

The Tragedy and Beauty of Lines at the Post Office

The post office line is one of the dreariest places to be on a Monday afternoon. I have never been in a packed room that silent, except perhaps for a funeral. At least at funerals, people occasionally laugh.

This is the perfect place to notice things, especially because there are few other entertainment options in a post office line.

Everyone in line is heads-down in their smartphones, escaping to the only world where the post office isn't needed and doesn't exist: the digital world. An ad pokes out at us advertising the glorious technological wonder of getting emails about our physical mail. Welcome to 2018, US Postal Service.

There is one bright spot in this post office: a bunch of flower pens which some enterprising post office employee must have made before they lobotomized her enterprise away. I remember being here before when a new employee was being trained in the ways of the USPS. She was surprisingly polite and friendly to customers.

I don't see that employee anymore.

It is a diverse line snaking around the line in the Monday afternoon post office. We are united in our misery: black, white, and brown. One girl spoke German, one woman spoke Spanish. Suffering breeds solidarity, and Atlantans suffer equally under the oppressive boot heel of the postal service.

A single lone employee waves over a new "customer" imperiously, without shifting her eyes. We all wait our turn. Then another employee emerges from the back. I have my chance!

I wait what seems like a lifetime, until almost ten minutes before the post office closes. While I'm waiting, I meet up with two young women who live in my apartment complex (we're at the post office to pick up our mail). We start to break the awkward silence of the post office. I joke that our mail may have been burned, or that the post office employee is taking so long because she is counting all the money we received in the mail. We are comrades and friends for sharing the same apartment complex and for sharing this waiting experience.

Our mail arrives again from the back after a mysteriously long time.

For me, at least, it's mostly ads.