

BOOKS

Four Corners seen from many angles and in great depth

THE VANISHING WHITE MAN
By Stan Steiner
Harper & Row, New York, \$10.95

It is estimated that between 90 and 95 percent of the essential raw materials remaining in the U.S. are located on Indian land. Accelerated development of these resources—especially energy resources—is affecting native peoples with an intensity their grandparents could never have imagined.

The Vanishing White Man begins with the case of the massive Four Corners strip mining and generating project built on lands of the Navajo and Hopi in New Mexico. These are people Stan Steiner knows with an intimacy unusual for one not native to them. His account of the theft of Indian land for the energy potential lying beneath it, is a classic.

If that had been all the book attempted, it would be an important and moving work, but not the remarkable one that it is. For Steiner proceeds from the specifics of coal mining and power generating to far deeper questions of energy itself: what it is, where it comes from, how it is consumed and how preserved.

His book goes from the particulars of the Four Corners project to the history of the current energy policy of the U.S.; from the challenge native peoples have raised to the present-day development of that policy back in time to examine what tribal and natural peoples have long understood about the function of energy in their cultures and economies.

Steiner then turns his attention to native Americans' white neighbors, whose ranches and towns sit astride the same coal deposits and who are beginning to understand the past in the light of their present feeling of being themselves "treated like Indians." The author leaps forward in time to envision a not-so-distant future of filth-shrouded, resource-gobbling cities and a sacrificed rural

America where over-used rivers run dry, once-clear air hangs heavy with particulates from hundreds of power plant chimneys, and webs of highways, pipelines and transmission lines wrap a torn and shredded landscape. Then a leap backward to look at the history of Europeans on this continent, the ideology of arrogance that has informed their actions and the role played by the sexist culture of European patriarchies in that history.

The book moves in many directions and touches on many questions, always coming back to the central one: how people live, how we understand ourselves living in the natural world. There is purpose in this wide-ranging design: first, to join the separate issues of resource development and native American sovereignty to the myriad other questions they raise, and further, to teach us something about how to understand these problems.

To Stan Steiner the unsupported personal testament of traditional Ogalala activist, Grace Black Elk (one of the women who were the backbone of the Wounded Knee occupation in 1873) is as valid and necessary to our learning as hard data on how many million acre-feet of non-existent Colorado River water have been allocated by government agencies.

He draws from both rational and non-rational knowledge, from the traditions and creation myths of native peoples and from the "verifiable" information of modern science. The result is neither a Domsday Book nor a rip-off of Indian spirituality. Steiner has found a path between those possibilities and managed to avoid the trap of an easy fatalism. He has put together in a mosaic that is his own, a vision we can share.

—Jonny Lerner

Jonny Lerner was one of the editors of *Voices from Wounded Knee* and is working on a book to be published by Akwesasne Notes.

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MUSIC

Robinson resurgent after blacklist blackout

In 1940 the Republican party was getting ready to nominate Wendell (One World) Wilkie to run against Franklin D. Roosevelt and the New Deal. The Philadelphia convention needed some cultural pizzazz, something more inspirational than Kate Smith and the Legion Band rendering *God Bless America*. So the program committee asked Paul Robeson to sing the role he had made famous in the dramatic cantata *Ballad for Americans* by composer Earl Robinson and lyricist John Latouche.

Robeson turned them down. He was singing the *Ballad* in New York's Lewisohn Stadium on the night in question to the sort of mass audience he found more congenial. There were speculations in the press that he wouldn't have sung for the GOP in any case. The *New Yorker* printed a "Talk of the Town" item to the effect that neither Robinson nor Latouche was particularly flattered at the GOP invitation. Latouche was quoted as saying, "We wrote the *Ballad* for all Americans, not just for Republicans," with Robinson adding, "Especially not just for Republicans."

But the Republicans had it on their program anyway. They got Ray Middleton, a musical comedy star of the period, to sing the Robeson part. It is (and was) after all a free country where you can buy what you can pay for.

Later that same convention season, the *Ballad* was sung at the Communist party convention.

Throughout the '40s the names of Robinson and Robeson were associated with a flourishing democratic musical culture. CBS sold millions of record sets of *Ballad*, which became a sort of unofficial national anthem. Robeson also recorded Robinson's smash hit *Joe Hill* (lyrics by Alfred Hayes) and frequently sang in concert Robinson's *Free and Equal Blues* (lyrics by E.Y. Harburg.)

Robinson was also writing successful longer works in this period. His *The House I Live In* (lyrics by Lewis Allan) was made into a short film featuring Frank

Throughout the '40s Ballad for Americans was a sort of unofficial national anthem...

Sinatra. And his major choral work, *The Lonesome Train*, a *Lincoln Cantata* (lyrics by Millard Lampell) was sung over every major network as part of the national mourning for FDR.

