

rest of the Christian world at the time, the undisputed master of his own destiny, even the *wealthiest American of 180* years later is, like the United States of today, but one vector in myriad other strategic quantities of which tomorrow is composed. It made no difference to Byron's future that the richest countries of his day were three times richer than the poorest, including the part of the world now called Pakistan. Today, it ought to make one hell of a difference to a Briton that the world's poorest countries are 77 times poorer than the richest, and that Pakistan has successfully tested medium-range nuclear weapons.

I don't know. I'm going to have some giblets with lentils for supper, smoke a Tuscan cigar, and see if that makes the perspective any more rosy.

Andrei Navrozov is Chronicles' European correspondent.

Letter From Arizona

by *Tod Newman*

On the Border



In the southeast corner of Arizona, surrounded by the beautifully wild, mile-high Sonoran Desert, lies the town of Douglas. I am writing from a booth in the coffee shop of the Gadsden Hotel, an ornate hotel rebuilt in the 1920's with a gilded roof supported by smooth marble pillars. Thornton Wilder stayed here for a year while working on *The Eighth Day*; today, a gentle but headless ghost stalks the basement.

Across the Mexican border in Agua Prieta, factories built into the hills no more than ten miles distant spout their disdain for American sensibilities in the form of smoke that casually drifts across the border into Douglas when the wind is right. The factory effluent rains down on Douglas as thickly as the bullets did when Pancho Villa's revolution came to Agua Prieta.

Seeing this smoke crawling into our national airspace makes me wonder just how wise it is to open up trade with a country which does not impose the kind of environmental regulations on its in-

dustries that an American factory must obey. Driving north from the border up Sixth Avenue, one finds parts of Douglas filling with newer shops that have moved into older buildings. These stores proudly advertise "*el precia mejor*" and are packed with relatively wealthy Mexicans wearing Nike and Adidas jogging outfits and carrying their bundled purchases. This is the pleasant side of free trade across the border. A short trip down US 92 to the west, however, quickly reveals the converse view: the well-worn footpaths heading north through the arid desert brush. This less pleasant view of free trade, in this case trade in labor, is even more noticeable in the washes following a rain, when thousands of footprints mysteriously appear overnight. The eyes on the other side of the border fence shine in the headlights of the Border Patrol vehicle, patiently waiting for it to pass so numerous shadowy figures can sprint across the dusty control road into the Sonoran Desert in the hope of reaching Albuquerque or Denver—and jobs. Frequently mixed in with the honest laborers looking for work are violent drug smugglers and other criminals. Ranchers and landowners around Douglas are beginning to respond violently to this nightly invasion, which leaves behind cut fences, wandering livestock, and threatened, fearful families. NAFTA, we were told, would end this second, less desirable form of free trade by creating more Mexican jobs. No one who visits Agua Prieta, Nogales, or Juárez will doubt that jobs have been created over the last few years. So why does this undesired labor trade still occur?

Why do men—1,000 per night, by some estimates—continue to cross this dangerous border? The laborers attracted to the jobs created in Mexico's border cities are overwhelmingly young females who will work for less than one U.S. dollar per hour. The girls who flow into these Mexican factories, or *maquiladoras*, usually come from poorer rural areas in the interior of Mexico and are happy to band together in cardboard huts without electricity or running water for the illusory freedom and poor wages that the *maquiladoras* provide. Girls as young as 12 or 13 lie about their ages to gain employment in the factories. This, of course, drives down labor costs which, in the absence of a tariff, results in a cheaper product than even Asia can provide and a demand for more low-paying jobs. Side effects that should not surprise those

familiar with the American welfare experiment are a rise in single motherhood, increased violence against women, and the collapse of the culture of the working Mexican poor. This is not a good labor market for a man supporting a family. The prospect of making three or more times as much money in U.S. cities may well seem worth the hazards associated with the border crossing.

Is it wise to implement free trade with Mexico without insisting on economic controls similar to those under which American industry operates? Without enforcing at least some minimal controls, we are likely doing irreparable harm not only to our environment and workers, but also to the Mexican environment, culture, and family. The "bullets" that now rain down on Douglas might seem blanks to outsiders, but they could prove far more harmful than the lead that came from Villa's revolution.

Tod Newman writes from Tucson, Arizona.

Letter From Virginia

by *Marshall Fishwick*

The Old Dominion Meets Sploge



What poses the greatest threat today to the Old Dominion—mother of Presidents, a state secure and renowned for precious memories and aspirations? No person or foreign power, but a vast impersonal force already despoiling cities and states around the globe, a force that I call "sploge": unregulated, unchecked growth, fueled by the three G's—Greed, Glitz, and Glut. It despoiled great cities like Cairo, Bombay, Rio de Janeiro, and Mexico City, then crept into the United States: Los Angeles, the New York-New Haven corridor, central New Jersey. Having infected Washington, will it move south into Virginia? How will the traffic, pollution, confusion, and congestion change our way of life?

I set out to seek answers, starting with the fast-spreading sploge already linking Blacksburg and Christiansburg on Route 460. (Three-digit highways seem to breed sploge. Have you ridden on Vir-

ginia's 220, 301, or 360 lately?)

Just outside Blacksburg, the tightly packed line of unsold cars, fast-food outlets, service stations (which don't give service), and tacky-tacky shanties stand doorway to doorway as cars move bumper to bumper. Passing what used to be a lovely arboretum, I reach the humbled intersection of 460 and 116: I call it Indigestion Junction, from the cluster of fast-food outlets spliced with used cars, a cemetery, a huge bowling-alley complex, and automobiles pouring in and out of the nearby Wal-Mart and Big K-Mart. Soon, I'm at another jumble where 460 meets I-81: This speed-death trap is so sploped that the governor stationed half of the state patrol cars there. On Sunday, February 21, 1999, they gave out over 100 speeding tickets. Who can say how many they missed?

