Infrastructure
The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers and Monumental Design

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Thinking big . . .
The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers

The Corps thinks big. Really big.
Big
Bonneville Dam, the Manhattan Project, Boston Harbor, the St. Lawrence Seaway
Much praised. Much maligned

“Getting a man off heroine was easy compared with getting Congress off the kind of pork that the Corps administers.”
Supreme Court Justice William O. Douglas

“The Engineer has become our king. Where a river silts up—dredge it. When it runs crooked—straighten it. Where it runs straight—deepen it. Where it runs at all—stop it. And where it doesn’t run—build a canal.”
George Laycock, The Diligent Destroyer, 1970
Army engineers think big in ways that challenge and sometimes defy civil engineering tradition.
18th Century Britain and France
French star-shaped bastion forts
British civil engineering tradition

Geddes & Robert’s Erie Canal 1825
West Point: the French scientific tradition
Chesapeake and Ohio Canal
Fort Monroe
Two bridges
Corps missions: navigation, flood control, environment
River & harbors mission

Corps Snag Boat, 1870s
Corps answers to Congress
Ohio River aquatic staircase
Flood control mission
Flood Control Act of 1917
Great Flood of 1927
MR&T
Mississippi River & Tributary Project

Bonnie Carre Spillway
Environmental Mission
• 1899 Refuse Act
• 1970 NEPA
• 1972 Clean Water Act
Salmon Recovery
Should the Corps breech its dams?
Losing Louisiana
Chaos Theory v. Ecosystem Theory

Nature is dynamic; engineering is static.
Conclusions

Corps at odds: it thinks big in ways that challenge civil engineering tradition.

Corps de facto planning agency for a nation without a central planning authority.

Corps serves Congress, hence decentralized, defiant.

Corps remains military; it copes.