

Book Reviews

ments diminished, and the populists, socialists, and neopopulists were crushed and forgotten.

Closing the Frontier depicts the ruthlessness of those who developed the last of the Great Frontiers. It indicates that radicalism had considerable appeal for an exploited agrarian class and that Oklahoma socialists were more committed than previous studies have demonstrated. Thompson utilizes oral interviews, radical newspapers, and letters to the editors of farm journals, as well as the basic historical monographs. The comparative analysis of major works on Oklahoma history is also valuable. While the overall prose and organization are occasionally disjointed, the book is a significant contribution in understanding the evolution and impact of radical movements in a frontier state where the concentration of socialists as well as the percentage of tenant farmers was greater than in any other state.

BUENA VISTA COLLEGE

WILLIAM H. CUMBERLAND

Democratic Vistas: Post Offices and Public Art in the New Deal, by Marlene Park and Gerald E. Markowitz. Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1984. xx, 247 pp. Illustrations, notes, bibliography, appendix, index. \$37.95 cloth.

When most people think of public murals they think of those done by amateurs on the sides of buildings, a momentary bright spot in a decaying neighborhood. This wasn't the case fifty years ago when murals were considered a significant and instructional form of art. For instance, plans for the 1939-40 New York World's Fair did not include a building devoted to contemporary art. When the fair's president, Grover Whalen, responded to the uproar from artists, critics, and the general public, he did so by explaining that it was the fair's desire to surround visitors with art, in the form of murals, rather than to store it away in a building. The greatest period of public murals and the greatest patron of them was the U.S. government during the depression, particularly the longest-running New Deal agency sponsoring art, the Treasury Department's Section of Painting and Sculpture (later called the Section of Fine Arts), which is the focus of *Democratic Vistas*.

As with many New Deal programs, the purpose was not simply to put people to work (though this aspect was not to be overlooked: more than ten thousand artists were employed between 1933 and 1943), but also to bring art to people who, for the most part, had no other first-hand experience of it. The goal in placing art in federal buildings, and more specifically in local post offices, was to reach as many people as possible. Moreover, it was intended that the subject matter reflect the

locality. A selected list of Iowa commissions indicates how successfully this was carried out: Audubon, "Audubon's Trip Down the Ohio and Mississippi—1820"; Corydon, "Volunteer Fire Department"; Cresco, "Iowa Farming"; Dubuque, "Early Mississippi Steamboat"; Hamburg, "Peony Festival at Hamburg"; Monticello, "Iowa Landscape"; Pella, "Hollanders Settle in Pella."

Nevertheless, though quality was maintained by offering commissions on the basis of anonymous competitions, and this process allowed unknown artists to compete equally against famous ones, there was no guarantee that the subject of the mural would find favor in the community where it was to be installed. Park and Markowitz show the problems artists sometimes had to deal with, not only in the form of hostile townspeople, but also when a building was not designed with the muralist in mind.

The authors state their purpose in the book's introduction: "to study the tensions between three polarities: the desire for quality in art and the commitment to make art democratic; the effort to create an art embodying national ideals and the wish to make art relevant to people in various regions of the United States; traditional artistic values and the contemporary styles" (9). They do this and more. *Democratic Vistas* is well illustrated and provides the reader with a sense of the diversity of the work sponsored by the New Deal. Of special interest to many readers will be the appendix, which lists, in alphabetical order by state, and then by city, the location of murals and sculptures commissioned by the Section.

INDIAN HILLS COMMUNITY COLLEGE

MICHAEL MULLEN

American Singularity: The 1787 Northwest Ordinance, the 1862 Homestead and Morrill Acts and the 1944 G.I. Bill, by Harold M. Hyman. Richard B. Russell Lectures 5. Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1986. x, 95 pp. Notes, index. \$15.00 cloth.

In this small volume Professor Harold Hyman of Rice University sets forth his views that American singularity has long existed and still does, and that a look at three of its earlier incarnations and their implications validates that point. Starting with the assumption that the values and aspirations of the revolutionary era embraced a uniquely American commitment to economic opportunity, social mobility, and political freedom, Hyman tests the sincerity of those values by seeing how much individual access to land, to education, and to legal remedies have been available in real life to the average American. He makes his case by examining the Northwest Ordinance, the Homestead and

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