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A Nice Little Place on the North Side: Wrigley Field at One Hundred by George F. Will (review)

Jason Duncan

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“aging further,” lest she become the sort of wreck she has witnessed in her grandmother, or the listless, complacent loner she sees in her mother, who “dreams of nothing.” Despite her dread, of course, the speaker realizes she will age, and sooner or later will die. As the book opens with a poem envisioning escape by flight from limits imposed by family, geography, or culture, so it closes with an acknowledgment of the one inescapable snare.

Scott Russell Sanders
INDIANA UNIVERSITY
Bloomington, Indiana

George F. Will, *A Nice Little Place on the North Side: Wrigley Field at One Hundred*. New York: Crown, 2014. 224 pp. \$25.00.

Our two-year-old son has a book subtitled “World Series Champions” that has a companion volume on the Chicago Cubs. This jarring fact is true, as the team won two of baseball’s first fall classics, in 1907 and 1908. Roosevelt—Theodore, not Franklin—was in the White House for the second and last of these long ago triumphs. Since then, including a century in one of sports’ most recognizable venues, Wrigley Field, the Cubs have fallen short of baseball’s greatest prize. Well-known political commentator and serious baseball fan George F. Will has written a charming and bittersweet history of the venerable midwestern ballpark. In a breezy anecdotal style, full of literary and historical references, he explains how the appeal of Wrigley itself is so strong that it overcomes the less happy results on the diamond within. The Yankee Stadium of the Midwest it is not. A more apt comparison, until recently, would be with Boston’s equally storied Fenway Park. The Red Sox last twentieth century World Series victory was in 1918; they broke through in 2004, however, and have won two more titles since. Worse yet, Chicago’s crosstown rival, the White Sox, ended their own long World Series drought—they had last won in 1917—in 2005, leaving the Cubs alone in their futility.

Will, an author of two other well regarded books on baseball, does not shy away from this frustrating history. Anything but a fair weather celebrity fan, he has been devoted to the Cubs since his childhood in Champaign-Urbana, Illinois. A great enthusiast for the time honored traditions of Wrigley, Will also possesses a keen eye and sharp wit for the foibles of this franchise and its beloved ballpark. Among the former are its abundance of

day games, its lush ivy walls, a location in a genuine urban neighborhood, and the Cubs' refusal to join the trend toward the constant, loud and garish "entertainment" that now bombards baseball fans between innings even at major league games.

One of the many pleasure of this book are Will's vivid biographical vignettes of some of the memorable personalities who have called Wrigley their baseball home. Among them is his account of Hack Wilson, a troubled soul but a truly great hitter, who spearheaded one of the Cubs' best stretches of post 1908 baseball, that being the 1930s. No book on Wrigley Field would be complete without several tips of the cap to Ernie Banks, whose calm and friendly nature seemed to personify the ballpark itself. Hall of Famer Banks led the Cubs during another of their periodic moments of near greatness, the late 1960s. Will points out that Leo Durocher, a Hall of Famer in his own right who managed Banks when Mr. Cub was past his peak, dared to criticize Banks publicly. Will brushes that aside but notes that, sadly, Banks' only remaining record is that for playing in the most regular season games without making it to the postseason. Even so, Will honors the statue of Ernie Banks' likeness that stands outside Wrigley Field today.

It was during the Banks-Durocher era that the Cubs suffered one of their most heartbreaking moments, when the upstart Mets, from New York of all places, overtook a veteran Chicago team in the final weeks of the 1969 season. Fifteen years later, a muffed ground ball cost the Cubs a trip to the World Series and a rematch of their 1945 loss to the Detroit Tigers in their last appearance in the Fall Classic. Will does not shy away from more recent agonies, including the ugliness of the 2003 playoff loss to the then-Florida Marlins. The image of the Cubs and their fans as cuddly sorts was damaged that year when some of the latter turned on Steve Bartman, who accidentally interfered with a catchable foul ball. Bartman was threatened with violence that night and had to be escorted out of the old ballpark, to which he has never felt safe enough to return, despite his enduring love for the Cubs.

Will also attempts to answer the century old question of why the Cubs cannot win a World Series. One traditional answer is that they played too many games in the daytime, thus, the theory went, sapping their energy for the season's final stretch. The reason Wrigley was without lights for decades after their competition installed them was not designed, but resulted from a turn of history. Cubs owner P. K. Wrigley, Will explains, had planned to install lights after the 1941 season, but Pearl Harbor intervened and so he donated those materials to the US war effort. One might think

that patriotic karma would work in the Cubs favor, but alas . . . In any event, the Cubs have been playing baseball at night at Wrigley since 1988, albeit fewer such games than other teams. It was other decisions not to modernize that set the franchise back in the middle of the twentieth century, especially their slowness in developing their own farm system of minor league clubs.

A pastoral retreat in the midst of the quintessential modern industrial city, Wrigley Field endures in the sporting imagination of the Midwest and far beyond. In the highly skilled hands of George Will, it has found its chronicler. Although the book includes a few black and white photos—including two of Ronald Reagan, Will's favorite modern president—*A Nice Little Place on the North Side* might be complemented by a well done coffee table book. Although their recent on field struggles have reached new lows in recent years, few baseball fans would begrudge them a third and long awaited World Series victory. When (or if) that day comes, one can also hope that Wrigley Field is where the final out is recorded. Such a moment would end the one century old Wrigley tradition that George Will and his fellow Cubs loyalists would gladly abandon as quickly as it took Ernie Banks to get around on a fastball during many a sunny afternoon on Chicago's North Side.

Jason Duncan

AQUINAS COLLEGE

Grand Rapids, Michigan

Anne Trubek and Richey Piiparinen, eds., *Rust Belt Chic: The Cleveland Anthology*. Cleveland: Rust Belt Chic Press, 2012. 218 pp. \$20.00.

Since its 2012 publication, *Rust Belt Chic: The Cleveland Anthology* has garnered its share of kudos. Jennifer Schwessler of *Arts Beat* states, “[This anthology] may help build the market for another endangered product—long-form magazine journalism.” *Goodreads* finds that “Put together, these stories create a new narrative about Cleveland that incorporates but deepens and widens the familiar tropes of manufacturing, stadiums, and comebacks.” Indeed, this collection of thirty-four essays, seven photographs, two poems, and a comic book segment, printed in a black-and-white format describes Cleveland, Ohio, in unpretentious and authentic ways.

Its conception sprung from the collaboration of Richey Piiparinen and