

Big Rotten Apple?

By Reg P. Wydeven
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I've always loved watching Saturday Night Live. One of my favorite ongoing skits from the late 1980s and early '90s was 'Bill Swerski's Super Fans.' The Super Fans were a group of middle-aged, portly Chicago residents who got together to discuss the virtues of Da Bears while drinking beer and eating polish sausages in Mike Ditka's restaurant.

Joe Mantegna played Bill Swerski, who moderated Da Bears round table, which also included Mike Myers, Chris Farley and 'Cheers' star George Wendt. Thankfully Da Fans pretty much ignored the Packers and focused their wrath on the New York Giants. While discussing the upcoming game against the Giants, the much-biased Fans claim New York is a crime-infested rat-hole. After guest diner and New York resident oddsmaker Danny Sheridan makes a disparaging remark about Da Bears, he is told to take his crack pipe back to New York and shoot somebody with his gun.

While the Super Fans' take on the Big Apple was meant to be comical, recent headlines may have shown their assessment may not have been too far off the mark.

First, New York Governor Eliot Spitzer resigned after his \$80,000 prostitution scandal was uncovered. While he has not been charged as of yet, Spitzer could be arrested for soliciting and paying for sex, and illegally arranging cash transactions to conceal their purpose. He could also be charged with violating the Mann Act, a 19th Century federal statute that has been used to prosecute other prominent men in the past.

Officially known as the White-Slave Traffic Act, the law passed in 1910 got its better known moniker from Illinois Congressman James Robert Mann. The federal law, which bans carrying women or girls across state lines for "prostitution or debauchery, or for any other immoral purpose," was passed in response to an outbreak of hysteria during the turn of the century over fears that immigrant men were abducting white women and girls who were leaving rural farm areas to work in cities, and forcing them into prostitution.

The Mann Act, which carries a maximum penalty of 10 years in prison, was amended in 1986 to replace the words "debauchery" and "any other immoral purpose" with "any sexual activity for which any person can be charged with a criminal offense."

Other high-profile violators of the Mann Act include entertainer Charlie Chaplin, architect Frank Lloyd Wright, musician Chuck Berry and heavyweight champ Jack Johnson. Chaplin was purportedly investigated by the FBI over his liberal political views. Wright was charged because of a child-custody dispute. Berry, who transported an underage girl across state lines, and Johnson, who transported a prostitute from Pittsburgh to Chicago, even served prison time for violating the Act.

Luckily for Spitzer, the Mann Act hasn't been used to prosecute individual customers of prostitutes for years. However, because Spitzer had taken a hard stance against crime while in office, the feds may just dust it off and use it again.

Secondly, securities trader Stephen Chang sued Manhattan's Hot Lap Dance Club after a stripper giving him a lap dance swiveled and smacked him in the eye with the heel of her shoe, causing him "to sustain serious injuries."

The club has allegedly stopped using its slogan that their dancers' beauty is eye-popping.