

CHAPTER 3 – COKE AND THE SUPERBOWL

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Introduction

In the series finale of *Mad Men*, Matthew Weiner's meticulous rendering of Madison Avenue in the 1960s, the show's protagonist Don Draper (Jon Hamm) leaves viewers with an impression that is either slightly quixotic, or deeply cynical. In a moment of what seems like centeredness and clarity, at a meditation retreat in sunny California, Draper's enigmatic smile segues into one of the most iconic advertisements in US history: 'I'd Like to Buy the World a Coke', McCann Erickson's 1971 campaign for Coca-Cola. Just how chronological the juxtaposition is remains unclear (Vranica and Sharma, 2015). Draper may well have channelled some newfound sense of humanity into this Big Idea, or perhaps it was simply a historical marker, a nod to what was then corporate America's nascent awakening to cultural diversity, social inclusion, and brand purpose. In *The Conquest of Cool* (1997), Thomas Frank's history of 'hip consumerism', the intermingling of politics, branding and culture begins roughly around the same time as Draper's personal epiphany, if that is indeed what it was (Howard, 2018). There is a slide here away from the didactic mode of advertising employed before this moment, towards the weightless, nuanced style of postmodern branding – of allusions and moods, and the emotional engagement of lifestyle marketing – that would become more prevalent afterwards. Both literally and metaphorically, Draper moves from a world of suits and social engineering to its ideological antithesis – the counterculture – and the Coke ad is the symbolic and ironic manifestation of this transition.

The *Mad Men* finale reminded viewers that Coke has, for decades, wrapped its brand identity around a message of unity in diversity. At a cost of US\$250,000, which was at the time roughly four times bigger than the average ad spend, the image of some 500 culturally and linguistically diverse singers on a hilltop outside Rome (hence its nickname, and what it is referred to hereafter: Hilltop) was an unabashed affirmation of multicultural harmony. Whatever the motivation for ending *Mad Men* on Hilltop, it remains a compelling testament to the cultural resonance of a timely message. Reeling from the social unrest of the 1960s, with street riots, contested segregation, assassinations and the collective trauma of the Vietnam War, middle America embraced Hilltop with unprecedented and atypical affection (Riggs, 2000). It not only set in place brand values that continue to define Coke decades later,

but made a bold and ultimately convincing bid for affective engagement. Then, as now, advertising that speaks to contemporary anxieties and concerns can place brands at the heart of dominant cultural conversations. Moreover, when these conversations are marked by division and discord, such forays register even more pointedly.

This chapter considers how the message communicated by Coke's Hilltop ad registers now, in a commercial climate that has parallels to the late 1960s and early 1970s. To do so, the focus of its analysis will be placed on that nebulous, sometimes frustrating space where politics, commerce and art converge in ways that defy clean demarcation. By canvassing the ads that Coke ran before and during the first three Super Bowls since the inauguration of President Donald Trump, the discussion shows how Hilltop's central motif – beauty in diversity – has not only been sustained over several decades, but has assumed particular meanings in light of current political debates. What emerges then is the cultural logic of contemporary branding, at the nexus of commercial imperatives, the 'culture wars' with which brands have been implicated, and a generational drift towards more personalised expressions of political identity (Precourt, 2016).

The Coke ads considered here both point to and draw from politically charged debates. This, however, is not an entirely new or novel phenomenon. To return to Frank: for decades, brands have reflected politically inspired ideals and aspirations. For Frank, this speaks to the inevitable exchange that links the advertising world with emerging cultural movements. First, and in practical terms, there is the extent to which even the most 'authentic' countercultures are themselves informed and endowed by the mediated ephemera of the 'sponsored society', the stuff of advertising (Frank, 1997, p. 8). Second though, and since the seismic cultural ferment of the 1960s, the advertising world – itself weary of hierarchy, excited by creativity, and embodied by Draper – increasingly saw countercultures not as Red-leaning adversaries but rather as inspirational allies, kindred spirits that fired up the creative imagination (Frank, 1997, p. 9). As such, neither the 'establishment' ethos of Draper's pre-retreat persona nor 'the people' he seemed to finally connect with were ever completely independent, autonomous or self-sufficient from the other. The analysis that follows sees this irony as a springboard for unpacking Coke's Trump-era Super Bowl ads. It shows that Coke has integrated imagery and ideals tied to a broad coalition that takes umbrage with Trump's more incendiary statements. This speaks to both shared symbolic resources, insofar as Coke is neither the first nor the only brand to take such a stand, as well as a perceived ideological symmetry with demographically significant consumers – that is, census data that shows that Latinx, African-American and Asian-American people constitute

