

## Letter from Hilton Head Island: Enjoy & Reflect

by E. Stake Salisbury

Dinah . . .  
Is there anyone finer  
In the State of Carolina  
—An old standard

An obscure and inexorably forgotten Canadian author by the name of Curwood once wrote a short story entitled "Great White Silence"; it was about snow-covered expanses in Alaska, or somewhere around the North Pole. The noun "silence" stood, of course, for something menacing and deadly. It doesn't connote that anymore in the minds of big-city and suburbia dwellers. Actually, it is closer to words like "bliss" or "paradise," if we consider the amount of sufferings inflicted upon us just by the sound of power mowers. One of the few ineptitudes of the U.S. travel industry is its disregard for the riches that can be mined from places that may offer silence in conjunction with sun, beach, ocean, and native dishes. Hilton Head Island, a resort off the South Carolina coast, does not invoke this attraction in its advertising either. Yet, divided into well-guarded and carefully separated "plantations," it markets, if semiconsciously, a sort of lush, green silence. This kind of serenity could be promoted, of course, as antebellum silence, a description not easily defensible and vulnerable to a variety of modish reproaches from the updated part of the contemporary Yankee mentality. Thus, even as style—tourism's Holy Grail—may actually prove to be the island's most attractive merchandise, the antebellum factor is rarely, and only in the most tactful way, mentioned.

The Yankee trek to Hilton Head has an intriguing historical dimension. As early as November 1861, the island was in the North's hands: 13,000 Union troops landed there, routed the Confederate forces, and established their presence for the duration of the Civil War. The current Yankee presence has swollen to

some half a million visitors per year. The Union soldiers built a stronghold called Fort Mitchell, where today we may find one of the best restaurants in the area, a powerful rampart of what's most refined in Low Country cuisine, a telling symbol of what the North never conquered in that fateful confrontation of cultures a century ago. There are countless examples of successful reconciliation between the then-implacable enemies, and its contemporaneity seems to be purified of that long-ago hatred. Hardly a more magnanimous and soothing revenge could be imagined than a superb Confederate eatery erected on the site of the Union bastion of arms, in which descendants of the Northern invaders now pay enthusiastic tribute to the Carolinian way of preparing soft-shell crab.

Hilton Head's significance for cultural contentions goes deeper and further. If there is a battleground (such terminology may not be the best word to describe a conglomerate of subtropical charms, beguiling greenery, and some of the best seafood in this hemisphere) where a palpable conflict between modern America's flavors, tastes, and sensitivities is right now taking place—that's where it is. Nowhere, perhaps, is the contest of styles so comfortably observable as here. It goes beyond mere externalities, touching the profundities of personified Americanism, and defines men and women in their midlife term who are reasonably prosperous, middle-class, and eager to participate in the formation of the very current American image. This is a tug-of-war between preppiness and the idealism of joggers—nicely genteel, suffused with smiles and morning greetings. Of course, it is cultural in substance. Obfuscations are inevitable; some preppies jog for health reasons, and most play tennis as a matter of honor. There's ample evidence, however, that jogging has become a subculture with all its consequences. It has created a sweaty, puffing

model of a human being, one who pursues an ideal of infinite and ultimate perspiration. The jogger is mostly (but not always, so help me God!) overweight and has a beard—this is the stereotype, studded admittedly with innumerable examples to the contrary of svelte, beautifully athletic runners of both genders. Actually, my generalizations are beside the point, for what the jogger of the last 15 years has finally come to symbolize, mostly in big cities, is the discord between the lanky and decently clad American and the obese and drooped American. The former, as he was visualized by Hollywood movies of the 1930's through 50's, announced to the world his tidy lankiness overlaid with Brooks Brothers charisma, which succeeded in ingraining itself in the world's consciousness as a victorious American emblem. The latter displays to the world his hairy armpits and the pimples on his chest and declares them manifestations of humanness and health, both physical and mental. Let's be honest—preppiness in itself is not the complete moral stance (in spite of posing as such) that its followers are eager to affect at each step. The preppy sports have long since lost their aura of pure chivalry and unconditional virtue. One muscular juvenile, devoted to preppy faith, told me once that golf is the easiest way to make money for anyone with both a hefty torso and preference for personal nattiness.

