

A photograph of a large, mossy tree in a swampy area. The tree is the central focus, with its thick trunk and branches covered in Spanish moss. In the background, an American flag is visible, partially obscured by the tree's branches. The scene is dimly lit, with light filtering through the foliage, creating a moody atmosphere. The entire image is framed by a decorative border.

THE
Soul
LOWCOUNTRY
summer

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“THE
magic
 OF THE **LOWCOUNTRY**”
 CAN'T BE EXPLAINED; IT HAS TO BE *lived*”

We share a mystery in the Lowcountry. You might say it's a mystery of the entire experience of "Being in the South," but those who have a little knowledge of history and the southern way know it all began right here.

The Lowcountry stretches from Charleston to Savannah with Hilton Head Island tucked safely in the middle. This legendary section of the southern coast never was like any other place. Long before her brash sisters—New Orleans and Atlanta—were fluttering their coquettish eyes, the grand ladies of Charleston and Savannah had already established gentility, grace and hospitality as the landmark traits of the South.

Some say it's the climate, since the summers are a time when one tends to move a bit slower. Some say it started as a pretty face covering the shame of slavery. People who suffer from seasonal affective disorder will swear it's the immense quantity of bright sunshine.

Anyone who has ever been outside during the dusky part of any Lowcountry mid-summer's eve, however, will take issue with these theories. This is the time of day for the ritual "Slap Dance" to escape the sport of those vicious twilight gladiators: No-see-ums and mosquitos.

During the day, the heat—hot, sticky, and humid—descends with ominous threats of heat stroke. It means the South is just as brutal as the freezing winters in the northern climates. Down here, the sunlight can be blinding and the size of spiders is mind-boggling; plus, we also have deadly, prehistoric reptiles lolling about in every pond or largish puddle. The American alligator is an apex predator, meaning that—like

sharks—they are at the top of the food chain with no natural predators of their own. And the hurricanes. Don't forget the hurricanes.

Clearly, the mystery goes deeper than a languid day at the beach. Looking at the history of the area, we discover that the Lowcountry was settled by many cultures. It was a melting pot. Spain first settled on Hilton Head Island in 1521. The oldest city in America (St. Augustine, Florida) wasn't founded until 44 years later in 1565. The Spanish didn't do so well on Hilton Head but France managed to make a go of it, followed by England's nobles. Soon Germany, Sweden, Ireland and Scotland sent settlers.

Of course, these are the same good people who settled the northern territories like New York. They brought those cultures and traditions with them. Even though New York is the same sort of melting pot, it's odd then that New York isn't known for her hospitality, her gentility or her grace.

All this begs a few questions: How did the Lowcountry set the tone for a geographical tradition that lingers to this day? How did having good manners become a universal emblem of the South? How did hospitality that will share food, offer a blanket, or lend a helping hand—without asking for anything in return—become part of the tradition? And just why do Southerners wave all the time?

In a look back at those early settlers, we have to conclude that they must have been hearty souls. These must have been a determined crowd with the hearts of entrepreneurs—adventurous rebels hunting for a better way. The trip must have been daunting, tiring, and painful for so many of our people.

Of course, some who landed here kept going. The heat and the bugs probably chased them away, but amid those same tribulations, another group stayed. They



stayed past the misfortunes, the sweltering heat, and the crushing losses due to things like yellow fever.

And there is the enigma wrapped in our mystery. The magic of the Lowcountry can't be explained; it has to be lived.

When the sun rises over a Lowcountry summer, the mornings seem to shimmer with splendor, optimism and wonder. Anything seems possible. Even today, the individualists that discover this place often stay here because it speaks to them. It quiets their restlessness but encourages their vision. Gazing at the landscape on those mornings it's as if the land gazes back at you. As if it sees you and, somehow you belong to it. For no matter how much of the land you buy, you never really own it. It always owns you.

Even the noises seem to have an extra tone or layer here. The sounds of the breezes that ruffle the pages of your book, the chirruping pitch of the birds, the slow whine of the insect, or the clink of the glassware. Here—voices carry.

Physics will tell you that a sound's wavelength modifies as temperature changes. Humid air makes sound travel faster because it's lighter. Dry air is mostly nitrogen, while humid air has more water vapor, making it a lower density. Sound travels fast-

est through solids, than liquids and finally through gasses like air. The idea of putting an ear to the ground, or on a train track, comes from this aspect of sound.

Humidity also impacts the scents of the days. This is why honeysuckle and freshly mown grass smell better on a southern morning. This physics lesson could go on and on, but the point is that we don't consciously detect all these shifts, for the atmospheric traits in the Lowcountry transform the quality of sights, sounds and scents.

Fragrance and aromatherapy is a big deal these days and the perfumed breeze of a Lowcountry summer might actually have something to do with southern hospitality. In 1996, psychologist Robert Baron tested people in an upstate New York mall outside of fragrant locations such as Cinnabon and the Coffee Beanery. He found people were significantly more likely to help an utter stranger who "accidentally" dropped a pen or asked for change while under the influence of those heady fragrances.

Of course, speaking about the scent of food, brings us to the famous Lowcountry style of cooking—of which, the Lowcountry boil is an undefeated champion. Not to mention oyster roasts, and southern barbecue. Grits, by the way, aren't actually

a southern food. They're Native American. Like polenta, grits are more of a tribal food item. The white corn from which they're made have a high mineral content, good nutrition, and more flavor. Polenta is yellow corn that is processed in a slightly different way, meaning that polenta is nothing more than a less healthy but more fashionable cousin.

All in all, the sights, scents, and sounds of a Lowcountry summer have never been duplicated anywhere on Earth. Explaining it, painting it or photographing it can't reveal the depth. It is the experience of all these aspects that created the people whose traditions of kindness, hospitality and grace still endures. Like Scarlett in "Gone with the Wind", we get our strength from the land.

It's a bold claim but the Lowcountry is the birthplace of Southern Legends. Those legends define the people who live here and the ones who visit, but can't stand to leave. We, as a group of visionary souls, stand as the proud result of our Lowcountry summers.