

Biden's Cuban Missile Crisis. But First, Super Bowl Halftime!



by Eric Rozenman

What, you ask, did the Super Bowl halftime show have to do with crises over Ukraine and Taiwan? Good question. The answer requires a bit of history.

Sixty years ago, President John F. Kennedy and the United States faced Soviet aggression in the Cuban missile crisis. It brought the planet closer to nuclear war than many recognized. Today, President Joe Biden, and the rest of us, confront threats from Moscow over Ukraine and China over Taiwan.

Then, Soviet Premier Nikita Khrushchev sought to exploit the weakness he perceived in a young American leader following the 1961 Bay of Pigs fiasco, Washington's ill-conceived attempt to overthrow Cuba's Fidel Castro. Now, Russian leader Vladimir Putin attempts to exploit weakness he saw in an old American leader with last summer's ill-conceived Afghanistan

withdrawal. Chinese dictator Xi Jinping seeks to do likewise.

As diversion from our dangers came the schlock that was Super Bowl LVI's (56 for the Roman numeral deficient) halftime show. Given that 112 million people [tuned to the game](#), the behavior of the popular entertainers in Los Angeles' \$5 billion SoFi Stadium raises a question:

Is the United States serious? Because if not, it won't be able to defend its interests.

Commissioner Roger Goodell (two-year pay [\\$128 million](#)) and the other empty suit moguls of the National Football League had painted "End Racism" across the Super Bowl endzones. Then they presented a halftime extravaganza that reworked a Jim Crow minstrel show; instead of whites in blackface, it featured blacks in blackface.

There are 32 NFL teams. Ninety-five percent of ownership is white; only two franchises have minority owners, neither of whom is [African-American](#). In the league's 100-year history, no team has had a black owner.

Would ownership with more African Americans have tolerated this year's halftime show? It spotlighted black rappers 50 years old and up—Dr. Dre (Andre Romelle Young—net worth estimated in the high hundreds of millions, repeatedly accused of abuse by the women in his life), Snopp Dog (Calvin Cordozar Broadus Jr., 35 million albums sold worldwide, almost as many arrests), and Mary J. Blige (actually Mary J. Blige, "queen of hip-hop soul," nine Grammy awards).

Dre and Dogg each grabbed his crotch as he strutted across the stage, as if for reassurance nothing was missing. White man-boy rapper Eminem (Marshall Mathers) did the same. Ms. Blige—about a decade past her drop-dead sexiness—overfilled a Victoria's Secret knock-off, revealing a bit too much derriere.

Accompanying all was a sullen horde performing what looked like an angry fertility dance.

Okay, entertainment tastes change across generations. Ours today include legalized “recreational” marijuana in 18 states and the District of Columbia (name a successful society that had more than one legal, general use intoxicant like alcohol here), and legalized on-line gambling in 30 states and the District.

But imagine the Supremes or Jackie Wilson, let alone Duke Ellington, Count Basie, Ella Fitzgerald or Sarah Vaughn watching this year’s [\\$17 million](#) modern minstrelsy. Would they have seen in the Hollywood bling a subtext of the insidious bigotry of low expectations?

By the time Eminem ostentatiously took a knee, a la’ former San Francisco 49’ers quarterback Colin Kaepernick’s 2016 kneel during the National Anthem to protest anti-black racism, league owners—for whom Kaepernick has [never played again](#)—must have imagined they’d achieved a politically correct daily double.

Meanwhile, back in the White House: Joe Biden presides over a country that tells itself such a halftime production somehow counters lingering racial prejudice. The chief executive—whose administration counts climate change as a major military threat—still hasn’t shown the public how Russian and Chinese aggression endanger a world in which U.S.-style freedom and democracy, including wretched excesses like the Super Bowl halftime show, are possible.

If and when he does, we the people will have to demonstrate that however easily and superficially we can be distracted, we still have what Americans in 1962 had—the ability to take serious matters seriously.

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Academica Press.*