

Letter From Washington

by Brett M. Decker

Police or Fascists?



Eleanor Holmes Norton has proposed to reopen Pennsylvania Avenue in front of the White House for limited automobile traffic. She convincingly testifies that a barricaded executive palace does not properly reflect our standing as a shining "city upon a hill." After two long years of paralyzing traffic jams due to the paranoid closing of the Avenue of the Presidents after the Oklahoma City bombing, this *coup de main* by the District of Columbia's delegate to Congress raises profound doubt about the proportional nature of security in the land of the free.

The D.C. municipal government has launched a new "zero tolerance" initiative to crack down on minor infractions of the law. Strict penalization for minor offenses, the argument goes, will discourage more serious crime by inculcating heightened respect for all laws. As a result of this new policy, police have dramatically increased arrests for such inconsequential transgressions as moving violations.

The imperious enforcement of a zero tolerance agenda creates confusion concerning the appropriate use of police. Since the dual role of the police is to enforce laws and keep the peace, there is a perpetual danger that authorities will cross the fine line of the former in pursuit of the latter. For example, while playing catch on the Capitol lawn during a quiet, sunny weekend, two friends and I were accosted by a Capitol policeman and ordered to leave the park. Under the mistaken notion that Washington is not ruled by martial law, we respectfully asked the officer what statute we were violating by tossing a baseball around in a public park (more than 250 yards from the foot of the Capitol steps). The officer angrily retorted that his

sergeant considered us to be a security risk and ordered our immediate removal.

In a similarly inexplicable incident, I was randomly pulled over while driving home from work one Friday evening on the George Washington Memorial Parkway. The traffic cop insisted on a breathalyzer exam even though I was neither speeding nor swerving and had not had a drop to drink. When I asked if he could legally make random searches of this kind, the officer arrogantly replied, "Well, I am." In like manner, motorists across the country are increasingly subjected to roadblocks and chance searches.

The ridiculous nature of these stories should be obvious. In a city with hundreds of homicides per year and a nation plagued by violence, the police have countless obligations that are more pressing than bullying law-abiding citizens. For example, church pastors in the increasingly trendy Chinatown neighborhood asked the Metropolitan Police if a patrol car could drive through the area on Sundays because churchgoers were being harassed and threatened on their way to religious services. The request was rejected by the 3,500-officer police department with the excuse that the city did not have a spare car or cop—perhaps the churches should hire private security guards, the police suggested. As a result of this policy of neglect, the neighborhoods of Washington, D.C., are increasingly risky at all times of the day. Last year, 78-year-old Alice Chow was gunned down at 2:00 P.M. on a Sunday while walking home from her church in Chinatown. Now Mrs. Chow is just a statistic, part of the annual 400 homicides in D.C. and over 20,000 nationally.

But these tragedies obscure the growing problem of police harassment. As crime escalates unabated, politicians play the demagogue, passing new laws that give law enforcement agencies more unrestrained powers. Both Senate Majority Leader Trent Lott and Senate Judiciary Chairman Orrin Hatch have suggested federalizing local criminal statutes and police forces. Meanwhile, overzealous authorities trample on the rights of ordinary Americans who have no viable vehicle of protest.

Whether playing catch in the park or drifting a few miles-per-hour over the speed limit to and from work, good law-abiding citizens are incessantly tormented by those whose duty it is to serve and protect them. While neighborhood streets are left vulnerable to crime, armed barriers are constructed to serve as a moat, keeping the people as far away as possible from their elected President. Like this blockade, many instances of overbearing state control seem insignificant—but they quickly add up when unchecked by a submissive population.

In a speech in 1771, Edmund Burke warned that "the greater the power, the more dangerous the abuse." In contemporary America, the tyranny of both criminals and the police rises while the unprotected majority live in fear. The bloated police bureaucracies do not need more staff, larger budgets, or new laws; they just need to crack down on criminals and leave the rest of us alone.

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Letter From Chicago

by Dave Gorak

Royko, the Cubs, et al.



He went to Wrigley Field on a hot day last June, along with several hundred others, to hear family and dignitaries eulogize columnist Mike Royko, who had spent more than 30 years banging out five columns each week while working for three different major Chicago newspapers. Otherwise empty because the team was on the road, the park was chosen for this tribute because Mike, like many people, was a long-suffering Cubs fan.

The formalities concluded, Mike's

friends and coworkers were invited onto the field, where a caterer had set up two bars and several buffet tables containing hot dogs, grilled chicken, and numerous side dishes. Filling his plate and grabbing a can of pop, he walked to the batter's box, which now was shaded from the late afternoon sun. It was here in 1932 that Babe Ruth had allegedly pointed to the right center field seats just before hitting a towering home run to that very spot. Six years later, Cubs catcher "Gabby" Hartnett, who was behind the plate for Ruth's supposed "called shot," would stand there in the ninth inning and hit "The Homer in the Bloamin'" that beat the Pirates six to five.