a growing percentage of the US population (Russo Whyllly, 2010). Herein lies the tense space alluded to earlier. When a corporate behemoth co-opts the language and imagery of countercultural resistance, it is easy to dismiss as a cynical play for relevance, a ‘woke’ wink that does nothing to disrupt the status quo. Indeed, since Coke is a capitalist construct beholden to shareholders and driven by profit, the ads here are not framed as anything other than commercial artefacts. That said though, contemporary branding is such that this does not cancel out political freight. Rather, and insofar as consumers increasingly code their political leanings into lifestyle choices, it is not the case that Coke has atypically or accidentally ventured into contested discourses. As amply evidenced by consumers’ conversations across social media, brands are now read in highly political terms, with their imagery, rhetoric and stories screened through partisan logics. Now more than ever, brand statements are politically fraught – and this was vividly illustrated with Coke’s first three Super Bowl ads since the election of Donald Trump.

The MAGA milieu

In his winning bid for the White House, Trump promised to ‘Make America Great Again’ (MAGA). Central to Trump’s ‘explanation’ of where and why the US had lost its way as global leader was an alarmingly skewed view of migrants – and this had immediate and devastating consequences. Since announcing his run for the presidency in July 2015, Trump has flaunted his disregard for ‘politically correct’ speech. For Trump, and as Jessica Gantt Shafer (2017, p. 2) writes, political correctness ‘is not an effort to use language that includes different peoples and acknowledges systematic injustices, but rather a weak bureaucratic sugarcoating of inherent truths – pandering to populations for the sake of a political career’. This made way for Trump to level some of the most caustic accusations squarely at migrants that sought entry into the US – in particular, Mexicans and Muslims. The former were defined almost exclusively as drug carriers, criminals, and rapists – hence the urgency to build a wall along the US–Mexican border. The latter were casually and repeatedly equated with terrorism; even refugees fleeing war-ravaged Syria were, by Trump’s reckoning, potential threats to US security.

Once elected and in the White House, it did not take long for Trump to show Americans (and a bewildered world) how he planned to rebuild America’s wealth and prestige. Not only did Trump double down on his commitment to ‘build the wall’ – and make Mexico pay for it, as if such a demand could be enforced – but in January 2017, just days after his inauguration, he signed into law Executive Order 13769, also known as ‘Protecting

The Nation From Foreign Terrorist Entry Into The United States'. This was widely referred to as 'the Muslim ban', since it put an immediate block on all arrivals from seven Muslim-majority nations for 90 days, as well as Syrian refugees indefinitely. It was the most extreme and public display yet of Trump's intransigence. In turn, whatever pluralism, hope and progress had been heralded by his predecessor Barack Obama appeared to have belonged to another country; and in some ways, it did. When he was campaigning for re-election in 2012, President Obama created (also by executive order) the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals program (DACA). DACA granted two-year work and residence permits to around 740,000 unauthorised foreigners that had arrived in the US as children (i.e. under the age of 16), were between ages 16 and 30, had lived in the US illegally for at least five years, and had either a high school diploma or were honourably discharged veterans (Martin, 2017, pp. 166–167). This protected those that had come to the US illegally as children, the so-called 'Dreamers', from the threat of deportation. More than an article of law, DACA spoke to an America of generosity and hope, where illegal immigrants were actually seen as 'Dreamers' rather than potential terrorists, or a fiscal drain (Edwards, 2018, p. 189).

Trolling Trump?

