

## Mother's Day Travels and Deep South

*The Cloak*, June 2023

We just got back from our week's trip to Florida. It turns out that both David and I have sons who live there — my oldest and his wife in Weston near Fort Lauderdale; and David's oldest son, David Jr., and his wife north of there in Kissimmee. We gathered to celebrate our family and each other over Mother's Day weekend. Turns out that David Jr.'s birthday fell on Mother's Day, so we had a double reason to celebrate.

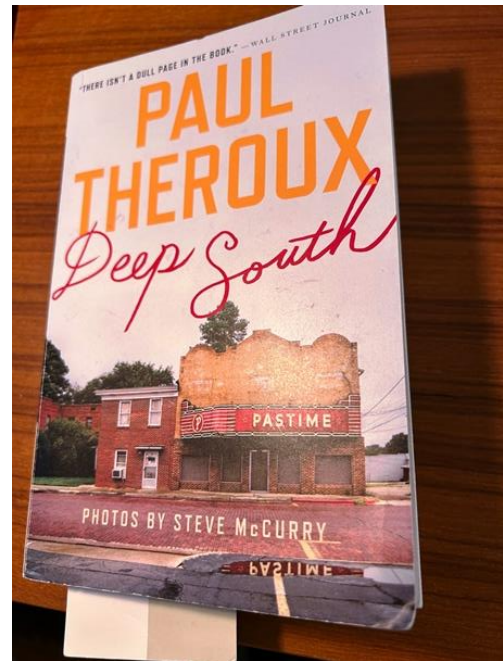
Well anyway, we flew from Richmond through Atlanta on Delta (can't avoid Atlanta on Delta!) and then on to Fort Lauderdale. Which brings me to a book I'm in the middle of titled Deep South by Paul Theroux. This is one of those books I'd say to run, not walk, to pick up and read. (See photo.) Theroux is a celebrated travel writer and novelist who drove from his home in Massachusetts to travel and then write about this

country's Deep South people and culture. (Including a bit of Virginia.) States like Alabama, Mississippi, South Carolina, etc. Real South. And he did the drive on back roads which took him through little towns and villages, joining local folks in places like bars, diners, and gun shows. Anyway, it's a fascinating page turner.

But unfortunately we flew. On flying, discovering the joy of driving the byways, Theroux had this to say:

*These days the airport experience is not only a disagreeable foretaste of all the insults to come on the trip, but also an annoying way of reminding the prospective traveler that he or she is an alien at home, and not just a stranger but someone perhaps to be feared, a possible danger, a troublemaker if not a terrorist ... in a mode of predeparture, scrutinized, needing to pass inspection before you can even think of the trip ahead. ... The dubious achievement in travel these days is enduring the persistent nuisance of a succession of airports in order to arrive at a distant place for a brief interlude of the exotic. (pp. 19-20)*

Thus, Theroux set off in his car, talking to local folks, taking notes, painting a picture of the culture in the Deep South. Which turns out to be charming, welcoming, but mired in poverty in those byways after loss of jobs amid shuttered stores, as the interstates like I-95 cut much of it out of America's mainstream.



But back to our trip. We had a wonderful family visit — despite flying through Atlanta — but that’s another story. Not an “interlude of the exotic” that Theroux mentions, but just a sweet, loving time with family. In How, Then, Shall We Live? Wayne Muller talks about the importance of being with others as an essential part of a full and meaningful life. He says:

*Gathering to observe ritual, ceremony ... these are the ways we remember the rhythm of things, the triumph of the spirit, the cycle of birth and death, the deepening of a life together. ... We need to see one another, to touch and be touched, to exchange some gift, some energy, some knowing that can be transmitted only in the physical body, from one to another. It is tangible, yet mystical; physical, yet immeasurable, invisible. (p. 134)*

As someone said, “nothing can be taken for granted. So stay wide awake, ready to seize each day as a blessing because the next one can’t be counted on.” And our family visit south was one of those seizings, because the time with family was precious and a joy-filled journey.

Amen and Blessings to all.