

The End of the Innocence

This town ain't big
This town ain't small.
It's a little of both they say.
And our ball club may be minor
league
But at least it's Triple A. . . .
We don't worry 'bout the pennant
much
We just like to see the boys hit it
deep
There's nothing like the view
From the cheap seats.
—Alabama, "The Cheap Seats"

Opening Day in Rockford, and my children, wide-eyed with excitement, are dragging me through the gate to the last season opener for the Rockford RiverHawks at Marinelli Field, and, in all likelihood, the last season opener for Marinelli Field itself. Next spring, the RiverHawks will move to a new stadium currently being constructed on the northeast side of town, out by the tollway—in Loves Park.

In many ways, the two stadiums could not be farther apart, but the presence of the RiverHawks—who belong to the far-from-Triple A independent Frontier League—several miles away will almost certainly mean that no minor-league team will consider making Marinelli, or any other downtown Rockford location, their home. And thus Rockford, recently named by *Sports Illustrated* as the number-one sports town in Illinois, will be without minor-league baseball.

The team's owner, Dave Ciarrachi, expressed an interest in moving the RiverHawks a mile up the road to Davis Park, in the heart of downtown Rockford, where the new stadium would sit right on the west bank of the Rock River. But Mayor Doug Scott dropped the ball, as he has on so many other downtown projects over the past three years.

Ciarrachi's desire to move is not surprising. While Marinelli is nestled in an idyllic (for Rockford, at least) setting on the east side of the Rock River in the southwest part of town, it is poorly oriented, and the batter and most of the crowd squint directly into the setting sun. While the stadium has the feel of a neighborhood park, the neighborhood has largely

disappeared, and few people can walk to a game. Fewer still would want to walk home after dark. Marinelli may not be in "the part of town where if you hit a red light you don't stop," but it shares the same ZIP code.

I'm ashamed to say that it has taken the potential end of baseball at Marinelli to get me to my first game in the eight-and-a-half years that we have lived in Rockford. Growing up in a small village in Michigan, baseball was the backdrop to my everyday life. My elementary school was on the same block as our house; my junior-high and high schools were across the street. In between, on the southwest corner of the block, sat two diamonds, the larger one for baseball, the other (closer to the elementary school) for softball.

Every day for 12 years, I walked past one or both fields, smelled the freshly cut grass, hung on the outfield fence and watched the team warm up for the game. In the spring, the fields were occupied most of the day and evening, with girls' softball and varsity baseball but also innumerable pick-up games featuring players of all ages.

In the morning, when the fields were empty as I walked by, they seemed to take on a magical quality. During six years of junior and senior high, I could have saved myself a minute or two each day on the way to school by climbing the fence and cutting across the field, but I never did. My reluctance didn't stem from some George Will "Field of Dreams" meditation on the "religion" of baseball but from the concrete fact of the fence, which set off that piece of land for a purpose other than my convenience. The community that gathered outside of that fence was more important than what happened on the field, but the field was what made that community come together.

Looking around up here in the cheap seats, I realize that there is a community at Marinelli, too—of old-line Rockfordians, black and white and brown, factory workers and laborers, old men and high-school kids. Some of them will follow the RiverHawks to their new stadium; many will not. The tickets will undoubtedly be more expensive (though a bargain, still, compared with Major League tickets);

the stadium may be too far away; it sits on the edge of a sanitized, yuppified area of chain stores and health clubs and new subdivisions. The crowd in the stands at the new ballpark may become a community, but I have my doubts. Suburbanites who live in vinyl-sided ranches tend to feel more comfortable in a crowd.

The game is a rout; the RiverHawks trounce the Springfield/Ozark Ducks 9-2—a near-perfect ending for a season opener. The children decide that they want to sign up for the kids' club, which will get them tickets to ten games throughout the season, and, as I gather our coats, I find myself looking forward to spending many evenings this summer at Marinelli.

Although I have always enjoyed playing sports and watching them live, I have never been much of a sports fan. The idea of following a professional team seems alien to me. I view sports, like the rest of life, through the lens of subsidiarity. Why should I root for the Detroit Tigers when I had the Spring Lake Lakers or, later, the Michigan State Spartans? Why bother with the Cubs or the White Sox or the Brewers, when Rockford has its own RiverHawks? A team that I cannot afford to see play live is an abstraction, a splash of electrons on a TV screen; you should transfer your allegiance to such abstract entities only when necessary.

As the lights go down over the field, I try to hustle the children out of the stands and into the parking lot so that we can walk back to the car while we watch the fireworks. We don't make it. The first volleys burst above center field, and we turn and stand at the top of the steps leading down out of the stands. As I look out across the empty and darkened diamond, lit briefly but brilliantly by each explosion, the last remaining cares of the day melt away.

Just to hit the ball and touch them
all
A moment in the sun . . .

