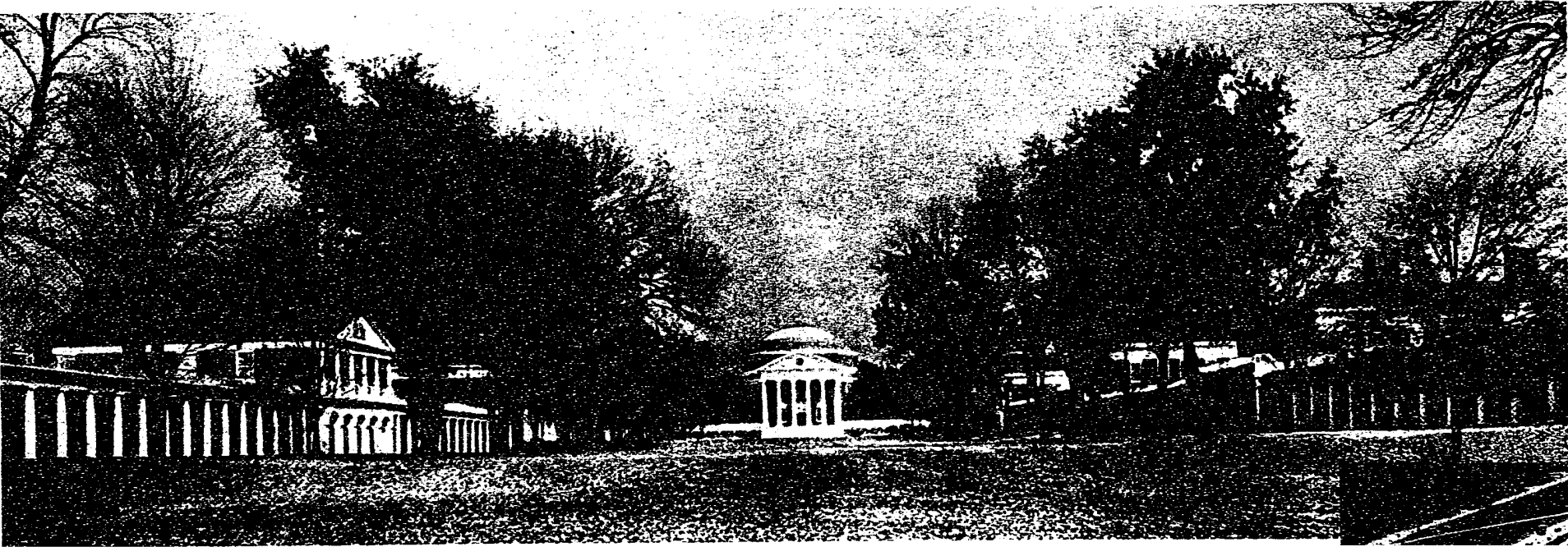


America the Beautiful, Defaced, Mutilated: GOD'S OWN JUNKYARD: The ...

By ADA LOUISE HUXTABLE

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"Startling, heaven-hell contrasts."
Illustrations from "God's Own Junkyard."

America the Beautiful, Defaced, Mutilated

GOD'S OWN JUNKYARD: The Planned Deterioration of America's Landscape. By Peter Blake. Illustrated. 144 pp. New York: Holt, Rinehart & Winston. Cloth, \$4.50. Paper, \$2.95.

By ADA LOUISE HUXTABLE

IN the early nineteen-fifties, a special issue of The British Architectural Review appeared, devoted to "Man-Made America." Its conclusion was that man-made America was a mess, and it provided some eye-opening shocks for its professional readers.

American indictments of the American scene followed, and now we have a book with the same theme aimed at the broadest possible audience. "God's Own Junkyard," says its author, Peter Blake, is a "muck-raking" book with a message. "It is not written in anger. It is written in fury. It is a deliberate attack upon all those who have befouled a large portion of this country for private gain, and are engaged in befouling the rest."

Its message is simple and explicit. Man can ruin anything, and does. The shining country that stretched from sea to sea,

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the skies, the plains, the woods, the spacious fields, are now defaced and mutilated — a babel of billboards, auto graveyards, googie architecture and subdivision devastation; all the apurtenances and excrescences of prosperity, the population explosion and the good life. It has been amputation by expressway and slaughter by suburban sprawl. Mr. Blake's book is a primer on the uglification of America the Beautiful.

Ironically, it is aimed at an audience that has ceased to see, that accepts the chaotic squalor it has created and lives in its own esthetic filth. It is addressed to a people whose philosophy is pragmatism and a country that maintains an almost mystical belief in the sanctity of free enterprise and the ultimate good of private profit. That both the beliefs and the people are blind is shown by this documentation of the destruction of the country's landscape and history. And that the results are less than practical is proved by the waste and loss of the country's irretrievable natural and architectural heritage. At the present rate of exploitation, the author says the future will be cultural-ly and esthetically bankrupt.

Mr. Blake, who is managing editor of Architectural Forum and author of "The Master Builder," presents his argument against the "planned deterioration" of our landscape with cool skill. His case for an ordered and beautiful environment is based on hard, incontrovertible facts: the impracticality of waste which destroys economic values as well as esthetic amenities; the real planning failures of suburbia that are as serious as its flagrant abuses of the land; the destruction of the city in terms of prosperity and livability as it becomes increasingly repellent under the hand of the speculative developer; the automobile's promise of pleasure and liberation turned into dismemberment of the city, the defiling of nature and the compounding of chaos with congestion.

Much of the story is told in the generous illustrations of this handsomely designed book — which has been aided by a grant from the Graham Foundation for Advanced Studies in the Fine Arts. Pictures are frequently paired for startling, heaven-hell contrasts. Salt Lake City's neon honkytonk faces the architectural serenity of Boston's Beacon Hill, orderly Jeffersonian elegance at the Uni-

versity of Virginia rebukes the commercial disaster of Canal Street in New Orleans, Park Avenue before and after Pan Am is a searing indictment of a brutal destruction of scale, detrition by Detroit turns rolling country into asphalt parking lots. The impact on a sensitive eye is bruising.

Unfortunately, the public eye is not sensitive, and does not bruise easily. It has even become increasingly inured to shock. It is doubtful that the average American would recognize it if he were set down in the Garden of Eden. It is also doubtful whether this striking but sophisticated selection of photographs, with such an obvious moral to those who deal in visual truths, will disturb him any more than the awful reality. They are an instrument for seeing, however, if enough people look; but they presuppose the reader's ability to distinguish between good and bad. For the most part, he is adjusted to his self-made atrocities and sets his sights no higher. This is the real tragedy of the American Dream, the irony of peace and plenty—that we have settled for the poor, the mean and the ugly in our inescapable physical environment.

