

# DIARY OF A TRIP TO ASIA

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*Early last December Dr. Tillman, a consultant to the U.S. Senate Committee on Foreign Relations, set out on a trip to Asia to study the Peace Corps and the Fulbright program in that area. worldview is pleased to have been granted permission to publish portions of the diary he kept on his journey, printed for the use of the Foreign Relations Committee. (Excerpts from Dr. Tillman's "Latin American Diary," chronicling an earlier journey undertaken for a similar purpose, appeared in the Summer, 1967 issue.)*

*Monday, December 9, 1968 — Bangkok to Vientiane.* I was provided with a briefing by Embassy officials in Bangkok. I was told that the 47,000 American troops in Thailand were concerned with the war and not with the Thai insurgency — except for 1,000 Americans engaged in "support" of Thai counterinsurgency efforts. I was also told that the people in the Embassy admired and approved of the work of the Peace Corps and that the Thais were generally tolerant of and friendly toward the American G.I. presence. The latter two points deserve comment.

My impression is that Embassy people often do *not* like the Peace Corps. One Embassy official in Bangkok told me that preliminary briefings were provided for incoming volunteers in order to relieve them of their "misconceptions" about such matters as American participation — or lack of it — in Thai counterinsurgency efforts. I remarked that it had been my general impression in the past, notably on my Peace Corps trip to Latin America, that the diplomats and volunteers tended to dislike each other, that this seemed to reflect some unfairness on both sides, but that the volunteers and diplomats were after all engaged in two quite separate kinds of activities and that their lack of rapport seemed both understandable and basically unimportant.

As to the contention made by the briefing officer that the Thais do not object to the G.I.'s, I reminded him that I had not raised the subject, my interest being the Peace Corps and cultural relations, but that, since we were on it, it seemed to me likely that soldiers on leave would behave like soldiers, in a manner unlikely to be endearing to the local inhabitants, whether in Fayetteville, N.C., or a village in the northeast of Thailand. We then had a chuckle — a feeble one — about little Thai babies being born with red hair.

At lunch, following my Embassy briefing, a volunteer spoke of the G.I.'s in the northeast and the striking difference between their impact on local populations and that of the Peace Corps volunteers. He said that he thought that the heart and the generosity were going out of our country and its impact upon people.

I said that it seemed to me beyond doubt that America's military impact was its paramount one in much of the world and that, in nurturing the Peace Corps and exchange programs on their present modest scale, we could not suppose that we were building a formidable rival to the military. We were rather nursing along a slender shoot without any real confidence of its ability to survive but only with some hope that, if it were kept alive, it might someday flourish. The hope is a small one, but the alternative is not to bother and that means no hope at all.

The thought is taking root in my mind that some formal linking of the Peace Corps and Fulbright programs might be desirable. Their direction and values are certainly compatible — in a way that the political-military-A.I.D. activities are not — and, according to Peace Corps volunteers, there is some prospect of practical down-to-earth collaboration in the field.

Fulbright lecturers could, for example, provide professional and scholarly guidance to volunteer teachers. There is, in fact, one Fulbright lecturer at a university in northeast Thailand who is working with Peace Corps volunteers in the teaching of English, providing them with tapes, materials, and guidance in language-teaching technique. . . .

*Sunday, December 15 — Calcutta.* Although the filth and poverty and human degradation are on a greater scale here than in Brazil, the shock, for me, was less acute, partly because I had seen human misery before, partly, I suppose, because one associates misery with India and is not surprised to find it.

The ride in from the airport provides a vivid introduction to India — swarms of people everywhere, living in the streets, sleeping on sidewalks, huddled in squalid shacks, taking water from open pipes in the street, virtually wallowing in the gutter.

As in Latin America the masses of dispossessed are a product of the postwar era. In Calcutta, which has grown from less than a million to six-million people

in twenty-odd years, the influx is due to the migration which followed partition and the coming to town of villagers seeking work, as well as to natural population growth. The misery and social anarchy of Calcutta seem beyond redemption; perhaps there is tacit acknowledgment of that in the fact that there are only two Peace Corps volunteers, one a volunteer secretary, working in the city of Calcutta.

I had cake and Coca-Cola with the Calcutta Fulbrighters yesterday afternoon, including the people who run the regional office of USEFI (United States Educational Foundation in India). Their grievance is the universal one: the cutback in funds which is forcing a drastic reduction in grants.

In the evening I had dinner with an impressive array of Indian academics and intellectuals. I talked at length with a professor of biochemistry who, like many Indians, smiled indulgently at my expressions of dismay over America's internal problems. He thought that our problems were easy compared to those of India, and, *compared* to those of India, they surely are. All that is lacking in America, he said, is the will and commitment to solve social problems, while India, will or no will, simply does not have the resources to cope with her problems. We have no money, he stressed several times; it comes to that.

I think he underestimates the problems of will and commitment, but he is undoubtedly right about India. He recalls that at the time of independence — and perhaps for a while thereafter — the Indians were full of confidence in what they were going to do. And when Kennedy was elected President of the United States, he recalls, there was going to be the brotherhood of man. Now all that is gone and India falters under the weight of insoluble problems. This professor does not have much hope; eventually, he foresees, as the population mounts, there will be starvation and, with it, civil war. Then what? I asked. He said that he did not know.

