



## The Bunkhouse Chronicle

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Columnist

### Tight Cowboys and social floppers

Last week's Letters to the Editor offered an important study in contrasts. One was a well-considered essay in which the writer expressed her concerns, approached the discussion with a counter-argument, and finally made an effective, reasonable case in favor of her beliefs.

The other was a kind of "First Thought, Best Thought" screed, lacked any argument whatsoever, and finally morphed into an embarrassing public soccer-flop.

Soccer-flopping, if you don't know, is an invention of European soccer players who fail to get enough attention from the referee and so collapse on the pitch in fits of classic Greek agony while hoping for someone to call a foul.

Thankfully, such behavior remains anathema to many

Americans. It makes us feel queasy and embarrassed for the flopper. Mostly because a grown man feigning injury and writhing around for attention lacks those qualities of mature sportsmanship and fortitude we still admire in athletes and others.

Incidentally, "predictable" is one of the better polysyllabic words, particularly in light of the epidemic of intellectual soccer-floppers who wander onto the field of play only to be carried off on stretchers — apparently near death — after phantom kicks to the shins.

Elsewhere, the collective soccer-flopping after Trump's pardoning of Dwight and Steven Hammond, now thankfully at home with their families where they belong, has been predictably amusing.

The floppers at CNN — who are no longer actually journalists — could do no better than offer the Hammonds' calculated pardon as proof of presidential racism because — wait for it — no one pardoned any of the key players in the Black Panthers or Philadelphia's MOVE organization.

Which is, in all seriousness, world-class soccer-flopping. It's the same strain of grievance-theater that allows them to conflate the Hammonds with the Bundys — despite the fact that the Hammonds disavowed the

Bundys' takeover of the Malheur Refuge from the outset.

As for the Hammonds, floppers must ignore two facts. First, that they had already served time — one thinks it was plenty — before being sent back to prison a second time under the mandatory minimum scheme. Second, they must not mind that agencies of government have lost control of more fires, and caused more damage to public and private property, without anyone EVER being held accountable, than the Hammonds imagined in their wildest buckaroo fantasies.

These facts matter because when we empower government to run roughshod over people we don't like — for whatever reasons — we might fairly expect government to someday run roughshod over our own little house of cards. And who will we blame then? Trump? Obama? Our neighbor with the "Visualize Whirled Peas" bumper sticker?

One problem underwriting all of this ham-fisted and predictable government nonsense is the notion of mandatory minimum sentences, which were always a bad idea, and the only reason the Hammonds found themselves re-incarcerated.

Mandatory minimums are a bad idea because they eliminate discretion from the judicial system, much in the

same way that "stats" deprive police officers of discretion when deciding whether or not to cite a Mini-van Mom for a moving violation.

Usually, Mini-van Mom only needs a warning, but under pressure by supervisors to bring up her monthly traffic stats, an officer is far more likely to cut a cite whether it's necessary or even helpful.

We used to believe, in the long ago, that discretion was a terrific tool, vital to the health and fairness of the judicial system. We expected officials to exercise it. But so many of those officials are intimidated by the weight of discretionary responsibility that we've flipped the equation in the other direction — which is to eliminate discretion altogether and turn every conceivable act of dumb behavior into a crime requiring mandatory punishment.

I shudder to think what would happen today, when floppers abound like locusts, to a teacher who did what I did once, which was to instruct my students how to build a field-expedient clay-mine.

That guy, today, would likely be burned alive in the town square. Never mind that it was effective to reach a class full of booger-eaters adrift in the late-semester doldrums. Never mind that there are, in fact, marvelous parallels between building

a claymore mine and constructing a traditional university term paper.

Today, floppers would no-doubt construe that effort as material support for terrorism — "Former Marine Makes Students Build Bombs" — but in the pre-flopper era it worked beautifully to get the attention of undergraduates, and hold it.

That lecture was probably the result of this column's warm embrace of classical liberalism — which too few remember as an alternative to wearing their punishing binary politics around like a medieval hair shirt.

Classical liberalism works because it just always prefers civic freedom above government intrusion and the histrionics of righteous floppers, who ruin the beauty of the game because they don't know how to play it very well.

Finally, in a personal note to letter-writer Ms. Dull: this columnist enjoys yoga. It's an excellent program for my lower back, which, after careers unkind to its evolutionary design, is now made of crushed glass. I hope to see you there. I think we could be friends. I'll be the bald, bearded, and tattooed guy in back, merrily groaning through a Sunday morning session of "Tight Cowboys" and sporting my favorite — and super-comfortable — Noveske Rifles T-shirt.

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