

MEMORANDUM

THE WHITE HOUSE

WASHINGTON

Tuesday, March 21, 1967

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I slept until 9:00 -- or rather I woke at 9:00 -- after a long night in bed, during which I alternately slept and lay and listen^{ed} to the wind as it beat and battered its wild assault on the house. The two long walls of the room were glass. So I had the curious feeling that I was on a mountain top, right under the sky, protected and yet utterly embraced by the storm. Black clouds were scuttling across the sky and fitfully the moon shone from behind them. The tree outside the window was bending from the wind, and the surf ~~shook~~^{shooked} on the rocks.

It was an ^{eerie}, lonely feeling for this beautiful, placid place I had known.

But awake at 9:00 the world was gold and bright!

I went downstairs and had coffee and fruit and cereal and quickly dressed, for Noble was here and we were going on a hike into the mountains.

We had reached Trudie and Joe Califano who are at St. Thomas'. They had caught the first boat over and arrived just as I was getting ready to leave. Trudie, gloriously brown, her blond hair swinging, was all eager to go on the hike. So Trudie and Noble and I set out right after breakfast -- I never look at a clock from morning until night. We rode a jeep to ^{Cruz}~~Cruz~~ Bay, St. John's only town, and then climbed upward in a winding, corniche drive that clung to the mountain-side, keeping always on the left. And my heart would be in my throat as we would round a corner and there would come charging at us another jeep. And around each corner, a more beautiful view of another blue bay with white sails and a little sandy horse shoe of a beach with green mountains

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rising right behind it. We passed trees with peeling red bark, and I thought of madrona trees. Noble said they were called the "naked Indian". And a little switch would be stuck in the ground and they would grow under the fence post. And so we did see them, often along the roadside.

Finally, we seemed to be winding along the third crest of the mountain, and we stopped at a sign that said "Old Ruin". It pointed down the mountain-side to a sugar mill, to petroglyphs, and ~~the~~ farthest to the beach at Reef Bay -- 2-5/10 miles. Noble said it was an old carriage road for oxen. On the downhill side, it was shored up with stones. But the grove ^{had} ~~that~~ encroached on the uphill side. And there had been no repairs, for how many years? And so it had grown narrower and narrower.

The vegetation was dense, exotic -- a myriad varieties of trees and plants. The huge kapok tree with its tortured trunk, the [?] ~~dead~~ space has wide flangies reaching out like the knees of the ^{Cypripedium tree?} ~~seeded man~~. The West Indian locust, with its ^{slate} ~~star~~-black pods. A strange parasite called a clutia that looks like a sea-grape that grows out of a crotch of a tree and then sends its roots straight down through the air to the ground. They grow bigger and bigger. Some wind around the parent tree, and finally it is dead. Fragrant lime with that tiny fruit, and one of the prettiest of all called the janep -- tall, slim, with a smooth bark that is gray and white and brown splotched. It looks just like the camouflage of our soldiers in the jungle. Big bay trees with ^{Their} deliciously aromatic leaves. And mangoes -- some heavily fruited. A vicious looking shrub called a ping-wing -- a wild pineapple. It grows about 4 feet high --

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a mass of long blades that arch gracefully up and then bend to the ground -- each one equipped with little saw-teeth that would just cut you to pieces, it would look like if you stumbled into the plant.

Noble told us that the old-time overseers planted them below their bedroom windows -- they needed to keep them open at night for the breeze, and they were always afraid the slaves might slip in and cut their throats. But not through these shrubs. Some of them had brilliant red centers. That meant that they were fruiting with a small, yellow pineapple-like fruit. I have no idea how anybody got to them.

There was very little wild life in this green jungle. An occasional zebra butterfly or ^{hermit} ~~summit~~ crabs scuttling to safety under rock. Very rarely a bird high above. But there was one strange form of life. Enormous termite nests, way up in the trees, big as bushel baskets. They appeared to be made of mud. Noble told me it was the waste from their own bodies, and they traveled in little tunnels from the ground up the tree to their nests, which were like a honeycomb on the inside.

