They Couldn't Take it With Them

THE LAND LORDS by Eugene Rachlis and John E. Marqusee. Random House, 302 pages, $5.95.

Reviewed by MURIEL FULLER

THIS book goes literally from A to Z with the story of America's landlords—John Jacob Astor to William Zeckendorf. Astor had two convictions about "the pastures of Manhattan," both of which proved to be right. New York was going to grow, and the only way it could grow was north. He bought what is now Times Square for $25,000, plus another $9,000 later. Profitable pastures!

In a lively and colorful style the authors tell of the early land merchants who followed Astor. An English musician touring this country in 1796 remarked, "Were I to characterize the United States it would be by the appellation of the land of speculations." This was not confined to Manhattan. The Van Sweringen brothers, Oris P. and Mantis J., established Shaker Heights in Cleveland, the "most spectacular" of early American suburbs. The Shakers left in 1888, and where three real estate agencies failed to sell it, "the Vans" did.

Henry Morrison Flagler, a Yankee, continued in Florida where Ponce de Léon left off, and died worth a hundred million dollars. The one man in this book who worked for something other than personal gain is Abraham Kazan; he went after New York's slums. "In 1886 New York's slum landlords were slightly intimidated, but only temporarily. Henry George, the advocate of the single tax and the author of *Progress and Poverty,* became a candidate for mayor. His denunciation of landlords attracted huge crowds, and worried the politicians." Because of George's fight, years later Kazan succeeded with his Amalgamated Housing. Fred French, Harry Black, who built the Flatiron Building, the Levitts and Zeckendorf are all here. A valuable and highly entertaining book.

"The Bigger the Lie..." Cont.

zine (April 19), and the same issue had an item about the oil rich Murchisons of Texas, who are getting into the real estate business. Here is a sample—"an acre in New Orleans for which they paid $300 now sells for $21,600."

While the wages of labor, some labor, so essential to the production of wealth, have gone up since the bad days of the Great Depression, perhaps five times, and in the case of very well organized labor, even more; the rent of land, equally essential, has increased, in this instance, and in many others, seventy-two times.

If the world is really getting smaller, why do they keep raising postal rates?

What we call real estate—the solid ground to build a house on—is the broad foundation on which nearly all the guilt of this world rests.

Hawthorne—*The House of the Seven Gables*