

Jay Robert Nash. *Darkest Hours: A Narrative Encyclopedia of Worldwide Disasters from Ancient Times to the Present*. Chicago: Nelson-Hall, 1976, 812 pp., \$ 39.95.

There is one very good thing about this

publication. The price of the volume is such as to bar the ordinary individual from purchasing a copy. This is fortunate for the book is a disaster on a large scale. The intent is unclear and the execution is very confused. The book purports to be an encyclopedia of human catastrophes, mostly natural but also many technological disasters. About 900 such events are written up with length of accounts running from a paragraph or two to several pages. There are no obvious criteria why these events were singled out for attention. Many of the lengthier accounts include eye-witness and journalistic stories which continue to perpetuate the myths about human and social behavior under stress (e.g. irrationality, mental breakdown, looting, etc.). There are also a number of sheer factual errors stated about specific disasters, ranging from the false belief that martial law was instituted in the 1906 San Francisco earthquake

to the mistaken notion that the 1963 Vaiont dam disaster in Italy was the result of heavy rains inundating the Piave River valley. The bibliography containing some 2,000 items is indiscriminating, mixing the most popular of accounts with scientific analyses, although the latter do not appear to have been used at all in the writing up of specific events. The over 400 illustrations are sometimes fascinating and informative but even many of these have not been reproduced well. Social and behavioral scientists, disaster planners or operational personnel in emergency organizations will find almost nothing of value in this compendium; even libraries can well afford not to get a copy for their reference rooms.

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