



## Gene Healy: The Five Worst Op-Eds of 2012

By: Gene Healy - January 1, 2013

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For three years running, I've closed the Old Year with a seasonal burst of bile, my annual Five Worst Op-Eds column.

As before, this year's malicious listicle rewards bad arguments and bad writing, with extra points for warped values.

### **5. Eric Posner, "The World Doesn't Love the First Amendment," Slate.com (Sept. 25)**

For warped values, it's hard to beat Professor Posner's lament that free-speech absolutism "prevent[s] the U.S. government from restricting the distribution of a video [the Innocence of Muslims'] that causes violence abroad and damages America's reputation." Today, hurtful videos spread "as fast as the Internet can blast them, beyond the power of governments to stop them."

In Posner's view, technology has made the entire world a crowded theater, so turn off your cellphone and pipe down: "Americans need to learn that the rest of the world -- and not just Muslims -- see no sense in the First Amendment."

If so, score one for the overused concept of "American Exceptionalism."

### **4. "Don't Be Nosy about Fast and Furious," L.Z. Granderson, CNN.com, (June 27)**

"We are a nosy country," Granderson, a weekly CNN.com columnist, complains. Some people even insist on investigating the "Fast and Furious" federal "gunwalking" debacle.

But "not everything is our business," Granderson insists, comparing the scandal to Iran-Contra: illegal and maybe ineffective, but "done as a way to make America safe." There you go, case closed.

Yes, it reads like the poor man's Jonathan Swift, but there's no indication it's deliberate satire.

### **3. David Brooks, "The Follower Problem," the New York Times (June 11)**

From here to the end, it's a clean sweep for the Gray Lady. Bronze goes to Brooks, who here scolds Americans for their lack of deference toward "people at the top." Is that because the elites have lately delivered an unholy financial and fiscal mess? No, says

Brooks, it's mostly our "cynicism" and "vanity." I suppose we'll have to audit the class on "Humility" he's teaching at Yale this spring.

**2. Maureen Dowd, "The Loin King," the *New York Times* (Nov. 3)**

Here, for the silver, is MoDo's fever dream of a President Obama who's finally attentive to her emotional needs. She gushes over Obama's "caring reactions" to Hurricane Sandy, an alleged improvement over his post-BP-spill coolness: "I couldn't help thinking of a 'Star Trek' episode, 'The Naked Time,' " she writes, wherein "a strange red liquid that causes everyone [on the Enterprise] to emote like crazy. Even Spock starts crying inconsolably because he can't tell his mother how much he cares about her. ... Has President Spock, who bounded into action on Sandy and rocked a New Jersey woman in his arms, really grown?"

**1. Tom Friedman, "Obama's Nightmare," the *New York Times*(Nov. 13)**

The winning entry is from the Times' mustachioed Maestro of Mixed Metaphors. Friedman asks why, despite some "breathtaking chainsaw-nails-pounded-into-heads violence," post-Saddam Iraq didn't "explode outward like Syria"? Because: "For better and for worse, the United States in Iraq performed the geopolitical equivalent of falling on a grenade -- *that we triggered ourselves.*"

Barely leaving us time to ponder the "for better" upside of that move, what "chainsaw-nails" are and how something can "explode" any way but "outward," Friedman's off to the grenade races without his obstetrics textbook:

"[Nobody's] willing to fall on the Syrian grenade and midwife a new order. So the fire rages uncontrolled ... and the Shiite-Sunni venom unleashed by the Syrian conflict" strains relations regionwide. Will venom-grenades give way to chainsaw-nails? It's a "breathtaking" performance that really makes your head pound.

This year, *Rolling Stone's* Matt Taibbi sponsored a "write like Tom Friedman" challenge in which the winners got fake grenades. Next year, *inshallah*, maybe I'll mail all my contest winners fake mustaches.