



The Kentucky Derby Is Decadent and Depraved

Hunter S. Thompson

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This was a seminal sports article by Hunter S. Thompson on the 1970 Kentucky Derby in Louisville, Kentucky, first appearing in an issue of Scanlan's Monthly in June of that year. Though not known at the time, the article marked the first appearance of gonzo journalism, the style that Thompson came to epitomize through the 1970s.

The article's focus is less on the actual race itself—indeed, Thompson and Steadman could not actually see the race from their standpoint—and more on the celebration and depravity that surrounds the event, as well as other events in Louisville (Thompson's home town) in the surrounding days.

The Kentucky Derby Is Decadent and Depraved Details

Date : Published June 1970 by Scanlan's Monthly

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Author : Hunter S. Thompson

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From Reader Review The Kentucky Derby Is Decadent and Depraved for online ebook

Marsha says

truly very funny. that poor british cartoonist... i bet he never had a better time in his life though.

alexandrasophiahampton says

I absolutely loved this. It's wild and "different" which makes it beautiful! I love the imagery he helps us visualize. The language is in such a way that even you know when it's all supposed to come out in one breath. I think it's fantastic. Truly amazing!

Khalid Al Khalili says

Quite a short read and it had me chuckling. Thompson is a beast.

Michael Lowe says

Sheer debauchery. Wonderful.

Armand Daigle says

I would have loved to see Thompson's face as he toyed with and bewildered the Derby faithful.

Thompson explains the Derby without explaining it, which makes sense for anyone that's been there and been so far and removed from the action, the horses and physical feats are rendered pointless. Booze, gambling, and the mob are head and shoulders above any sort of pageantry.

Vcautin says

Bueno, bueno. En español solo 27 pgs.

Shanwar Badr says

Anticlimactic by today's standards but an entertaining article nonetheless.

Hunter S. Thompson is the quintessential outsider who loves to make himself the quintessential insider. In his eyes, the Kentucky Derby was never about the horses but rather the real beasts on the stands. Hunter & Ralph set out to expose the breed of "sub-humans" who attended the derby for what they are only to find out they were just as decadent and depraved as their subjects. Pure Gonzo journalism, worth the read.

Larry Wang says

An interesting little piece and my first delve in Gonzo journalism. Thompson's style is a little wacky and not really to my taste, but there is still some good stuff here. Definitely influenced some of David Foster Wallace's pieces later on, particularly "Big Red Son".

Danielle says

Thompson is a crazy man and interestingly enough is from Kentucky. This article presents the reader with the worst kind of Southern - a drunk, racist, xenophobe and [insert additional negative Southern stereotypes here]. We also discover the article is not only about the Derby but also about the author.

In reading this, I wonder if my own experiences would've been the same. Did his craziness just attract craziness? Also, I wonder what Thompson's childhood was like and did it push him to such debauchery.

Dianne says

People used to read interesting, informative sometimes funny magazine articles. This is one of those articles written by a famous witty writer. What I found out about this famous horse race besides the well known fact that there are many addicted gamblers ready to spend their last ten bucks on the dream of winning back some small amount of the fortune they have lost on the horses is how inebriated many of these well dressed people become at the track.

Rebdoomer says

Drunk reporting.

Evan says

Long before there existed a merchant association's campaign to "Keep Louisville Weird," Hunter S. Thompson was the living embodiment of the concept -- a local boy and the alien spawn of its weirdness, a favorite son that his civic parents embraced with the furtive hugs reserved for Black Sheep. Heroes' welcomes have been reserved for the 'Ville's more "respectable" alumni. Jennifer Lawrence, Diane Sawyer,

Colonel Sanders, Muhammad Ali; these and others are enshrined in monumental images on the sides of the city's buildings, on mega-billboards deemed "Hometown Heroes." So far, there is only one literary notable so enshrined: Sue Grafton. Sue Grafton. Sue Grafton.

Hometown heroes are not allowed to take drugs and commit suicide, you see? Bad for the youth.

Mr. Thompson could not go home again, but he knew his way around the block. In this 1970 consideration of his hometown's most famous event, he largely bypasses the event to get at the heart of its darkness.

Thompson was not only the city's most notable writer, but also its most biting humorist, and here he is in full-throttle glory.

As I haven't read this recently enough to have fresh impressions for a cogent, intelligent review; I'm simply giving this a general recommendation. It's not really a book, but a now-famous article from Scanlan's Monthly in 1970 and a high-point in Hunter Thompson's creation of gonzo journalism, as well as the beginning of his fruitful partnering with the stylistically whacked illustrator, Ralph Steadman.

It is, in fact, one of the funniest stories ever written. A story about an event that is not about the event very much but about the observer's reactions to the world of 1970 that revolved around it, and his own drug-addled alienation from it. The opening graphs are every bit as good as those from *Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas*. Read it here: <http://brianb.freeshell.org/a/kddd.pdf>

As for Thompson and his Louisville legacy, he understood the game. It's OK to be weird, but not *too* weird. If his face was painted on the side of a building, and if he was still with us, he'd probably just sling out a couple of his .44 magnums and use his monolithic visage for target practice.

(KevinR@Ky, substantially amended in 2016)

Daniel says

Quintessential Hunter S Thompson gonzo journalism. What I find so interesting about this style of writing is it's hard to tell what's real or not because it all *seems* so real. He apparently submitted this thinking it was a terrible piece of writing and consequently ended up sparking gonzo journalism itself. One of the scenes towards the beginning of the story where he met "Jimbo" at the bar was particularly memorable for me. It's just something about fitting every spectator at the Derby into one heuristic of a person I find so funny. This story is just plain funny.

Matthew says

Next year, when spring is in glorious bloom and mid-May comes around on Derby weekend, do yourself the favor of downloading or otherwise locating the audiobook version of this "Rolling Stone" magazine piece which catapulted Thompson into Gonzo Journalism fame. Narrated by actor Tim Robbins, with lush, jazzy musical accompaniment by the legendary Bill Frisell, "The Kentucky Derby is Decadent and Depraved" captures Thompson in his most hilarious and paranoid vision of a Vietnam-era Lexington afternoon, doomed to be sabotaged by Black Panthers, white supremacists, and the whisky gentry, with an unsuspecting Ralph

Steadman, arriving from England to document the whole affair with this wine-stained illustrations.

Thom Gibney says

"There he was, by God--a puffy, drink-ravaged, disease-ridden caricature...like an awful cartoon version of an old snapshot in some once-proud mother's family photo album. It was the face we'd been looking for--and it was, of course, my own". What started as a generally innocent writing assignment became the benchmark for what would later become Hunter S. Thompson's own branding of New Journalism, the self-immersive sub-genre of Gonzo Journalism characterised by the dark brooding humour, societal wrongdoings and the misdeeds of the writer in question. The breed of sub-human that Hunter S. Thompson and Ralph Steadman intended to find during that fateful Kentucky Derby turned out to be themselves, possibly existing deep within the far recesses of their subconsciousnesses and waiting to be unleashed upon the unsuspecting Kentuckian population. "The Kentucky Derby Is Decadent and Depraved" is a mix of conscious reminiscings and the incoherent notetaking that would come to inspire a new generation of readers and writers alike.