Wrapped up in the sight and the sound, I hardly even notice that Neil Diamond's schlock-pop anthem to unlimited immigration, "Coming to America," is blaring out of the speakers; when was the last time

you saw a fireworks display and weren't subjected to the Solitary Man? But now, accompanied by several especially jarring explosions, come the swelling strains of "God Bless America":

Stand beside her and guide her
Through the night with a light
from above.

And suddenly, we're all grown up / and this old town's not quite so small, as the field before me fades from view and I find myself staring at the images of Baghdad that monopolized my TV screen at the beginning of the Iraq war. The moment, a brief, happy return to my childhood, has been lost.

Every generation, it seems, has its defining moment. My teen years coincided with Ronald Reagan's two terms in office; it was, relatively speaking, a good time to grow up, when America was "walking real proud and talking real loud again." (The reality, of course, was somewhat different, but teenagers live on perception.) Gulf War I was an awakening; September 11 was a shock, even for those of us who understood the threat posed by insurgent Islam; but the war in Iraq and the United States' headlong rush into empire has been, for me and others in my generation, the end of the innocence.

Leftist critics of empire, being good humanitarians, tend to focus on imperial excesses abroad, and our actions in Iraq have had their share. The worst damage, however, is the corruption that occurs at home, which can only fully be understood by those on the patriotic right (the real right, not the Microsoft-Wal-Mart-McDonald's nationalists of Fox News or the left-right of the neoconservatives); and in this, the war in Iraq may have a greater effect even than the Vietnam War. The neoconservatives who control this administration have argued since 1989 that we needed to find another enemy to replace communism, but the Cold War justification for Vietnam looks clear and logical compared with our stated reasons for getting bogged down in the current quagmire. Because these perfidious policy wonks have hijacked U.S. foreign policy to serve non-American (not to say un-American) purposes, decent people can no longer watch fireworks on Opening Day without staring into the face of horror.

Over the past few months, we have received the occasional letter from a subscriber informing us that he will not re-

new his subscription when it runs out because *Chronicles* has "only criticized the war in Iraq but hasn't offered a constructive alternative." At first, I found these remarks puzzling; after all, in February of last year, before the war began, we published an entire issue ("Target: Iraq") devoted to alternatives, and it hardly needs saying that Tom Fleming, Srdja Trifkovic, and Sam Francis continue to offer better analysis and recommendations than those emanating from the fevered imaginations of Richard Perle and Paul Wolfowitz. I finally realized, however, that these subscribers aren't necessarily in favor of the war but, as decent patriots and loyal Republicans, have been caught up, however reluctantly, in the imperial transformation of America. Their letters express a frustration at not finding in our pages a sound-bite alternative that they could use to reply to those who spout the Bush administration's sound-bite justifications for this war. If we could offer that, however, *Chronicles* would not be the same magazine.

Having invaded the most secular country in the Middle East and turned it into a hornet's nest of Islam, we have two options. We can engage Islam as Christians and men of the West, fighting by the just-war rules that represent all that is best in our tradition (no more Abu Ghraib or carpet-bombing of civilian targets) while realizing that following those rules may mean that we lose the physical battle but win the spiritual war. Call a spade a spade and an insurgent, a warrior. Quit spreading the lie that Islam is a "religion of peace" and acknowledge the truth: Islam is a demonic religion of war and of strife, second in size only to Christianity and second to none in the fervor of its adherents. Only once we see it for what it is can we engage it properly, without

descending to its level. That would require, however, a truly Christian leadership in America; and of that, we are sadly lacking.

Our other option is to admit what we have gotten ourselves into; to pull out; to shed the shackles of empire. Return to our borders, and secure them. Deport all non-citizen Muslims (and Jews, and any other non-citizens whose primary allegiance is likely to be to a country other than ours), and set about the business of rebuilding the moral, cultural, social, economic, and political infrastructure of this country. While this wouldn't necessarily require a Christian leadership, it might help our leaders become more Christian, because, in the end, it would amount to a form of repentance.

My wife and I have shielded our children from the images—and even the discussion—of the war in Iraq (proof positive, I'm sure Sean Hannity would say, that we're really closet liberals), and, as I look down at my children gazing up at the fireworks, I'm relieved to find their eyes more bright than the explosions reflected in them. Their awe, unlike mine, is unaccompanied by shock—but for how long?

If the United States pursued either of the options above, I could explain our country's actions to my children and have hope that, someday, they might simply be able to enjoy Opening Day with their children. I cannot explain to them what we are doing now. In the larger scheme of things, it may seem minor, but this, to me, is one of the worst effects of empire: that fathers standing in stadiums on Opening Day in "the middle-size towns / in the middle of the Middle West" should find themselves at a loss for words, and not because of what's happening on the field. <C>

For the latest from Rockford, visit

**THE
ROCKFORD
files
WEBLOG**

at www.ChroniclesMagazine.org

Letter From Prague

by Srdja Trifkovic

The Perils of "United Europe"



A visitor to Prague in the immediate aftermath of the Czech Republic's formal entry into the European Union will find few outward signs that something rather momentous has taken place. Your documents are still checked at the border crossing as you drive into the country from Germany; the *koruna* (crown) is still the legal tender; and the gold-and-blue E.U. logo does not yet adorn any Czech license plates.

