

governmental errors, and can freely criticize when it suits its purposes. "Power without responsibility" is not a bad posture for a populist party, but it is one unlikely to last beyond this Riksdag's three-year term. Over the long run, New Democracy's leaders look toward a true "right-wing" government in Sweden. If they can double their vote to 14 percent, a coalition of the Moderates, the Christian Democrats, and New Democracy might just be possible.

Near the end of my visit, news from America shook up everyone: Pat Buchanan had taken nearly 40 percent in New Hampshire; George Bush was wounded. Business leaders and the Moderates were deeply distressed. Believers in a New World Order resting on Bush-Baker internationalism, the Common Market, and the World Bank, they saw one of the legs of their vision wobbling. Swedish media commentators, however, quickly reassured them that New Hampshire was a fluke, and that Buchanan couldn't possibly repeat his success in another state. After all, George Bush had won the war in the Gulf and right-wing populism has no staying power. Only time will tell.

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Letter From the Lower Right

by John Shelton Reed

A Sense of Place

Some people, mostly Southerners and geographers, like to argue about how you can tell whether you're in the South. This discourse (if you'll excuse the expression) can be more or less serious. My friend Vince Staten, for instance, once ran up a major phone bill calling restaurants on the Interstate to see how far north you can get grits for breakfast.

But some heavyweight scholarship has been devoted to the question, too. A Penn State geographer named Wilbur Zelinsky, for example, has compiled some great maps that show where people start painting their barns (roughly the same place where they once began to farm with horses instead of mules, just north of the old National Road through Ohio,

Indiana, and Illinois). Zelinsky has also looked to see where creeks stop being called that (or branches, or runs) and become brooks. (If you see the word "brook" in a Southern place-name, you can be sure the real-estate developers have been at work.)

This game can go on and on, and often does. Literally hundreds of criteria have been suggested, from kudzu to sweetened ice tea. My own contribution has been to look at phone books to see where people name businesses "Southern" or "Dixie" something-or-other. (Turns out there are a lot of hairdressers named Dixie, but I didn't count them.) My theory, if you can call it that, is that folks outside the South don't do this much.

The phone-book test works remarkably well, which is to say that it confirms my prejudices—like the one that says southern Florida, northern Virginia, and western Texas are only marginally Southern, these days. If it hadn't worked, though, I'd have scrapped the technique and stuck with the prejudices. After all, some of us just *know* when we leave the South.

It seems that, just like folks with acute sensitivity to light or noise, some people have a hypertrophic sense of place. Southerners may be especially vulnerable to this inflammation, but it's not just another regional malady, like hookworm or pellagra. Here's an Englishwoman, for instance, Jessica Mitford:

On the train, through Kentucky. There's already a marked change of atmosphere. The women on the train seem to travel in Sears catalogue dreamy date dresses. One is wearing a beige silk sheath, spangled semi-transparent top, high-heeled simulated glass slippers. She's a great kidder. The conductor, checking on reservations, just asked her, "Are you Mrs. Jennie Lee Kelley?" She answered, "Can't you see I am, by my browbeaten look?" Shrieks of laughter from all, especially her fat husband. . . . Lovely pale green, lush country outside. . . . In a Louisville hotel: already the punctuation and spelling are breaking down. A brochure in my room says, "Derby Lounge. Stall's are named and portray famous derby winners . . ." and also, "YE-OLE KENTUCKIE BREAKFEASTE." Why the hyphen?

Borrowed from you-all?

This is exactly the sort of alertness I experience from the moment I get off the plane at Newark. All sorts of everyday things take on special significance when they're *northern* things. My wife finds this ironic: she says she can move the furniture or get a new hairstyle and I won't notice for months. Maybe so (I haven't noticed), but put me in a new place and by God I *pay attention*.

A while back I wrote that when I used to drive north to college on old U.S. 11, chronic heartburn always set in about Hagerstown, Maryland, and it let up about the same place when I headed south. A book reviewer picked that out as an example of my "characteristic exaggeration," but—as God is my witness—it's the literal truth. What's more, my buddy Jake read the review and wrote to say that the same thing always happened to him somewhere around Newcastle, Delaware.

