

## OUR VIEW

# Vick Fallout

"So I've got a lot of down time, a lot of time to think about my actions and what I've done. I will redeem myself. I have to." So said suspended Atlanta Falcons quarterback Michael Vick as he stood alone at a podium Tuesday in Richmond, Va. Vick, one of the brightest stars in the NFL, a remarkable talent with a brilliantly strong arm and amazing speed, had just plead guilty to federal dog-fighting charges. Vick's fate is now in the hands of U.S. District Judge Henry E. Hudson, who will sentence him on Dec. 10. Hudson could sentence him to between 18 months and five years, the maximum. The facts of the case are disheartening. In a written plea, Vick admitted to supplying money for and gambling on dog fights; claims corroborated by three co-defendants who earlier plead guilty. Vick also admitted to helping kill six to eight pit bulls severely maimed in backyard battles at his Virginia estate. The case sprung from an investigation in drug activity by Vick's cousin; authorities found evidence of dogfighting, seizing dozens of dogs, some injured.

This case has sparked righteous indignation on so many levels. Of course People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals weighed in. Its director, Daphna Nachminovitch, wrote on the organization's blog: "PETA's offices, located just over an hour away from Michael Vick's rural mansion—where we now know dozens if not hundreds of dogs were forced to fight to the death in the pit—has been receiving vague allegations of Vick's involvement in illegal animal fighting activity for years, sadly without much concrete evidence to back it up. While local authorities—who have historically mishandled dogfighting cases—sat on evidence in this case, the U.S. Attorney's office was obviously determined to get the job done. The professional sports world is plagued with players who have been accused, charged, or convicted of cruelty to animals, abusing pit bulls, and dog fighting, and we hope that this indictment sends a loud and clear message to players and the NFL that celebrity is not a sufficient excuse for breaking the law, and that animal abuse should never be tolerated under any circumstances."

Animal activists have a right to be miffed; that's a given. But scapegoating Vick isn't going to solve the problem. Brutal as dogfighting is, it's no less barbaric than cockfighting, where two roosters are placed in a ring and forced to fight to the death. In several states, cockfighting is legal. In places where it's only illegal if there's a monetary prize, the rules are literally unenforceable. PETA's website has extensive information about cockfighting: "Cockfighting usually involves other crimes in addition to cruelty to animals. Gambling—frequently illegal and involving large sums of money—is found at many cockfights, as are firearms and other weapons that are sometimes used in violent, interpersonal crimes, including murder, as seen in a triple homicide that occurred at a Northern California cockfight. Illegal drugs are also commonly found at cockfights, and criminal investigators have happened upon roosters and fighting pits while searching for other illicit materials. In one instance, officers raiding a California marijuana farm allegedly found more than 150 roosters and cockfighting paraphernalia "amid the 4,000 pot plants they expected to find.... Young children are often present at cockfights; exposure to such violence can promote insensitivity to animal suffering and an enthusiasm for bloodshed."

So why hasn't this cruel bloodsport been outlawed?

The blogosphere is ablaze with indignation over whether Vick's punishment fits the crime. He's facing more time in prison than some athletes have received for assaulting women. Does that mean dogs are worth more than women? Illegal immigrants, it seems, also have fewer rights than dogs—they can be deported at a whim. In the Middle East, Arab women and children claim to be lower on the value totem pole than pets. The point here isn't minimizing Vick's crime. He's grown. He knows right from wrong. Perspective is what's lacking. What does it say about our criminal justice system, our value system, when you can violate a woman and get off scot-free, but hurt and kill an animal and lose your freedom?

WHAT DO YOU THINK ABOUT THIS STUDY THAT SAYS SENIOR CITIZENS ARE HAVING SEX TWO OR THREE TIMES A MONTH?



## 'Oops' upside the head for too long

By James Clingman  
Special to Sentinel-Voice

We have been taking blows upside our heads since 1619, and some Black people still believe it's unintentional. As long as the perpetrators say "oops" or sorry, we are somehow consoled.

In the 1980s we danced to the beat of the Gap Band's song, "Oops! Upside Your Head," but today we are dancing to the constant rhythm of a "beat-down" and taking the apologetic "Oops" part seriously.

We act inappropriately to being marginalized and mistreated by the larger society, especially when it comes to economics, by looking for any way to excuse their behavior against us. We say, "Oops!" to our own assailants and keep on dancing to their tune.

In a recent conversation with a friend, in answer to his questions as to why Black people are so reluctant to act in our own best interests and what it will take to get us to do so, I asserted that we have not been slapped hard enough yet.

I also shared with him my belief that our people really believe we can change the hearts of those White folks who continue to mistreat us. Not only do we believe we can change them, in some cases we really don't believe they are serious when it comes to keeping us down



JAMES CLINGMAN

and even eliminating us altogether. It's just another "Oops" moment.

In some distorted illogical way, some Black folks believe that Whites who work daily to keep us in our place will eventually change their ways and start to help us move forward. Despite knowing what has happened since 1619, we still believe that someday they will bring us into the fold and elevate us to the level we deserve; after all, we have been in this country as long as they have. Keep dreaming.

White people, certainly not all of them (I should not have had to say that, but I know how paranoid some of our people are when it comes to those kinds of statements), but many are dead set on maintaining status quo in this country. Now more than ever, due to the increasing reality that Whites will become the "minority" in a few years, they are circling their wagons to make sure that if and when it does happen, they will still be in charge. Re-

member South Africa, when Mandela was released?

Black people have been slapped upside the head by the White establishment for centuries and still many of us believe it's an aberration. The way we are still being treated is normal, business as usual. Why can't we see that? Why won't we acknowledge that? Why won't we do what's necessary to reverse our situation?

I contend that we haven't been slapped hard enough to wake us up—or to knock us completely out. It's just been enough to keep us ducking and dodging, bobbing and weaving, trying to stay out of harm's way, all the while rationalizing and mitigating the behavior of the perpetrators.

"Oh, he really didn't mean to do that to us; let's just hang in there, and things will change soon." Or, we will explain it away with other

silly, Rodney King-type comments like, "Yes, I got hit, but it really wasn't that hard."

Picture this: Someone beats you and your relatives on the head for 400 years and the best you can offer is a "Why can't we all get along" speech or an olive branch asking, no, begging them to stop.

Why should they stop? What's their incentive to stop? Something that has gone on for 400 years in any country becomes part of the fabric of that country. Why would any Black person say or even think they can change the heart of the establishment toward Black people after four centuries?

The only instance I know of that occurring took place with Moses, who was under God's authority, of course, and even after the worst

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