

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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living hotel has become the city hall, another an antique shop; one railroad station is the Chamber of Commerce, the other a garden center and farmers' market. A cotton warehouse has become a row of shops, an aerobic center, and a bakery. Mainstreet stores are all in business. An industrial zone has attracted some new plants including, recently, the first Japanese manufacturer to come to south Georgia.

We surveyed the area's ethnic foods as we had in Toronto—meaning, in Tifton, the barbecue and catfish places. But first we sampled the opinions of local gourmets (e.g., the public library staff, a pawnshop owner, members of a wedding party). In our final rankings, our findings coincided exactly with the judgments of these resident experts (who might, of course, have been cousins of the owners). First place for barbecue easily went to a former filling station carryout run by two black men with a single table under a pecan tree in the back. The worst in all categories (sandwich, Brunswick stew, cole slaw) was a regional chain. The best catfish was at a packed, locally owned seafood place with no frills, meaning no tablecloth.

On the opposite side of the highway is the "Agrirama," Tifton's attraction for tourists, most of whom seemed to be from around Tifton. It is a collection of antique farm cabins, schools, barns, mills, and businesses, all of which are being operated by old folks who grew up keeping house, milling corn, grinding cane, sawing logs, or dispensing sodas.

These Georgia buildings have a peculiar architecture. You won't see them outside the region, but you can still see the same cabins and barns on back roads. Tiftoners come to inspect this "living museum," I expect, not for nostalgia, but because those country buildings, like the others in "historic Tifton," make them feel proud about structures, a physical context that sets them apart from other people. It gives them a sense of identity, of belonging to some place—though certainly not one of them would describe his motivation in that highfalutin way.

So how is it these two very different places are such successful, happy, good places to live? We knew the answers before we went (and you did before reading this far). But we saw the two principles stark and plain before us, nine hundred miles apart.

First, architecture counts. Worthy buildings, especially those preserved from the

past, provide the primary structure for civic consciousness. People don't throw trash or commit crimes so freely in a city they care about. They are encouraged to behave as if they were in a museum, place of worship, or their own house. Even the dullest of us has some aesthetic feeling, and a sense of pride or self-respect comes from being part of a handsome physical continuity. It's as if Cleveland had a winning football team every day of the year; we're all part of this larger, beautiful surround.

Most Americans have moved from somewhere else. Fine buildings create a community that welcomes, inducts, and implicitly sets a standard for conduct. Architecture sets a tone—inspiring, depressing, or numbing. Alas, the tone you hear in Cleveland's downtown is mostly discordant and destructive of public spirit.

A parking lot never turned anyone on; auto ignition is not the spark of life. There are blocks of ill-zoned land in Cleveland that deaden the passing soul because human life has been expelled from them. A city that disregards public pleasure and honors private profit in permitting wasteful destruction and banal construction will get the kind of self-preoccupied citizens it deserves. The money we save on cheaply designed public housing projects is spent many times over tending to the social ills those depressing structures help to create.

The second lesson also has to do with scale—not only of structures, but of enterprises. The person who serves food or goods has to have a stake in the process, if work is to bring the mutual satisfaction we used to know in this country. Corporate chains transform small enterprises into heavy bureaucracies—the kind we deplore in Washington. But because they are private and market-responsive—qualities we esteem—we don't seem to object to the subtle or blatant, but always powerful, ways they shape our lives.

It is a deadly figure, a finger of blame pointed at each patron, that one chain has sold 11 billion hamburgers. Think of the many thousands of little guys who were driven out of business in the process, how much creativity lost, how many sinews of the community were cut. It is precisely a revulsion against lack of choice, against sameness and massiveness and, above all, against control from above and outside that has produced the democratic revolutions in Eastern Europe and elsewhere. This social decay is happening

here: it is the slow, quiet demise of our traditional way of life.

Toronto and Tifton tell us that we do not need a revolution or nationally fatal sleeping sickness to free ourselves from homogenization and external control. The solution is at hand if the vision is clear. Preserve what is best in the physical city of the past. Preserve and nurture the small and indigenous entrepreneur. Celebrate diversity and keep it authentic and vital. A great city is neither a museum nor a theme park. People have lived well in cities like Cleveland before us. That great achievement demands our respect and our active emulation.

Henry Precht is a retired foreign service officer and the president of the Cleveland Council on World Affairs.

Letter From Arizona by Gregory McNamee

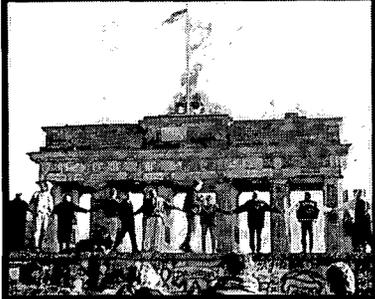
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