Jake also sent along a photocopied page from *The Web and the Rock*. As usual, Thomas Wolfe does go on, but he's worth quoting at length:

George would later remember all the times when he had come out of the South into the North, and always the feeling was the same—an exact, pointed, physical feeling marking the frontiers of his consciousness with a geographic precision. There was a certain tightening in the throat, a kind of dry, hard beating of the pulse, as they came up in the morning toward Virginia; a kind of pressure at the lips, a hot, hard burning in the eye, a wire-taut tension of the nerves, as the brakes slammed on, the train slowed down to take the bridge, and the banks of the Potomac River first appeared. Let them laugh at it who will, let them mock it if they can. It was a feeling sharp and physical as hunger, deep and tightening as fear. It was a geographic division of the spirit that was sharply, physically exact, as if it had been cleanly severed by a sword. When the brakes slammed on and he saw the wide flood of the Potomac River, . . . he drew in hot and hard and sharp upon his breath, there in the middle of the river. He ducked his head a little

as if he was passing through a web. He knew that he was leaving South [sic]. His hands gripped hard upon the hinges of his knees, his muscles flexed, his teeth clamped tightly, and his jaws were hard. The train rolled over, he was North again.

Hard and sharp and hot and taut—"Every young man from the South has felt this precise and formal geography of the spirit," Wolfe claims, "this tension of the nerves, . . . this gritting of the teeth and hardening of the jaws, this sense of desperate anticipation."

Well, all I feel is indigestion, but the point is that Wolfe gets it right about something physical happening to Southern boys—some of us, anyway—when we leave the South. We're sort of human dowsing rods for Southernness. If you want to map the region, maybe you could just point us north and draw the Rolaid line.

* * *

By the way, although I think Jake and I respond—OK, maybe over-respond—to real regional differences, something else was going on with Wolfe's young Southerners. They were reacting not just to real differences—strange accents, strange foods, strange-looking people—but to *expected* ones, expectations nurtured by their own needs and imaginations. "They felt they were invading a foreign country," Wolfe writes; "they were steeling themselves for conflict [and] looking forward with an almost desperate apprehension to their encounter with the city." ("Desperate anticipation" and "desperate apprehension" in the same paragraph, but that's old Tom for you.) "They were also looking forward to that encounter with exultancy and hope, with fervor, passion, and high aspiration."

"Not me," Jake wrote in the margin. Well, not me, either. But for a certain sort of dreamy young Southerner the north—New York City in particular—has always had a special fascination, from afar. Listen to Doug Marlette, the Pulitzer Prize-winning cartoonist who draws "Kudzu." A few years ago, when he moved from Georgia to the Big Apple, Marlette felt obliged to explain himself to his Southern friends and neighbors. "New York's energy, excitement and vitality have always attracted me," he wrote. "It's the show—the cultural vortex of the race, the storm center of human achievement."

And, he continued, "it holds a special place in the dreamscapes of my youth and the mythic underpinnings of my budding ambition." Marlette recalled how his image of The City came to be:

As a child growing up in small towns in North Carolina and Mississippi, I visited New York and studied its environs only from television, movies, books, and magazines. The media initiated me into the secrets, mysteries, and allures of the city.

I learned about Macy's from *Miracle on 34th Street*. I knew that Rob and Laura Petrie on the *Dick Van Dyke Show* lived in suburban New Rochelle. The offices of *Mad* magazine were located on Lexington Avenue. They made fun of ad-men on Madison Avenue.

Those places and frames of reference were as much a part of the geographies of my imagination as were Judea and Samaria from my Sunday school lessons or Vicksburg and Chancellorsville from my history books. And I imbued those alien landscapes and cultures with a vitality and reality that seemed achingly absent from my own.

Many young Southerners have felt that way, responding less to actual places than to their *ideas* of those places—ideas that may be little more than stereotypes. But there's an irony here. When people do that, they can help to create the facts they've imagined. New York's an exciting place, in part, because it's full of young provincials who have gone there for its excitement. I think of four guys I grew up with in East Tennessee. One is gay, and last I heard was in Los Angeles, doing what I don't know. Another is a Unitarian minister in a classic New England small town. The third is an avant-garde professor of French at an Ivy League university. And the fourth lives in Marin County, where he sells motorcycles and computers, caters Japanese food, and gives instruction in some heretical offshoot of Roling. Notice that by doing what they want in settings where it's a conventional thing to do, my friends are contributing to the persistence of regional differences: making New England look more like my stereotype of New England, California more like my idea of California. And by leaving the South they have contributed to the relative

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absence here of gay, sushi-eating, Unitarian post-structuralists.

Incidentally, I don't know what happened, but Doug Marlette recently moved again, from New York to North Carolina. He's my neighbor now, just up the road in Hillsborough, and if he has explained that move in print, I haven't seen it. Maybe he feels no explanation is necessary.

