

Dancing on a Volcano

by Christian Schneider

In 1939, legendary French director Jean Renoir released “Rules of The Game,” a film that still frequently resides at the top of many “Greatest Movies in History” lists. The film was a madcap satire of French society in the late 1930s, portraying the governing class as crude, oversexed, and naïve to the realities of the world.

When the film was released, France was on the brink of entering World War II. Renoir’s portrayal of French culture as infantile and elitist clearly conveyed a message to the public that they didn’t want to hear. At the film’s debut, a riot ensued, with some patrons setting fire to newspapers in an attempt to burn the theater down. During the War, the film was placed on a government list of banned movies, as it was supposedly bad for the public’s morale.

In Renoir’s eyes, too little attention was paid to the serious issues that plagued society, such as the impending World War. In a 1966 interview, Renoir quoted a poet who said it was like they were “dancing on a volcano.”

When watching old movies, it is often jarring to realize how little things change over time. America in 2007 is still at war, yet you’re assured of a spot on the news if you’re a dead Playboy playmate, a bald pop-star slattern, or a homicidal diaper-wearing astronaut.

In Wisconsin, voters will select a Supreme Court justice on April 3rd. Thus far, none of the public debate between candidates has even approached how either of them would serve as a member of our highest court. Instead, we get charges that one justice didn’t disclose a relationship with a bank in some small claims cases, followed up by a bogus complaint filed by a special interest that purports to oppose special interests.

Then we’re treated to an equally irrelevant counterclaim that a candidate’s campaign workers lied to some cops who asked them where they were from. It’s gotten so ridiculous that one television station thinks it’s relevant that one of the candidates [made some calls](#) to a ski resort using her office phone.

Both campaigns would probably go through the usual verbal contortions to say that the above examples show their opponent’s “trustworthiness,” or “ethics.” In fact, they don’t show us anything at all.

They don’t show us what each of the candidates thinks about the constitutionality of Wisconsin’s school choice program, which gives low-income African American children a chance to escape Milwaukee’s failing schools. They don’t show us how the candidates would constitutionally justify unlimited gambling in Wisconsin, just years after citizens thought they passed a constitutional amendment banning expanded gambling.

They don't show us how the Constitution allows someone to now sue a company in Wisconsin for actions that may have taken place 100 years ago, and that may or may not have caused their injuries. They don't show whether the candidates read the constitutional right to "to keep and bear arms for security, defense, hunting, recreation or any other lawful purpose," to mean "depending on what neighborhood you live in."

They don't tell us how one of the candidates would decide a case on free speech restrictions being pushed by a campaign finance reform advocate who is helping her get elected. They don't tell us what authority the Court has to write entirely new laws, such as the mandate that all juvenile interrogations be videotaped.

On April 3rd, Wisconsin voters could end up picking the swing vote on the State Supreme Court based on issues that are painfully superfluous to actually being a justice. Voters could neglect issues of historical importance to pick a justice based on whether we like her nails. And when the volcano erupts, we'll have no one to blame but ourselves.