

memory of flowers. Is it likely, I wonder, that her concrete experience was resisting the expressed object of the settlement venture? I wish the authors had responded more subtly to such possible ambiguities.

The value and the pleasure of this book is that it makes one glad to listen in on some women who have lived so long in the Salt River valley, which in itself, for Arizona, is rather an accomplishment.

These United States: Portraits of America from the 1920s, edited by Daniel H. Borus. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1992. xii, 410 pp. Illustrations, biographical sketches of the contributors. \$25.00 cloth.

REVIEWED BY JOSEPH F. WALL, GRINNELL COLLEGE

Early in 1922, when Warren G. Harding's "normalcy" and Sinclair Lewis's "Babbitry" were setting the tone most satisfying to Americans in that post-Wilsonian, post-World War I era, a discordant note was struck by the appearance of *Civilization in the United States*, edited by Harold Stearns. The book consisted of thirty-three essays that analyzed American culture and found it wanting. So acerbic was the book's evaluation of our culture that most Americans ignored it. Only for those disillusioned Americans labeling themselves the Lost Generation did it become a gospel of truth.

One intellectual, however, felt that Stearns's book must be answered in detail by a more sympathetic and careful analysis of the forty-eight states then making up the American Union. Ernest Gruening, managing editor of *The Nation*, immediately laid plans for a series of articles that would portray the United States not in its generalized totality, but in its wonderfully complex individuality. The series began on April 19, 1922, with an article on Kansas by William Allen White, for Gruening knew that the redoubtable editor of the *Emporia Gazette* was always ready, willing, and able to evaluate his native state. For the next twenty-eight months, the individual states, as scripted by their chosen authors, made their appearance in the pages of *The Nation*, following no rational order, neither alphabetical nor geographical. The last state essay, Ralph D. Paine's on New Hampshire, was published on August 20, 1924.

The authors were apparently given *carte blanche* as to what they would include—and exclude—in their six- to eight-page essays. Most of the writers did subscribe to the general editorial policies of the liberal, progressive *Nation*, but even that generalization is not applicable to all on this highly eclectic roster of writers.

How Gruening chose the forty men and eight women writers to depict These United States would itself make a fascinating if unfortunately untold story. Some of his choices were obvious: Willa Cather for Nebraska, H. L. Mencken for Maryland, Sherwood Anderson for Ohio, Sinclair Lewis for Minnesota, Theodore Dreiser for Indiana, Douglas Freeman for Virginia (incidentally, one of the most disappointing essays of the lot), Zona Gale for Wisconsin, and W. E. B. Du Bois for Georgia (although that choice must have raised hackles in the Peach state). Other choices were strangely inappropriate: Edmund Wilson for New Jersey, which he despised and from which he fled as soon as he was old enough to leave; and James Cain, the writer of tough, urban crime novels, for West Virginia, which he had only casually visited.

Each of these writers believed that his or her state had its own individual style and culture, as bad or as good as that might be. They were in agreement with White's opening line, "It is curious how State lines mark differences in Americans," no matter how arbitrary those boundaries might be. Only Hayden Carruth, writing on South Dakota, believed the state lines dividing the Great Plains served no purpose other than for administrative division. There was no cultural distinction between North and South Dakota in his opinion, and the Dakota Territory should never have been cut into two states.

Readers of the *Annals of Iowa* will be particularly interested in the essays on Iowa. Here Gruening made one of his inexplicable choices. One can think of several writers of note having roots in Iowa who might have presented this state to the nation: Hamlin Garland, Emerson Hough, Harvey Ingham, and Ruth Suckow come immediately to mind. Instead, Gruening picked an unknown, Johan Smertenko, who apparently spent only two years in Iowa as director of publicity for Grinnell College. Iowans, however, will be pleasantly surprised to find Smertenko's essay one of the best-written and most perceptive of the entire series. His appreciation of Iowa's pastoral beauty and the richness of its soil, his concern for its increasing farm tenancy and its decreasing population, and his pessimism regarding the future of what he calls "Mortgaged Eldorado" will induce in today's reader a strong sense of *déjà vu*.

Although these essays were reprinted in book form in 1923, they never had the impact that Gruening had expected. Rather than serving as a corrective to Stearns's book, the essays were quickly forgotten. We are much indebted to Daniel Borus for having resurrected these long-lost essays. Not only does his excellent introduction place them in their proper historical context, but the essays

themselves provide us with one of the best social histories as written by contemporaries of that decade that we have. Collectively they prove conclusively Gruening's thesis: there is no single civilization in this vast country. The plural "these," not the singular "this," is the proper adjective to use with "United States."

Radicalism in the States: The Minnesota Farmer-Labor Party and the American Political Economy, by Richard M. Valelly. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989. xvi, 258 pp. Tables, notes, bibliography, index. \$29.95 cloth.

REVIEWED BY WILLIAM C. PRATT, UNIVERSITY OF NEBRASKA AT OMAHA

In some respects, the Minnesota Farmer-Labor party is the great exception of twentieth-century political history. Richard M. Valelly claims in *Radicalism in the States* that it is "the most successful case of a radical, state-level third party that American politics has seen" (xiii). Here, to use his vocabulary, political entrepreneurs built a movement at the height of the World War I antiradical hysteria, met with their first success in the Harding era, and elected congressmen and governors in the 1930s.

Valelly, a political scientist at M.I.T., argues that prior to the New Deal era there were opportunities for capable third-party advocates in the upper Midwest and West. These openings were most likely to occur in one-party states, which were dominated by Republicans who were unwilling to make room for insurgents or respond to their issues. In addition to Minnesota, such efforts also were successful for a time in North Dakota with the Nonpartisan League (NPL) and in Wisconsin with the La Follette Progressive party. Later, however, after the New Deal took hold, there was less political space for left-wing third parties, and they withered on the vine. New Deal innovations strengthened the role of the federal government and, regardless of Roosevelt's intentions, weakened or disrupted the constituencies of the insurgents. Valelly argues that New Deal farm policy helped the Farm Bureau, an opponent of the Farmer-Laborites, while the pro-CIO National Labor Relations Board alienated AFL unionists. In 1936 the Minnesota Federation of Labor endorsed the Farmer-Labor ticket; two years later it only backed Elmer Benson, the incumbent Farmer-Labor governor. Valelly does not neglect the Benson administration's handling of the patronage issue, or the role of the Red Scare and antisemitism in the 1938 defeat, but he is more concerned with establishing that

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