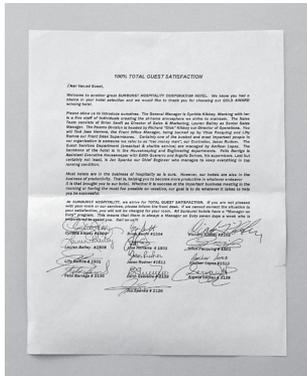


**'100% Total Guest Satisfaction'
From the Comfort Inn,
Vienna, Virginia, USA
2003**



Dear valued guest!

In about August 2003 I went on a pilgrimage to Washington DC. This trip was partly for a holiday, but mostly to track down *The Declaration of Independence* and *The Constitution of The United States of America*. Unfortunately, when I arrived at the Rotunda for the Charters of Freedom where they are housed, I found that it was closed for renovation. You can't imagine how disappointed I was.

However, back in my hotel that night, I noticed a sheet of paper on the night-stand that bore a striking resemblance to *The Declaration of Independence* (or at least the parchment facsimile of it that I had bought from a souvenir shop that day). But this was the declaration of '100% Total Guest Satisfaction', signed by all thirteen staff of the Quality Inn.

Next to my Charters of Freedom facsimiles I was tempted to see this document as a trivialisation of social contracts. It was photocopied on cheap paper, and surrounded by the furnishings of a budget hotel. Placed on my nightstand next to the *TV Guide*, I didn't really take it seriously. It seemed insincere, flimsy and too easy to ignore. With hindsight, however, it seems to have more weight. Any contract is a complex social phenomenon. It was a big promise—"we strive for total guest satisfaction". Thinking of all the contracts that exist in the Hotel to make it function (between employers and employees, hotel and city, employers and federal government etc.), what was intriguing about the document was that the staff felt the need to share it with their guests. I'm not sure if it was a uniquely Washington impulse for them to want to formalise and make visible/material this normally unspoken social contract, but the result was that they invited us all to witness it.

Jonty Valentine

1. Rewritten from the text 'The Weight of a Document', *The National Grid* #7, March 2006. p.83.