

Hoover tried, unsuccessfully, to find political redemption as an ex-president, but made himself a useful citizen, Leuchtenburg believes. He concludes the book on a note more upbeat than most of the text: "But there was more to his career than the four years in the White House. Hoover, an associate told the press, 'fed more people and saved more lives than any other man in history'" (161).

Hoover's reputation among historians seems carved in stone, and Leuchtenburg only reinforces it. He includes nothing, whether of fact or interpretation, that cannot be found in previous Hoover studies. The biographer, at least indirectly, employs Hoover as a foil for FDR. Almost every statement on policy is a comparison by inference to the New Deal. Some of the passages quoted above read like caricature. We see nothing of the Hoover who was kind, gentle, sincere, modest, and unselfish, who battled tenaciously, if unsuccessfully, to tame the Great Depression, and who loved children. The book is a rehash, one more nail driven into a coffin already nailed shut. The lack of new facts or original ideas is a sad commentary on how little distance Hoover historiography has traveled during the past 50 years. Some original revisionist work was done in the 1970s, but it died stillborn. It is unfortunate that this eminent historian, with the opportunity to reflect in maturity, missed the chance to write something new and different and instead leaped aboard a train that had left the station long ago.

Nonetheless, with the economic downturn of 2008–2009, scholars and journalists are newly interested in Hoover and the formidable problems he encountered, and are examining him again for new lessons — and finding them.

*The Impact of the New Deal on Iowa: Changing the Culture of a Rural State*, by Gregg R. Narber. Lewiston, NY: Edwin Mellen Press, 2008. xi, 314 pp. Illustrations, charts, tables, notes, appendixes, bibliography, index. \$119.95 cloth.

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Everyone knows that you shouldn't judge a book by its cover. It's also true that you shouldn't judge a book by its title. That bit of wisdom bears repeating when considering Gregg Narber's new book, *The Impact of the New Deal on Iowa: Changing the Culture of a Rural State*. Simply stated, this book is both more and less than the title implies.

First it's important to note that this is *not* a book about the impact of the New Deal on Iowa's economy. For example, there's nothing in the book about Roosevelt's agricultural or industrial policies or pro-

grams. In fact, terms such as *corn*, *soybeans*, and *meatpacking* are not to be found in the index. There isn't a single reference to the Agricultural Adjustment Act, the Soil Conservation Service, or even Henry Wallace.

The major title, therefore, is somewhat misleading; the subtitle more closely defines the pages that follow. Simply put, Narber concentrates on New Deal work relief programs that enhanced "culture" within the Hawkeye state. "My argument, reduced to its simplest statement," he notes in his introductory chapter, "is that the New Deal sought to and did dramatically change the culture of rural America; it effected a fundamental and irrevocable shift in the way rural Americans live, work, learn and recreate" (7). And Narber defines "culture" very broadly — including "programs that had an impact on the natural and built landscapes of Iowa, programs that had nothing in particular to do with high culture" (31). Thus the book includes significant information on the construction of parks, art centers, schools, and band shells as well as public art such as murals in post offices, libraries, and other public buildings.

The core of the book is a program by program discussion of the various New Deal cultural work programs as they were manifest in Iowa. The first chapter focuses on the writing of *Iowa: A Guide to the Hawkeye State* (1938). The next three chapters take a broad focus on the murals in public buildings and post offices as well as the arts centers established in Ottumwa, Mason City, Sioux City, and Des Moines. Perhaps the most significant piece highlighted in the book is the mural *Breaking the Virgin Prairie* designed by Grant Wood that graces the Parks Library at Iowa State University.

Narber's most questionable work comes in the last three chapters of the book. By defining "culture" very broadly, he devotes considerable attention to New Deal work relief programs that improved the general environment and quality of life in the state — projects such as roads, schools, jails, even sewage disposal plants. It is doubtful that these are "cultural" projects unless one defines the term so broadly as to be meaningless.

He is on firmer ground when he writes about the impact of the New Deal on Iowa's natural environment. "The projects in Iowa's state parks," writes Narber, "are one of the most lasting legacies of the New Deal and are projects aimed squarely at enhancing the lives of Iowans by providing opportunities for them to recreate in natural settings" (40).

Narber's final chapter deals with utopian communities in Iowa, more specifically the Granger Homestead Project spearheaded by the tireless Luigi Ligutti. Narber readily admits that the Granger Home-

steads, an effort to provide homes to underemployed Iowa miners, was a poor model of a new way to live in the state. The project did, however, accomplish its core mission — giving meaningful work to desperate Iowans.

Perhaps the biggest limitation of the book is its relentless focus on the administration of these work relief programs in a single state. There's too much about how the programs were established and directed here in Iowa and not enough about the real impact of what was accomplished. Were Iowans pleased with their new murals? Did they enjoy their new state parks? Did they visit their new art centers? Were the cultural programs in Iowa different from those in other states? That information is hard to find in this book.

On balance, however, Narber is to be applauded for bringing attention to the impact of the New Deal on Iowa beyond its farms and its factories. Many will question his very broad definition of the term *culture*, but few will disagree with the underlying value of all of these programs — getting people back to work as quickly as possible. That is the true impact of the New Deal on Iowa.

*Negotiating Relief: The Development of Social Welfare Programs in Depression-Era Michigan, 1930–1940*, by Susan Stein-Roggenbuck. Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 2008. xi, 252 pp. Maps, tables, illustrations, notes, bibliography, index. \$49.95 cloth, \$9.95 CD.

Reviewer Joan Gittens is professor of history at Southwest Minnesota State University. She is the author of *Poor Relations: The Children of the State in Illinois, 1818–1990* (1994).

In *Negotiating Relief*, Susan Stein-Roggenbuck examines Michigan's aid to the poor at the height of the Great Depression, carefully charting the complicated interplay between rival groups who felt that they were best suited to decide the nature of relief and who was deserving of it. She focuses on four Michigan counties that represent urban and rural divisions, as well as geographical and economic variations, in the state.

The title *Negotiating Relief* is an apt summary of what she found in the documents. At every level of relief, there was tension and a struggle for control. In one major rivalry the new federal officials charged with implementing New Deal programs such as Federal Emergency Relief, Aid to Dependent Children, and Old Age Assistance confronted local officials — the established administrators of such county resources as the infirmaries (formerly poor houses) and mothers' pension programs. The local administrators, who were overwhelmingly male and businessmen or farmers, felt that they were more familiar with the circum-