



The Procrastinator

better late than never

Special 2009 Edition

Friday, January 2, 2009

volume I | issue 7

Please email questions or letters to the editor to TheProcrastinatorNewsletter@gmail.com

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The Ways of the World: Sports Agnosticism

Trey Smith



Notre Dame's Touchdown Jesus looks on as boosters and school presidents behave like moneylenders in the temple that is collegiate sports.

Everyone has written a fifth grade level essay on how sports are like a religion. Sports have traditions, rules, ceremonies, rituals, holy places, etc. and people are passionate about all of those things. I myself am guilty of turning sports into a religious experience. My worry, however, is that anytime a large number of people put a great deal of passion, devotion and faith into something it inevitably becomes corrupt.

I'm not a terribly religious person. Which isn't to say that I hate religion or anything; in fact one of my two minors in college was religious studies. I find religion extremely interesting. I also am not an atheist of any sort. Nor am I one of those hippies that describe themselves as 'spiritual.' I'm just a guy that believes in a higher power (God), but doesn't see much value in having some old man interpret an even older book that was assembled by a different group of old men nearly two thousand years ago. So while I absolutely do not believe that a guy got swallowed by a whale, and then lived inside of it only to be spit out unharmed, I do believe there is a good message to be gleaned from that story. My beef is that who's to say one person's interpretation of that message is any better than someone else's?

I feel like that's a jaded but pretty typical view of organized religion. And let's face it the history of organized religion is littered with some of the lowest points in humanity. The trouble is that once people put their faith into something that essentially has a monopoly on a particular subject, that organization can ply their devoted audience to do whatever the organization wants them to do. 'Send our children on a crusade to recapture Jerusalem, sounds like a great idea!' 'Racism is ok because black people are descended from Ham, totally plausible!' 'Fly planes into buildings, where do I sign up?'

It's things like that that turn folks like me into agnostics; jaded believers observing the world the way Tom Waits observes, through song, bar scenes: with equal parts humor, acceptance and disdain (listen to 'Warm Beer and Cold Women' and you'll see what I'm talking about).

This gets us back to the contemporary sports world. If we look beyond the initial fifth grade comparison between sports and religion, it becomes apparent that the similarities go beyond a fifth grader's intellect and unfortunately enter into the realm of a cynical agnostic.

Why are there 34 bowl games? Why are there no college football playoffs? Why is there no salary cap in baseball? Why does it cost a fortune to attend a sporting event? Why are there games that are televised but I can only see them if I subscribe to a new network? Why has college basketball become a minor league for the NBA? And so on and so forth.

The answer to all those questions is greed.

I am a lifelong Duke fan. As a child I would watch every Duke game with the absolute, unquestioned knowledge that Duke equaled the good guys. Obviously this is a subjective view, but it is a view I've put my faith into wholeheartedly. Thus, when Duke lost, as a child I was immensely confused. My faith was shaken. 'How could Duke lose, they're the good guys? The good guys are supposed to win.'

Now, as an adult, I still watch every Duke game and believe that Duke equals the good guys, but knowing all the things I know now my attitude after a Duke lost is different. Instead of feeling disbelief, as I did as a child, I think to myself, 'Of course Duke lost, they are the good guys and the good guys never win because there's no justice in the world!'

The Church of Medieval Europe abused its power to coerce the faithful to challenge any government or organization that posed a threat to the Church's authority. Thus, the faithful parishioners were rewarded for their devotion by being used as nothing more than a means to the Church's greater end.

I ask you if contemporary sports are any different from the Medieval Church? As sports fans we are all dutifully committed to sports and how are we repaid? Does the BCS ask us if we think it'd be better to go to a playoff system? Does anyone ask a college basketball fan if it's stupid to force people who don't want to go to college to go there for one year and then leave? Does baseball ask us if it's fair for the Yankees to have the four highest paid players in all of baseball on their team?

