

of the book. McJimsey convincingly shows that although FDR did not "conceive of all or even most" of the New Deal, it was, nonetheless, "uniquely Roosevelt's creation" because it was influenced by his "social values," he "recruited people who were able to conceive it," and he "provided the political muscle to enact it" (288). Even if one is not entirely convinced by the author's thesis, his book makes a strong case for judging FDR's administration in the context of the complex policy challenges of those years.

This book, based on an extensive body of secondary literature, with a few references to published primary sources, has some weaknesses. At times it is difficult to see how FDR's pluralist approach differed, in practice, from earlier, Progressive Era approaches. The chapters dealing with foreign policy, although solid, are less convincing in terms of the author's thesis. Some might find that the treatments of women and Native Americans, prominently played up on the dust jacket, are not fully integrated into the work.

Overall, however, this work is a valuable and engaging contribution to the literature on Roosevelt and his legacy. It offers students of the period an excellent reminder of the complexity of those years. Its conclusions, in general, are evenhanded and judicious. While many, no doubt, will quarrel with the argument that the Roosevelt administration can be characterized as having a unified pluralist approach to decision making, this book has made a contribution to the debate on Roosevelt's legacy and his impact on the presidency.

American Dreamer: The Life and Times of Henry A. Wallace, by John C. Culver and John Hyde. New York: W. W. Norton & Co., 2000. xi, 608 pp. Illustrations, notes, bibliography, index. \$35.00 cloth.

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No twentieth-century Iowan was more influential or more controversial than Henry Agard Wallace. On the eve of the Great Depression, Wallace was the nation's most respected farm editor and a brilliant corn breeder who was introducing hybrid seed corn to the Midwest. After leaving Iowa in 1933 to become U.S. secretary of agriculture in Franklin Roosevelt's New Deal, he presided over a vast expansion of the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) and became one of the New Deal's stars. In 1940 Roosevelt tapped Wallace as his vice-president. Wallace used his new post to appeal for the liberal agenda he made famous in his "The Century of the Common Man" address.

Four years later, in part because of his liberalism, he was dumped from the ticket for Harry Truman, but he stayed in Washington as secretary of commerce. As postwar relations with the Soviet Union soured, Wallace was steadfast in calling for continued U.S.-Soviet cooperation and pursuit of a cooperative internationalism. When he publicly criticized the anti-Soviet "get tough" policy of 1945 and 1946, his views forced a break with Truman and induced his ill-fated presidential bid with the Progressive Party in 1948. Thereafter, he largely disappeared from public life and died in 1965.

Wallace was one of the most brilliant, accomplished, and perplexing figures in the history of modern America. For much of the 1930s and 1940s, he was the idol of American liberals as he spoke for expanding and internationalizing the New Deal, ending racial inequality, and building an American economy capable of vastly expanded material benefits for all social classes. But to his conservative opponents—as well as to his many liberal critics—he was a naïve and dangerous man given to utopian visions and religious mysticism. Conservatives denounced him as a "Red" and poured forth ridicule. Liberals who distrusted the Soviet Union mocked what they saw as his foolhardy lack of reality concerning Russia.

For many years now, historians studying Wallace have had available his collection of personal letters (indexed and microfilmed by the University of Iowa), his 5,000-page oral history, and his fascinating personal diary. These rich sources notwithstanding, no substantial biography came forth, undoubtedly because of Wallace's baffling and enigmatic nature. Finally, however, there is a first-rate study of Wallace's life. *American Dreamer: The Life and Times of Henry A. Wallace* is a perceptive and thoughtful biography written by John C. Culver, a former Iowa congressman and senator, and John Hyde, a former reporter for the *Des Moines Register's* Washington bureau.

Wallace was born in 1888, the son of Henry C. Wallace and the grandson of "Uncle Henry" Wallace. Through their farm journal, *Wallaces' Farmer*, and their zealous commitment to cornbelt agriculture, the Wallaces were well-known farm leaders. Henry A. followed in their shadow when he took over as editor of the family paper after his father became secretary of agriculture under Warren Harding. Early in his youth Henry A. displayed both his quirky eccentricity and his lifelong passion for intellectual inquiry and scientific research. Wallace was always curious, always experimenting, and always seeking a new understanding of his world. These qualities inspired not only his corn breeding work, which in turn helped him found Pioneer Hi-Bred Company, but also his search for religious meaning in modern life.