There are other, more important, visible distinctions. Compared with most of her Western European partners in the Union, Bohemia is still remarkably monoethnic and monoracial—which may help explain why Prague is one of the safest and cleanest capital cities in Europe. Unlike those of Rome or Paris, its magnificent squares are mercifully free of the street "merchants" from Lagos and pickpockets from Tirana.

This may change soon, however, according to Michael Semin, executive director of the Civic Institute. I met this youthful-looking father of five when I came to Prague as a guest of the Institute to attend its conference "Can the West Be Defended?" and found in Mr. Semin a Euro-skeptic who sees no reason for celebration. He predicts that the new, post-communist members of the European Union will no longer be the masters of their own borders and will not be able to control who will settle in their lands: "We will have to adjust completely to the immigration policy dictated from Brussels, as immigration is one of the areas over which member-countries will have no veto power. The new members will have to have the same immigration policy as, say, Germany or France, and, in the long term, the results will be similar. Right now, we have a very small number of Muslims, and they do not present a problem in the Central European societies. This will start changing soon. At the moment, we have some immigration, mostly from the countries of the former Sovi-

et Union, specifically from the Ukraine, but that is acceptable because [the immigrants] easily adapt. They have a similar language; many of them are practicing Christians. But these people are not what those E.U. immigration dictators have in mind when they speak about the need to create a more 'multicultural' society here. What they mean is that we will have to accept immigration from other parts of the world."

An early sign of Prague's loss of its freedom of action in the postcommunist period came in March 1999, when the Czech Republic joined NATO's war against Serbia as a consequence of her membership in the alliance: "Under NATO, we were bombing Yugoslavia, which I consider a crime. The Czech government at that time very reluctantly, under the pressure from NATO, joined other member countries in the bombing. This was related to the fact that NATO had reformulated its principles and its objectives. It is not any more a defense organization against Soviet communism; it is part of the structure exporting secular humanism all over the world as 'humanitarian interventions.' Just look at the people who took over the European and Atlantic organizations! Basically, the Cold War was ended by the generation of the 60's—by the Frankfurt School; by people like Lord Robertson, who, under Thatcher, was campaigning for unilateral nuclear disarmament; by Xavier Solana, Joschka Fischer, and other people of the left. This generation had inherited all of the post-World War II Western institutions. That is why I don't expect any recovery of the old communism, because it is not useful to the left any longer. The left has different means to achieve its goals now: Communism is discredited, but now they have all these institutions at their disposal."

In Semin's view, the European Union is an even more important tool than NATO of radical change for the left, and a far more dangerous one. It imposes secular humanism from top to bottom through an array of bureaucratic, legal, and financial instruments. This, Semin maintains, had been concealed from the Czechs as they were about to vote in a referendum on joining the European Union. Those lobbying on behalf of the European Union worked hard to conceal that what the people were effectively voting

for was the acceptance of the European constitution—the whole framework of unified Europe—together with its Charter of Fundamental Rights, even though that key document had not been finalized at that time: "Nobody really knew what kind of organization we were going to join. Now it's clearer to those who read the Draft of the European Constitution, including the charter. This is a dramatic shift towards centralized power within the E.U. The Czech Republic will have only 2.4 percent of the influence, and between 70 and 80 percent of its legislation will come from the European Union. The Czech parliament will not even formally approve those laws: They will be incorporated directly into the national legal code. There is no possibility, there is no legal or political mechanism, to block that. Any such attempt would result in punishment. In the near future, Czech politics will be just a charade, nothing else. No important matters will be decided domestically. The centralization of power is linked to the fact that the veto power is going to be abolished in most policy areas. The majority is going to decide for the whole of 'Europe,' which obviously will create tremendous tensions."

Semin stresses that the Charter will promote the postmodern concept of "rights" and "nondiscrimination." It will insist on an array of minority rights based on race, sex, and sexual orientation. A Catholic school may have to accept a Muslim teacher of history if it is to receive any state funding. This approach may also raise the issue of the exclusively male priesthood in most Christian denominations, which proponents of the charter already call discriminatory. Their strident demand that women be allowed into the monastic communities of Mt. Athos is only an indication of what is yet to come. Semin warns that the judges of the European Court in Luxembourg will interpret the European constitution—and the charter—and it will have no other court above it: "The decisions of the judges will set precedents obligatory for the whole of the European Union. Whatever they decide, there will be no judicial authority in the member states that will be able to overrule that decision. By the decision of those judges, we may have to legalize homosexual 'marriage' here in the Czech Republic, although this has been rejected