No. Of course they don't ask us those questions, because they know that they can do whatever the hell they want and we'll keep watching because we've invested ourselves emotionally into sports. We put our faith in them, so we're

a captive audience. Just pawns being moved around by higher-ups who use us to further their own greed.

So where does that leave us? I certainly don't feel that I watch sports with the same enjoyment that I did as a child. Back then sporting events were just the pinnacles of a good day, whereas now a good sporting event is merely a brief respite from a barrage of bullshit. I may enjoy a good bowl game, but afterwards I'm still left yearning for a playoff system. I still love a Duke win and get depressed after a Duke loss, but the wins are less sweet and the losses are more painful knowing that college basketball has been reduced to nothing more than a commercial for the NBA.

In short, I fear that I will end up regarding sports in the same way that I regard religion; a great idea that's been corrupted by people and organizations that abuse the fact that people are willing to give them their faith. So as someone who doesn't want to become a sports agnostic, but fears that it might be inevitable, next time I'm watching a really good game I'll raise my beer and drink to the hope that somewhere out there is a sports version of Martin Luther. *P*

Trey is waiting on your 95 Theses to be emailed to him at dantzlsmith@gmail.com

Food: American Grocery, Greenville, SC

Morgen Young



I didn't realize when I moved to Columbia that I would be making such a culinary sacrifice. South Carolina's capital city unfortunately is lacking in many dining options. This somewhat college town turns to California Dreaming and the Chili's near the latest shopping mall. Being a vegetarian in the South provides additional obstacles in dining, as there are only so many fried green tomatoes and pimiento cheeses one can eat. Columbia seems fixated on the current obsession with New South cuisine, but personally I find it cliché. Columbia is not completely lacking in restaurants – I have a few favorites scattered in the Vista (Motor Supply Company), Main Street (The Whig and Hampton Street Vineyard) and Shandon (Mediterranean Tea Room). However as a whole, the city does not provide a range of choices, as do other locations.

South Carolina does hold a few gems in terms of dining locales. Charleston, of course, boasts numerous restaurants, but I find Greenville a much more inspiring destination for interesting food choices. Having spent my formidable college years in the Upstate, I regret not becoming more familiar with what Greenville had to offer. The recent boom in Main Street development and the revitalization of the West End has made the city a haven for foodies in the Carolinas. During a recent trip to Greenville (as I have to occasionally escape Cola to find new and interesting places to eat), I visited American Grocery in the West End. Located

just past the well-traveled area of downtown, the restaurant is situated beyond the reach of most out-of-town parents visiting their college kids and other tourists in the area. American Grocery presents refined seasonal fare in an unpretentious and relaxed setting. Utilizing all local produce, meats, dairy and seafood, the restaurant presents a new menu based on whatever is in season and available to them. This ensures that your meal is prepared using the freshest ingredients, while supporting local farms and businesses.

I began my meal with a field greens salad with potatoes and mushrooms in a tarragon vinaigrette. It was unbelievably fresh and innovative. I find that a salad that is interestingly done is one of the hardest recipes to conquer. Typically sad, wilted lettuce is presented swimming in a pool of bottled dressing. But this first course was a refreshing introduction to American Grocery. To my surprise a vegetarian (and truly vegetarian, without having to ask for substitutions or double checking the ingredients) option was provided on the menu. I was presented a skillet tableside with broccolini on a bed of winter greens and roasted garlic scented grits. It was a warm and comforting dish, but lacking in acid to brighten the rich flavors. However, the textural contrast was wonderful, with the creamy grits against the crispy vegetables. It was a fantastic meal, albeit expensive. But well worth the time and money to get to American Grocery.

Perhaps Columbia will expand its culinary horizons and include a restaurant of equal quality to American Grocery. Or perhaps I need to quit my bitching and move to the Northwest to be among other crunchy, vegetarian, eco-types who are as obsessed with good, local food as I am. Until then I will continue to curse the South's fascination with all things fried. *P*

Morgen is an unabashed vegetarian. If you would like to woo her with tofurkey recipes, please email her at: morgen.young@gmail.com

Bonfire of Inanities: Procrastinator Author Totally Spaces on Writing Essays

Brad Wright



Wright, clearly busy over the past two weeks.

