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## The XL Super Bowl

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SPORT AND SOCIETY FOR H-ARETE  
The XL Super Bowl  
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Sunday is Super Bowl XL in Detroit. In the Roman Empire the XL denoted the number forty. In a fortuitous parallel within the American Empire the XL carries the meaning, "Extra Large." No doubt Super Bowl XL will be both extremely large and as decadent as one would expect of a Roman orgy in the time of Caligula, the Emperor who, in a post-modern gesture, appointed his horse to the Roman Senate.

The XL designation also raises the medieval theological question as to which is more appropriate to the Super Bowl, the XL designation of this current festival, or the deliciously labeled Super Bowl XXX (Triple X) of a decade ago? I will leave the divination of the answer to those who are experts in parsing words indicative of excess and obscenity.

Yes, it is that time of year when the mind of social historians and well-educated economists turn to the terminology of the great economist and social critic Thorstein Veblen. In his masterpiece, *The Theory of the Leisure Class*, the brilliant critic identified and categorized the behaviors of the predatory nouveau riche of late 19th century America. What Veblen didn't know is that his vocabulary and descriptions would still apply to a much wider swath of American society in the early 21st Century. The phrases "conspicuous consumption," "conspicuous waste," "conspicuous leisure," "predatory fraud," "vicarious consumption," "predatory business practices," and "pecuniary emulation," all seem as apropos now as they did a century ago.

How rich is it that Ford announced a layoff of 30,000 workers and the closing of some XIV factories just prior to the arrival of the mid-winter festival of consumption in the Motor City? Corporate wealth will be on display in the most conspicuous of ways, while the game itself will be played in Ford Field, a designation that cost the flush Ford Motor Company a mere XL Million dollars. Veblen would be beside himself with such a remarkable display of "predatory business practice," not to mention "conspicuous waste."

To add to the festive atmosphere, General Motors announced losses of nearly IX Billion dollars last week and the Motor City Big III continue their long-term trend of declining market

share. Chrysler added its bit to Super Bowl preparations as they announced a 6,000 worker layoff.

Certainly this will not slow the celebrations of Super Bowl XL week in Detroit. The corporate tents will be there in greater numbers than ever, and the Big III will certainly be a major presence entertaining visiting executives and politicians. The lavish parties at luxury hotels will saturate the Detroit atmosphere this week as "conspicuous consumption," along with the game, must go on whatever the circumstances.

Detroit is presenting itself as a city in revival. The Host Committee of the Super Bowl will spend X million dollars on parties, concerts, sports clinics, and indoor and outdoor festivals. "This is going to be a blockbuster event," Gov. Jennifer M. Granholm of Michigan said. "They have every detail covered." They also have every abandoned building covered with signs promising future development, or torn down to remove what had been longstanding eyesores. The new Detroit has the feel of a Potemkin Village.

Some \$100M has been spent to clean up the city, and yet with all that, Detroit comes into the Super Bowl with the highest unemployment rate of any American city except New Orleans. It has accumulated a debt of \$30M and has been forced to close nine recreation centers and lay off a number of police. Party On!

Each of the NFL's special guests will receive their own \$25,000 silk-boxed, autographed copy of "XL: Forty Years of the Super Bowl." Perhaps they can get a quick look at this high priced prose while enjoying their river eel sushi with \$15 cold sake at the "Oslo." Down the street is the aptly named "Envy" with its XX foot waterfall and brushed stainless steel bar. The gainfully employed may prefer the Elysium Lounge where for \$200 to \$600 on Friday you can trip the light fantastic on the dance floors highlighted by "an undulating LED light wall." The \$2 million Lounge has five V.I.P. rooms and Grey Goose will set you back a modest \$300. Cedar-plank salmon, anyone!?

As for the redundant Ford workers, "Let them eat brats!"

If you want to do your Super Bowl up right in total Veblean fashion you need to contact "Fine Things Packages - A Leap from the Ordinary!" They have a variety of offerings to meet your Super Bowl needs, including the need to "display."

The Classic Super Bowl Package at \$3,750 per person will bring you a four-day/ three-night stay at the Best Western, an upper level ticket to the game, roundtrip airfare, local transportation and a few other minor amenities. The Premier Package moves you to the Sheraton and adds a few other goodies including a corporate level ticket to the game for \$4,595. The VIP Package puts you in the Embassy Suites for five days and four nights, gives you Official NFL Premium Hospitality, including three hours of pre-game grazing and a two hour post-game party, all for \$5,695.

The Ultimate Super Bowl package (and don't we all deserve the ultimate?) takes you to the Ritz Carleton for \$14,500 per person and adds more goodies including the Playboy Party, Official Executive Club Hospitality at Comerica Park, a wide range of amenities and admissions at various party sites, and a game ticket between the 30 and 50 yard line. You can't go alone, and that means for a couple the cost is a mere \$29,000.

As for those who just got their pink slips from Ford, maybe the Ford Corporate Tent will offer a small table over in the corner offering instructions on filling out unemployment compensation forms.

Yes, Super Sunday will be one more super Super Bowl, America's most important mid-winter holiday, and at XL maybe the largest yet.

On Sport and Society this is Dick Crepeau reminding you that you don't have to be a good sport to be a bad loser.

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