

Squaring Dupont Circle

HEAVEN IS NOT a farm.

If you spend too much time on the American Right—in either its demotic or romantic-intellectual forms—you might forget this essential truth. You'll be subjected to paeans to rural community; cities are so soulless! They're cold, artificial, out of touch with beauty (which explains why cities produce so little great art). City folk exemplify capitalist modernity at its most unnatural.

Well, I'm human, not natural. I like strangers, mostly because I am one. I'm also a resident of one of America's least-loved cities: her nation's capital. And my current address is an even harder sell for the conservative mind: the former gay ghetto, Dupont Circle. Here is a neighborhood where nobody's your neighbor. Yet everybody is.

Dupont in the summer favors one sense only—sight. On Saturday around the fountain, women in bright dresses saunter past men in sherbet-colored suits, giving one another the eye.

The other four senses aren't so lucky. You can usually placate taste with a Jack Daniel's chocolate ice cream sundae from Larry's. Touch is worse, since all you feel is your clothes sticking to your body. Smell, which in a District summer always seems to be shifting from honey-suckle to unhailed garbage, settles down to a one-note hum of sweat. And there are buskers, hiking out their guitars for the treacle of the counterculture: Dylan, Neil Young.

In the summer, God remembers the District and clamps down his palm on it. The city gets slow and flirtatious. We swelter under a low-slung skyline, teasing strangers.

The man next to me calls out to a group of women, "What country y'all from?" The

darkest and most statuesque slowly turns her head toward him and, with a hometown voice laden with irony and resignation, replies, "*This* one." They laugh and shake their heads at one another and he settles back, foxed for the moment.

I'm told that country life teaches you patience and charity, since you can't get away from your neighbors or your past. Every day you pass the familiar scenes of your little victories and large heartbreaks.

The city teaches you patience and charity in a different way: You learn to negotiate among strangers. Every region has a different way of managing it—pop culture tells me that Midwesterners smile relentlessly, Southerners drink and fight, and Californians drive. D.C. flirts. If you don't interpret strangers' actions with charity and good humor, you'll go crazy here.

The scene is full of small public camaraderies. A man with a stuffed crocodile on his shoulder encourages his little boy to play with a couple's trained parrots. Two men share a bottle of rum. Their casual illegality is also very D.C.; it's part of the fatalism bred by our civic helplessness. The bar I sometimes frequented before I turned 21 had a sign above the door, *ABOVE THE LAW SINCE 1996*. Until then it had been an after-hours speakeasy, which it still was, but the slogan was too good to resist. This is Marion Barry's city. When the *Washington Post* ran a contest seeking pickup lines that could only be used in the District, the winner was, "Your beauty renders me as powerless as Del. Eleanor Holmes Norton."

Dupont today, like the gay community generally, has gone aggressively bobo

(David Brooks's abbreviation for "bourgeois bohemian," those who want the perks of living outside the rules as well as the perks of following them). Happiness beat ecstasy, order beat alienation, respectability beat solidarity. I chafe at the new bobo order, but I have to pay respect even to respectability when it is this hard-won. As you ascend the long escalator up from the Dupont Circle subway station you can read lines from Walt Whitman's "The Wound-Dresser" carved in stone:

*I sit by the restless all the dark
night — some are so young;
Some suffer so much — I recall
the experience sweet and sad ...*

Even bobos can offer an exhausted beauty in the wake of the plague years.

In the gay community you meet a lot of the deracinated cosmopolites who populate conservative caricatures of the city (a role once played primarily by Jews). You meet the people who left home, family, and tradition behind. And you learn why: who left whom, the gay son or the mother who won't speak to him?

But the stronger defense of the deracinated cosmopolite is that he is Everyman. The city is the human condition with the volume on high. The past is always lost, even if you stay right where you left it. The longing for home is never fully satisfied. The most familiar neighbor—and even your own beloved—always remains a stranger with whom you must negotiate.