Brad Wright, frequent contributor to The Procrastinator newsletter, abjectly failed to start writing the two essays he had promised editor Michael Orr prior to Wright's Christmas vacation. Despite having a full two weeks since the last edition of the newsletter, Wright found himself completely and utterly unmotivated to begin work on two promising topics. Though he had planned on writing a scintillating examination on the negative aspects of American Exceptionalism, as well as a soaring tribute to recently retired, soon-to-be Hall of Fame pitcher Greg Maddux, Wright admits that he completely dropped the ball.

"Well, I got the idea for the American Exceptionalism essay after a drunken viewing of Beerfest, so I probably wasn't ever going to write that one anyway," a visibly embarrassed Wright claimed. "As for the Greg Maddux tribute, well, my computer crashed over vacation so I couldn't get on Wikipedia to look up his stats, and I had a ton of parties to go to, so I just put it off."

When it was pointed out that his boss had been out of the office for the three days prior to the deadline, giving him more than ample time to write something, a flustered Wright blamed the various distractions of the Internet for his delay.

"Did you know you can watch whole movies on Hulu.com? I sure as hell didn't until a few days ago," Wright exclaimed. "How can I be expected to write something when Muppets from Space is on? And have you seen the SNL short 'Jizz in my Pants'?? I must have watched it at least 30 times. Hilarious."

Orr expressed both disappointment and utter lack of surprise at the turn of events. "Of course, I'm a little disappointed. I usually enjoy Brad's work and I was really curious to see those two essays," Orr said. "This edition was really shaping up to be one of our best, so I can't help but feel a bit let down. On the other hand, this is The Procrastinator, and I've known Brad for a long time, so it's not in the least bit shocking."

When asked if he would have the essays he promised ready for the next edition of the newsletter, Wright vaguely replied, "If I get around to it." *P*

Brad thinks this piece is a bit TOO funny, and can be brought down a peg at bwright08@gmail.com

Politics: The Israel Hypocrisy

Michael Orr

This country supports the nation of Israel in its quest for acceptance, security and autonomy in the Middle East. There is one word that was not included in the previous sentence that is the subject of this piece: peace.

Ever since its inception in 1948, Israel has been fighting with everyone from Palestine, Egypt and Syria. It is commonly held that Israel must constantly fight because it is in the crosshairs of these countries as well as the likes of Iran. It is commonly held in this country that we must support Israel as a stabilizing force of peace in the region and as a last refuge for the Jews of the world.

Let's begin with the first part of the Israel argument. Israel exists because of the Holocaust. After the Nazis ruined the Jewish communities of Europe, the West felt obligated to give displaced and otherwise affected Jews a nation-state of its own. So one was created and Israel suddenly was declared existent. With our "Christian nation" at the backbone of the push for the nation of Israel, Americans supported the creation based on a shared religious background and a justifiably guilty conscience about the Holocaust.

What Americans often do not realize, or perhaps choose to ignore, is that Islam is also a religion that shares common ancestry with both Christianity and Judaism. Abraham is the father of each religion so it comes as a bit of a hypocrisy when the US favors Israel in world matters on religious grounds. In fact, while reading most of the New Testament, the Jews are slammed as the evil Pharisees and as the killers of Christ. So why now, based on a religion-based support, are Jews given a favorable position in world affairs as compared to other religions?

The next part of the argument comes with the word 'peace.' Theoretically, Israel is supposed to show the rest of the

Middle East how a country can be run using democratic elections and religious tolerance. It is quite true that Israel does in fact elect its officials in a system of democracy fairly similar to that in America. But the example it is supposed to provide is nothing more than a joke. Israel is a brash a nation as exists on earth. And for a country that was founded just sixty years ago at the whim of Western diplomats, it is especially harsh in its criticisms of the validity of a Palestinian state.