When he reached his early forties at the start of the depression, Wallace had come to feel stifled as farm editor and was casting about for some new career when Roosevelt beckoned him to Washington. It was a brilliant choice. Wallace and the able staff he assembled not only made the USDA a critical agency in combating the depression but vastly enlarged its scope and responsibilities and enhanced the range and quality of its scientific work.

Wallace must surely be reckoned the greatest secretary of agriculture in USDA history, but as Culver and Hyde explain, he aspired to even greater influence. By the mid-1930s he was writing books and articles and delivering speeches that sought to redefine American liberalism. His idealistic vision endeared him to Roosevelt, who elevated Wallace to the vice-presidency over the furious opposition of party regulars. Initially, Wallace enjoyed great influence as he spoke on behalf of liberal internationalism and took control of early wartime mobilization agencies. When he tried to wrest control of critical powers of the Reconstruction Finance Corporation from the conservative Jesse Jones, however, he encountered an arrogant and powerful enemy. An increasingly distracted and feeble Franklin Roosevelt either would not or could not resolve the dispute, and in 1943 the feud ended on embarrassing terms for Wallace. There followed the still more humiliating loss of the vice-presidency in 1944 at the hands of party functionaries.

Roosevelt salved Wallace's wounds by naming him secretary of commerce (in place of the hated Jones). Wallace used the new post to advocate continued U.S.-Soviet cooperation and the creation of a full-employment economy. Worsening international tensions, however, undermined Wallace's pleas for peace and forced Truman to dismiss him. Convinced that the containment policies were hurtling the world toward an arms race and possibly yet another war, Wallace defiantly agreed to challenge Truman as the candidate of what became the Progressive Party. The ensuing campaign was an ugly one. Wallace may have forced Truman to the left, but his own cause was hurt by the Berlin Crisis and the involvement of American Communists within the Progressive Party.

Culver and Hyde recognize Wallace's shortcomings and weaknesses. They make clear his diffident, aloof nature, his distaste for political combat, and his penchant for embracing causes and ideas with greater passion than personal friendships. They write at length of the less praiseworthy episodes of his career, such as his bizarre relationship with the painter and explorer Nicholas Roerich, his acquiescence in the 1935 "purge" of liberal lawyers trying to defend southern sharecroppers in the Agricultural Adjustment Administration, and his ill-

fated Asia trip of 1944. They credit Wallace in his 1948 campaign for bravely speaking out against racial segregation in the South and smear tactics nationwide, but they see the campaign's cruel red-baiting, splattered eggs, and meager number of votes as a sad and pathetic end to a remarkable public career.

The authors make just as clear Wallace's greatness. He was a "dreamer" in the best sense of the word, for he envisioned a peaceful, more just world and fought with candor and courage to achieve it. No conventional politician, Wallace set out to make something better of American politics. He wanted to educate, uplift, and challenge the American people to forge a more decent society.

American Dreamer is at its best when discussing Wallace and national politics. The chapters on national conventions and elections and the bruising political infighting of the 1930s and 1940s are well told and often make for dramatic reading. Less satisfactory is the discussion of Wallace and agriculture and particularly Wallace as secretary of agriculture. Culver and Hyde are also reluctant to step back and assess, judge, or speculate. They decline, for instance, to ask whether Wallace might have led the United States more effectively than Truman after Roosevelt's death. Would Wallace have been a strong president? Could he have coped with the seething political turmoil and darkening international relations of the late 1940s? Was he right in calling for a different Cold War policy? Or did his dreams of peace and prosperity cloud his understanding of the Soviet menace? Was he right to portray so many of his critics as part of an incipient American fascism? Or did his rhetoric undermine his credibility? On these and other matters they rarely comment.

What they have done, and have done with great skill, is to write a full and balanced portrayal of Henry A. Wallace. That is no easy task, and they have done it well.

For *American Dreamer: The Life and Times of Henry A. Wallace*, John C. Culver and John Hyde won the Shambaugh Award, presented by the State Historical Society of Iowa to honor the best book published on Iowa history in 2000.

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