But by the 1950s the blacklist had removed Robinson and most of his lyricists from view and hearing by the American public. Paul Robeson had his passport revoked, spent eight years in virtual house arrest, and finally left the country to live and work in England.

A generation grew up who knew Paul Robeson only vaguely as a great singer of black spirituals and *Old Man River*, and who never heard of Earl Robinson or any of his music—except perhaps *Joe Hill*, which was considered a folk song—i.e., without authorship.

Then on July 4, 1976, *Ballad for Americans* was performed as the climax of a Bicentennial concert by the Los Angeles Philharmonic in the Hollywood Bowl. An overflow crowd of 19,000 was on its feet cheering at the end of the cantata. A few may have remembered the last time *Ballad* was sung in the Bowl (on the night of its world premiere), but most had never heard it before. The enthusiasm was so universal and so sustained that conductor Zubin Mehta called the composer to the platform,



and Robinson received a standing ovation.

Of the three men who had stood in the same spot taking bows for the *Ballad* in 1940, only Robinson remains. John Latouche died during the '60s, and Paul Robeson in January 1976.

But Earl Robinson is, as he puts it, "resurgent."

He has written several successful songs in the last few years, including *Hurry Sundown* (lyrics by E.Y. Harburg) and *Black and White* (lyrics by David Arkin). The latter was recorded by Three Dog Night and has sold over a million copies as a single.

No mean performer in his own right, Robinson has been touring the country giving lecture-concerts. At the time of Paul Robeson's death he appeared in ten memorial concerts in this country and an eleventh in Athens.

Since then Robinson has been acting as narrator for orchestral performances of a recently completed Chinook Cantata, *Ride the Wind*, which is dedicated to retired Supreme Court Justice William O. Douglas. *Ride the Wind* has been incorporated into a new opera, called *Washington Love Story*, which is soon to be premiered. And Robinson is already at work on another—one to be based on the life of the Armenian folk hero, David of Sassoun.

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A Green Light for Lobotomies



Women suffering anxiety and depression at the loss of family, youth and career opportunities constitute the majority of psychosurgery patients today.

By Lani Silver and Elyse Eisenberg
Pacific News Service

Washington, D.C. A congressionally mandated national commission has urged the federal government to "conduct and support research" on psychosurgery, or lobotomy—the controversial surgical destruction of brain tissue for the purpose of altering behavior. The 11-member commission also proposes guidelines for performing psychosurgery on institutionalized mental patients, prisoners and children.

Minimizing concerns raised in recent years about the safety, morality and efficacy of psychosurgery, the commission declares the technique "has potential merit and...the risks are not excessive, despite the fact that the results of specific procedures have not been completely validated."

The National Commission for the Protection of Human Subjects of Biomedical and Behavioral Research was appointed by the Department of Health, Education and Welfare in 1974 to study the hotly debated topic. Composed of mental health and legal experts, the commission sent its recommendations to HEW Secretary Joseph Califano in March. Among the major recommendations:

- Psychosurgery should be performed only at institutions with HEW-approved review boards. These panels of experts would be charged with assuring the competence of surgeons performing the operations and with determining that the surgery is appropriate for each patient. They would also guarantee that "informed consent" to the surgery is given by each patient.

- Psychosurgery on children, prisoners and involuntarily confined mental patients should be performed only after informed consent is given by the patient or—if in-

competent or underage—the patient's legal guardian or parents. A court must also review all such cases.

- HEW should maintain a national information center of psychosurgery for the purpose of assessing the safety and value of the procedure.

- Institutions not complying with HEW guidelines should be denied federal funding.

►An experiment, not a therapy.

While some 50,000 psychosurgeries were performed in the U.S. during the 1940s and '50s, the number has dwindled to about 500 a year today, largely due to the public outcry raised against the practice.

Critics of psychosurgery say the major impact of the commission report is that it legitimizes the procedure as an approved therapy, as opposed to an experimental technique.

The recommendations and stamp of approval were based on a review of the relatively scant professional literature and a study of 61 patients who had received psychosurgery over the past 10 years.

More than half of the 61 patients were said to have "improved significantly" from various mental disorders, though some were worse and others were unchanged. At least 34 of the patients, however, were studied within four to 18 months after their surgery, so that long-term results were not available for more than half the subjects examined.

Dr. John Sealy, a professor of psychiatry at the Charles R. Drew medical school in Los Angeles, says that such a study is an unscientific basis for approving the use of psychosurgery. "We don't know that much about the brain to make that kind of entry [surgery] safe, and we

don't know that much about any particular person," says Sealy.

"It's morally abhorrent," he adds, "to take that kind of risk without having done the underlying scientific work on animals first, and that's a good decade or more away."

Dr. Lee Coleman, a Berkeley psychiatrist and outspoken critic of psychosurgery, says the commission guidelines "label the practice as essentially a therapeutic procedure and declare that review boards would be sufficient to prevent abuse of individuals."

