

it from a perspective influenced by thoughtful contemporary feminism. It is as enticing and insightful a brief introduction to a multi-faceted subject as one could hope for, given the present state of the art.

Although Ryan's *Womanhood in America* begins in the colonial era, more than half of the long book is devoted to the twentieth century and therefore deserves mention in this context. Like Banner, Ryan is highly sensitive to the ideological constraints on woman's place. Since she makes no pretence at a survey, she has room to push further some themes only alluded to in Banner's book. For her what is most impressive about the 1920s and World War II is continuity. The apparent shifts of the twentieth century were essentially conservative, binding women more tightly in their sphere, a sphere now of family, work and consumption. Ryan comes back repeatedly to what she claims is a new emphasis on heterosexual intimacy, in the end finding the contemporary cult of feminine sexuality even more restrictive than the nineteenth century cult of motherhood. Doubtless some will choose to be put off by the book's tone, for of the volumes discussed here, this is the most argumentative. Despite lapses and rough edges, however, it is probably also the most thought-provoking for those who seek some overall framework within which to interpret women in this century.

It takes no radical perspective to recognize that the slighting of women in the typical text and lecture course is unjust to women and a serious, avoidable distortion of our past. But to be persuaded that women's history ought to receive more attention in one's courses is not always the same as being able to rectify the situation. Happily, these six books provide the conscientious teacher with valuable material to fill gaps and improve generalizations about American women, indeed, about American society at large. None of these books is above undergraduate comprehension; particularly Banner or Chafe, both in paperback editions, would serve nicely as collateral course reading. And for the teacher so inclined, these six studies can be used to illustrate well the effects on historical investigation of different assumptions about women and about how our society works.

In a field as little worked as the history of women, one ought be grateful for any serious contribution. But these six books demonstrate that if careful scholarship is better than careless work, scholarship informed—by a matured feminism is better yet. The six also demonstrate that making sense of the history of women demands all the sophistication historians can bring to the job. For the imaginative searcher, sources for the history of women are available in embarrassing abundance. But in women's history, as elsewhere, usually the difficult hurdles are the conceptual ones. In this area, the argument has begun, but only barely. Where these authors have rushed in, others ought also to tread.

The College of St. Catherine

Alan Graebner

culture and the new deal

THE FEDERAL THEATRE PROJECT: Plays, Relief and Politics, 1935-1939. By Jane DeHart Mathews. Princeton. Princeton University Press. 1967. **THE NEW DEAL FOR ARTISTS.** By Richard D. McKinzie. Princeton. Princeton University Press. 1973. Cloth: \$19.00; Paper: \$6.95. **THE DREAM AND THE DEAL.** By Jerre Mangione. Boston. Little, Brown and Co. 1972. Cloth: \$12.50; Paper (Avon): \$3.95.

In the arts, economic recession hits hard. Theater and concert-going, the buying of books and paintings are often curtailed as families and individuals stretch shrinking budgets to cover necessities. In such periods, the idea of public funding of the arts often surfaces. In the 1930's, such government support was instituted and the last years have produced a number of studies of the New Deal cultural projects.

The three books under discussion detail government support for the Theatre, Art and Writers Projects during the life of the Works Progress Administration (WPA), Harry Hopkins' wide-ranging agency for public employment. Mathews describes the course of the drama project as it presented *MacBeth* in Harlem, circuses in the Midwest and "theater in the park" in urban neighborhoods. McKinzie reveals the tremendous bureaucratic problems involved in requiring painters, sculptors and print

makers to punch time clocks, and the aesthetic dilemmas posed by communities whose views of art differed from those of government artists and administrators. Mangione, who was an administrator for the Writers Project, presents the view from Washington of those artist-bureaucrats who were charged with giving relief and preserving the skills of those unemployed by the emergency—and with presenting professional programs that would create a groundswell of cultural enthusiasm to encourage an egalitarian, nationalistic cultural renaissance.

It is in those contradictory aims—relief and art—that all three historians see the partial failure of the experiment. The WPA was a temporary agency, concerned with financial need and the administration of vast amounts of money and numbers of people. Whether the work involved building sidewalks, raking leaves or performing Beethoven's Ninth Symphony, the goal was the same: to support workers for a limited period of time, and to produce socially useful results which were acceptable to the Congress which funded the program, but not competitive with private enterprise.

Within the arts projects, however, art was as important as relief. Participants were to produce "professional" quality work. That meant that the most talented, not the most needy cultural workers should be given preference. Moreover, they were to involve the public in the arts, to give the common man recreation and inspiration, and to regenerate what many felt to be a moribund national culture. The attempt to combine need and talent, politics and art, bureaucracy and a free-flowing cultural renaissance was carried out to varying degrees by the individual projects. But whether they were as conservative as the Federal Music Project, or as experimental as the Theatre Project, they all failed ultimately as art projects, caught in this web of conflicting demands. They did support some workers, preserving old skills and helping beginners develop professional techniques. They did produce some art.

Politics intervened, and the Theatre Project was terminated by Congressional order in 1939. When the approach of World War II signalled Congressional budget cuts, it was obvious that the other three had caught the imagination of too few people to survive, and they were gradually phased out.

