



At least once a month, my husband and I have the same conversation. It goes like this . . .

Me: "Got any ideas for my column? I'm stumped. I have nothing to say."

Jeff: "Write about the outrage."

Jeff has been telling me to "write about the outrage" for years now. He thinks it's a hilarious thing to say, especially to a woman in wretched sweat pants half-crazy with writer's block.

I don't think I've ever really followed his advice. Oh, I'll write about the vexation. Or the irritation. Or even the devastation. But the outrage? I tend to steer clear.

This week – being even more stumped than usual – I thought it might be fun to humor Dear Hubby and see what's out there. In terms of outrage, I mean.

Did you know Beyonce lip synched (lip sanc?) the National Anthem at President Obama's inauguration? Of course you did. You're a responsible citizen; you watch the news. Are you outraged? Lots of folks are. Me? Nah. It's not like we're talking about Dame Kiri Te Kanawa here. We're talking about Beyonce. She's a pop star . . . who reps for Pepsi . . . and is currently gracing the cover of GQ wearing little more than two Band Aids. I think we ceded the "gravitas" factor long before the lips started synching. I do feel sorry for her, though. She will now face tremendous pressure to sing live at the Super Bowl (which, ironically, seems like a perfectly

reasonable place to lip synch).

On a more serious note, Hillary Clinton became outraged – or pretty close, anyway – during the Benghazi hearings last week. When pressed by Senator Ron Johnson to explain why her department had called the attack on our consulate a "spontaneous protest" that got out of hand – a narrative that was soon proved false – she became visibly irritated, offended even, snapping, *"What difference, at this point, does it make?"* As you might imagine, conservatives were outraged by her outrage – they found it outrageous! – which, in turn, outraged progressives, who found the whole line of questioning outrageous to begin with. So now everybody's outraged. Isn't this fun?

Lots of outrage at Lance Armstrong, too, which isn't particularly outrageous, considering. It's hard to say if people are more outraged by what he did – taking performance enhancing drugs and lying about it for years, among other things – or the fact that he confessed on air to Oprah (an outrageous PR move!) while appearing outrageously composed for one so disgraced. And now – outrageously! – there's a new accusation that Armstrong lied to Oprah when he said he'd raced clean in 2009. Outrageous.

While researching this article on Google, I learned that Erick Erickson, the outrageous editor of the Red State blog, recently beseeched his fellow conservatives to stop with all the outrage already. "We have too many outrage pimps on both sides of the aisle whipping the respective bases into a frenzy and fury against the other side," he wrote. "What I am finding is that among conservatives there is too much outrage, piss, and vinegar. It makes our ideas less effective. We have become humorless, angry opponents of the President instead of happy warriors selling better ideas . . . Conservatives, frankly, have become purveyors of outrage instead of preachers for a cause."

Hear, hear! Political Outrage is a thriving and pernicious industry, and while everybody knows it, nobody likes to admit their side is complicit. It's rare to hear an "outrage pimp" like Erickson take his own team to the woodshed for outrage mongering. So kudos for that. But I'm not surprised that plenty of his readers were outraged by his article. (Seems they *like* being outraged and don't like being told to stop.) Nor am I surprised that the progressives over at Salon were a little outraged, too. Their blogger Jillian Rayfield wrote a skeptical piece called "A Kinder, Gentler Erick Erickson?" in which she reproduced some of Erickson's own outrageous remarks over the years. Ouch! As it turns out, being branded a "purveyor of outrage" by Erick Erickson is like being labeled a "psycho killer" by Charles Manson. Is it possible Erickson's really had a change of heart? Maybe. And maybe MSNBC's Chris Matthews will suddenly start scolding his Hardball viewers for seeing racism around every corner. Now

that
would be outrageous!

No column about The Outrage would be complete without a reference to the recently rekindled gun control debate. All I have to do is consult my multi-culti Facebook newsfeed to see that there are equal levels of outrage on both sides of the argument. Some of my FB friends are outraged because they feel their constitutional freedoms are under assault, while others are outraged at the notion that anybody should own an assault weapon. Both sides have mounted their high horses, and the arrows of self-righteousness and moral certainty are flying. (Okay, for one side they're arrows; for the other, bullets.)

I understand the outrage of both groups – it is, perhaps, my curse that I am driven to read and read, and read some more, until I understand everybody's outrage – but as a result, I don't share it. What do I feel about the shootings at Newtown – and the seemingly endless series of shootings since? Not outrage, that's for sure. More like deep, dark sadness. And bafflement. And, honestly? Helplessness. Don't get me wrong – I'm glad that the people who fix things are determined to fix this. And I sincerely hope they make some headway. But I look at contemporary American culture – the violence and pornography, the over-medication and media-saturation, the obsessive consumerism and spiritual hollowness – and the gun debate just feels so small. It feels like we're quibbling over which pain meds to give a dying woman, instead of talking about cures.

But it sure does keep the outrage industry hopping, doesn't it? The folks are tuned in to their cable news networks of choice (watching their ads for Viagra and the Lifestyle Lift), the family feud is raging on Facebook – where you can order an authentic Louis Vuitton handbag for only \$199! – and all is right with the world.

Outrageous.

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