But the strangest of all things was the hand of man in this jungle. Almost straight up the road wound. It was perilous walking. And yet it had been used for sugar cane fields, Noble told me.

White man first came to St. Johns Island in 1718 when the Danes explored it, although Christopher Columbus had actually stopped at St. Croix 225 years ^{ago} in 1493, but only to take on water. The Thias-Carib Indians there drove them away, the story goes.

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The Danes had expanded from St. Thomas to St. John bringing their sugar cane and the mills with them. And slave labor. The terrace ~~and~~ the mountain sides, building stone walls to make terraces against erosion up the mountain sides, stripping off the jungle and planting sugar cane.

Through the trees we could actually see some of these terraces still. And just as strange, we began to encounter stone walls -- often three or four feet thick and ^{shoulder} high -- outlining a corral or a house site or a pasture.

Finally we came to one that followed us for more than a mile down the mountain side along the oxen road. It was incredible -- the amount of labor that went into building those walls and clearing that land and planting that sugar cane! But the jungle is avenged, and now it is just as though man had never been here.

And then we came to the first sugar mill -- a mile and a half or so up the mountain side from the ocean. Trees have sprouted inside its rooms and grown to 20 or even 30 feet tall. It is covered with vine. But part of the walls stand. The front door outlined clearly. On one side, about 30 feet of masonry.

And this was the most fascinating tale of all, because it was made partly of ~~solid~~ brain coral that must have grown for, was it thousands of years under the sea? ^{and} partly of thin, pinkish red ^{ballast} Danish bricks that came as ~~ballast~~ in the hold of the ship but had gone back carrying rum and molasses. And partly from the black volcanic rock of which this Island is made, all put together with cement by the hand of man. How long ago, nobody knows. Nor how long ago abandoned.

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We knew that after the slaves were freed in 1830-odd, it was, it became economically unfeasible to run the sugar cane plantations, and the fields gradually retreated down the mountain side, the forests up high were cut for charcoal, and then pretty much abandoned. But still, down close to the sea the last mills operated, now driven by steam to serve the dwindling cane fields. Though the Danes own them and reap the principle financial harvest, the overseers, he said -- the people that actually lived here and came in contact with the slaves were English or Irish. Hence, the English language, and much, much later the habit of driving on the left side of the road.

We of course ^{had} acquired the Virgin Islands from the Danes in 1917 -- one of the results of the ^{first} World War.

It was farther down the mountain that we came to another sign from the hand of man. A National Park Service sign pointed off to the right -- 2/10th of a mile to the petroglyphs.

We left the oxen road and followed a much narrower trail that wound upward until we came to a water fall. A rather enormous, magnificent path of a water fall that was now dry, except for a pool at the base, and farther on down another pool. A wildly dramatic looking place. I wondered if they had used it in times past as a ceremonial place for worship or gathering. Anyhow, ^{there} they were petroglyphs on the rocks, carved, Noble said, by the Arawaks who had lived there in pre-Columbian days, making pottery, cultivating a few things, leading a quiet and peaceful life, until the cannibal Caribs moved in, killed most of the men and took the women and children as slaves.

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It was the Caribs that Columbus had found on St. Croix. And what had become of them, who knows?

The petroglyphs were quite clearly defined. And one has been used as a well-known insignia of ^{Caneel} ~~caneel~~ ^{bay} plantation, on boats and dinner napkins and stationery. There were perhaps six or eight different kinds. One in a shape of a ^{grinning} ~~grinning~~ skull. One that had an almost ^{psyche} ~~psyche~~ quality -- like a character from Peanuts. Noble scooped water with his hands from the pool and threw it over them to make them stand out in clearer relief. But it was not these rather pitiful men that interested me most. It was the Danes, the black slaves that had labored in the cane fields, and the English and Irish overseers, and their futile attempt to turn this steep mountainside into a farm. Such arrogance!