Part of the reason for the demise of the federal arts projects can be found in the conflicting expectations placed on them. But a final contradiction remained which is not directly addressed in these studies, although Mathews asks some of the relevant questions in her article, "Arts and the People: The New Deal Quest for a Cultural Democracy."¹ Mathews defines "cultural democracy" as being composed of "cultural accessibility for the public, social and economic integration of the artist and the promise of a new national art." She points out that the New Dealers never really defined the concept for themselves. And the problem was that, despite the rhetoric of cultural egalitarianism, an elite, however liberal, still controlled the decision-making process and aesthetic standards. The artists continued to see themselves as "artists" to be integrated, rather than as "workers" who produced cultural articles for their fellow workers. Geographic concentration impeded the spread of culture across the country: many communities refused to accept transferred workers who might be left in their care when the WPA ended, and many artists were unwilling to resettle outside of metropolitan areas. Yet even in regions where local arts found some response, the official reaction was telling. McKinzie notes that the state WPA director in Texas would allow only one Federal Art Project, The Index of American Design, to operate in his state. It was charged with preserving as many examples of folk art as possible. McKinzie comments that "Field workers concluded that the Index fit in perfectly with the desires of the Texan mind because it glorifies and advertises their local cultural development." On the Federal Music Project a regional director closed down a mariachi band in southern Arizona which played to large groups of Mexicans and Anglos every weekend. He justified the closing by arguing that the players could not read music and "the pitch of the trumpets was decidedly Mexican." Both the Art Project and the Music Project organized large teaching programs, but 75% of Art Project workers were employed in eight metropolitan areas and the Music Project always cut teaching projects to preserve performing groups in budgetary retrenchments. "Cultural democracy" never became "art as process." The relationship of art to reality, social relevance and politics was never clarified. If "art as process" means, finally, that art is participated in and relevant to everyone, that "art must teach

people, in the most vivid and imaginative way possible, how to take control over their own experience and observations, how to link those with theory, and how to connect both with the experience of others,"² then the inability to define the terms in the New Deal art projects becomes more than a rhetorical failure. In the era of bread and circuses, with public funding for arts projects created to enlarge experience and develop understanding, the average American got half a loaf, and that was often sliced the wrong way.³

University of Gothenburg

Jannelle Warren-Findley

footnotes

1. *The Journal of American History* 81, September 1975.
2. Meredith Tax, "Culture is not Neutral, Whom Does It Serve," in Lee Baxandall, ed., *Radical Perspectives in the Arts*, Baltimore: Penguin Books, 1972.
3. In addition to cited material, I drew on information from Jannelle Jedd Warren, "Of Tears and Need: The Federal Music Project, 1935-1943" (Unpub. Ph.D. dissertation, George Washington University, 1973).

reviews

PAINTING AND SCULPTURE IN MINNESOTA, 1820-1914. By Rena Neumann Coen. Minneapolis. University of Minnesota Press. 1976. \$19.50.

Despite the well-intentioned efforts of the American Revolutionary Bicentennial Administration to manage a triple focus on "Heritage '76," "Horizons '76" and "Festival USA," it has traditionally been the Festival which has captured the imagination of the populace—a fact which, for the serious student of American culture, brings to mind Henry James' plaint on the occasion of Queen Victoria's Golden Jubilee: "The splendor of course will have to be great to wash down the vulgarity."

Despite their relatively low profile, however, there are other, more quiet and enduring benefits to be had from the current epidemic of Bicentennial fever, and one of these hails from the University of Minnesota, Minneapolis. There the University Gallery has organized a major exhibition of "The Art and Architecture of Minnesota," which after its Twin Cities opening will tour the state for the balance of the year. In preparation for the exhibition extensive conservation and restoration of damaged artworks was undertaken, funded by the Minnesota American Revolution Bicentennial Commission. Their support for such an ambitious project helps ensure the survival of a fragile and precious cultural patrimony for the Tricentennial, and beyond.

Gallery director Barbara Shissler introduced the Coen book, published in conjunction with the exhibition, as "the first study of the art of our state considered in depth and within the context of American art history." Hilton Kramer has elsewhere (in his *New York Times* review last year) described the delicate balance of sympathy and detachment, and the careful distinction between the indigenous and the merely parochial, which is required in detailing the history of our nation's art. Such problems are only accentuated when the focus is narrowed, as is the case here. "The writing of such history requires, above all, the kind of moral delicacy that can do justice to the small-scale accomplishment without inflating its actual merit, and," Kramer warns, "delicacy of this sort—never abundant at any time—is unlikely to prosper under the imperatives of the Bicentennial campaign." Happily, in the Minnesota instance, Rena Coen has brought to the task the requisite moral delicacy, and the resulting volume is a model for other states to follow.

In her effort "to describe American art of the nineteenth and early twentieth century from a Minnesota point of view," the author spans the period from the territory's early exploration to the eve of World War I (thereby conforming to the terminus of the Smithsonian Institution's ongoing *Bicentennial Inventory of American Painting Executed Before 1914*, another anniversary windfall). To her chronological organization she has added an intriguing chapter on the "Painters of the Panorama" (a phenomenon deserving still further study in nineteenth-century art history), and a chapter on the pedestrian art of "The Capitol" which only proves that in St. Paul as elsewhere in the Republic artists failed to be inspired by "official" patronage. Many of the artists and images in Coen's amply illustrated book are unfamiliar, but generally the Minnesotans parallel the mainstream elsewhere—lake-country Luminists or Hennepin County Homers—and to these more familiar trends Coen judiciously relates her subjects. (Occasionally the appearance of a better-known hand in this