Nobody Is Neutral Under Aruba's Hot Sun

The author, Hunter S. Thompson, on a fast lance under the title "The National Observer during a lengthy tour of South America." A hailing, panoramic view: First the concrete, palm-lined quay, dotted with natural fruit stands; then the pier lined with fishing sloops; then the speed-boat shed at the entrance to the harbor, one or two heavily-laden smugglers setting out to make their stealthy trip to Columbia.

Under a burning sun on a recent morning, four men were sitting on the Trocadero fire hydrants. Read the Antilleans: "Booee," a local merchant, and "Makaku," a landowner. "Makaku" is a Papiamento-language nickname for a family's eldest son. "Makaku" is the regular word for money. The Antilleans, they were of Dutch ancestry, mixed with the native slave blacks.

The third was a Dutchman, Jos Van Kulik, Aruba editor for the Amigo di Curacao. The Amigo, a daily, is the largest paper in the Netherlands Antilles. And the fourth was an American—me.

Their Holland Is Hot

Most of the Trocadero patrons are Dutchmen or prosperous Antilleans. Many of the Dutchmen are former officers or US soldiers in the Royal Dutch Navy, and when they talk about how much they feel they don't really believe it. The Holland most of them know was the Holland before World War II, and it is more a memory than a fact.

There is, of course, still some tangible contact. Letters come from some Dutch tobacco ad drink Dutch beer, their language is Dutch—but their clothing, their clothes in a sort of Caribbean limb, and time weights heavily on their minds.

Their salaries are high, by any standards, and their daily routines are long since a forgetting. Open the bar at noon, close it at noon, open it again at two, and lock up at six. They are paid for their work and the ability to do their work is done by employees.

De Olde Molen, Aruba's best restaurant is a reminder of the Netherlands for Aruba's Dutch residents.

With tears in my eyes—I am going to have you.

You turned back to the American. "Who are you who is in these elections, well for instance, almost all the recent people against the cut-throats and the bol-sheviks."

Van Kulik, the journalist, chuckled quietly, "I think I'd like a cool beer," he said, signaling the barman. Makaku was still talking about "hangings, hangings."

Booee nodded the American. "Do not pay any attention to this fanatic," he said with a smile. "He is an old and bitter man."

"Hah. Makaku snapped. "He'll pay attention when he sees you danglin' them in a lamp post." He nodded solemnly, "This day of judgment is coming—we have a nose for every one of you thieves."

Reprisals and Vendettas

Booee laughed, "Who do you call thieves? Only 2,000,000 of out 20,000,000 is 10 per cent. Is that the trouble? He looked at the American. "I ask you, why would you hang a man if he took only 10 per cent?"

There would, of course, be incidental election hangings. (The PPA, for example, retained its majority of five of the eight seats.) But sweeping economic reprisals and lingering personal vendettas are common after each contest at the polls. When a party comes into power, for instance, all government employees of the other party are fired immediately—they have been secretly looking for the opposition.

Many do. Few Arubans are neutral at election time, they are afraid to say which side they are on. After the elections, however, everything settles back to normal.

Relatively, that is, "Normality" on Aruba is a hard word to pin down. For the white Dutchman, for instance, it is a life strung out over long hot months and years starting at the barren, crusty-old Dutch island as it turns faintly red in the evening. The "cumi," or Aruban countryside, is indeed one of the ugliest sites in Christendom. A kind of scrub brush and huge boulders, dry gul-lies and mile after mile of rock-dotted flats.

Americans Live Apart

For the American expatriate at Lago, the world's largest oil refinery, normality has little to do with Aruba. The 3,000 Americans down there on the island's southern tip live almost entirely apart. Now and then you will see one or two in Oranjestad or a Dutch hotel. The Dutchmen call them "utility people," and they are "living out there behind their wall."

Americans are not viewed with much sympathy by the Antilleans. President Kennedy, the only one who has visited the island, was the late Lloyds Smith, a former President of Lago. There is a statue of him in front of the Aruba Cultural Centre. Lago has a beach on the south shore is called Lloyd Smith Boulevard.

For the American tourists at the big, new hotel, normality is what they left at home. They spend their days pedaling idly around in the surf on things called watercyles, or just wandering up and down the beautiful eight-mile beach that stretches from the hotel in both directions.

The Aruba Caribbean is three years old and doing well, according to the local Tourist Board, but it is not very popular with the natives. "That is not Aruba," they say, "It is ugly."

It is also expensive. During the winter months a single room goes for $28 a day, and in the summer, $17. But a guest is granted the privilege of getting it all into the casino.

Aruba is a peaceful place with enough strange twists to make it interesting. The Divi-Divi tree forever points downward, and the former old left feet offshore at the Palm Beach Club where you can have your drink sent out by cable car. The wind never stops, it almost never rains, and the people are hospitable in the extreme.

As Van Kulik puts it: "Aruba is a nice place to be, I like it, and if not for the politics I might stay."

Governors Rockefeller and Brown

Catching Dinner Outside Town

HUNTER S. THOMPSON

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