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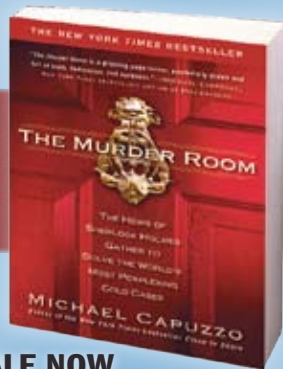
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### THE MURDER ROOM

The Heirs of Sherlock Holmes Gather to Solve  
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BY MICHAEL CAPUZZO

## The Better World

# Go Down Moses

By John & Lynne Diamond-Nigh

**T**oo loose or too tight. A group of friends gets together for coffee and philosophy each week. Today—the meaty topic of littering. Several of us have grouched on about the litter in our yards. Recently, facing a torn-trousered kid who had just dropped a Kit Kat wrapper on the grass, I got a whack of incredulity. Pick it up? Was I unaware that this is a free country? Was I, perhaps, from...Canada?

Arriving home, we learned that a planned trip with my French class to Buffalo was off. Neither of us could drive the school van—a new insurance prohibition. To do so we'd have to take a six-hour driving course. By tomorrow. (We've driven school vans impeccably for twenty years.)

Too loose; too tight. Is politics our pill of equilibrium? We have, quite rightly, an Old Testament notion of politics. The Capitol dome is our Mount Sinai. Law flows down the long front steps of the Capitol like Mosaic commandments.

But turn that around. What if we get exactly the representatives we deserve? Our swelling mania for competition in everything from flossing teeth to boiling eggs—why shouldn't it make its way to Washington? What, instead, if the wisdom and evenhandedness we long for in Washington required, first of all, wisdom and equilibrium in us? What if we were on top? (Actually I've been on the top of Mount Sinai. It was cold and wildly desolate and my mother fainted and was carried back down on a camel.)

Jefferson and Franklin, both jazzed with visionary Enlightenment ideals, thought so. Both men understood that freedom was, far from the negligent

deposit of litter in my yard, a moral and an intellectual fitness program equal to anything you do each day in the gym—sixty pushups whereby you strengthen a collective moral wrist that knows just how loose or tight to turn that nut without breaking the bolt (our class trip) or leaving the nut to work loose (the broad class of litterers and cell phone libertines).



What would Jefferson say today? Turn off the gadgets; pick up a book. Go to great lengths for a good conversation. And a glass of wine. Learn how to build a kitchen table.

Which brings us back to the art café. We're a bunch of philosophical hobos, roistering idea-rummagers. As we chat, the nut imperceptibly tightens. We're talking about things that matter more deeply. Conundrums. Creative turns. Disappointments. Moral choices. By nine, coffee isn't just waking us up, it's foreclosing a headache from thinking that hard.

But not too hard; the wrench gives out at just that moment—O so delicious—of perfect enlightenment. 🍷



John writes about art and design. Lynne's Web site, [aciviltongue.com](http://aciviltongue.com), is dedicated to civility studies.