damning view of midwestern Regionalism as simple-mindedly nationalistic and even fascistic. Despite the writing and rhetoric of Benton especially, Dennis finds the artists clear-eyed and critical of American life in their works of art, largely unswayed by any "America First" mentality. As for fascism, he describes the history of these interpretations, suggesting again that the midwesterners were shallowly understood. The most influential assertion of fascism and similarity to German painting of the 1930s came from the writings of H. W. Janson (the author of a major text for surveys of the history of art). Dennis demonstrates how that criticism arose largely from Janson's personal animosity toward Grant Wood, which developed when both were teaching at the University of Iowa in the early 1940s. The author also finds evidence of the Regionalists' modernism in their treatment of female imagery, and he details that role in the work of each of the midwestern painters.

Finally, Dennis identifies three other artists, whose works are generally regarded as good examples of American adaptation of European modernism, as actually being more thoroughly "Regionalist" than the midwesterners. Charles Demuth, Charles Sheeler, and Marsden Hartley, all of whom were associated with Alfred Stieglitz and the American avant-garde, were, Dennis suggests, much more involved with the specifics of their various regional subject matter. Despite the abstraction of their styles, he finds them much more consistent in their devotion to depicting the flavor of certain locales and less critical of American scenes and practices.

The view of Wood, Benton, and Curry as full and innovative participants in modernism will remain unacceptable to some readers, but Dennis's research, interpretations, and arguments are worthwhile and convincing in their claim that Regionalism's relationship to modernism is challenging, complex, and not as one-sided as many have thought.

Harvesting the High Plains: John Kriss and the Business of Wheat Farming, 1920–1950, by Craig Miner. Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1998. xi, 225 pp. Illustration, notes, bibliography, index. $29.95 cloth.

REVIEWED BY GILBERT C. FITE, UNIVERSITY OF GEORGIA, EMERITUS

For many years, controversy has raged over the best use of the Great Plains. Some environmentalists have argued that the region should never have been plowed up, and sharp criticism has been directed toward absentee landlords, or suitcase farmers, who reputedly raped

the area and left the soil to blow away in destructive dust storms. Two scholars, Deborah and Frank Popper, wrote in 1987 that settlement over a good part of the Great Plains was the "largest, longest-running agricultural and environmental miscalculation in American history." They have suggested that much of the Great Plains should become a kind of Buffalo Commons that would preserve the region's natural resources. *Harvesting the High Plains* provides an excellent antidote to such arguments. In writing about John Kriss and wheat raising on the High Plains of northwestern Kansas and eastern Colorado, Craig Miner has shown how large farmers can be successful in the region and at the same time be good stewards of the land.

John Kriss's early life hardly predicted that he would become one of the nation's largest and most successful wheat growers. Born in Omaha in 1905, he experienced a hard existence after his father died in 1913. In 1920 his mother remarried, and the family moved to a farm near Colby, Kansas. Fifteen-year-old Kriss had just completed the eighth grade, which ended his formal education. Despite a lack of formal schooling, Kriss had characteristics that more than made up for educational deficiencies. He was intelligent, industrious, a hard worker, and thrifty. During the 1920s he held a variety of farm and town jobs and was able to acquire 160 acres of land.

In 1933 he became farm manager for Ray Garvey, a Wichita businessman who owned several thousand aces of farm land in and around Thomas County, of which Colby was the county seat. Most of the land was about on the 101st Meridian. The operation was known as the G-K Farms. Initially, Kriss was paid $60 per month in the summer and $20 in the winter, plus a share of the wheat crop.

Over the next decade Kriss developed and implemented business and production practices that made wheat growing on the High Plains a profitable enterprise. During the rest of the 1930s, he wrestled with depression prices, drought and dust storms, federal farm policies, and other problems. At the same time he managed Garvey's operations, he bought land for himself. As a manager, his main goal was operational efficiency, in the hope of showing a profit. He also believed in using good land practices. To increase efficiency, Kriss gradually got rid of the individual tenants who had been farming Garvey's land and employed work crews who worked under a foreman. Kriss practiced summer fallowing, used the latest machinery that left the land in a position to retain the most moisture and reduce wind erosion, experimented with the best varieties of wheat for that region, and gave careful attention to the business aspects of farming. He kept detailed records on rainfall, production, costs, and other matters. He

was successful in controlling costs, and was a master of detail in every aspect of his operations. To Kriss, farming was a business, not a way of life. In fact, he lived in Colby and managed farming operations on thousands of acres from his office. But he was also a hands-on manager who traveled to the farm locations regularly to see firsthand how operations were going.

By the 1940s good crops and better prices were making Kriss a rich man. In 1946 Kriss managed 100,000 acres for Garvey in Kansas and eastern Colorado, of which about 50,000 acres were in wheat. He harvested 600,000 bushels that year and 1.2 million in 1947 on Garvey and Kriss lands. On his own land he produced more than 300,000 bushels in 1947 that brought over $2 a bushel. Kriss, who had started out as a farm laborer some fifteen years earlier, was now a millionaire, and more. John Kriss and his sons continued to farm on a large scale during the rest of the century.

This is a first-rate book. It is well written and based on a wide array of records, including the correspondence between Garvey and Kriss. Miner also had several interviews with Kriss before his death in 1996. The combined personal and documentary sources make a solid base for a book that should correct some of the doomsday writing about the Great Plains. Craig Miner has established himself as a top authority on the region with his earlier volume, *West of Wichita*, and now *Harvesting the Great Plains.*

Harvest of Dissent: The National Farmers Union and the Early Cold War, by Bruce E. Field. Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1998. x, 244 pp. Illustrations, notes, bibliography, index. $35.00 cloth.

REVIEWED BY DUNCAN STEWART, STATE HISTORICAL SOCIETY OF IOWA

In 1946 the National Farmers Union (FU) was smaller than the Grange or the Farm Bureau, but as the self-proclaimed voice of America's small farmers it had an influential place in the Roosevelt coalition. After World War II, the FU urged President Truman to strengthen FDR's agricultural and social policies and to continue cooperation with the United Nations allies. FU president James Patton condemned Truman's cuts in agriculture programs and his collusion with big business to assert American power abroad. By 1948, after the collapse of Henry Wallace's independent presidential campaign and amid growing anticommunist paranoia, Patton began to rethink the FU's criticism of American policy.

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