

AN OVERVIEW OF THE DECLINE AND FALL OF THE AMERICAN NATION

The collapse of the American nation took place at the end of the Late Ultimate (2037-2041). For some eighty years following that event, what came to be known worldwide as “the Larsen Papers” lay undiscovered under the rubble of New York City, or, more exactly, under the rubble of Non-Presidential Hall of The Actaeon College of Institutional Analysis and Social Control, The University of New York (New York, New York, United States of America). It was this institution, after all, in which Eric Larsen still continued to struggle as a doomed member of the faculty as late as the Middle and even the Late Ante-Penultimate Periods of the Collapse—as late, that is, as the years approximately 1996 through 2006.

Volume Sixteen of the 22nd Century’s magisterial and most indispensable work of historical scholarship, *The Decline and Fall of the American Nation*, as every reader knows, consists entirely of these Larsen papers. Evidence within the unique and famous documents themselves, along with certain extremely rare corroborative discoveries that have arisen from archaeological work in the general area of Studies in Lost Americana, indicates that Larsen, during this specified period, was engaged in a highly ambitious project, to which he had given the general working title of “My Life in Education and the Arts Before and During the Gathering of the Great Calamity As I Have Experienced and Now Believe I Understand It.” The project, specialists in this area of The Collapse generally agree, consisted mainly of new work written for the occasion of the doomed project itself, but also of certain earlier pieces refurbished for inclusion in it. Whether or not the author seriously hoped for successful publication of so radical a work, and, if he did have that hope, exactly how he imagined he could safely bring about its realization, are questions whose answers remain unknown.

Here, after all, is the famous “Diary” itself, which brings us its unique and extraordinary revelations about the inner workings and true nature of Actaeon College, describes the pathos and misdirection of its profoundly paralyzed and corrupted faculty, and portrays also the pernicious, unregenerate, morally violated figure at its helm, President Morton R. Penguin-Duck himself. The “Diary” takes us inside Actaeon’s onerous classrooms, shows us the day when Sasha Brearly brought Larsen’s academic career to an end, and takes us through the very moment of President Penguin-Duck’s crushing betrayal, when he casually determines that a single and cancerously destructive lie should be made a part of the professor’s permanent record instead of the simple truth that would have vindicated him and made possible not the destruction that followed, but further years of a liberating and productive intellectual life.

Along with this story of depravity and ruin in America's institutions of higher learning in the decades preceding the Collapse, Larsen delves also into the past, searching there for the seeds of destruction that were to mature during his own lifetime and that, not long after, were to bring forth for the nation itself a harvest of ruin.

If it weren't for the lucky survival of the Larsen Papers, the world would have been deprived of this often searingly moving look into the deep and troubled corners of the most private life of one of America's greatest, and most prescient, intellectual figures. And the world would have been deprived, too, of the other huge and unique gift offered us by the papers: nothing less than the equivalent of a walking tour through the extraordinary banalities of life inside (and around) America's degenerate Late Ante-Penultimate or Early Penultimate academic institutions of "higher" learning. In Ting's expressive phrasing, Larsen's insertions into the papers of objects and items of daily life create innumerable windows through which we can look directly into a scene that has become, in almost equal degrees, villainous, pathetic, and risible.

The Editors