

Iowa's real pioneers. In all of these murals, there is not a whiff of a conflict with native peoples, of political squabbles, of the terrible ordeal of making a living in nineteenth-century farming. And surely somebody must have objected to a group of murals that puts art at the historical culmination of the state's toils and tribulations! Even Grant Wood, one suspects, wouldn't have gone quite that far.

Were there protests, like those that broke out in Kansas in the 1930s when John Steuart Curry painted a lethal tornado on the walls of the Topeka capitol, much to the displeasure of local boosters? Or is it true that the gilding obscured everything else—that if the public murals of the Midwest were sufficiently sparkly and fashionable, then it really didn't matter which silly nymph was Electricity? In short, Bailey Van Hook's fine book opens as many questions as it answers, especially for local historians seeking a window on the mind of Middle America in the Progressive era.

The Radical Middle Class: Populist Democracy and the Question of Capitalism in Progressive Era Portland, Oregon, by Robert D. Johnston. Politics and Society in Twentieth Century America Series. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2003. xxiii, 394 pp. Illustrations, maps, notes, appendix, index. \$35.00 cloth.

Reviewer Robert E. Bionaz is assistant professor of history at Chicago State University. His dissertation was "Streetcar City: Popular Politics and the Shaping of Urban Progressivism in Cleveland, 1880-1910" (University of Iowa, 2002).

Robert D. Johnston's monograph features a fine historical narrative interrupted by unfortunate partisan forays into the thicket of Progressive Era historiography. He wishes to "rehabilitate" and "vindicate" the "middling" Portlanders whose democratic populism "has often represented a radical challenge to the authority of economic, political, and cultural elites," and "question[ed] many of the fundamental assumptions of a capitalist society" (xi, xii). He also wants to "reinvigorate . . . substantive historiographical debate" within the academy, and hopes his findings will provide "firmer grounds for an expansive democratic hope" (xiv). Focusing mainly on politics in Portland during the first quarter of the twentieth century, Johnston explores a range of issues: direct democracy measures such as the initiative and referendum, proposals for a unicameral legislature and proportional representation, the single tax movement, the controversy over smallpox vaccination for students, and a compulsory education bill. He also examines the ideas of some leading public figures of middle-class radicalism in Portland: mayor Harry Lane, city commissioner Will Daley, direct democracy advocate William U'Ren, and anti-vaccinationist Lora Little.

The strength of Johnston's monograph lies in its narrative of Progressive Era Portland. He finds evidence of Portland's middle-class radicalism primarily in local newspapers and voting patterns. His interpretations suggest important ways historians might rethink urban progressivism by examining middle-class political activity in their explorations of Progressive Era urban radicalism, capitalist critiques, democratic impulses, and urban politics. This should be of interest to specialists in the field as well as persons interested in urban progressivism. Given the prominence of urban Iowans in Progressive Era direct democracy experiments, Johnston's narrative might suggest new ways to look at that phenomenon.

Johnston's portrait of Portland's middle classes, their relation to capitalism, and his rendition of an urban populist radicalism that includes both middle- and working-class proponents differs from the bulk of Progressive Era historiography, which presents middle-class persons as moderate politically and committed to capitalist values. Johnston describes "the middle class" as actually "middling-classes," which include independent proprietors and white-collar workers, a *petit bourgeoisie* whose egalitarian capitalist vision and sympathies with Portland's wage laborers fueled a cross-class democratic populism in the city. Armed with a producer's vision and imbedded in the city's community life, these middling persons stand in direct opposition to impersonal, large-scale capitalism.

Their democratizing instincts come through clearly in battles for state proportional representation and against compulsory smallpox vaccinations. While issues such as the initiative and referendum are well-known progressive staples, proportional representation schemes and anti-vaccination initiatives appear less frequently in the era's historiography. Johnston demonstrates how the first represented an attempt to replace "effective disfranchisement with genuine representation" (143), while the second recreates the battle Portland's middling democratic populists waged against "the authority of governmental and medical 'experts' to define personal and public health" (178). Johnston blends these unsuccessful challenges with other democratic measures such as the single tax to offer a compelling portrait of a politically engaged and radical middle class consistently challenging Oregon's established social, political, and professional elites. Having established the persistent radicalism of Portland's middling classes in city and state politics, Johnston offers a concluding chapter that discusses democratic populism's promises for politics in the twenty-first century.

While offering a fresh perspective, Johnston's monograph suffers from some organizational, stylistic, and interpretive problems that degrade its quality. He intertwines the Portland material with preachy and pedantic chapters on historiography that disrupt the narrative. In spite of Johnston's professed respect for the "intelligence" of "the sages who have come before us" (xiii), his treatment of other scholars—Marxists and feminists in particular—often degenerates into vitriolic attacks on their myopia and features such unhelpful insights as his accusation that modern intellectuals have demonized the American middle class, apparently because of "guilt over their privileged backgrounds, or because of their lack of democratic faith" (5). Finally, Johnston offers some questionable interpretations. For instance, in an attempt to describe many of the middling Portland business owners as "anti-capitalist," he offers a circumscribed and unpersuasive definition of capitalism, "whose core is extensive wage labor employed by large enterprises seeking high profit by exercising their quasi-monopolistic privileges in the market" (83), thereby excluding small proprietorships. He performs similar contortions to rationalize middling support for a compulsory education bill supported by the Portland Ku Klux Klan (221–47) and an antidemocratic statement made by Harry Lane (44–45).

In spite of these flaws, Johnston's book is a useful revision of Progressive Era historiography; it should stimulate lively debate, new historical questions, and new lines of inquiry.

The Pen Is Mightier: The Muckraking Life of Charles Edward Russell, by Robert Miraldi. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003. xiii, 328 pp. Illustrations, notes, bibliography, index. \$32.50 cloth.

Reviewer Bill Silag is a consultant in the Iowa Department of Education's Bureau of Community Colleges and Career and Technical Education. Several careers ago, even before he earned his Ph.D. in history and wrote a number of articles about the settlement of northwest Iowa, he wrote a master's thesis about Charles Edward Russell.

Iowa-born Charles Edward Russell was one of about a dozen prominent American journalists whose critiques of corporate capitalism in the early years of the twentieth century helped produce a spate of regulatory legislation that remains fundamental to the conduct of commerce in the United States to this day. Derisively named "the muckrakers" by Theodore Roosevelt, Russell and his fellow writers devoted themselves to exposing the grim human realities—the poverty, injustice, and political chicanery—accompanying the concentration of wealth and power in the hands of the new century's emerging business elite.

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