increase in domestic violence.

SILENCE, PLEASE

In my early 20s, I was in a rock band. We played different kinds of music, but all of it was really loud. The slogan "How do we do it?... Volume!" was a pretty good description of our approach. When you're loud, you don't get criticized. Or at



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least you don't hear it. But that was 30 years ago. Now I don't like anything loud. I need to be able to hear what my wife is saying. I've learned that it's better for everyone if I hear her the first time. Before I buy something else that we don't need. And before she commits me to a social function. Or an institution. I used to like loud things like rock music and dragsters and explosions. Now I like quiet things — like babies not crying and phones not ringing and salesmen not knocking. If I worked at the airport wearing those silencer earmuffs, I'd probably leave them on all the time. Except, of course, when my wife is talking.

LIFE LESSONS PART 1

As I look back over my life so far, I've learned a few life lessons. Some of them were expected. You could see them coming. Others came as a total surprise. So, to enlighten those who are coming after me, here are a few unexpected life lessons that you may encounter:

— Jokes that are funny to you may not be funny to members of the opposite sex or the clergy.

The power of ordinary people

This is the unlikely story of what happens when government officials skip the bureaucratic mission statement to embrace the mission itself.

It began in 1992 in an office in Contra Costa County, Calif. The public health department staff was reviewing yet another sobering study. It showed that African-Americans still received significantly poorer health services than Caucasians. The disparity was starkest in the breast cancer statistics.

In Contra Costa County, white women had a much higher incidence of breast cancer than black women: 154 per 100,000 for whites compared to 110 per 100,000 for blacks. But black women were more likely to die from the disease: 35 deaths per 100,000 versus 26 per 100,000 for whites.

One reason, the staff concluded, had to be early detection. They knew from the 1992 statistics that 71 percent of white women — but only 44 percent of black women — were diagnosed at an early stage of the cancer. Chances of survival diminish the later the cancer is detected. If they could close this gap, they could close the gap in the mortality rate.

No county in California, and perhaps in the nation, had brought about parity in breast cancer survival rates between white and black women. But that's what Contra Costa County set out to do. They knew it would mean chipping away at cultural beliefs, economic barriers and government intransigence. They knew they would have to mobilize



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an army of activists and health care professionals.

"There was a sense that these disparities were some inevitable fact of nature," said Dr. Wendell Brunner, Contra Costa County's director of public health. "But we knew the cause could be identified, addressed and eliminated."

By the end of that year, the University of California at San Francisco was regularly sending a mammography van into Contra Costa neighborhoods. The county held the first in a series of Women's Health Days at Martin Luther King Jr. Health Center in Richmond, offering uninsured and underinsured women free breast and cervical screenings.

Local groups, including the school districts, hospitals and the American Cancer Society, introduced a breast health education project at Contra Costa high schools in 1994. The following year, the county procured funding through a new state tobacco tax for the Breast Cancer Early Detection Program, which provided free breast exams and mammograms.

By 1996, health advocates were out talking one-on-one with women and driving them to health

— A T-shirt saying "I'm With Stupid" should never be worn on a first date.

— Clearing your nasal passages should be done in private, rather than during a job interview.

— Women have no interest in how much you can drink.

— Teen-agers with purple hair are not seeking your approval.

— Spring-loaded tools should never be carried in the pants pockets.

LAST CALL

The other day, I saw a guy walking through the park with his sweetheart. They were holding hands and strolling in a leisurely fashion like the people in those French movies do. And the whole time, he's talking to somebody on his cell phone. Nothing urgent. Just talking leisurely to an acquaintance while he meanders through the trees with his significant other. Now, I'm not a relationship expert, but when your partner would rather make small talk over the phone than talk to you, I think it's time to hang that one up. And make sure you reverse the charges.

Quote of the Day: "If you find yourself feeling happy, try not to think of anything." — Red Green

Red Green is the star of "The Red Green Show," a television series seen in the United States on PBS and in Canada on the CBC Network, and the author of "The Red Green Book" and "Red Green Talks Cars: A Love Story."

centers for breast exams and pap smears. By 1998, office walls all over the county were decorated with calendars featuring 19 local African-American breast cancer survivors. Wanna Wright was the cover girl.

"A lot of African-Americans saw what happened to women with breast cancer. They not only died, but they died an agonizing death," said Wright, a 22-year survivor. "There was a feeling that there was nothing anybody could do for them, so why find out?"

The results of the county's work arrived this year in a packet of the latest statistics: 71 percent of both white and black women with breast cancer were diagnosed at an early stage. It will take a few years to gather mortality rates, but it is expected that the gap will be considerably narrowed.

Breast cancer isn't the only health disparity between blacks and whites. But by conquering this one, Contra Costa showed that the disparities can be diminished. It also showed the power of ordinary people — even government people — to bring about revolutions.

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