



**Your On the
Street Reporter**



Uyless Black

Life is a Dog Fight

Preface

Hello and welcome. I thank you for taking the time to examine some of my work. Additional information can be found at www.UylessBlack.com and blog.UylessBlack.com

This material represents a work in progress. As readers provide feedback, as I uncover new information, if I uncover errors, I will update or correct the text of this manuscript. That stated, I hope my initial efforts have led to a fairly stable offering.

On-line publishing is a new experience for me. Most of my work has been produced in books from my publishers. They are fine companies, but I wanted to try something new. I find I now have more control over my work. Not the content, as my publishers have never asked me to include or exclude anything of significance. Rather, I find I can now more easily integrate, separate, or merge pieces of work. Hard copy does not lend itself to such flexibility.

Most of the writings you will find at my Web site and my blog are available free of charge. Some material is on a fee basis, but not much.

I ask you to honor the copyrights on this material. Unless the book, essay, or report is priced, I am creating this work for our personal use. It is not intended for commercial consumption. Please note the footnotes and obtain permission from the sources if you wish to re-use any of the text, tables, or photos for commercial purposes. If I later decide to sell any of this work, I too will go through the copyright procedures. You are welcome to cite my work; I ask you to provide attribution.

I have used hundreds of sources for my work and I am keen to credit others' help. Why not? It only takes a footnote, and I hope other writers do the same for me. If I have missed citing a source, it is without intent.

I use comments and conversations that are inside quotes in one of three ways: As verbatim reconstructions (from recordings); as nearly accurate reflections (from my notes); or as more distant remembrances (possibly from mental fantasies). I take Mark Twain's approach to quotations: I strive for accuracy; if I do not have exact notes, I strive to convey the spirit and meaning of the quote.

I hope to hear from you about my work. I hope you enjoy it. I hope you will find some of it edifying. I hope you get a few laughs along the way.

Life is a Dog Fight¹ **Part One: I was Caught!**

July 22, 2007

Hello from Your On the Street Reporter. This report is about a dog fighting operation in which NFL quarterback Michael Vick was allegedly involved. He has yet to be tried in our courts. Before bringing in Mr. Bob Dylan to help with this story, let's pause briefly and consider the subject.

In my childhood years I watched cock fights. They were relatively benign affairs as the chickens were not armed with razors on their legs. While living in the Philippines (and visiting the wild town of Olongapo) I saw fights where "armed" cocks sometimes killed each other. I also watched dog fights. One dog, whose face was badly torn by another dog, was later shot by his owner. I've watched bull fighting in Madrid where the bulls were put to death by the matadors after being stabbed by mounted spearsmen so many times the animals couldn't lift their heads. After the bull was dead, the matador cut off his ears to the cheers of the crowd. A tractor then hooked the carcass up and dragged it off to a butcher shop

Cock fighting and dog fighting are considered by some people to be sports; not participatory sports, but spectator sports. The chicken and dogs often get torn-up and sometimes killed, which explains why humans choose not to be part of the contest.

With bull fighting, humans are involved but they hold all the aces. These aces are the picadors' spears and the matadors' swords. Ole!

What is a common element among these three sports? Let's focus on dogs as they invoke more sympathy than a chicken or a bovine, and I'm seeking your sympathy. For centuries dogs have been bred to trust and obey humans. They are now completely reliant upon us. We have changed their once wild, independent natures; they have become domesticated dependents. Our kindness and care is essential to their well-being.

I'm not much of a tree hugger and I have an aversion to many of the Democrats' social programs for humans. But I'm one serious dog hugger. For that matter, I'm a hugger of any helpless creature that Mother Nature and the human race have established to be our ward.

It is not my intent to equate the worth of a dog to that of a child, but the idea of our obligation to take care of both is valid. I am completely incapable of having any sympathy or empathy for anyone who abuses a child. Even if the abuser is mentally ill, I just can't cross that line. I have a deep seated prejudice against child abusers.

I feel the same way about anyone who abuses animals; in this example, dogs. We have a moral duty not to exploit our guardianship of these helpless critters. Dog fighting breaks this trust.

¹ Please see note at the back of this document regarding credits for the artwork on the cover. Also, for the mentally obtuse....and lurking attorneys, all quotes between Uyles Black and Bob Dylan are hypothetical; and all rights are relinquished!

It is my practice to avoid profanity in my writings. But on occasion, it is warranted. A derisive word I associate with those who abuse animals? They are pricks.

We now ask our favorite folk singer, Mr. Bob Dylan, to sing us a ditty. Take it away Bob!

Bob, "OK, but watch your mouth about my supposedly borrowing verse. I only borrow from dead poets; the rest of my stuff is from a live poet: Me! Anyway, this song is named, 'Ode to the Prick, Who is Named Michael Vick':²

Strum, strum, strum...
*There is a young man named Vick,
who is accused of deeds that are sick.
They say he fights dogs,
if they don't fight, they are flogged.
And if they should lose, they are tricked."*

Reporter, "Fine limerick, Bob. But I'm confused about the last line. How are the dogs tricked?"