Trump was inaugurated on January 20, 2017; the National Football League (NFL) Super Bowl that year was played on February 5 (the first Sunday of the month). That the biggest television event in the US, with the most expensive advertising in the world, should fall so soon after such a controversial election would prove highly significant. Of interest here though is not just the temporal proximity that linked the 2017 Super Bowl to Trump's election, but the fact that a brand as iconic as Coke should make such an emphatic statement on Super Bowl Sunday, and continue to do so the following two years as well. Few sporting events in the US are as anticipated or spectacular as the NFL Super Bowl. More than a football match, it is, for domestic audiences at least, a panoramic television institution (Yelkur, Tomkovick and Traczyk, 2004). Almost every year, records are rewritten: audience size, ad spend, and global reach grow annually, forging a worldwide community as well as a national one. The Super Bowl sits within the US calendar (and its retail) much like Christmas and Halloween, and attracts viewers worldwide with much more than football (O'Barr, 2012). In fact, over the last few decades, and as far as much of the world is concerned, there have been at least two other attractions. First is the halftime entertainment, which almost always features a major headline act. This has included Prince, Paul McCartney, Madonna, Bruce Springsteen, Beyoncé, The Rolling Stones, and U2. Second are the advertisements,

which, remarkably and most unusually, are experienced and analysed like at no other time, anywhere. It is only the Super Bowl that can guarantee an audience that is as attentive to the ads as it is to the content they sponsor (Raithel, Taylor and Hock, 2016, p. 3788; Tomkovick, 2010, p. 354).

Given the scale of the Super Bowl now, it is practically expected that, in addition to the competing teams, both the halftime entertainment and the advertisers should step up and treat the largest television audience in the world to something extraordinary. This was certainly expected for the 2017 Super Bowl. Once it was announced that the halftime performance was to be delivered by pop sensation Lady Gaga, media was abuzz with speculation. Lady Gaga was a youthquake phenomenon – bold, outspoken and quick to rally her fans, who she calls her ‘Little Monsters’, around contemporary activist causes. That she should headline the Super Bowl just weeks after Trump’s inauguration was therefore ratings gold dust. As *Billboard* magazine reminded readers on the eve of the game, Gaga had tweeted that, to get elected, Trump had ‘empowered racist intolerant Americans’ (Lipshutz, 2017, p. 36). As far as most media were concerned, Gaga was primed to take on Trump’s more divisive and controversial policies, statements and tweets, on television’s biggest stage. That did not happen.

Not only did Lady Gaga not mention Trump at all during her Super Bowl performance, but almost every advertisement that aired did – obliquely if not directly, and critically nonetheless. Without citing his name, few left any doubt that he had inspired their approach, and their consensus was clear (Hunt, 2017). Budweiser, for instance, maker of ‘America’s beer’, reimagined its founder’s journey from Germany to St Louis, his story an unmistakable parallel to the present-day refugees facing discrimination, bigotry and travel bans. Airbnb upped its #weaccept campaign, also launched in the wake of Trump’s travel ban; across imagery of ethnically diverse faces was this message: ‘We believe no matter who you are, where you’re from, who you love, or who you worship, we all belong. The world is more beautiful the more you accept.’ Carmaker Audi went with its #DriveProgress initiative, to campaign against lingering pay disparities between men and women, which assumed a more critical edge in light of Trump’s infamously sexist and misogynistic comments. For its part though, Coke did not launch a new advertisement but rather recycled its ad from the 2014 Super Bowl, called ‘It’s Beautiful’.

That Coke should repeat this campaign in the early aftermath of Trump’s win was highly telling. The one-minute ad featured Americans of varying ethnicity, religion, gender and sexual orientation. In turns, the late 19th century Christian patriotic song, ‘America the

Beautiful’, is sung in different languages, including Spanish, Senegalese, French, Keres and Tagalog. Even when it premiered in 2014, Coke anticipated pushback from conservative Americans. Back then, and to help its online fans survive the so-called ‘culture wars’ that simmered across social media, Coke designed a strategy to arm them with apposite and fact-based retorts. Against charges that ‘real’ Americans sing only in English, for instance, Coke (via its online community) stressed that the singers were in fact *all* American citizens. Still, and as expected, the ad proved divisive. During the 2014 Super Bowl, Coke’s advocates helped #AmericaIsBeautiful to trend number one across Facebook, Twitter and Google within the first 24 hours that the ad aired. Inevitably though, there was immediate backlash (Poniewozik, 2014), with #SpeakAmerican and #BoycottCoke also trending. If nothing else, this much could be said: within 24 hours, ‘It’s Beautiful’ had 10.5 million YouTube views, the *Wall Street Journal* called it one of the few ads to have had ‘lasting impact’, and Coke reaffirmed its celebration of a multi-linguistic, multi-faith, multicultural America (Lacey, 2015). To revisit this ad in 2017 was therefore powerful, unambiguous and unexpected – and thus that much more effective. In this instance, and perhaps paradoxically, to repeat a Super Bowl ad that had proved divisive on its first outing was newsworthy for both its novelty, and as a show of an emboldened commitment to American diversity. Within what seemed an advertising-led push to troll Trump, with one advertiser after another referencing his more inflammatory statements and stances, it was impossible to miss Coke’s point: they too saw in Trump’s rhetoric a version of America that both conflicted with its brand values, and ran counter to a narrative of diversity and inclusion that had inflected American advertising for decades – or at least since Hilltop. Indeed, Coca-Cola’s Turkish-American CEO Muhtar Kent had already joined numerous industry leaders by publicly condemning the travel ban as an affront to both Coke’s core beliefs and commitments to diversity, fairness and inclusion (Grantham, 2017).