We were beginning to get tired. The trail was flattening out. We were approaching the sea. There were a few more familiar things -- bamboo, thick -- "mother-in-laws tongue", South Siberia -- and occasionally my old friend Lantanna. There is much about this place that reminds of Bang ~~Seng~~ ^{Seng}, Thailand and the Bay of Siam -- the blue sea and the wooded mountains. But it lacks the volcanticity of that land.

Just as we came within the sound of the sea, we saw the ruins of the last sugar factory. It had been in use when Nobles' father was a child. He had told him tales of how he would go to one side of it and receive a taste of the rum in a dipper and on the other side your little boy could go and get a stick of sugar cane to chew.

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It had been horse-driven in its earliest days, And we found the big flat circle where the horse had gone round and round. So had I seen it in my childhood in East Texas. And the little stone line sluiceway where the juice had poured downhill into the vat. Much of the walls were still standing. Here the Park Service had restored a bit. It did not have quite that utterly lost in the jungle look with 30-foot trees growing from the rooms.

The gears were still in place. Huge, rusting machinery and enormous round pots, four or five feet in diameter.

Amazingly enough, back up along the trail we had come across several signs of man. Three of these huge pots were used for water for cattle -- scrawny, boney cattle. And occasionally beside the roadway, the rusted rim of an ox-cart wheel.

Steam engines had been brought in to replace the motive power of the horse.

I bent over and read the legend that appeared on the side of the great engine, now partly grown over with vines. "A & M McOnie - Glasgow, Scotland - 1861" And thus it had persisted to a dwindling economy until about 1924. It was almost on the beach -- a beautiful sandy beach. And we saw a long, comfortable boat awaiting us with cold beer and the manager of Caneel Bay and Captain Smith, who had taken me out when I was here before. He was an old man about 77. He remembered when this sugar mill was last in operation. He also told me rather scornfully, rather regretfully, that things were different now -- that there wasn't enough rain. But that there used to be just lots of rain. It would rain for two days and nights. And that is how they had been able to raise

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sugar cane, he said.

The water was gloriously blue, but the breeze still stiff. We went to ~~Cruz~~ Bay, passed several anchored catamarans and glistening white sail boats. And in our jeeps and back to the house.

Bess and Joe were in from snorkeling -- or rather swimming, because the water had been too ~~murky~~ ^{murky} and wind too high to snorkel happily.

We ate enormously from the delicious buffet.

Then, I listened to the sad news that Lynda Bird was having trouble getting in -- bad weather. Inevitably, my mind went to Stephen and Audrey Currier, and I was thankful for the Secret Service, sure that they would make her stay in San Juan. ~~But~~ ^{had} Jerry told me that that was one of the five most dangerous places in the world if the flight wasn't considered entirely safe.

For all our ignoring of time, I saw someones watch at the lunch table and it was 3:30. So I know it must have been after 4:00 when I went to take a nap. But instead, read "Look Homeward Angel" by Thomas Wolff -- a fallout of our trip to Nashville. The book had been given to me by Thomas Wolff's brother, Fred, in their old home.

Jerry called me and said that Lynda Bird had arrived safely in San Juan and was already in the air. The winds had quieted enough -- headed for St. Thomas. And she arrived about sun down, weary and full of funny long stories about the two full days that it had taken her to get from the Ranch to the Rockefeller's house here.

I stopped at the entrance and showed her the view as you look through the

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hall out toward the beach and the bay and a ship in the distance and St. Thomas beyond. And a little later, that extraordinary brilliant evening star which looks like it has just been pinned up for the occasion.

She and Bess and I had a merry time before dinner with a drink and the long recital of her audacity, and then we dined by candle light. There was a power failure with a good broiled steak and a birthday cake for Lynda. Bess had thought of it -- with sparklers on top. And I brought down her present, some old Dickens' books, including Christmas Carol, which Mr. Fleming had found for me. And Bess gave her a mask and a snorkel tube. Her daddy had sent her a traveling clock, George a pearl bracelet and ^{the} secret service earrings to match. I think she might carry the precincts she lives in, those who know her best. And Luci and Pat, a lounging outfit.

And then we went to bed early, the wind quieting a bit, and all of hoping for 80° weather and the still sea tomorrow.