Now we come to the current state of affairs in the Middle East. Israel has been bombing the Gaza Strip for several days and has no intention to stop. The supposed provocations were several bombings of southern Israel by Hamas forces after Israel broke a short cease-fire agreement. Israel will likely kill a thousand or more but the American press will not decry these attacks as acts of terrorism.

Why not? There are so many Jews with influential positions and with money that it would be political or editorial suicide to speak out against Israel in this country. There would also be protests by the children and grandchildren of Holocaust survivors that America is letting down Israel and reopening the doors that were most recently opened by the Nazis. Finally, it is just rare in general for the American media to point out the hypocrisies of our international agendas.

When Palestinians shoot rockets at Israel, they often kill civilians, which is truly a shame. It is barbarism and certainly not the way to solve the deep-seated issues between the two nations. But Israeli responses are never with grenade launchers or sniper rifles. No, Israel responds with tanks and with bulldozers destroying Palestinian neighborhoods, with air force strikes and bombings and with massive troop movements killing hundreds, sometimes thousands of civilians. Why is one considered terrorism and the other self-defense and self-determination? Why is Israel always given a free pass in our press when they are killing on a scale the Palestinians could only dream of?

This is not meant to suggest that Israel does not deserve to exist. Rather, it is simply to point out the inadequacies of the arrangement between our two countries. It is sad that we as Americans label Iranians, Syrians, Palestinians, Iraqis, Afghans, Pakistanis, Omanis, Yemenis and many others as terrorists but never Israelis. It is below our view of ourselves to be such proponents of democracy and justice in the world but to turn a completely blind eye to the terrorist activities of the Israeli government.

Perhaps one day, when the great great grandchildren of Holocaust survivors and victims have died and New York and Florida demographics change and America turns away from Christianity as a central tenet of government, people in this country might look back and see the fallacies of our Israel policy. They might see that we allowed state-run terrorism to exist and flourish under the protective glare of our military. They might see that rather than promoting peace and prosperity in the Middle East we instead instigated conflicts that caused the deaths of thousands upon thousands for the sake of a singularly hypocritical government that is not even our own. And perhaps they might see how we enacted religious and racial profiling to deny rights and government to Arabs and Muslims but allowed Jewish militants to do whatever they pleased. P



Michael is incensed about this topic as almost any other. If you can talk him down, please send an email to mikeaorr@gmail.com

The Fifth Column: Hotel Africa

Trey Smith

Chapter 1: Disorientation

There was a couple standing on the motel balcony. The man pulled a pack of cigarettes from his jean pocket. His eyes were fixed on the sun setting beyond the freeway and in between the cracks of the Atlanta skyline. He broke his gaze just long enough to light his smoke. He took two long drags then twisted it in his fingers and handed it butt first to the woman standing to his right.

She put it to her mouth and took a deep, harsh pull. The corners of her plain lips snapped up and her teeth clinched as she inhaled. She pulled hard once more before handing it back to him. Then she turned, gently touched her right hand to his right shoulder, and walked into the numbered room. As she walked away her hand trickled down his right arm and then returned to her side as she glanced down at a week's worth of trash piled outside their doorway.

He just stood there; piercing eyes contrasting with faded clothes and worn skin. Staring through the haze into the sun. Then into the darkness.

* * *

The airport gate was chaos. We'd all arrived from our hotels or connecting flights. People and bags were strewn everywhere. The electricity of nervous energy created an audible buzz among the throng. I sat there calmly. Silently judging people as if I were in a doctor's office trying to discern their illnesses.

It was easy to diagnose my contemporaries. Scattered vacationers, pensioners, businessmen and women, locals returning home, volunteers, church groups and fellow college students. I had been fortunate enough to be the only one from my school. Unencumbered, I was able to freely observe the others.