I dodge in and out of truck convoys, yearning to get to the Route 50 exit—a two-laner in Northern Virginia through Paul Mellon country that has resisted every sploge attack (at least until 50 hits Fairfax County). Mellon might well be the Virginian of the Century, not only for his philanthropy but for keeping a whole area safe and civilized: playing a major role in restoring Monticello, preserving the landscape, being a responsible Virginia citizen. He cared.

Paul Mellon graced 91 years of the 20th century. Had he lived longer, he would have faced another formidable problem—the speculative construction taking off near Dulles Airport. A new super-sploge threatens Mellon's Northern Virginia; nearly 8.5 million square feet of office space (as much space as in downtown Miami) is being built, financed by millions of "speculative dollars."

Fairfax County already has twice as much available office space as the downtown cores of such cities as Boston, Philadelphia, Houston, Dallas, and Atlanta. Where will this building boom land us? "You never really know," a key Virginia developer, Chris Walker, admits. "It's sort of like the stock market."

"Spec" construction is a dicey, take-a-chance scheme that can bring in big bucks—or fall flat (as it did throughout southeast Asia) and leave environmental nightmares. But even successful megaplosion results in crowd culture, with its traffic jams, bankruptcies, legal battles, junk mail, flimflams, virtual reality, and honking horns. Push, shove, and curse; it doesn't help. Join the crowd in this brave new world, and lose your identity.

Beware the glut, not only of cars, paper, and electronic information, but also piles of garbage. Would you believe that Virginia receives 5,000 tons a day from New York City, dumping it onto land adjacent to one of our most precious spots, William Byrd's Westover Plantation? I had intended to go see for myself—but I haven't the stomach for it. Instead, I take Exit 156 off of I-95 into historic Prince William County to visit Potomac Mills—which my "fact sheet" describes as a "super-regional mall encompassing 152 acres featuring live potted foliage." I could shorten that hyperbole to one word: sploge.

Potomac Mills—a 1.7 million-square-foot center with parking spaces for over 9,000 cars—"aggressively markets" not only domestic travel, but also (again, quoting my fact sheet) "international tourism concentrating on UK, Germany, South America, Brussels, and Amsterdam." Come one, come all—get your free shopping bags and discount coupon books with a value of over \$400! Hungry? There are 23 eateries (an appropriate word), shopping-cart rentals, and hard floors "most conducive to walking." And, of course, spending.

Are there any malls like this in other states? "Oh yes," a well-rehearsed tour manager assures me. "We have malls in major cities all over America, and plan to expand. Who knows—we might build one near you. Where are you from?"

"Blacksburg."

She drags out her map. "Never heard of it. What's it near?"

"Roanoke."

"Is that near Richmond? Oh. Here it is, just off I-81. Well, someday we may put a super-mall between Roanoke and—where did you say you live?"

"Never mind," I reply, walking quickly away. Puzzled, but still smiling her perpetual smile, she hurries back to her pack.

Is there a future for Virginia's past? Of course—if we help to defend, explain, and preserve it. Groups like the Preservation Alliance of Virginia can play a key role. They have a daunting task. Nearly 40 percent of those living in Virginia today are non-natives; since World War II, we have grown ten percent every ten years. It is estimated that, by the year 2030, Virginia will have a population of over eight million. What will the "Virginia tradition" mean then?

The wheeler-dealers, splogers, and mallers will dismiss my case as sentiment-

tal and nostalgic. "Get a life," they will say. "Get off your narrow backroads onto the Information Highway. Think tomorrow!"

I have tried, and I've found a good deal of misinformation and virtual nonsense. I'm worried about today. I side with former University of Virginia President Edwin A. Alderman: "We Virginians are sometimes laughed at for our sensitivity to local things and our pride of state. We will not be laughed out of these things."

Of course, we must seek middle ground, accepting some change and inevitable growth. But we will take our stand and remember our heritage. Our traditional state song ("Carry Me Back to Old Virginia") is gone, but the birds still warble sweet in the springtime. We intend to keep Virginia green. We will not trade our white dogwood blossoms, blushing redbuds, and masses of mountain laurel for 30 pieces of silver.

I find my car in the auto jungle and head home. To avoid I-81, I cut off on old Route 11 and travel through Salem, Shawsville, and Elliston. Later on, I might just go to Blacksburg's community center, Abingdon's Barter Theater, and Galax's Fiddler's Convention. As I pull into my driveway, a sassy blue jay chirps a greeting, and Edward, our gaudy golden retriever, comes running out, tail wagging.

It's good to be home.

Marshall Fishwick is a professor of American Studies at Virginia Tech.

LIBERAL ARTS

... BUT I WAS JUST A KID

"Britain's Scout Association blasted veteran rock star Elton John . . . for staging a raunchy dance routine with male strippers dressed as cub scouts.

"The flamboyant star, singing at a 10th birthday party for the gay rights group Stonewall, was accompanied by six teenage dancers who peeled off their toggles, caps and scout uniforms to dance in their underwear.

"A spokesman for the Scout Association, Britain's best known boys' club, said: 'We are disappointed a star of Elton John's caliber participated in something that was so lacking in taste.'"

—from Reuters (November 30, 1999)