Bob, "That's the irony of the situation, and irony is one of my strong suits. You see, these dogs are trained to fight other dogs and to win the battle. You've seen dogs fight, haven't you?"

Reporter, "Sure; everyday. Life is a dogfight."

"I'm not speaking metaphorically. For a change, I'm speaking literally. Anyway, a beaten dog will give up the fight, thinking if it submits to the victor, it will get off the hook. It will be demoted in the pack, but will still be able to hang-out with the other dogs.

"Well, this fella Michael Vick has been indicted for running a dog fighting operation. And dog fight operators trick the losing dogs. They don't get to hang around. They get killed-off! By my brilliant line of, "And if they lose, they are tricked," I'm using symbolism to make a point."

"Just make the point Bob. Which is?"

"OK, cool your jets. I couldn't come up with a rhyming word as neat as "tricked." This version just doesn't capture the essence of my song:

Strum, strum, strum...
*There is a young man named Vick,
who is accused of deeds that are sick.
They say he fights dogs,
if they don't fight, they are flogged.
And if they should lose, they are electrocuted, drowned, hung, or shot."*³

² Based on news reports of *The Coeur d'Alene Press*, July 18, 2007, p. A11, and Tom Wier, "Vick Case Sheds Light on Dog Fighting," *USA Today*, July 19, 2007. Retrieved July 19, 2007 from AOL news. In fairness, I add the word allegedly to Vick's reported actions. They have yet to be proven in court. Still, the circumstances have me convinced Vick ran a dog fighting operation. Anyway, Mr. Vick is not a prick; he is an alleged prick.

Reporter, "Hmm. Doesn't rhyme, but the change has a certain jarring effect. Pretty effective culling, wouldn't you say?"

"Yeah, and investigators tell us the culled losers may indeed be killed. After all, losers lose. They also lose money for those who wager on them to win. So, the dog fight promoters cull them out of the pack. Anyway, Vick hasn't been found guilty of anything, but his place in Surry County, Virginia had 55 Pit Bulls caged-up in pens."

Reporter, "So what? Pet stores cage-up all sorts of critters. And I know some pit bulls that are gentle as lambs. Maybe he breeds dogs. Although I admit the name of his operation, The Bad Newz Kennels seems a bit odd."

"No kidding. A grand jury in Richmond indicted Vick for dog fighting, procuring and training Pit Bulls, and conducting the operation across state lines. Which leads to the second verse of my sure-to-win-an-award song:

Strum, strum, strum... ♪♪♪♪

We will do a role reversal,

We will have a dress rehearsal!

We'll sharpen Mike's teeth, put glass in his hair,

Make him real angry, next comes the dog's lair."

Reporter, "Eh, you're suggesting Vick be part of a dog fight? That he be placed in a 16-foot square plywood ring, and go to combat with an angry Pit Bull who has sharpened teeth and cut glass in its fur? Isn't that sick?"

Bob, "If what Vick is accused of doing isn't sick, I don't know what is. What's good for the goose is good for the gander. What's good for the dog fightee is good for the dog fighter."

Reporter, "You're saying the punishment fits the crime?"

Bob, "Yep, let me put the idea into verses for my epic song:

Strum, strum, strum... ♪♪♪♪

So we're having Vick fight a Pit Bull,

an action so artful and manful.

Reporter, "He's now in the dog pit?! If nothing else, your idea is original. Anyway, if Vick's found guilty, he's in for some big time changes; all bad news for him"

Bob, "Eh, that would be bad newz."

Reporter, "Ha. Well, who says an old dog can't learn a new trick?"

³ Ibid., The Coeur d' Alene Press. And thus far, alleged.

"We will see if it can be Michael Vick."

"You're rhyming again."

"It's in my blood."

Your On the Street Reporter.

Life is a Dog Fight
Part Two: I'm Sorry (?)

June 4, 2009

Hello from Your On the Street Reporter. The first part of this report gave no quarter. It was written almost two years ago, and reflected your Reporter's views on animal abuse. My views have not changed, but an update to the first report is needed. Here it is.

As most everyone knows, Michael Vick was found guilty and sentenced to 23 months in prison. Mr. Vick is out of jail, doing the remaining time at his home (until July 20, 2009). His probation is scheduled to end July, 2012.

The media claims that how Mr. Vick will fare in the future depends on how much remorse he shows and his convincing others of his remorse. This includes courts, probation officers, NFL Commissioner Roger Goodell, the owners of the NFL teams, and the general public.

Your Honor, I'm deeply sorry...that I got caught

How many times have we witnessed this scenario?