Hilton Head Island, looked upon as a cultural encounter, offers some insight into the vibrations and the nature of the strife. The atmosphere of cautiously delineated, pleasant middle-class snobbery is so pervasive, but at the same time so well-detached from the shallowness of the big-time, superwealthy snobbism, that it is more rewarding than amusing. There are traditions for this propitious differentiation in the region. A Carolinian scholar told me a beautiful story about a little island, St. Helen, in the Beaufort

County coastal archipelago. When the news about Napoleon's irrevocable exile arrived in Savannah and Charleston, it was immediately assumed that the deposed emperor would come there. An avalanche of social activities, parties, balls, and festivities was planned—although the sentiments about Bonaparte might have been somewhat mixed by

that time. Preppies would have understood both the excitement *and* the need for some pluralistic equanimity. Joggers, as they mostly incorporate liberal feelings, would probably have forgotten the Napoleonic code and focused on his imperialism. This is exactly the trouble we have in connecting equanimity with liberalism these days. □

## THE AMERICAN PROSCENIUM

### *High Technology*

A founder of the Contadora group (the latest Latin American forum of political conscience), Mexican Foreign Minister Mr. Bernardo Sepúlveda Amor, shares in a *Time* magazine interview the Latin American notion of representative and pluralistic democracy:

We do not think that the Nicaraguan opposition can legitimize its position through the use of force. On the contrary, we think that right now the Nicaraguan authorities are doing their best to find a mechanism by which

political parties will be able to function in that society.

This is exactly what Stalin told Roosevelt and Churchill in Yalta about how the Soviet puppet regimes in post-World War II Eastern Europe would evolve their "mechanisms." Roosevelt and Churchill bought it. We know what happened next. And now, almost four decades later, *Time* is still buying it. Mr. Sepúlveda Amor is presented as "The stylish, eloquent former professor of international law . . . actively involved in seeking a peaceful solution to the conflicts in Central America." □

## JOURNALISM

### *Time's Precision*

*Time's* shining light in the domain of publicistics, Mr. Hugh Sidey, instructs Ronald Reagan on why and how we should be cautious and measured in flexing America's military muscle:

Twice in the past four decades we miscalculated, and we had war in Korea and Viet Nam.

What did we "miscalculate" in Korea? On June 25, 1950, with no prior indications of an armed conflict, North Korean

troops—equipped, trained, and tactically instructed by Soviet supervisors—massively attacked the internationally and legally determined border between the two Koreas and invaded the South. The free world, under America's leadership, was brutally confronted with a historical fact, coerced to respond, and had not a modicum of other choices but to go to war. The only other available option would have been an unconditional surrender, allowing the despairing South Koreans to be red rather than dead. So how did we miscalculate? What chance did we have to miscalculate anything?

An even more blatant case of precision

### The Choice

The last time a British writer won the Nobel Prize in Literature was 1953, unless Samuel Beckett (1969), an Irishman who can be identified with France, or Elias Canetti (1981), a Bulgarian who resides in England, is bent to fit the category. Curiously enough, the 1953 presentation was made not to one of the country's novelists, playwrights, or poets, but to Sir Winston Churchill. Clearly, England was overdue. The selection of William Golding for the 1983 prize is surprising, as he is, although a serviceable enough stylist, really a two-book man: *Lord of the Flies* (1954) and *The Spire* (1964). In the first he essentially shows that Rousseau's garden is no place that anyone would want to live in—and certainly not die in; the latter delineates man's reach and the elusiveness of a handhold. During the 10 years between the two books and in the nearly 20 years since *The Spire* Golding has continued to produce books, none of which has had any significant cosmopolitan effect. The Nobel is still the premier literary award, so one would expect the recipients to be like Caesar's wife. In this case—as in others during recent years—that isn't so. Robert Graves and Lawrence Durrell would be more defensible choices, yet even they lack the breadth of vision that a Nobel laureate should be expected to have. And then there's Graham Greene, who has been long waiting in the wings and who certainly exhibits all of the manners necessary to be in sync with the "progressive" sympathies of the Stockholm academy. Given the time frame, Greene should slip out of the theater. □