

no pipe dream

RESETTLING AMERICA.
Edited by Gary Coates.
Brickhouse Publishing Co. (Andover, Mass). 570 pages. \$14.95.

By IFAN PAYNE

It is conventional not to review the work of colleagues, but every now and then a work is produced of such quality that convention becomes stupidity. Such is the case with *Resettling America*.

Gary Coates is an associate professor in the department of architecture at Kansas State University. He has devoted considerable effort to spreading the gospel of energy conservation and appropriate technology, not only nationally, but also locally through his affiliation with the University for Man. At UFM, he is the guiding light behind the Appropriate Technology Program and was involved with the development of the project for the passive solar addition to their building.

We live in a world surrounded by electronic lies. The nightly news brings reports of the collapse of the copper, nickel and steel industries and of

national economies, reports that are sandwiched between commercials extolling the industrial way of life.

Clearly something is wrong.

Resettling America is a book that sets out to explain what is wrong—not only with the American way of life, but also with the industrialized world as a whole—and to propose solutions to those problems.

The bulk of the book contains a series of articles which describe a number of efforts to develop alternative environments and lifestyles to the all pervasive one that surrounds us and that seems currently bent on self-destruction. But these descriptive articles are framed by an introductory and final section that are dominated by the writings of Coates himself. It is these latter that bear the brunt of outlining the issues and creating a theoretical framework for the rest of the book.

In a tone that is all the more impressive for being calm and unhysterical, Coates outlines the, by now, well-rehearsed facts concerning the depletion of nonrenewable energy stocks, the cause and effects of environmental pollution, and the

meteoric rise and apparent breakdown of industrialized society.

He then lays out the alternative forms of our future social development as he sees them. We can return to a preindustrial state, a decimated mined-out landscape of deserted cities; we can develop into a hyperindustrial society as envisioned by H.G Wells and Robert Heilbroner; we can evolve into a superindustrial society as predicted by Herman Kahn and B.F.Skinner; or, finally, we can chose the path to a metaindustrial society.

It is this latter, the metaindustrial society, that according to Coates holds our only viable hope. In promulgating this view he is keeping good company. E.F.Schumacher, Amory Lovins, Lewis Mumford and Ivan Illich have all stated that the decentralization of social, political and economic life and the use of local, renewable energy sources is the only scenario that holds any hope for the continuation of our race as we know it.

“Fortunately”, writes Coates, “since the metaindustrial alternative is much closer to the original

American ideal of a Jeffersonian democracy in a garden landscape, the fundamental shift in world view will not be perceived as a loss of what is, but rather as a recovery of what could have been.”

What could have been, exists in greater number and in a healthier state than many of us may realize, and it exists right here in the U.S.A. The descriptions of the settlements, descriptions that constitute the core of the book, bear ample witness that Coates’ thesis is not just a pipe dream.

The future works, and the future is with us, runs one of the themes of this book, but that future is in a form somewhat removed from that portrayed in *Better Homes and Gardens* and by the political and economic establishment of this country.

From Zen communities to Shaker settlements to rural new towns and self-help housing, the revolution is already with us but since there is no product to sell, no advertising accounts to bankroll, this news rarely makes it among the jostling crowd of electric potato peelers, lite beer that

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that has more calories than ordinary beer, and the other ephemera of life that have been elevated into central concerns for the American way of life.

Resettling America is an important book that not only challenges many of our concepts of business-as-usual but also offers solutions that do indeed hold out hope for a truly brighter

future, and Coates is a persuasive guide through the search for that future. We ignore his call at our own risk.

"We must learn to live within the same energy flows that sustain all other life on this planet", he writes, for the choice is quite simply between "utopia and oblivion".

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