

sign that says "EVERYBODY" on it. Colored chairs are screwed to the sign, a few feet off the sidewalk. Vagrants sit in the chairs and drink. It is nine o'clock in the morning.

Crossing south, Papaya World exists no longer on the corner of 42nd and Seventh. Here we find the work of the notorious Karen Finley, a "performance artist" known for her shrill, repetitive speechmaking and the startling physical activities that accompany her monologues. In one of Miss Finley's infamous little skits, she used to cover herself with chocolate syrup and place yams—there is no polite way to express it—in her posterior orifices. Artists have always been a little nuts, but given Miss Finley's attraction to starchy tuberous roots, I'd rather have Van Gogh cut my hair than let Finley in my kitchen. Here on Times Square, Miss Finley has given us something called "Positive Attitude," which features large colorful drawings of a naked man, woman, and child, arms akimbo and bodies covered with reddish and purple skin blemishes. There is poetry, of a sort, that says in part, "I tell myself I am visited with raspberries," "I am a polka-dotted little pony," "Lollipops of cherry and grape adorn me," and "I am a speckled wild cat with a coat of rare beauty." Then a little orange placard fills us in: this piece is about Kaposi's sarcoma, a rare and fatal form of cancer that is common among people with AIDS. It causes one to break out in red and purple lesions.

It is true that the UDC and its 42nd Street Redevelopment Project are not wholly responsible for the entropy of Times Square. Successive city administrations have sucked tax dollars to maintain their own bloated bureaucracies, attacked property rights through rent controls and excessive economic regulation, and shirked their law enforcement duties by allowing vagrancy and petty crime to become the norm. An activist, imperious judiciary has enshrined what was once socially unacceptable behavior into "rights," and has cut away historical property rights in the name of the public weal. Credit also a faithless and perverse elite who have found it chic to reject and injure the very social structure that has fostered their freedoms and their affluence. And finally, the most important contributor has been the lethargic and indolent public, rich beyond comparison with any other peoples of any other era, whose precious

birthright of civil and economic liberties is being sold off piece by piece in return for the thin lentil soup of collectivist promises, class envy, and unprincipled sentimentality. When future historians and archaeologists pick through the ruins of what was once the greatest city in the world and contemplate its spectacular decline, those 13 acres in the heart of Manhattan will be a very good place to start looking for answers.

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## Letter From Batavia

by Bill Kauffman

### Sports and Local Sovereignty



Since 1940, the Batavia Clippers have played baseball in the lowest of the low minors, the Class A (formerly D) New York-Pennsylvania (neé PONY) League. The ballpark, Dwyer Stadium, named for the shoestore owner who served as club president for decades, is just one block from my parents' house, so I've spent many hundreds of lazy summer nights in the bleachers, watching the team run through a series of affiliations (Pirates, Tigers, Indians, Mets, Phillies) while compiling one of the worst cumulative records in the history of the minors.

The NYP is the oldest continuously operating Class A league, and the Clippers are an original franchise. No matter. The major leagues, in their relentless quest to erase every last vestige of individuality and impose a suffocating standardization on the game at all levels, are about to snuff the Clippers—unless we promise to commit an expensive act of vandalism that is the moral equivalent of toppling an ancestor's tombstone.

The Professional Baseball Agreement, which the minors "agreed" to in the way that I agree to give my wallet to a Crip holding a knife to my throat, stamped a

single cookie-cutter mold over more than 150 American cities and their ballclubs. Every last detail of running a team, however niggling—clubhouse showers, parking lots, lighting, the size of the locker room—is covered by the PBA, every last idiosyncrasy smothered.

Batavia, a community-owned team, did its best to comply. The clubhouse was expanded. Brighter lights were installed. The dirt and grass got a manicure. It wasn't enough. The Philadelphia Phillies, the Clippers' parent team, demanded that our field be reconfigured to more closely resemble Philadelphia's 1970 Veterans Stadium, with its boring symmetry. The problem, you see, is that Dwyer's quirky contours made it a hitter's park. The power alley in right-center field measured barely 350 feet, and for 50 years left-handed batters delighted to watch long pop flies turn into home runs.

No more. Our charming little bandbox has been pulled and stretched till it looks like your typical Philadelphia slob, fattened on mounds of inedible cheese-steaks. In 1993, the first summer of our distention, the Clippers finished dead last in the league in home runs.

Yet even this contortion was not enough. Dwyer Stadium's wooden grandstand was built by local workmen under the aegis of the Works Progress Administration, certainly the most constructive agency of the New Deal. It is as sound as most quinquagenarians, but it must come down. So must the first- and third-base bleachers. Dwyer Stadium, handicraft of our grandfathers, the closest thing we've had to an ecumenical gathering place for half a century, must be demolished, else pro baseball will desert Batavia, forever. In Dwyer's place we must erect—with dollars extorted from taxpayers who've never heard of Batavia and are no worse for their ignorance—a spanking new concrete and plastic atrocity.

Theological baseball writing is cloying and phony and almost always the product of guys who throw like girls. Similarly, the much-praised movie about life in the minors, *Bull Durham* (1988), though its auteur Ron Shelton is a former bush-leaguer, rings false. I've known a few of the rouged sluts whose tender ministrations soothe the boys, and I can tell you that while many are prettier than Susan Sarandon, the chance that even one of them reads Blake during idle hours is remoter than Pluto. Neverthe-

less, a religious word—desecration—fits. You don't have to buy the nonsensical *Bull Durham* "church of baseball" conceit to believe that a place at which the generations have gathered in fellowship and seasonal fraternity is made holy.

