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## The Fifth Horseman is Riding, by Larry Van Goethem

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## BOOK REVIEWS

### *The Fifth Horseman Is Riding*

By  
LARRY VAN GOETHEM  
MacMillan, 1974  
150 pp. \$4.95

This is a collection of writings which originally appeared in the New York Times. Larry Van Goethem is obviously speaking for the pure rivers and lakes, the wilderness areas, clear blue sky, abundant wildlife, and all other facets of the good life of rural America, part of the "American dream."

Few people could quarrel with the author's goal, one which is more and more frequently being heard, of preserving the natural condition of the land; turning back pollution, the Fifth Horseman of the Apocalypse. His essays depict the invaluable, yet subtle, pleasures which may be irreparably damaged: the glacial lakes of Wisconsin, the migration of wild geese, the simple pleasure of fishing and the pure, wild rivers. He views America's rivers, a dying species, as the true indicators of the state of the nation's health. The cleansing of these rivers and their respective watersheds is a vital step in the restoration of the land.

According to Mr. Goethem, the American public has lost its relationship with the land through exploitation and despoliation, instead of living in harmony with it. In the opinion of the author, selfish, money-hungry real estate agents are largely responsible for this dilemma.

His basic solution to all of these ills is to move away from the decaying cities back to rural and small town America, revitalize interior America. Supposedly, by limiting cities to the 50,000-100,000 size, perhaps larger if managed correctly, the problems of crime, pollution, etc., which are so prevalent today will be greatly alleviated. Mr. Goethem insists that this is what the people actually want, but they are trapped by the "System," the anonymous bureaucratic monster. This time the scapegoats are lawyers, those "intellectual whores" who created, maintain, and perpetuate the System. Lawyers, like real estate people, are probably guilty of many, if not all, of the crimes attributed to them by Mr. Goethem, but I hardly think it equitable to segregate them from the rest of the population as the only evil ones. The blame for the problems of this country cannot be placed on the shoulders of the members of a few profes-

sional groups, it is shared by all. But the author keeps referring to the "people" (reminiscent of the "silent majority"), as if there exists a basic core of good, innocent American people. "The time is here to cut the System down to size, to opt for greater simplicity and more voice in the System by the people who really count—us." But who exactly is "us"?

Basically, the author's ideals and goals are commendable, but the methods by which these goals are to be accomplished seem so simplistic as to detract from the point he is attempting to make.

The format and writing style appear very similar to Aldo Leopold's *The Sand County Almanac*, which first appeared in 1949. This also tends to detract from the book. Mr. Goethem writes in a romantic, nostalgic manner, heavily interlaced with metaphors and similes, as if trying to convey some type of uncontaminated, down-to-earth Americanism. This type of approach is appealing, but at this stage of the problem will do little to preserve the natural environment of this nation.

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