- Someone gets caught in the act of a crime, such stealing, killing, raping, abusing, fornicating, defrauding, swindling, or selling snake oil.
- The person is found guilty.
- The person issues an "I'm very sorry." statement to those he damaged and to the public.
- Prior to getting caught, the person was not sorry enough to stop doing what he was doing. It is only after he gets caught that he suddenly becomes sorry.

I suggest that this person's statement is correct if he adds another clause, "I'm very sorry I got caught." Think about it. By getting caught, does he suddenly go through a transformation; an alteration of his persona? I think it highly unlikely. Deep seated beliefs and associated behavior is very difficult to change. Can it happen? I think so, but not often.

Even more problematic is the requirement for this person to lie to the judge, probation officer, and his former dogs about his new state of awareness, atonement, remorsefulness and humbleness. Our society says to this person, *Say you're sorry and you can get on with your life.*

Malarkey. Vick has done his time. He paid his debt. The sentence was 23 months in prison. It was not 23 months in prison and a new moral makeup. Why does he have to say he's sorry?

Even more, we can't possibly know the true feelings of the Michael Vicks and Bernie Madoffs of the world. We can't because the recantation of their crimes only occurred after their hands were found in the cookie jar. Show us someone who pulls his hand out of the jar before he is caught, and we will be more willing to accept his contrition and altered beliefs.

On the Other Hand

However, this topic is not as simple as I've laid it out to be. It's actually much more complex. People can and do change; they can undergo profound alterations to their belief system.

It's surprising to me, but I've just recently come to appreciate how aberrational behavior might not seem aberrational to the person doing the aberrations. I was watching a movie in which two attorneys were conversing about racial prejudice. One was from the south; the other from the north. The southerner said to his colleague, "You just can't understand how something like our racial attitudes are embedded into us from the time we are born. It's almost impossible to dislodge something like that out of our system by attending awareness lectures."

The statement gave me pause. In fact, it disturbed me. How on earth can I conjure up an ounce of sympathy for something as repulsive as racial bigotry? Yet, this person was saying that certain beliefs, if taken-on early in life, may not be easily altered.

I have a personal (and inconsequential) testimony to this effect. It makes no sense, but I cannot stop rooting for a football team I've come to dislike. I've identified with this team for over four decades. Now, with the new owner and unknown players, I don't care for the organization. Try as I try not to, I still cheer for them each Sunday. And I'm speaking about a triviality here; not something as serious as an attitude toward animal abuse.

It could very well be that Mr. Vick was inculcated from his youth that dog fighting was ethical. It could be that he did not think his aberrational behavior was aberrational at all. I find dog fighting sick. I found the bull fighting in Madrid sick. (I was careful not to express this opinion to the Spaniards sitting next to me at the bull ring.)

So, perhaps what we sometimes need is a "wake-up call," something to jar us out of an ossified mental state. In the case of Michael Vick, 23 months of prison, bankruptcy, loss of his esteem, and loss of his career would appear to be enough wake-up calls to get his attention.

I hope Mr. Vick has seen the light of day. I hope he has changed. If society requires him to grovel, so he must. But he has paid his debt. He did the crime. He did the time.

We humans can be a nasty lot. But we can forgive. We can accept a "sinner's redemption," even if we are not sure he is really redeemed. To not offer our hand to this "fallen" human would be to close-off a part of us that makes us different from...well, chickens, dogs, and bulls.

So, let Mr. Vick play football. Let him become a spokesman for animal rights. Let him get on with life. It's great if he has been redeemed and is also remorseful. (If he isn't, society will require him to lie about it anyway.) In the final analysis, it's our conscience that's the final moral arbiter; not a judge or a football commissioner; not Oprah or Rush; but our own scruples. Ironically, Mr. Vick has done more for dogs than most anyone else in America.

Besides, his crime was against dogs. Part of his sentence is that he cannot own any dogs. His crime was not against the game of football. It makes no sense to deny him the opportunity to ply his trade.

Before closing, permit me to return to one of my favorite profanities, the word prick. When I was a kid, I recall one of our favorite dismissals of another boy was to offer this dissing, “Once a prick, always a prick.” We can’t really believe this statement because it means we can never change. We can and we do. Let’s give Mr. Vick a chance; let’s let him put the Bad Newz Kennels in his rear view mirror.

“Yo! You there! I’ve been waiting backstage to finish my epic song.”

“Sorry Bob. OK, please close out this report.”

“OK, here goes:”

Strum, strum, strum...
*Can an old dog learn a new trick?
Time will tell as we watch Mr. Vick.*

Your On the Street Reporter

Note for Artwork on Cover

The Michael Vick and Snoopy faces were taken from a cartoon sent to me by my sister-in-law. She did not have the source, and my copy’s source notation is not readable. But here it is, and I thank the artist for the cartoon.



I have taken the liberty to reproduce the full cartoon here:

