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## Marine: America the Raped: The Engineering Mentality and the Devastation of a Continent

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## RECENT BOOKS

### BOOK REVIEWS

AMERICA THE RAPED: THE ENGINEERING MENTALITY AND THE DEVASTATION OF A CONTINENT. By *Gene Marine*. New York: Simon & Schuster. 1969. Pp. 312. \$5.95.

*And God said unto them, Be fruitful, and multiply, and replenish the earth, and subdue it; and have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over every living thing that moveth upon the earth.*

—Genesis 1:28

Man is making high marks in multiplication and dominion, is excelling in subduction, and is flunking replenishment. By any test man has won his war with nature. When we are victorious in wars against nations, our choice, with Churchill, is magnanimity. But despite the victory over nature, the carnage continues. The continued destruction is strange, for nature has few professed enemies. Few will espouse opposition to animals, trees, flowers, clean air, and clean water. But the carnage continues. Who will champion ugliness, destruction, and death? But the rape of America goes on.

Perhaps the answer to this dilemma is that man's narcissism extends above all to his own creations. Things man makes, especially big things, seem to have inherent worth and goodness. We stand in awe as the guide tells us of the cubic yards of concrete in the dam, the acre-feet of water backed up behind it, the area of land flooded by it, and the number of killed workmen entombed in it. We are told of the electricity-generating capacity provided, of the irrigation water stored, of the floods prevented, and of the recreation made possible. It would seem irreverent to ask about what was buried or driven away, about the evidence of man's past and the earth's past now covered by water and ultimately to be covered by silt, about the water lost through evaporation and the consequent concentration of minerals in the remaining water, about the ugliness of muddy banks and stained walls when the water level is down, or about the alteration and destruction of life in the river.

It may be that it is the profiteers who would have us accept that there will be growth and that growth alone is an absolute good. Industry must be enticed to locate where we live so that we can have goods and services and payrolls and tax bases. No seemingly inhospitable questions may be asked. Industry must not be troubled about possible depredations of the environment; after all, those costs are external—they are the unavoidable price of progress and society simply must pay them.

Who thinks this way? Who are these rapists that Gene Marine writes about?

They are not necessarily employed by lumber companies or mining companies or railroads; a lot of them work for you and me. They are the public servants who work for the Port of New York Authority or for the state highway commissions. They work for the United States Forest Service or the National Park Service. They are in the Army's Corps of Engineers and the Bureau of Reclamation and the Bureau of Public Roads. They are dedicated, single-minded men. And when they talk—which is as rarely as they can manage—their language is the language of fanatics.

They are called Engineers.

They build bridges and dams and highways and causeways and flood-control projects. They *manage* things. They commit rape with bulldozers. [P. 16.]

And again he states:

"Engineers" does not (necessarily) mean "engineers" . . . [T]he rape of America is being perpetuated not merely by men with hard hats and surveying instruments (though such men are by no means excluded), but by men in a number of professions who have in common an "engineering mentality," the capacity to approach problems only in the way that the least imaginative and most robotic of engineers would approach them . . . Tell an Engineer that his dam will destroy a salmon run and he will meet *that* problem with a fish ladder. Tell him that his fish ladder will create another problem, and he will deal with *that*—but never by abandoning the fish ladder and certainly never by questioning the existence of the dam. What he will not do is look at the totality of what he is doing. He cannot, any more than a raven can fly backward. [Pp. 200-01.]

Mr. Marine's concern about what Engineers do goes far beyond the more commonly understood meanings of conservation. He is not concerned only with preserving the beautiful and the spectacular or with cleaning up obvious sources of pollution. Nor is his position that of the so-called "backpack snob" or "outdoor aristocrat" who wants his own isolated preserves protected from crowds. His concern is more intensely practical. It is for the preservation of eco-systems "because we may, someday, vitally need what they contain" (p. 226); it is for the preservation of genetic information. The goal is not easy to explain to those who are too insensitive to try to see that important values may justify saving swamps, salt marshes, and deserts, as well as forests, rivers, and lakes; that there may be good reason to save species of lizards and insects as well as the bison and the American Eagle; and that we can no longer tolerate the sacrifice of anything of life or nature without a compelling reason.

The book is constructed around the description of a succession of widely ranging exploits of the Engineers in America. Mr. Marine treats plans for jet airports in the Florida Everglades and in the Great Swamp of New Jersey and plans for dams in the Grand Canyon

and in the Yukon River. He tells of mining, digging, dredging, cutting, damming, bulldozing, and spraying. Again and again, he portrays the Engineers at work mindlessly accomplishing their specific missions and damning the consequences.

Some will doubtless think that Mr. Marine is too strident, and at times he does seem too eager to find malice or stupidity where there may be only an honest difference of opinion. But he means to alarm us; he means to help create the public awareness, concern, and anger that will require government and industry to do something. In the past we have often been too docile, too quick to believe that the Engineers' handiwork was essential for our well being and that the side effects were unavoidable and justifiable.

There is, however, occasional cause for hope. Enormous oil reserves appear to have been discovered beneath the forbidding ice and snow of the North Slope of Alaska. We might reasonably have expected that the Engineers would easily have had their way with the North Slope. After all, why should it be protected? For whom should it be saved? But the irreverent questions are being asked. The Engineers have been asked to explain how they plan to protect the delicate eco-systems of the North Slope. They are being asked how they plan to protect the animals and fish from destruction and the waters from pollution. They are being asked what they intend to do to preserve the precarious surface growth of lichen, mosses, and short grasses that insulate the permafrost which, in turn, holds the soil together and prevents wholesale erosion of the landscape. Perhaps—just perhaps—precautions will be taken in Alaska to protect the delicate eco-systems. If some destruction is unavoidable and is justified by the need for the oil, we may at least know, for the first time, what price we are paying for "progress."

Mr. Marine's book is well written, exciting, and sometimes depressing; but in one respect the author shows poor judgment. He sometimes equates the Engineers with persons against whom he holds grievances on other matters. That equation is most unfortunate. That one may disagree with Mr. Marine about Vietnam should not cause him to reject the book's central theme. The little old ladies in tennis shoes can help, and should not be alienated. In a small way Mr. Marine has committed an Engineer's sin; he has failed to look at the totality of what he has done; he has injected into the book extraneous matter that may prove destructive of his purpose. We can only hope that most readers will recognize that there ought not to be any dove or hawk, liberal or conservative, or left or right, on the issue of stopping the rape of America.

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