

*The Black Image in the New Deal: The Politics of FSA Photography*, by Nicholas Natanson. Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1992. xii, 305 pp. Illustrations, notes, bibliography, index. \$18.95 paper.

REVIEWED BY LAWRENCE O. CHRISTENSEN, UNIVERSITY OF MISSOURI—ROLLA

Between 1935 and 1942, the Historical Section of the New Deal's Resettlement Administration/Farm Security Administration took 60,250 photographs of Americans and American scenes. Roy Stryker directed a group of talented photographers—including Walker Evans, Dorothea Lange, Arthur Rothstein, Edwin Rosskam, Marion Post Wolcott, Russell Lee, Ben Shahn, Jack Delano, Carl Mydans, John Vachon, and Gordon Parks—in creating these massive files. It is their images that form many of our impressions of the 1930s and early 1940s.

In this volume, Nicholas Natanson analyzes the racial dimension of these photographs. He asks, "Did blacks gain the numerical representation in the FSA file that their share of the national population, and their respective shares of regional populations, warranted? . . . How did the FSA work conform to or defy the patterns of black portrayal established by other 1930s–40s photographers, whether politically left or mainstream, whether government sponsored or private, whether white or black? . . . How frequently did FSA photographers venture beyond FSA solutions—the politically safest black subject-matter during the depression—and address issues bearing on economic and racial hierarchies? . . . To what extent did FSA black images reach the public arena?" (5–6)

He answers these questions through quantitative as well as qualitative analysis. While African Americans made up 9.8 percent of the American population in 1940, 10.1 percent of FSA photographs concerned black topics. Natanson concludes, "Given that Stryker hardly encouraged attention to blacks during much of his tenure, given that the information division as a whole could make wider use of white than black images, and given that other non-Anglo minority groups tended to be underrepresented in the file . . . this level of black representation is striking" (66). Gordon Parks, the only black photographer on the staff, did not join the project until 1942, and while he contributed to increasing black representation, whites such as Russell Lee, Ben Shahn, Marion Post Wolcott, Edwin Rosskam, and Arthur Rothstein contributed the bulk of the black images.

Natanson addresses the quality of the images and their public uses in separate chapters. Another chapter is titled "The FSA Black Image in the Marketplace." He includes treatments of Ben Shahn's southern photographs, Arthur Rothstein's Missouri Bootheel series, and Russell

Lee and Gordon Parks's urban images. In discussing such volumes as Archibald MacLeish's *Land of the Free*, Herman Clarence Nixon's *Forty Acres and Steel Mules*, Sherwood Anderson and Edwin Rosskam's *Home Town*, and Richard Wright and Edwin Rosskam's *12 Million Black Voices*, all of which were based on the FSA collection, as well as a variety of public exhibits of the agency's photos, the author concludes, "the innovative quality of the FSA black file was hardly given its due. . . . Recognition of black individuality and diversity tended to be lost in the various currents of the 1930s and 1940s: populism and romanticism, New Deal boosterism and wartime nationalism, not to mention outright racism" (255). Even the two most prominent blacks associated with the collection failed to escape these currents. Natanson notes that while Gordon Parks "experienced discrimination directly, the reality of segregated theaters, restaurants, bus stations, and street-car stands, as well as public bathrooms, parks, playgrounds, and schools was not to be found in Parks's Washington documentation" (186). And in *12 Million Black Voices*, Richard Wright, "a black author who knew much better," repeated "the white tendency that had proven so stultifying over the years, that of treating the black millions as a monolithic mass" (247).

Readers interested in popular culture, photography, the Great Depression and World War II, and in African-American history will find this well-constructed book worthwhile. Midwesterners will particularly like the discussions of *12 Million Black Voices* (because of its Chicago base) and the Rothstein images of the 1939 Missouri Bootheel sharecroppers roadside strike.

*"All Will Yet Be Well": The Diary of Sarah Gillespie Huftalen, 1873-1952*, by Suzanne L. Bunkers. Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 1993. xvi, 325 pp. Illustrations, notes, bibliography, index. \$46.95 cloth, \$17.95 paper.

REVIEWED BY BARBARA HANDY-MARCHELLO, UNIVERSITY OF NORTH DAKOTA

Sarah Gillespie was eleven when her mother, Emily Hawley Gillespie, gave her a diary. The diary became her trusted confidante, keeping records of visits, chores, gifts given and received, and especially anything that disturbed Sarah. Emily taught Sarah to keep a diary, just as she taught her the skilled work of house and barnyard. Emily sometimes picked up Sarah's diary, read it, wrote a response, and asked Emily to write in her own diary when she became too ill to do so. This openness suggests that Huftalen's diary was less a secret hiding place for her most intimate thoughts than a means of commu-

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