"We have facilities that are either historic or dumps, depending on how you look at it," says NYP President Bob Julian. There's a junkyard adjacent to Dwyer, and the distinction is easy to make, except perhaps for executives of a monopoly business that is ruled by naked greed and stupid jock malevolence. (Maybe on demolition day we can fill the stands with toddlers and let Vince Coleman toss the dynamite.)

Most of the small Upstate cities in the NYP League—Geneva, Auburn, Watertown—are in the same boat as Batavia, and if the wrecking balls haven't swung by the fall of 1994 we'll be booted out of the league, to be replaced by Canadian burghs with hideous modern stadia.

Why not? The abandonment of provincial American towns by corporate vermin is nothing new. For 20 years we've watched as our largest factories have shut down or flown south, laying off 50- and 60-year-old men who had worked at the plant all their lives and firing salaried employees who were nearing full pensions. This is why thoughtful and decent men sometimes become socialists.

(Then again, they also become anarchists. The county courthouse in Batavia was constructed in 1843 of limestone from nearby quarries. Albany has informed us that it is obsolete and must be replaced because it lacks: one, handicapped access; two, air-conditioning; and three, daycare facilities. Such brutes, our forbears.)

All minor leagues, including the NYP, take great pride in the players they've fed to the big leagues, but this misses the point. I've seen a handful of journeymen you've never heard of—John Knox, Bernardo Brito, Jerry Dybzinski—get their starts, but the only future Hall of Famer I remember is the Milwaukee Brewer Robin Yount, then an epebic shortstop for the Newark Co-Pilots. In any event, it's impossible to predict which, if any, of the 25 or 30 kids who arrive in Batavia each June will eventually have a cup of coffee in what sissy baseball writers refer to so annoyingly as The Show, and who really cares? Unlike the majors, with their mercenary heroes and sham traditions—mutable as uniforms;

teal today, torn tomorrow?—the continuity in minor league cities is provided by the fans, passing lifetimes in the same bleachers as the cast of players changes annually.

Mr. Dwyer, the stadium's nonagenarian eponym, is at every game, dressed in coat and tie, and when an umpire blows a call he'll let him hear it. So will the old gal who shared her youthful charms with the ballplayers in the 1940's and the wonders of her maturity with the coaches in the 1950's. She's not much in demand anymore, but she's in the grandstand every night, and I like to try to imagine this raspy-voiced, wizened crone as a sassy looker. There is the retarded man whom my dad and his teenage pals used to look out for; now he is grey, a little slow of step, but still here, laboriously keeping score in a notebook. I have shared long wisecracking Dwyer evenings with my boyhood friends since we were eight years old. Someday we'll be interred within hailing distance of each other, and I like to think that unlike the regret-filled corpses of Grover's Corners we'll reminisce unto eternity about the time Brian Lambe stole home in the bottom of the ninth.

Any appeal for the preservation of small joyous things runs into the buzzsaw claim that one's memories are fraudulently idyllic and, besides, "that *Leave It to Beaver* world doesn't exist anymore—if it ever did." This cool and worldly put-down is made, you'll notice, by people whose knowledge of Middle America comes directly from the TV screen, which is why they frame their arguments around the Nielsen top ten. Sandra Bernhard is a star and Donna Reed is dead and that's that.

Yet the America in which homesick shortstops from Texas give worshipful kids from Upstate New York cracked bats and pinches of Red Man in return for dixie cups full of lemonade really does exist, however much it discomforts the New World Orderlies or sounds like the mawkish fabrication of a cynical, huckstering Fifth Avenue ad-man. (In the infamous summer of 1993 the Lords of Baseball outlawed chewing tobacco in the minors—but not the majors. Another disposable custom.)

So there we are: either Batavia begs, borrows, and mostly steals \$2 million to raze Dwyer and build an eyesore, or the Batavia Clippers die. The nickname Clipper, by the way, comes from the harvesting machine manufactured by

Massey-Harris, Batavia's chief employer at the time of the team's founding. Massey-Harris pulled out of town in 1958, leaving vacant an enormous and grimy plant right across from our pioneer cemetery. It's the bottom of the ninth for the rural rustbelt, and with those pushed-back fences a grand slam seems mighty improbable.

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## Letter From Nicaragua

by Ray Lowry

### Signs of the Sandinistas



The mural is old and faded, a reminder of headier days when the world looked ripe for violent revolution. Three years of neglect, the effects of a tropical climate, and petty vandalism have combined to give the mural its present appearance of a long-forgotten billboard along some abandoned stretch of rural highway. Yet the huge faces painted on the mountainside, Carlos Fonseca, Daniel Ortega, and Augusto Sandino—founder, unseated *cuadillo*, and namesake respectively of Nicaragua's Sandinista National Liberation Front—still glower at those making the border-crossing into Nicaragua at Los Manos.

The crossing causes but a ten-minute delay in your journey thanks to an efficient and friendly group of customs employees. You change your money into Nicaraguan cordobas and are surprised to learn that they have a value roughly equal to the Honduran lempiras you have been spending these past days—about 15 U.S. cents. This is the new *cordoba de oro* or gold cordoba, of course. The old silver cordoba has a value exactly equal to that which it possessed in the Sandinista days—*nada*.

You climb into the canvas-covered back of the two-and-a-half-ton Isuzu truck that serves as a bus, pay your three-cordoba fare, and you're off to Ocotol, a small market town about 15 miles down