

women; for the most part, it further entrenched them in the status quo" (94).

Noun has written a highly readable brief history of the WPA's role in helping Iowa women survive the Great Depression. The book includes more than 60 photographs that wonderfully complement the story Noun tells. Based primarily on the records of the Iowa WPA office, interviews with participants, articles from the *Des Moines Register* and the *Des Moines Tribune*, and selected secondary sources, Noun's account offers a detailed study of the agency's operation at the state level. She does not provide any new interpretation of the WPA's work. The book would have been enhanced if Noun had placed the story of the Iowa women in the WPA in a broader context, comparing the Iowa experience to other state programs in the Midwest or nationally. The use of a wider range of sources would have also been of value; for example, using newspapers of other major Iowa cities, such as Waterloo, would have provided more information on the WPA's impact on the lives of African American women. In addition, manuscript collections, such as the papers of Harry Hopkins and Ellen Woodward, as well as the records of the WPA in the National Archives in Washington, DC, would have provided Noun with a wealth of data to understand the complexities of establishing and maintaining the agency's policies and bureaucracy. For the general audience interested in Depression-era history, this work will be a very enjoyable book to read; for scholars, it will offer a stepping stone for a broader study of women in the WPA.

Noble Abstractions: American Liberal Intellectuals and World War II, by Frank A. Warren. Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1999. xxii, 330 pp. Notes, index. \$40.00 cloth.

REVIEWED BY BILL DOUGLAS, DES MOINES

In *Noble Abstractions* Frank Warren charts the dominant liberal intellectual responses to the challenges posed by World War II. He argues that American liberalism failed to distinguish between its *hopes* for a progressive future domestically and abroad to be brought about by a liberal president and by an "international civil war" between the forces of fascism and democracy, on the one hand, and the *reality* of a pragmatic politician in the White House and an alliance that included imperialists and that naturally put national interests above internationalist principles on the other. This failure distorted postwar possibilities by underestimating what was achievable in favor of trying to protect a wartime *status quo* consensus domestically, and would soon

divide the liberal community either into underestimating the national interests inherent in U.S. foreign policy or overvaluing the goals of the Soviet Union.

Iowa readers may want to turn first to the chapter on Henry A. Wallace as "apotheosis" for the liberals during the war. The chapter is more about Wallace as icon than Wallace the individual, although Warren is not favorably impressed with Wallace's political analysis or consistency. But it was Wallace's very vagueness that made him so attractive to liberals desperate for signs of life in a New Deal that had been largely shelved for the duration. Such wishful thinking also substituted for organizing when indications pointed, correctly, to Vice President Wallace's replacement on the ticket in 1944.

Annals readers will also appreciate the major Midwest angle of the book: a chapter on the later career of Tom Amlie, who gets sympathetic treatment. Amlie, a former Democratic congressman from Wisconsin, struggled to get U.S. liberals to commit to an ideological framework for supporting congressional candidates—and also struggled to find work in a political environment not receptive to even nudges toward the left. Both his political failure and his resumé problems are suggestive of the war's ending of the New Deal—and also evoke later liberal-left attempts to interject an ideological perspective into Democratic Party politics, although Warren does not draw the lines so far forward.

Ruralists will savor Warren's capturing of a comment about radical Socialists Travers Clement and Lillian Symes by Socialist bureaucrat Harry Fleischman, who attributed their dogmatism to "'living in the country,' where they had 'nothing to do but think.'" More generally, Iowa historians of the period may notice the national liberals' influence on Iowans. At the same time as I was reading *Noble Abstractions*, I happened to have occasion to track the editorials of Donald Norberg, small-town editor of the *Monroe County News*. Norberg, a pro-labor, New Deal Democrat, sounds some of the same themes—though he was particularly fond of *The Progressive*, a periodical that Warren does not include because its support of the war was more critical than its sister magazines on the East Coast. Assuming that Warren is basically correct in his depiction of wartime liberals, it would be useful to find out how Iowa liberals, Democrats, and labor were and were not influenced by the national liberal intellectuals Warren describes.

The precise focus of the book is both a strength and a weakness. In some ways the pro-intervention, pro-New Deal liberals clustered in New York periodicals—*The Nation*, *The New Republic*, and *PM*—are self-defining, but Warren deals carefully with the nuances of their dif-

ferences, which became fissures after the war. But sometimes readers may want more circumstantial information—the presence of a number of women in the intellectual circle seems an innovation worth comment. In addition, more connections between liberal intellectuals and labor could have been drawn out; the larger question of the links between intellectuals and grass-roots activists is largely unexplored. The notes are extensive and helpful, but the failure to include a bibliography is compounded by the fact that the otherwise excellent index does not include the secondary sources found in the notes: readers interested in whether Warren takes into account the viewpoint of a particular historian will be hampered by that absence.

Warren is forthright in declaring his own political attraction to the Socialist Party's "critical support" of the war—a position that allowed for more defense of civil liberties and less support of imperialist war aims than the liberals' position, given their illusions about Roosevelt and about the nature of the war. Warren's critique of World War II liberalism can help explain the subsequent weakness and malleability of that political tendency.

Paul Powell of Illinois: A Lifelong Democrat, by Robert E. Hartley. Carbondale and Edwardsville: Southern Illinois University Press, 1999. xviii, 229 pp. Illustrations, notes, bibliography, index. \$49.95 cloth, \$17.95 paper.

REVIEWED BY HOWARD W. ALLEN, SOUTHERN ILLINOIS UNIVERSITY AT CARBONDALE

Robert Hartley's biography of Paul Powell is a fascinating study of one of the most powerful leaders who ever served in the Illinois state legislature. Powell grew up in Vienna, Illinois, a very small town in southern Illinois. He was elected as a Democrat to the Illinois House of Representatives in 1934 and from 1949 until he was elected Illinois secretary of state in 1964 he served as minority leader or Speaker of the Illinois House. Powell worked well with Republicans as well as other Democrats, and he frequently exploited the differences between Chicago Democrats and downstate Republicans to the advantage of his southern Illinois constituents and himself. Twice, reporters in Springfield voted him the most effective legislator in Illinois.

Hartley makes clear that Powell's reputation as a self-serving downstate politician with "flexible ethical standards" (39) is well deserved. No major policy or cause can be identified with him, although he served during the tumultuous years of the Great Depression, World

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