

Of Thee I Sing:

Being a left-leaning smart aleck, I tend to get down on a lot of our nation's stands and policies. It's actually a lot easier for a person of my bent to criticize than it is to praise. Most writers will always take the easy way out. There are so many ripe targets on the American political scene that any commentarian should never be out of material. It doesn't matter whether you're left, right or Martian, if you can't find something in the American scene to complain about you should find another calling.

So what I'm about to do is the far more difficult column. I'm here to praise and thank and honor and smile at the Country we live in. It really is quite a remarkable place. When I take the time to do it honor, the words come easily.

I was looking at a photo of the recent "change in government" in the West Bank, in Palestine. It showed dozens of heavily armed men and boys climbing a back stairwell in the Parliament building. They were there to "install" the new government and assist in the "transition" from the previous government. In America we sometimes have to go to court to settle an election and I know it feels terribly unfair to the side that loses the decision. But any comparison between that process and the armed take over of a sitting legislature is beyond ridiculous. The pundits who say that both events are in the same ballpark are pandering, or nuts.

Veronica was telling me about a young woman who was just back from New Orleans where she spent the last six months rebuilding homes and resettling citizens. We all know the Governments, local and federal, messed up. But at the same time this young woman worked with thousands of other generous humans, contributing millions of hours for absolutely nothing in return, except the joy and pride that come from helping someone who's hurting. Americans are great at that. We always have been. Here's hoping we always will be.

When I see the wreckage in the Amazon and the smoke in China and the dead lake in Siberia I take justifiable pride in the millions and millions and millions of acres that our country has set aside as public, protected lands. I know conservancy has its enemies. And I also know this country has a magnificent hundred year record of creating our Yellowstones and Yosemite and Dinalis. The simple fact that any attempt to infringe on a protected wilderness means a monumental fight for the developer is great praise indeed for Americans.

We love the Next Thing here. We are absolutely smitten with the newest technology, gadget, service or idea. We fund them, invest in them and expect to make our fortunes on them. That's a good thing. It's easy for a lefty to get down on the markets but putting money behind some widget that you think will change the planet isn't all bad, is it? For every Vegematic that happens, there is also a Telephone.

When's the last time that an American sporting event caused the fans in the stands to go after one another as if team loyalty had achieved a status slightly above mother love? It doesn't happen here. You don't see fans trampled to death at Shea or Tiger or Fenway or any venue. Not even a Packer fan. It's safety first, I guess, but the only times we get crazy here is after our team wins, out in the streets, where one has somewhere to run. If you tried to enter an American stadium with the stuff that English soccer hooligans carry to a match, you'd find yourself in the cooler standing for one of those unflattering photos, with a number.

We just returned from Jazz Fest in La Crosse. Jazz is the child of 20th century America. It is music of boundless energy, humor and melancholy. It is the intersection of music theory and the people's wisdom. It is what the melting pot turned out in its finest moments. Like so many things in our history Jazz, opened the floodgates. Our Revolution opened the gates. Universal suffrage opened the gates. The Manhattan Project opened the gates. The scary thing about a gate is that you don't always know what 's going to come through it, once it's opened. One of the factors that made us great has been our willingness to open a gate and take our chances.

We have the Statue of Liberty standing at our east gate. The Lady has swelled so many chests with pride. She has caused countless tears of joy. She has created more confidence in self and culture than any great beacon, anywhere in history. She is the embodiment of so much that we need to hold noble and true and worthwhile. She is us.

Of Thee, I sing.