"There is absolutely no reasons," he says, "to believe that it is therapeutic. It is experimental and in fact it's one of the sloppiest forms of experimentation going on at this time."

►Done on the powerless.

Commission chairman Dr. Kenneth Ryan of Boston Hospital for Women defends the guidelines. "We have two kinds of protection—to protect people from inappropriate use and to protect people from not having access to a medical remedy which may be important to them.... You can't stop the procedure in general without interfering with the rights of some and you can't allow the procedure to go on unregulated."

Dr. Sealy, on the other hand, says that in addition to the experimental nature of psychosurgery, the practice is "politically reprehensible" because "in most cases the victims will be already powerless people."

He and others in the psychiatric community point to proposals in the early '70s to study the neurological causes of violence among ghetto rioters and criminals. Psychosurgeons in Boston, Los Angeles and elsewhere have also proposed setting up institutions to develop behavior modification therapies, including psychosurgery, for the treatment of violence-prone offenders.

Dr. Coleman also points out that any new wave of psychosurgery "is inevitably going to be done on the most powerless people, such as institutionalized mental patients or prisoners, and children and women."

While the guidelines would require the informed consent of the patient (or a guardian or parent) in such cases, critics object that guardians or parents don't always act in the patient's best interest. Dr. Ernest Bates, a San Francisco neurosurgeon who testified before the commission, points out that parents "are frequently acting in their own best interests. They may have a child who's upsetting them or disturbing them and they go to a doctor who says, 'We can make your child more manageable at home.'"

"Now that may not be the best thing for the child and I'm sure it's not the best thing when it goes on to result in psychosurgery," says Bates.

►Majority now middle-aged women.

Dr. Peter Breggin, a Washington, D.C., psychiatrist who has led the fight against psychosurgery, says that while the treatment is apparently not being used much on children any more, "the most oppressive and frequent treatments are given to middle-aged women" because of the special problems faced by American women in their 40s and 50s.

Breggin claims women, suffering anxiety and depression at the loss of family, youth and career opportunities, constitute the majority of psychosurgery patients in America.

He says that while the operation may sometimes relieve the symptoms of anxiety or depression, they also leave the patient with permanent brain damage and loss of intellect, memory and motivation.

"There are only two things you can do with a human brain," he adds. "You can either leave it alone or you can harm it."

Breggin, who campaigned hard for the creation of the commission in 1974, calls the guidelines "a giant step backwards" and a "white-wash of psychosurgery in response to the criticism that has been made of psychiatry."

Critics predict the controversy will now move into the courts via increased malpractice suits against psychosurgeons, and into the Congress, where Rep. Louis Stokes (D-Ohio) will introduce a measure in April seeking to ban psychosurgery at all federally funded institutions.

Lani Silver teaches women's studies at San Francisco State University, is co-director of an educational program called Women's Speakers Network. Elyse Eisenberg is a freelance reporter. They are currently working on a year-long investigation of mental health issues.

Many forms of psychosurgery in use today

The approximately 200 active psychosurgeons working in America today—those doing brain surgery to alter behavior as opposed to removing painful tumors, for instance—claim that the techniques have become highly refined since the early days of lobotomies. Procedures now go by such names as cingulotomy, orbital undercutting, multi-target limbic lesions and pre-frontal ultrasonic lesions, among others.

Whatever the name, the results are much the same: all the procedures cut or otherwise destroy selective brain fibers that are believed to be connected to centers of anxiety, depression, hostility or other mental disorders.

The earliest method involved drilling a hole in the skull usually just over the eyebrow, and inserting a sharp instrument into the brain to cut the tissue.

Another method that has gained favor is known as ultra sound surgery, developed by Dr. Peter Lindstrom of San Francisco. This process does not involve cutting, but relies on high-pitched sound waves to destroy selective brain tissue. California law governing psychosurgery does not apply to ultra sound surgery.

Other techniques developed by Dr. Frank Ervin and others in Boston, often called the "capital of psychosurgery," involve implanting dozens of tiny electrodes in brain tissue after exposing and drilling through the skull. Electricity can then be used to burn the target tissue. Lasers have been used in the same way.

The basic theory underlying psychosurgery is descended from the early work of Egas Moniz, a Spanish surgeon who won the Nobel Prize 28 years ago for his discovery of the therapeutic value of prefrontal leucotomy in certain psychoses. He hypothesized that certain abnormal connections between brain cells stabilize in psychotic people, but remain unstable and thus unimportant in mentally healthy people.

But Dr. Elliot Valenstein, professor of psychology at the University of Michigan who reviewed the medical literature on psychosurgery for the national commission, says no one really knows what happens in lobotomies.

"Authors [of medical literature] are quite explicit about not knowing 'how' or 'why' psychosurgery works and they openly state that physiological explanations at this time are pure conjecture, based on indirect, heterogeneous and often tortured sets of arguments," he says.