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A PRESS RELEASE

ABOUT ERIC LARSEN'S REVIEW

OF

THINE ALABASTER
CITIES GLEAM

*“A Slightly Fictionalized Memoir of a
Career in the Last Half of
The Twentieth Century”*

BY

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You Should Review This Book!!

Eric Larsen is a novelist. He won the *Chicago Tribune's* first Heartland Prize for best novel of the year about the Midwest. Most recently he has written *A Nation Gone Blind*. He grew up in the Midwest (in Minnesota), got his M.A. and Ph.D. at the Midwest's famed University of Iowa Writers Workshop, and was a Professor of English at John Jay College in New York City for 35 years.

In an email, written prior to his book review about a four-volume work by another native Midwesterner who absorbed the region's views as a youngster, Larsen called the work "a generally wonderful and marvelous book." He also allowed himself to

exaggerate because of enthusiasm: he said the author's "recall of detail is worthy of Proust" and "his richness of narrative is worthy of Cervantes." But, he said, "Exaggeration aside, I found the book a real treasure."

The book he was speaking of is *Thine Alabaster Cities Gleam*, a four-volume, slightly fictionalized memoir by a law school dean, Lawrence R. Velvel. In an email subsequent to his review, Larsen said the "whole book really is a major contribution to a very American literature, right down even to its wonderful way of straining against genre and the limits of genre." Larsen added his "wish [that] all four volumes were in the hands of every reader in the nation, and, even more important, of every editor, both the news AND literary types." (Emphasis in original.)

Then, in an Amazon blog, Professor Larsen stated what he called "an imperative: Get hold of and read this book," which has "many, many, many . . . great stories about law, the practice of law, and the sheer deceitfulness and dishonesty not only of the institution of law as it has come to be a great foundation stone of Establishment America, but great stories—and true ones—about how DISHONESTY has become the very weft and woof of the whole of ESTABLISHMENT America." (Emphases in original.)

In his review itself (which is appended), Larsen once again was not shy about praising *Alabaster Cities*. "Some books still matter—even greatly," the review begins, "although generally they're not the ones you'll have heard about." For the ones you will have heard about are generally only those that are the product "of the culture of fraud and prefab lies, of the 'official' and 'acceptable' culture" which permeates "the entirety of mainstream publishing." Larsen's own, quite differing measure of "what makes a book a good one" "is short and simple: It's the truth-measure."

Truth is what he finds in *Thine Alabaster Cities Gleam*. Velvel's "subject through all four volumes of this memoir is the simple and consistent truth that honesty in America is a *big* disadvantage, in fact, a *crippling* disadvantage, to a person's profession, career, success, stature, income and life achievement." (Emphases in original.)

Velvel, continues Larsen, says Lincoln's life and views best illustrate the American Dream that "you can rise as high as talent plus hard work can carry you, "and that you must help your fellow man. But "in the last half of the 20th century," quotes Larsen, Velvel believes that Lincoln's version of the American Dream has become "largely fictive, largely fantasy. What Lincoln so aptly called the 'race of life' did not necessarily go—perhaps did not go at all—to the talented and hard working; still less did it go to the talented and hard working who acted to help others as well as themselves, or who thought that in the long run right can make right. It went instead . . . to the purely greedy and to those who were always and only looking out for number one, to the incompetent, the venal and the evil who would play the game the company way . . . , to the thoroughly dishonest and the fraudulent, to the immodest, the celebrated and the self celebrated, to those who, in government or business, did not stickle at doing evil."

That is “the entire story in outline,” says Larsen—“the decline of the American nation from Lincoln to Cheney, with the steepest slide from social morality into fraud and depravity taking place from 1950 onward. . . . I’d say it’s pressing, vitally important, *essential* that this story be told.” Yet “it is nonetheless one of the stories *most* thoroughly and rigorously suppressed by the media and by publishing—by the Cheney-powers and the corpo-gov powers, powers that are . . . [controlled by] the ‘purely greedy,’ those . . . always and only looking out for number one,’ ‘the incompetent, the venal and the evil.’ No wonder they don’t want the story told.”(Emphases in original.) But Velvel “goes ahead and tells” the story “lock, stock and barrel,” says Larsen—he “records and laments the moral-intellectual decline of an entire nation.”