John Shelton Reed lived for ten years in Massachusetts and New York, but now writes from Chapel Hill, North Carolina.

Letter From Cleveland by Henry Precht

A Tale of Two Cities

Visits in the space of ten days to Toronto, Ontario, and then Tifton, Georgia, demand reflective analysis for stronger reasons than the compelling force of alliteration. The city and the town are so different that the visitor to both is driven to look for the faintest similarities. Once that effort is made, however, sweeping conclusions are revealed to guide us against repeating past mistakes in the

future of cities like our Cleveland. My wife and I traveled to these distant places for good but irrelevant reasons; it's what we saw, tasted, and heard that counted.

When boosters speak of the great features of Cleveland, they tell us of the museums, Browns, orchestra, theaters, ballet, and ethnic diversity. They never mention the one great advantage we hold over most other American cities: we're close to Canada. In Canadian seasons there are forests and lakes for the rough and ready and Stratford and Niagara-on-the-Lake festivals for the cultivated. But, year around, 35 minutes away by air, there's Toronto. It is, in two words, an "urban lesson" for all of us who live to its south.

The first thing you notice about Toronto is that it is *clean* in a way that we have forgotten was once true of American cities. Since there is no army of street sweepers in sight, the probable explanation is that people don't throw their trash on the streets. Moreover, the streets are free of human detritus, although the statisticians tell us that somewhere in this city of 3.2 million there are fifty thousand homeless. (Not surprising when the apartment vacancy rate is also about .1 percent.) Why the absence of waste—material and spiritual? Can Canadians simply be more considerate or are they laggards in developing a post-industrial, consumerist society? Let's look further on the city streets.

The second thing you observe, lifting your eyes from the pavement, is that there are fewer police and, even after work, more people than you will ever see in most downtowns south of the border. One reason, you learn, is that there is so little crime. Metropolitan Toronto, half the size of Chicago, has less than one-tenth the homicides and robberies. Philadelphia, larger by half a million, has five times the homicides and over three times the robberies. Useful facts for planning your urban vacation.

Walking around downtown, you are soon taken by a third fact. The city is a treat for the eyes and intellect. There are great, handsome towers of modern business and finance. And, in the same neighborhoods, there are public buildings from the past and blocks and blocks of small shops, restaurants, and businesses. Most of these seem to have one feature in common: they are owned by real people rather than corporate chains.

Development and growth came relatively late to Toronto; the city missed

the opportunity to have its structures regularly destroyed and replaced. But there is much that is new and equally attractive that is hidden from view. If you're driven off the streets by the cold, you can walk literally for miles underground past the same kinds of small shops and eateries.

The diversity in structures is rich and enriching; the mix of peoples offers an even superior celebration. Toronto is a city where different communities are valued and distinct, yet fully part of its life. Indian, Hungarian, Afghan, and Ethiopian restaurants are all supported by their communities as well as by outsiders. A Mandarin channel is a fixture on TV for the eighty thousand Chinese. Crucially, the ethnic communities are knit together by a superb urban transport system.

An Iranian émigré to the city told me, "We are made to feel at home here in a way you Americans can't conceive. You would want us to adapt to your ways; here we keep our own while taking from them as we like. Best of all, Canadians make us feel we are needed—and it may even be true."

In Tifton, Georgia, no ethnics appear in this small Southern town except blacks and whites (with a red-neck subsection). If you've driven Route 75, that straight shot from Atlanta to Florida, you've passed just outside Tifton. You probably never knew it. Few outsiders take the exit and drive the few miles east from the highway.

Like a medieval town with elaborate defenses protecting its perimeter, Tifton is masked along the invasion side by a system of spectacular "offenses." Half-mile high neon signs invite you to spend \$15.65 for a room or to eat in America's most popular fast-food places. It seems an impenetrable wall of bright colors, almost audible in their assault on the senses.

Behind this cacophony and the more traditional inner ring of auto dealers is Tifton. The suburbs seem little changed over the town's hundred years of history: run-down places for the blacks on one side, prosperous homes for whites on the other. But it is the "historic center" that we want to see. It speaks of a town that will not die. Years ago this center of "the nation's richest agricultural area" boasted three large hotels, mills, warehouses, and train connections everywhere. But the population sank to ten thousand, the mills closed, and the hotels lost out to the highway motels.

Now, somehow, the population has risen to twenty-two thousand. One sur-

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