This morning my USIS control officer, the acting Peace Corps Director, and I went sightseeing in Calcutta. We went to a coffeehouse in the student district near Calcutta University and then walked along streets lined with bookstalls.

We stopped at the branch USIS library — the main one being downtown. The library is up several flights, neatly laid out, card-cataloged and comfortably air-conditioned. The place seems incongruous in its dense, steamy urban surroundings. The books, to the extent I could tell by sampling the catalog, are rigorously harmless: I looked up, for the fun of it, Eldridge Cleaver and Robert Kennedy — both missing. Ful-

bright is represented by the innocuous *Prospects for the West*.

The USIS mission also seems to me incongruous and I engaged my USIS host in a discussion of it. I suggested that the aim of USIS was, by one means or another, to charm foreigners, to induce them to think well of the United States. He said he thought that was not true, that the Indians hungered for information about America, that, for example, he had recently been complimented by an Indian for the fact that the library included a book by Senator Brooke, a member of the opposition party. Was I aware, he wanted to know, of the extent of the Communists' activities in this field.

I persisted: Trying to persuade people who need a square meal a hell of a lot more than they need a good impression of the United States that our experience is "relevant" to theirs, that we have a message for them, is a dishonest and unworthy enterprise.

The poor of Calcutta may well be the most wretched people on the face of the earth and we Americans are the richest. Do we really have anything to say to them? I sense in this a kind of exploitation: the rich are not satisfied to be rich and leave the poor to their benightedness. We require tribute as well. That, I judge, is the real meaning of our exertions toward winning their hearts and minds.

Maybe those libraries are useful, or maybe they ought to be closed up. I certainly don't see much chance of these libraries really "representing" America. The image-making approach can never allow of serious dissent. Nor, I suspect, can it portray the real glory of America either — the ideals we haven't been able to live up to but which remain alive, shaping the American conscience, inspiring and activating a remarkable generation of young people.

The only solution that comes to mind is to take foreign information programs — if we are to have them at all — out of the hands of political agencies and to vest them in some autonomous and presumably disinterested body, on the model of the British Council.

We lunched with Peace Corps volunteers. I talked with one volunteer who has extended for a year, and hopes to stay in India even beyond his three years in the Peace Corps. He went home recently and found it not to his tastes — an atmosphere "filled with hate," he said. . . .

*Thursday, December 19 — Bangalore to Bombay.*  
. . . Yesterday a young volunteer escorted me to a small town an hour and a half's drive out of Bangalore. There we visited volunteers who are working in poultry and egg production at a farm run by the State of

Mysore. We then returned to their house, where we talked about politics and the draft and the problems of conscience which arise when a volunteer faces the prospect of being drafted for Vietnam.

We returned to the State of Mysore Farm where my escort and three other volunteers are working in the Central Poultry Farm. A former student of philosophy and theology, the volunteer who took me around today is also highly educated, though not formally, in agriculture and animal husbandry, having been raised on a farm in the Midwest. Everywhere we went he was keenly aware of land use, of its misuse and its possibilities.

Two of my escort's housemates took me through the hatchery, explaining their methods of breeding white leghorns for the economic production of high quality eggs. I was required to wear a full-length white coat, which I later discovered was to protect the chickens from my germs and not, as I had supposed, me from theirs.



I had dinner that evening with the Bangalore Peace Corps staff. I asked them if they thought India could "make it" and they surprised me with their optimism. The one problem which still seems insuperable is population growth. Otherwise, they said, there is hope: the developing agricultural revolution, the existence of a highly developed administrative infrastructure and the seriousness of purpose of the government. They themselves have been surprised, they said, by the extent to which the government reaches into the villages.

I was struck by the contrast between their mental set and my own. Mine, I suddenly became aware, has been ironic and pessimistic, though not hopeless, and I hope not cynical. It is of course a mood which I share

with my countrymen, a mood born of Vietnam and race crisis, of the collapse of the New Frontier and the Great Society, of the young people's rebellion and alienation, the loss of trust in the judgment and honesty of our government, the rise of crime, the murders of Kennedy and King and the burning of the Washington ghetto. We have lost faith — those of us who have been in America these last few years — in the wisdom as well as the efficacy of our own past efforts. We are full of the sense of the harm we can do — at least some of us are — through our own ordinary human susceptibilities, even when our intentions seem to us to be excellent ones.

We are not ready, as the volunteer in Madras State had put it, to stop "beating our heads against the wall." But neither am I prepared to repudiate as unfounded this chastened outlook. It is, on the basis of recent events, all too well-founded.

I note only that my Peace Corps dinner companions of last night, having been out of the United States for the last few years, have a different outlook. At first skeptical of their hopefulness, I soon remembered that I used to feel that way myself and I remembered how much I liked it. Maybe, as they believe, there is hope for India; and maybe we really can help the Indians. I have no interest in acquiring an attitude of idiotic optimism for its own sake, but neither would I wish to prejudice a situation of which I know very little on the basis of a pessimistic mood shaped by events in an alien environment.

