While baseball may be the favored “American” sport, there is little doubt that the Super Bowl is a quintessential American sporting event that draws the nation together around our televisions. In 2011, the Super Bowl became the most watched television program in US history, drawing 111 million viewers. Why do we all tune in? For the ads, of course. Or, at least those of us who aren’t football fans do. Each year there are a few ads that spark buzz, occasionally controversy, and 2014 was no exception. In 2014 the buzz was over an ad for Coca Cola that played “America the Beautiful” amidst images of the United States as a multicultural nation. The ad featured scenes representing a wide range of diverse people (including the first male same-sex couple to ever appear in a Super Bowl ad). The outrage was sparked by the fact that the patriotic song was sung in a variety of languages. Before the ad had finished airing, viewers had taken to Twitter using the hashtag #SpeakAmerican to rant. And it should come as no surprise that some viewers found the multicultural, multilingual view of the United States to border on treason. Michael Smerconish of the Philadelphia Inquirer reported that shortly after the ad was released a Minnesota-based church announced that it was throwing away all of its Coke products because “Mexicans singing the National Anthem is an abomination.” He quoted another angered viewer who exclaimed, “it’s not bigotry to demand that we have a unified language,” and if we don’t, “we are no better than the 3rd world cesspool dwellers that refuse to lift themselves.” Time Magazine reported that another blogger wrote, “@CocaCola has America the Beautiful being sung in different languages in a #SuperBowl commercial? We speak ENGLISH here, IDIOTS.” Actually, the United States does not have an official language, but that didn’t stop the hate mail.

The pundits quickly jumped into the fray, too, with Glenn Beck saying that clearly the purpose of the ad was to “divide people.” Rather than consider the ad a complex view of a nation with an increasingly changing demographic, most conservative pundits saw the ad as divisive and inflammatory. And they found it to provide an unsatisfactory view of the immigration debate. Michael Patrick Leahy of Breitbart.com wrote: “Executives at Coca Cola thought it was a good idea to run

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a 60 second Super Bowl ad featuring children singing ‘America the Beautiful’—a deeply Christian patriotic anthem whose theme is unity—in several foreign languages. The ad also prominently features a gay couple.” Most mainstream news media coverage of the controversy simply reiterated the main talking points coming out of the debate, rarely providing a corrective to the inaccuracies that framed much of the outrage. CNN contributor Benn Ferguson stated that the commercial inspired resentment because it showed US immigrants “not assimilating.” Former GOP Rep. Allen West, also a Fox News contributor, worried that having an ad like this from a “company as American as they come” is a sign that “we are on the road to perdition.”

Luckily we had satire to save our sanity and our national values. Both Jon Stewart and Stephen Colbert responded to the attacks on the ad by offering much-needed perspective and balance. Stewart began by reminding his viewers that “America the Beautiful” is not actually the national anthem: “You know, the only thing more delicious than a tall, cool glass of ‘Co-cola’ is the irony that the self-appointed patriotic American watchdogs seem unaware that our national anthem is in fact not ‘America the Beautiful’” (see Figure 7.1). He then went after the idea that having immigrants sing “America the Beautiful”—a song about the beauty of the nation after all—was not, in fact, representative of a melting pot of immigrants in love with this country: “They’re singing ‘America the Beautiful’ while drinking Coca-Cola,” Stewart exclaimed. “How much more American assimilation can they have? Maybe if they were open-carrying a gun shaped like Jesus while using a bald eagle strap-on to fuck an apple pie.” He then reminded viewers that if anything was wrong with the ad, it was that it was too schmaltzy, playing on our heartstrings perhaps a tad too much.

Colbert added his own geeky take on the debate by pointing out the hypocrisy of conservative pro-English pundits like Leahy forgetting that E Pluribus Unum is not in English either. He quoted Leahy: “When the company used such an iconic

Figure 7.1  Stewart points out that the ad’s only major flaw is its schmaltzy sappiness