As detailed at length elsewhere in this book, Coke is a globally recognised and widely consumed American icon, with a cultural presence that has grown over 130 years, and expanded outside the US in particular since the 1960s. By virtue of this salience, and a heritage steeped in the symbols and mythology of America itself, it matters what Coke should say during the biggest television event in America. In fact, with a newly minted president who vowed to ‘Make America Great Again’ through such schismatic policies and promises, it behoves icons of American culture to demonstrate a point of view. For a brand like Coke then, having crafted such a sanguine image of multicultural bliss, Trump’s win posed a break with narrative, inasmuch as nativist talk of border control and ‘extreme vetting’ signalled

deep displeasure with multicultural America. Connotatively then, the consequences for the Coke brand, tethered to such a warm embrace of radical diversity, are significant. Within a political milieu infused with the angry populism that characterised Trump's signature policies, Coke's messaging assumed a distinct, almost jarring poignancy. Coke presented a very different reading of what in fact had made America great in the first place – and continues to do so.

Super Bowl, super significant

Perhaps in any other period, 'It's Beautiful' would not have struck such a profound note. Yet such is the power of context and timing that, in the wake of Trump's win, Coke's ostensibly generous, tender and optimistic vision for multicultural America was especially affective. Moreover, nesting this advertisement within the Super Bowl was critical. As the most expensive real estate in advertising, brands strive for more than just cut-through; a strong Super Bowl ad becomes a national talking point (Alberti, 2016). Audience engagement during this broadcast is so precious and rare that whatever mindshare a brand secures is born of atypically careful planning and strategy. Messages are crafted specifically for the Super Bowl on the safe assumption that they will reach the largest television audience in the world; statements that are audacious or polarising are therefore doubly high-risk, since the potential for negative fallout is that much greater. The significance of this ad thus sits at the intersection of three highly charged contexts: the history and mythology of the Coke brand; the cultural weight associated with the Super Bowl; and a political climate contoured by a controversial president.

Super Bowl viewers are receptive in ways that are not just unusual for television, but are almost impossible in the 21st-century era of media surplus and fragmented audiences (Quesenberry and Coolson, 2014, p. 439). Not only are the majority of US households, bars and clubs tuned in; but they are deeply engaged with the advertising. An oft-cited Nielsen study once found that over half the Super Bowl audience in the US alone actually enjoyed these ads more than the game (Taylor, 2016, p. 167). The event achieves what McAllister and Galindo-Ramirez (2017, p. 52) call 'a revered commercial cocoon', as viewers become 'advertising attentive, not only tolerating advertising but actively watching it, seeking it out in advance and after the game, and discussing it with others'. For this, the 2017 advertisers paid a record US\$5.8 million per 30 seconds of airtime, up from US\$5 million the previous year. Cognizant of how viewers' engagement with these ads manifests now (that is, increasingly online), brand marketers often pre-release their Super Bowl ads prior to the

game itself, since this has been shown to animate and intensify post-game conversation (Spotts, Purvis and Sandeep, 2014, p. 464). This shows a form of cultural spillage, as the ads merge with a suite of social conventions that mark the Super Bowl as spectacular consumption – with rituals around food, fandom and conviviality (Kim, Freling and Grisaffe, 2013). In turn, and as Matthew P. McAllister (1999, p. 409) writes: ‘Super Bowl ads are no longer seen as crass sales pitches – an obvious self-interested discourse that viewers eye with cynicism and suspicion’; rather, like ‘the latest blockbuster movie, these ads are now to be watched for their own sake’.