It was hard not to openly smirk at them. Burdened by familiarity, those joined by classmates chirped among themselves about their shared experiences. What major they were in, what courses they'd taken, what professors they'd had, what mutual friends they knew. Of course all of this led to the great reveal: how they'd come to decide to study abroad in South Africa. Each story was different, but only to a degree, and all of them were similarly fated.

Their counterparts, like me, were alone. Unlike me however, they sought to cure themselves of this. They became exaggerated extroverts. They nervously bent the ear of anyone around them. They volunteered their personal lives freely and without provocation. In order to appear courteous they asked others questions, but their questions were carefully designed, intended to move the conversation in a direction that suited yet another of their prepared autobiographical monologues.

There was a brief respite from this production when the plane began to board and we were corralled into line. Unfortunately, once onboard, the conversations reignited with renewed vigor. Like social speed dating the seats had been rearranged and each person's story had to be retold to their new audience.

The woman sitting next to me looked to be in her forties. Her skin was sun damaged and she was fairly obese. I had noticed her earlier in the gate filling a water bottle from her purse at the water fountain. We exchanged pleasantries and basic information, enough to ensure that we weren't strangers. It was more of a formality than anything else. Plus, I figured it would assure her I wasn't being rude when I moved to the empty seat to my left so that I wouldn't be so cramped. She was from just outside Statesboro, Georgia and had worked as a trucker before taking a managerial position at a fishery in Maryland. The fishery had recently burned to the ground so she used her severance pay to buy a world ticket. It was her life long dream to travel the world. This was the first time she'd ever been on a plane. She faced seventeen hours in the air before we reached Cape Town. Her nerves were apparent, but they were genuine. I stayed in my assigned seat.

Meanwhile the students around us stowed their North Face bags, sipped from their Nalgene bottles and continued to let their nasal chatter cut through the compressed air. As the woman next to me returned to reading her book, a collection of motivational sayings and words of wisdom with pocket-sized explanations of their meaning, I noticed that the page she held down with her left thumb read: "Real communication only takes place when people feel safe."

With that the plane shuttered away from the gate.

* * *

When we landed in Cape Town, three movies, a healthy chunk of reading and three bad meals later, the cabin sprung to life. Not waiting for the seat belt light to turn off, there was an audible and over-privileged clicking sound

throughout the plane as the students, in what would kindly be described as youthful exuberance, freed themselves from their seats. Now they spoke like conquering heroes as they discussed how they had managed to survive the voyage. It had the feel of a bizzaro Middle Passage. These fortunate sons and daughters had crossed the Atlantic in the mild discomfort of economy class and now, instead of arriving at a land they'd be bound to in forced servitude, these willing travelers thought they'd found a place where they could be the most free. They had left the land built by slaves to come to the exploited home of those exploited people. Stranger still, most of them had done all this in search of an existence not tainted by history nor defined by a built environment, and this search had led them to a land beset by history, pinning for modernity.

I stepped out of the fuselage, down the motorized staircase, onto the tarmac, and into the midday winter sun of Africa. The sky seemed a lighter shade of blue and the colors all around appeared to have a pastel hue that I wasn't used to. A bus took us to the airport itself where the unwashed mass that we were, crowded into passport control. A burly man in a green uniform broke my passport's cherry as he pounded the first stamp I ever received into my recently issued passport. I collected my two checked bags and walked out into the arrivals area. A tall skinny white man with a run of the mill checkered shirt tucked into khaki pants and thinning, wispy light brown hair was holding a sign that read "Interstudy." When it came to study abroad programs my college had apparently taken a page out of its largely apathetic and disorganized student body's book. Therefore, there was no college-run study abroad program available to me. For the most part I was the gold standard of stereotypes for my often-ridiculed college, but in this one instance I managed to muster the energy to find an external non-university affiliated program that would do all the heavy lifting of arranging my study abroad 'experience.' Hence, here was this youthful looking middle-aged person, Peter Munich, Interstudy's 'man on the ground,' welcoming me to South Africa. *P*

They wishes he were part of the Lost Generation, but instead must suffer as an analog guy in a digital world. He can be reached electronically (read: impersonally) at dantzlersmith@gmail.com

The Ways of the World: Rediscovering America

Michael Orr



American is sometimes a hard sell. Which is weird because of how intense we're all supposed to be about being American. But domestic tourism in the States just doesn't get as much recognition as it should. We all scoff when we see ads on tv for Arkansas or Oklahoma but how else are they supposed to get the word out that they do exist for non-residents? And even for residents? How many people have been to the state parks, battlefields, national parks or nature preserves in their own states?