He turned to look at the right field corner where, many summers ago, his father had brought him to see his first big-league ballgame. He looked at the top of the wall just left of the foul pole where the old man had leaned over and talked it up with a player who was shagging fly-balls during batting practice. They talked, he remembered, as though they had known each other for years. That was the last time the two went to a ballgame together because, a few years later, the young boy fell in with the wrong crowd and became a White Sox fan.

"Hey, how about taking our picture?" asked one of his friends, who had joined a few others on the pitcher's mound. "Sure," he said, and he set his food and drink on the ground behind the mound in the spot normally reserved for resin bags. "Great! Now you get up there, and I'll take one of you," said the friend.

He looked in at home plate and thought that 60 feet, 6 inches didn't seem that far to throw a ball. He could do it easily, he thought, but not at 90-plus miles an hour.

The picture taken, he walked off the mound through the infield where men like Roger Hornsby, Phil Caveretta, and Ron Santo had played the game. He headed for the 400-foot marker in straight-away center field, and, as his feet touched the outfield grass for the first time, he felt the skin on his neck and arms begin to tingle. The old, green scoreboard loomed larger as he strolled toward the ivy-covered walls, and he swore that he heard the opening strains from the title theme of the movie *The Natural*. How corny, he thought, but was what he felt at that moment much different than that experienced by any rookie the first time he walks onto a major league field?

Two men stood, talking, at the 400-foot sign. He walked over and touched the ivy, and said facetiously, "Hey, do you think that 'Shoeless Joe' might show up?" He took in the full beauty of the park, listening to the popping sounds made by the numerous pennants, including the one bearing Billy Williams' number, that fly above the grandstand. And he wondered how some are able to throw a ball from this spot and hit the cut-off man, very often on the fly.

The three walked back, and, after bidding the other two goodbye, he headed for the home team's dugout and sat on their bench for a few minutes. "Wow! What a great smell, huh?" asked someone, referring to the dank odor coming from the tunnel leading to the clubhouse. "You can tell this is really an old ball park."

He looked at the left field wall, over which Ernie Banks sent his 500th career homer, and again he heard the voice of announcer Jack Brickhouse: "Back, back, back! Hey! Hey! He did it! He did it! Way to go, Ernie!"

Sadness came over him as he again looked into the right field corner. The old man was 30 the last time his team played in the World Series, and the odds of him seeing another get poorer each day. Why hadn't the gods been more generous to someone with such devotion and loyalty? His melancholy lingered as he left the field, not because of this team's sorry performance over the years, but because he wondered why some sons and fathers never develop that special relationship enjoyed by others. Why do some boys grow up having to seek other heroes?

As he stood at Clark and Addison waiting for his bus, a short man in his 80's hurried up to him and said, "Hey, if you see a cab coming, give me the high sign, and I'll get my wife. She's standing over there, just inside Gate F. It's too hot out here for her. I'd really appreciate it." He said he would, and he watched the old man walk back to his waiting wife.

A car pulled up at the stoplight that had just turned red. The driver, an attractive woman in her 30's, lowered the passenger-side window and, looking in the direction of the old man, asked, "Excuse me, isn't that Studs Terkel?"

"Yes, ma'am," he answered. "It surely is."

He grinned a lot on the way home, thinking about how he had spent the afternoon. This day would never have

come had he insisted, fresh out of high school, that he pursue his dream of becoming a drummer like Gene Krupa or Buddy Rich.

"Listen," his mother had said, "you can't make a living playing drums!" She told the wayward youth that the brother of his third-grade teacher was a printer at the *Chicago Daily News*. "He said he can get you a job there," she continued, and she strongly encouraged him to do the right thing.

His big-band dreams in tatters, he relented, and in the spring of 1959, he joined the *News* as a copyboy. A short time later, while working the night shift, he spotted an unfamiliar face in the newsroom. The man looked pretty much like all reporters did in those days: the sleeves of his white shirt were rolled up to the elbows, his tie was loosened, a cigarette dangled from his mouth. He didn't smile much, and his voice very often sounded like a low growl.

"That's the new guy," said a coworker. "His name is Royko."

Dave Gorak worked at the Chicago Daily News for 13 years.

LIBERAL ARTS

YOUR TAX DOLLARS AT WORK

After 39 days and \$750,000, the Illinois State Police forced Shirley Ann Allen of Roby, Illinois, out of her house and into a psychiatric ward. The case, dubbed "Roby Ridge," attracted national attention after Mrs. Allen refused to submit to a court-ordered psychiatric examination and ran the busybodies off with a shotgun. Now, after more than a month of examination, a psychiatrist has determined that she is not a threat to herself or others, and a judge has ended her court-appointed guardianship. While the Illinois State Police have refused to repair the damage that they caused to Mrs. Allen's house, one might expect them to offer an apology for the standoff. Instead, Illinois State Police Director Terrance Gainer told the Associated Press, "I think everything has played out fairly." Of course he does: the State Police purchased \$104,000 in new equipment just for the standoff.