It is within this setting that Coke’s Super Bowl ads during Trump’s presidency take on an acute immediacy, sitting so close to what became the main headlines coming out of Washington. By the time the 2018 Super Bowl neared, Trump had neither tempered nor qualified his views. In turn, the stage was set once again for advertisers to either ignore or acknowledge ideas that had hardened into White House orthodoxy. Once again, in 2018, Coke chose to do the latter with a campaign called ‘The Wonder of Us’. Again, there was a kaleidoscopic montage of contemporary America. Instead of song though, there was a simple paean to the ‘wonder’ of diversity. It was written by Becca Wadlinger, copywriter with Wieden+Kennedy (the agency responsible for the ad). The lines include:

No feet have wandered where you’ve walked

No eyes saw what you’ve seen

No one’s lived the life you live

No head has held your dreams

It was a call to action – there is a Coke for every American – but it worked through an appeal to empathy. As with ‘It’s Beautiful’, the diversity on show was progressive, contentious and for some, *un-American* (Sacks, 2014). The inclusion of hijabs, homosexuality, and gender fluidity was seized by alt-right news network Breitbart, conservative commentator Glenn Beck, and many others on social media as Coke’s airbrushed apologia for terrorists and sexual deviants. As it happened, 2014/2017’s ‘It’s Beautiful’ had also included a hijab (and Coke’s 2019 Super Bowl ad, discussed shortly, did too). Since September 2001, and certainly in the US, few sartorial items have been as politically laden as the hijab; it is a hot-button index to the ‘other’ and triggers online conversations that veer from animated to outraged with speed and intensity. The Hilltop ad marked difference through complexion and clothing;

almost fifty years later, this does not go anywhere near far enough for the intersectional politics of identity today – and ‘The Wonder of Us’ pointed to this truth, hijab and all.

‘You aren’t the same as me’

Departing from the cinematic style of ‘It’s Beautiful’ and ‘The Wonder of Us’, Coke’s ad for the 2019 Super Bowl was a short animated film, again with a poem as the voiceover. It was called ‘A Coke is a Coke’. Both aesthetically and in phrasing, ‘A Coke is a Coke’ drew liberally from Pop Art’s Andy Warhol (1928–1987). It both referenced Warhol’s quote regarding the egalitarianism of Coke, and nodded to his 60s-era visual vocabulary: accessible, ironic and graphic in shades of red, brown, white and black. In his 1975 book *The Philosophy of Andy Warhol: From A to B and Back Again*, the artist writes:

You can be watching TV and see Coca-Cola, and you know that the President drinks Coke, Liz Taylor drinks Coke, and just think, you can drink Coke, too. A Coke is a Coke and no amount of money can get you a better Coke than the one the bum on the corner is drinking. All the Cokes are the same and all the Cokes are good. Liz Taylor knows it, the President knows it, the bum knows it, and you know it. (*Phaidon*, 2019)

Grafted onto the 2019 Super Bowl ad, a certain naivety is implied by both the artwork and the poem, which includes these lines:

*A Coke is a Coke is a Coke, it’s the same for everyone
You can get one if you want it, no matter where you’re from
He drinks Coke, and she drinks Coke, even though they disagree
And while the bottles look alike, you aren’t the same as me
Stars drink it, chefs drink it, farmers want one when it’s hot
There’s a Coke here if you’re thirsty, but that’s cool if you’re not
We all have different hearts and hands, heads holding various views
Don’t you see? Different is beautiful and together is beautiful too*

In 2019, and for the first time in twelve years, Coke broke with convention by airing its ad not during the game itself but rather just before the national anthem (which was sung by Gladys Knight) – a decision not without political carriage. Again, the context involved Trump, and his response to what had become a wedge issue in American public life. In solidarity with Black Lives Matter, the online movement to protest widespread indifference

to police shootings of young African-American men, NFL superstar Colin Kaepernick famously ‘took a knee’. From 2016, the quarterback with the San Francisco 49ers knelt during the US national anthem prior to each game, in order to spotlight the heartbreaking chasm between the sentiments expressed in ‘The Star-Spangled Banner’, and the lived experience of young black American men. The issue intensified in September 2017 when President Trump called for NFL bosses to fire any players that refused to stand during the anthem; it was a pointed rebuke not just to Kaepernick but other US athletes that followed his lead. By then, to ‘take a knee’ had become code in an increasingly divided country; it spoke to police brutality and the social positioning of African Americans, and the extent to which the Trump era coincided with (and probably contributed to) the unapologetic politicisation of all cultural spaces, including sport.