Unfortunately, the days of finding a cheap plane ticket to London or Paris are all but over. With the consolidation of the airlines and with rising gas prices (despite our current, temporary drop) and labor costs, it just isn't very easy to get across the Atlantic anymore. And it's never been inexpensive to fly to China, Australia or anywhere else further than the few thousand miles it takes to reach Europe. Compounding those natural issues is the current

fate of many American workers. Which is to say lots of people don't have jobs anymore. And for those who do, who in these times can really afford a week in Prague or Barcelona?

I know it isn't as cool to do domestic travel but think of all there is to offer in this country. From sea to shining sea they say. Well have you actually ever been to both the Atlantic and Pacific coasts? And if you have, have you been to Florida and Maine or Washington, Oregon and California? Or what about the Grand Canyon, Mount Rushmore, Old Faithful, the Mississippi River or the Great Smoky Mountains?

The great thing about traveling in the States is that you don't have to learn another language. Unlike the UK or Australia, you don't have to learn how to drive on the other side of the car and road. You already hold the national currency and there really are cheaper flights to be found out there to make a round trip to Santa Fe, Great Falls, Montana or Portland, Maine.

And as important as it is to learn about other cultures and languages, there is much to be seen within our own borders.

I'd venture to say that the people living in Seattle, Atlanta, New York and Dallas are as different as any of us are from folks in London, Madrid or Moscow. We all claim to love our country but many of us have never been outside of the state in which we were born.

I think it's time we rediscover America. And it can be done in a lot of ways. The next time you're on a business trip to Philadelphia, take the thirty-minute drive out to see Valley Forge. If you're visiting family in San Francisco, take a day to drive three hours to see Yosemite National Park. Maybe you're changing jobs and moving across the country. Think about driving it, you wouldn't believe the things you'll see crossing the width of this country.

From Wall Drug and the Corn Palace in South Dakota to Lake Tahoe in Nevada to Everglades National Park in South Florida to Acadia National Park in Maine, there's something for everyone if you're just willing to pull off the freeway and take a look. Maybe it's the world's largest ball of twine or standing on a corner in Winslow, Arizona, we should be willing to take in all that this country has to offer.

It's really easy to stand on a soapbox and preach how America should be the voice and force of morality in the world. I happen to disagree completely with that, but plenty of people do it. But how many of those America apologists have been to even thirty of the fifty states? Shouldn't we be willing to experience the vast and varied cultures within our borders before trying to defend ourselves in the face of others?

I'm proud to say that I've visited (I'm not counting plane connections) forty-three of our fifty states and I'll be adding New Mexico in February. I've arrived in some places by plane and I've driven the length and breadth of others. I have my favorites, like Alaska, Montana and Maine, and those I don't really care for, like Kansas and Maryland, but I've spent at least some time in each of them. That's the only way to really know what it is you're standing for when you say you're representing your country.

So let's all think about taking some time to really explore the cities and states we live in. If we're serious about saving our country's economy and saving or creating jobs, there's a very simple way. Don't spend dollars in other countries when you can spend them here in America. I don't want to discourage international travel, it's been some of the most rewarding time of my life while abroad, but there's something to be said for getting to know your own country. I don't think we all do enough of that and really, it's worth it. *♫*

Michael has not yet been to Hawaii, New Mexico, North Dakota, Nebraska, Oklahoma, Texas or Mississippi. Any ideas on how to get him there can be sent to mikeaorr@gmail.com