"What country y'all from?" Eventually you learn that you don't know the answer. ■

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Breaking the Bank

Can the GOP follow Andrew Jackson back to power?

By Sean Scallon

RON PAUL'S Rally for the Republic in Minneapolis last September had an echo of 1832. The Twin Cities' Target Center thundered to chants of "End the Fed!" much as a gathering of Andrew Jackson's "Hurra boys" had roared, "Down with the bank!" and "No rag money!" President Jackson's implacable opposition to the second Bank of the United States carried him to re-election and branded his party, the newly organized Democrats, as champion of the middle classes. Today, as discontent with the Federal Reserve mounts—a majority of Congressman Paul's House colleagues has cosponsored his bill to audit the Fed—can the Republican Party find a path back to power in Jackson's anti-bank strategy?

The Federal Reserve System is essentially the third Bank of the United States. It was created in 1913 as a compromise between wealthy proponents of central banking, progressives and populists who wanted to take control of the money supply away from Wall Street and put it in the hands of the federal government, and conservative Democrats who wanted a reserve system to provide liquidity in case of another national emergency like the Panic of 1907, in which J.P. Morgan had to marshal private capital to rescue the stock market. All of these groups got something out of the public-private hybrid that was the Federal Reserve. Thus the central bank began with little controversy.

The good feelings did not last long. Congressman Charles Lindbergh Sr., the so-called "Gopher Bolshevik," soon

denounced the Fed as part of the same "Money Trust" that had long run the country. "Our financial system has been turned over to the Federal Reserve Board. Board members finance the system by the authority of a purely profit-taking group. The system is private, codified for the sole purpose of obtaining the greatest possible profits from the sum of other people's money," he warned. Attacks on the Fed have since come from the Right as well, with free-market economists such as Milton Friedman and Murray Rothbard blasting the central bank for constricting the money supply in the 1930s (which led to the Great Depression) and the expansionist credit and currency policies of the 1960s and '70s (which led to the Great Inflation).

The secrecy and concentrated financial power of central banking has always aroused populist suspicions. The chartering of the first Bank of the United States (BUS) in 1791 quickly gave rise to opposition, which saw Alexander Hamilton's brainchild as undemocratic, monopolistic, a tool of foreign stockholders, and a betrayal of the Revolution, since colonists had rebelled as much against the economic policies of the Bank of England as against the Crown itself. Once Thomas Jefferson's popular Republican Party rose to power, the bank's doom was assured. President Madison allowed its charter to lapse in 1811.

But after the War of 1812, Madison changed his mind. He supported chartering a second Bank of the United States to stabilize the war-wracked nation's finances and curb the influence

of local paper-issuing banks. Demand for credit in the young Republic soared after Kentucky became a state in 1792 and Tennessee joined the Union in 1796, as settlers poured into these states and pressed further south and southwest. These frontiersmen were Andrew Jackson's people—Scots-Irish from Pennsylvania, Virginia, and the Carolinas. Between 1817 and 1818, the Kentucky state legislature, in what social historian William Graham Sumner called "bank mania," chartered 40 small banks to lend settlers money. The Bank of the United States, far from quelling this credit expansion, got in on the act by opening branches in Louisville and Lexington. The result was a classic speculative bubble that finally burst in the Panic of 1819, sending the Mississippi and Ohio valley regions into a collapse that took five years to liquidate.

Local banks, including Kentucky's state-run Bank of the Commonwealth, deserved most of the blame. But the BUS had done its part to feed the speculative frenzy, and further resentment of the bank was stoked by the Supreme Court's *McCullough v. Maryland* decision, which ruled that states could not tax the BUS but the BUS could tax local banks to the tune of \$60,000 each. The Bank of the United States received over \$600,000 from former shareholders in Commonwealth Bank, while many settlers lost their land. Weren't these frontiersmen, whose Kentucky Rifles had won the Battle of New Orleans, only doing what the federal government wanted by populating this area from the