Larsen goes on to say that the reason the book’s major protagonist ran into difficulties in law firms in Washington, D.C. was that “The firms and their management knew unequivocally that [the protagonist] not only was hardworking, capable and insightful, but they *also knew that he was honest* The firm . . . couldn’t *possibly* trust him later on to do what they expected of all their associates and partners, to bend rules, cut corners, make secret deals or, in short, to do the wrong thing in the interest of the firm. In short [he] was *honest*. . . . Raised in Chicago by socialist-leaning Jewish parents who themselves valued honesty and truth as the highest values, [he] . . . was the carrier of his family’s intellectual and moral legacy.” (Emphases in original.)

Larsen ends his review by saying that anyone who has lived through the disasters of the last eight years “will immediately understand, first, the extraordinary importance of *Thine Alabaster Cities Gleam*, and, second, will understand how and why it may be that so prescient, revelatory, and impassioned a book has been held by and large under the radar of a general reading public. It’s too meaningful. It’s too relevant. It’s too dangerous”

Larsen agrees with Velvel’s quoted view that “‘dishonesty, in all its degrees and in its various forms, has reached such a level that to call ourselves a civilized society is perhaps to have changed the meaning of civilized in a significant way and to a significant extent.’” But Larsen “‘thrill[s] at the *knowing*. . . that there are *some* . . . who see the nation as it is, who value it as it ought to be, and whose lives remain dedicated in whatever ways possible, to opposing the omnipresent moral ruin and decay and to replacing it with uncontaminated soil that can nourish new and salutary growth.” (Emphases in original.)

In the first two volumes of *Alabaster Cities*, the plots which carry forward the views to which Larsen resonated so strongly deal with the protagonists’ college and law school days at Michigan and Harvard, with federal court battles against undeclared wars in the Viet Nam era, and with the practice of law in Washington in the 60’s, 70’s and 80’s. The plots of the last two volumes are concerned with a brutal battle against the political and legal establishments to create a law school for the working class, minorities and other people who get the short end of the stick in American life and generally are not allowed entry into the professions. Larsen says of the plot lines that “It’s no stretch to say that *Alabaster Cities* is an American non-fiction novel, that it gathers together great

American themes—of money, class, privilege, immigration, education—and that it carries them to an irresistibly dramatic, and dramatically *American*, end. (Emphases in original.)

Thine Alabaster Cities Gleam, as Larsen says, has been kept under the radar by the government and the establishment. They don't want the public to hear about it or to consider what it has to say. They don't want its deep criticism of what happened in the last 50 years, of how it happened and why, to become a major part of the public discourse. For *Alabaster Cities* details the bad habits of mind and culture which have come to prevail in all areas of American life since 1960—the habits of mind and culture of those in power in every walk of life. And it details these matters, as Larsen says, in the context of true stories in an “American non-fiction novel” filled with “difficulties, dead-ends, double-crossings, back-stabbings, financial reverses—until [the main protagonist] at last becomes a co-founder” of a law school for the non-affluent in New England. Larsen wishes the book, with its philosophies and stories, were in the hands of every reader and editor. A book like *Alabaster Cities Gleam* should be written about by reviewers so that the public will know of it, instead of it being ignored and thereby suppressed *de facto* by reviewers. We hope that you will either review it yourself or commission a review of it. You can obtain a copy of the book [from Amazon](#) or by sending an email to Jeff Demers at demers@msslaw.edu. Or contact Sherwood Ross, Media Consultant to Massachusetts School of Law at Andover at sherwoodr1@yahoo.com

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Click here for Eric Larsen's [review](#) of Lawrence Velvel's [*Thine Alabaster Cities Gleam, A Slightly Fictionalized Memoir of a Career in the Last Half of The Twentieth Century*](#)