Of course, Kaepernick was not the first footballer to bring politics into sport, but with Trump’s incendiary intervention, Kaepernick came to symbolise just how fractured US politics had become, and how deep its fissures ran. After that season ended, Kaepernick opted out of his contract and, as a free agent, could sign with any other team – but he was not picked up. The subtext appeared simple enough: Kaepernick had both antagonised the president and divided football fans that were, if declining audience ratings were any indication, turned off by his protest due to either apathy towards his cause, or support of Trump’s position. By taking a knee during the anthem, Kaepernick stood up to racism, bigotry and prejudice; he also reminded the NFL (and its audience) that the anthem’s lyrics rang hollow for many Americans. For Coke to shift its 2019 offering to the cusp of this moment (rather than the actual game) in turn shifted the focal beam towards the conversation that Kaepernick had started, and made a branded contribution to it: ‘*Don’t you see? Different is beautiful.*’ It was therefore no mere coincidence (Schultz, 2019). According to Stuart Kronauge, then Coke’s Senior Vice President of Marketing in North America:

We have a long history of using the country’s biggest advertising stage to share a message of unity and positivity, especially at times when our nation feels divided. This year, we decided to place our ad just before the national anthem as Americans come together in their living rooms to remind everyone that ‘together is beautiful’.
(Quoted in Steinberg, 2019)

Coke did not ignore or underplay just how divided the US had become, but they did pivot this fact back to their Hilltop hopefulness. Fault lines exist, and that is okay: ‘*you aren’t the same as me*’. The tone seemed more resigned than overly ambitious; the humanity that Coke settled

on appeared at peace with (or even ambivalent towards) contemporary American life, its cultural fissures too strong even for Coke to repair or resolve. For all that though, that the ad aired literally seconds before the anthem was sung was important. For many Super Bowl viewers, the issues around Kaepernick, the anthem, and his contention that the continuing mistreatment of numerous Americans belied its spirit and sentiments were top of mind. Coke's reworking of the Warhol quote spun the dialogue back to its central premise: the radical, unshakeable egalitarianism of the world's most famous soft drink. It might well have appeared an obscene conflation; the accessibility of Coke (by any measure) is not on par with the upholding and protection of basic civil rights. The ad thus worked primarily as a reminder: the equality that both Kaepernick and Coke champion is not one achieved with the erasure of difference and diversity, but through it – and that is entirely consistent with whatever hope and pride is expressed in 'The Star-Spangled Banner'.

Conclusion

In the decades since Hilltop premiered, its upbeat message of togetherness in diversity has underpinned and upheld the Coke brand; it has been a consistent and coherent trope around which Coke has fashioned numerous iterations of ads. Therein lies a huge part of Coke's brand equity. As with all brand strategies, it is premised on the opportunities and challenges of contemporary marketing: competitive, globalised and increasingly required to show a distinct agility in light of dynamic conditions (political, cultural, social and economic), without compromising brand identity. That Coke should weave the Hilltop message into its 2017, 2018 and 2019 Super Bowl ads is not in itself surprising. However, while the cultural logic of branding has not changed too much since the 1970s, it does not follow that its messaging strikes the same notes as it did then, quite simply because cultural conditions have changed. Specifically, the political climate in Trump's America has problematised Coke's sunny optimism, since so much of the president's most vitriolic statements run counter to Coke's Hilltop 'heart'. As such, for Coke to foreground its take on multicultural America as something to be celebrated and cherished during its most important advertising opportunity (the NFL Super Bowl) both warrants acknowledgement and offers critical insights.

As a perennial presence in American culture and a global symbol of America itself, there is much at stake in terms of how Coke manifests in the Trump era. In his promise to 'Make America Great Again', Trump arrived at a definition of 'great' that effectively excised huge swathes of the American population. Coke's first three Super Bowl ads since Trump's inauguration are thus read as politically hued, unapologetic commitments to a very different

notion of 'great'. In turn, the Hilltop ad now seems like an inspired (and inspiring) salve for a nation bruised by violence, war and unrest; the Super Bowl ads considered here, by comparison, carry far more critical bite. Against White House rhetoric that hinges on a narrow, exclusive and exclusionary concept of American progress, Coke counters with the assertion that America is already 'great', not despite its multiculturalism, but because of it.

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