

Democratic Art: The New Deal's Influence on American Culture

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argument loses originality. Others have analyzed regionalist writers and other artists through their relationship with the fertile land of the Midwest—for example, E. Bradford Burns's succinct and skillful *Kinship with the Land: Regionalist Thought in Iowa, 1894–1942* (1996).

Buechsel's argument suffers from other weaknesses as well. It is difficult to parse any analysis of modernism when the author mostly does not define *modernism*—not a simple idea—other than as a general ideological or thematic movement away from the Protestant ethic.

Four chapters are devoted to a thorough analysis of Sherwood Anderson's works, but then each of four other chapters is devoted to another midwestern author (Willa Cather, F. Scott Fitzgerald, Ruth Suckow, and, anachronistically, Jane Smiley). Such a collection suggests more random choice than comprehensive literary scope. The organization and, at times, the analysis itself reveal the book's origins as a doctoral dissertation and, for me, its ultimate inability to rise above that form's limitations. Those with a particular interest in Iowa literary history can certainly gain some value from the close readings of Suckow's *The Folks* and Smiley's *A Thousand Acres*, but Cather and Fitzgerald, of course, have been treated much more extensively (and adeptly) elsewhere.

Finally, in this era of ecocriticism, with its rich and diverse new understandings of writing and the natural world, the book's monolithic conception of "nature" itself remains overly simplistic and ultimately opaque; agricultural fields, woods, backyards, and so forth all constitute an undifferentiated "land" or "nature." Bringing new understandings of nature to bear on modernism's regionalists would no doubt provide more insight into midwestern relationships with the land than medieval European spirituality does.

Democratic Art: The New Deal's Influence on American Culture, by Sharon Ann Musher. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2015. 293 pp. Illustrations, tables, notes, index. \$45.00 hardcover.

Reviewer Victoria M. Grieve is associate professor of history at Utah State University. She is the author of *The Federal Art Project and the Creation of Middlebrow Culture* (2009).

This engagingly written account of New Deal arts funding quickly put to rest my concerns about whether we need yet another book about the New Deal art projects. Although there is not much new information for scholars in Musher's account, the thematic organization of the material and her excellent use of biographies and key examples make it a useful book for both students and experts in the field. The

author's deft handling of all of the arts projects and the coexistence of a variety of approaches to the arts does justice to a complex time and a complicated subject. The thousands of New Deal art projects were many things to many people; Musher provides a well-balanced and readable account of these many experiences.

In chapter one she offers a comprehensive overview of national and international intellectual influences and models for federal involvement in the arts in the early decades of the twentieth century. Following that survey, Musher dedicates a chapter to each of four "visions" of the arts that informed the New Deal: art as grandeur, enrichment, weapon, and experience. Finally, in a chapter titled "Art as Subversion," she discusses the conservative attacks and the breakdown of the Left that ended government sponsorship of the arts by 1943.

Unlike many other scholars of New Deal art projects, Musher does not concentrate on one of the arts projects but analyzes all of the projects through these thematic lenses and biographies of notable participants. For example, Charles Moore, the head of the Commission of Fine Arts, and the 1938 controversy surrounding the design of the Jefferson Memorial demonstrate how the nineteenth-century ideal of "art as grandeur" was in decline. Critics of the proposed structure ranged from those who condemned the design as derivative and imitative—more related to the dead hand of Greece and Rome than to modern America—to those who saw it as overly fussy and impractical. Others suggested that a democratic national design competition would have inspired more innovative ideas and more inclusive participation.

Chapter three will be of particular interest to Iowa readers, as Musher makes regionalism central to her discussion of "art as enrichment." Advocates of this vision of the arts agreed with "art as grandeur" proponents that art should uplift viewers. Using George Biddle's mural *Society Freed through Justice* (1936) as an example, Musher discusses American Scene painting as a celebratory art that was meant to inspire national resilience through depictions of the forgotten man as a national hero, as well as depictions of local history, legends, and heroes. Although subject to criticism from academic artists on the right and social viewpoint artists on the left, Musher judges the Treasury Program a largely successful government experiment in the arts.

In chapter four Musher analyzes how various administrators and programs used "art as a weapon" to expose racial and class inequality and other social ills that plagued American society. Musher sees these attempts largely as failures: Iowa native Hallie Flanagan's unapologetic use of the theater as a political weapon resulted in the early demise of the Federal Theatre Project. Black leaders of the Federal Writers' Proj-

ect failed to alter white depictions of southern states in the federal guides. Further, overtly political art provided grist for conservative attacks on the art projects specifically, and against the New Deal more broadly. Finally, Musher judges the “art as experience” approach as the most successful because the sense of public ownership of the arts outlasted the New Deal in the form of community art centers, the popularization of folk cultures, and progressive art education.

Musher applies her history of New Deal arts funding to contemporary questions of arts funding. Warning of the political implications of using art as a weapon, and lamenting the purely economic justifications used by recent supporters of federal art funding, Musher argues that advocates should take a lesson from the 1930s art-as-experience activists who argued that, beyond creating jobs and stimulating the economy, the arts “make us more thoughtful, satisfied, and engaged citizens” (218).

Winning the War for Democracy: The March on Washington Movement, 1941–1946, by David Lucander. Urbana, Chicago, and Springfield: University of Illinois Press, 2014. xi, 320 pp. Illustrations, appendixes, notes, bibliography, index. \$55.00 hardcover.

Reviewer Kristin Anderson-Bricker is associate professor of history at Loras College. Her Ph.D. dissertation (Syracuse University, 1997) was “Making a Movement: The Meaning of Community in the Congress of Racial Equality, 1958–1968.”

Although history textbooks mention the threatened March on Washington in 1941 for jobs and freedom, most Americans are unfamiliar with the March on Washington Movement (MOWM) that took place during World War II. In fact, A. Philip Randolph initiated a national movement that proved most successful at the local level. In *Winning the War for Democracy*, David Lucander goes beyond the activities surrounding Randolph to explore the MOWM in St. Louis, Missouri. Lucander sees the St. Louis chapter as the most dynamic and successful of the 37 branches (73). These local activists shared a commitment to the Double V campaign announced by the *Philadelphia Courier* in 1942. World War II provided a unique opportunity for African Americans to express their patriotism by helping to defeat fascism abroad and racism at home. While black men fought foreign enemies, those African Americans remaining on the home front worked to make democracy real in their communities. The all-black organization saw employment as a route to a better life, so local chapters focused on increasing African Americans’ access first to defense industry jobs and later to skilled