This matter of mood is of great importance. We have become suspicious of aid because it has come to seem a political instrument in the hands of a leadership committed to unsound policies. Perhaps, however, Vietnam notwithstanding, aid is doing some good in India. Things are happening in the country economically, and they have not really "knuckled under" to us in such matters as Vietnam and Czechoslovakia and voting in the United Nations.

That of course is no doubt due in part to the fact that the Russians as well as we are helping them economically, and it occurs to me that that is probably all to the good, helping to dilute the unhealthy effects of bilateralism in the same way that we would hope to have it occur through an internationalized aid program. . . .

*Saturday, December 21 — Bombay to Jaipur. . . .*  
The Peace Corps has matured since my visits of two years ago. The commitment is still there — the decency and the human concern — but it is more disciplined and directed, more practical and less sentimental. I have detected this strongly on the part of both staff

and volunteers. India, as the one volunteer put it, needs more than "love," and love is not antithetical to technique. As to themselves, the volunteers feel that they have an obligation to do more than have a valuable personal experience. In that, I believe they are quite right; they came here to serve and they should serve.

We spoke last night, as I have so often spoken with Peace Corps people, of the fundamental difference between their aims and those of the diplomats. They dislike, as I do, the endless, mindless game of power politics engaged in for its own sake. They dislike, as I do, the tendency of politics to become self-contained and self-sustaining, as if nations were people and politics were life. That is why they hate being associated with the operating arms of American foreign policy. And for that same reason they would love — many of them, perhaps most — to see the Peace Corps internationalized.

Politics, properly practiced, is *about* life but it is not itself life. That is something which the volunteers instinctively and explicitly understand, and it separates them from the political practitioners. The diplomats in their way are every bit as parochial as the hicks and hillbillies whose interests are confined to their own families, jobs and communities. The diplomats do not realize that they are functioning in the same way; their world is populated by *other* diplomats who refer to themselves by the names of the nations they represent and thus suppose that they are functioning on a grand, cosmopolitan scale. But, insofar as their interests are confined to interstate rivalry and the jockeying for advantage, one with the other, they are no different from the businessmen, farmers, teachers and who-all else are trying to get ahead in their own communities, the only difference being that the hicks know they are hicks while the diplomats fancy themselves "nations" and their total clique "the world."

I have no objection in the world to "parochialism" insofar as that connotes people trying in an unpretentious way to live their own lives in their own communities in a decent and responsible way. But I don't much care for the self-deceiving sophistication of those who confuse world travel with worldliness and politics with life.

A colleague asked me why I wanted to go to India where, as he put it, "nothing is happening." Nothing much is happening in India, from the infinitely parochial standpoint of "world politics": no revolution, no war right now, no internal upheaval, no major international negotiation. No, nothing is happening in India, nothing but life, life consisting of 500 million living, breathing, multiplying hicks, struggling for life, every one of them, in an ocean of adversity.

Diplomacy, like propaganda, is a way of playing an established game according to established rules, and doing so without questioning its value and meaning and purpose. It is a necessary form of human activity and it is not to be disparaged. But neither is it to be confused with those activities — education and volunteering — whose function is to question the game and its rules and assumptions and to experiment with new games for new — and I daresay higher — stakes. . . .

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*Tuesday, December 31 — Tehran to Paris.* . . . Again and again these last few days in Iran I have heard expressions of enthusiasm, even received congratulations for, the Apollo moon shot. It has captured the world's imagination and admiration, as it seems no sensible achievement in human welfare ever could do. Little as some of us may like it, there is no denying that this is the sort of thing that people love. The Shah said that the money might have been better used for human welfare and the *Monday Herald Tribune* quotes *Aktvelt* of Copenhagen as follows: "We are still surrounded by people living in the stone age. Not for a long time yet shall we be able to talk — as the three astronauts did — about the good earth." That, however, is a minority view.

Stopping in Beirut Airport, I saw relics of the Israeli raid — the charred remnants of airplanes — carried out in retaliation for the Arab terrorist attacks on an El Al airliner in Athens. A closer than astronaut's eye view of life and politics on the "good earth."

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*Thursday, January 2, 1969 — Paris to London.* Finishing these notes, I am thinking that we are indeed living in a stone age — a material one for most of the human race, a moral and political one for just about all, and we are not doing much to move forward toward a new stage of human development.

The moon is a great adventure, but I have seen things these last four weeks that interest me more — teenagers preparing for teaching jobs in northeast Thailand, children eating high-protein lunches in a primitive village in South India, farmers experimenting with fertilizer and hybrid seeds in the north Indian State of Rajasthan, a park designed to provide fun for children, and repose for adults in a city in northeast Iran:

In all these activities I have seen American Peace Corps volunteers and Fulbrighters involving themselves in a constructive way. That their adventure *could* turn out to be a more significant one than Apollo seems to me beyond doubt; whether it will in fact remain very much in doubt.