WPA Posters: A New Deal for Design

by

Cory J. Pillen

A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment of
the requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy
(Art History)

at the
UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN-MADISON
2013

Date of final oral examination: 05/03/13

The dissertation is approved by the following members of the Final Oral Committee:
Anna V. Andrzejewski, Associate Professor, Art History
Barbara C. Buenger, Professor, Art History
Nan Enstad, Professor, History
Lauren Kroiz, Assistant Professor, Art History
Nancy Rose Marshall, Professor, Art History

Table of Contents

Acknowledgements

The author and anthropologist Zora Neale Hurston explained that "research is formalized curiosity. It is poking and prying with a purpose."[1] In the process of writing this dissertation, a number of individuals and institutions have encouraged my curiosity, facilitated my prying, and helped me refine my purpose. I am immensely grateful for their guidance and support.

A Chancellor's Fellowship from the University of Wisconsin-Madison provided valuable assistance during my last year of dissertation writing. Likewise, a twelve-month Predoctoral Fellowship from the Smithsonian American Art Museum (SAAM) was vital to the evolution of this project. The Smithsonian has established a rich intellectual environment for researchers and my work benefited substantially from the encouragement and feedback I received from my co-fellows at SAAM as well as the Museum's distinguished group of curators, particularly Virginia Mecklenburg, Joann Moser, and Bill Truettner.

I was also fortunate to receive a number of grants subsidizing travel to archives and conferences where I conducted research and presented work related to my dissertation. Two Vilas Travel Grants from the UW-Madison Graduate School funded research trips to the National Archives in College Park, MD; the Pennsylvania State Archives in Harrisburg; and the National Park Service Library in Harper's Ferry, WV. A grant from the John W. Hartman Center for Sales, Advertising, and Marketing History allowed me to spend a week immersed in the archives at Duke University, which holds a number of important collections related to

[1] Zora Neale Hurston, *Dust Tracks on a Road: An Autobiography* (1942; reprint with a forward by Maya Angelou, New York: HarperCollins, 2006): 143.

advertising and graphic design. Finally, awards from the Vernacular Architecture Forum and the UW-Madison Department of Art History supported travel to conferences where I received useful input on my health and housing chapters.

I have been privileged to have the support and guidance of many exemplary scholars at the UW-Madison throughout my graduate career. These individuals have shaped this document in many ways through their feedback and the examples they set as scholars and teachers. I am particularly indebted to my advisor and dissertation chair Anna Andrzejewski, whose knowledge, interdisciplinary approach to scholarship, and mentoring skills played an important role in my decision to pursue graduate studies and contributed significantly to my growth as a scholar and teacher. Likewise, this dissertation benefited substantially from the feedback and encouragement I received from fellow graduate students at the UW-Madison and members of my dissertation committee: Barbara C. Buenger, Nan Enstad, Lauren Kroiz, Nancy Rose Marshall, and Ann Smart Martin.

Other individuals have contributed to this project in varying ways. I am particularly grateful for the assistance I received from librarians and archivists at the UW-Madison; Marshall University; the Chicago Historical Society; Duke University; the National Archives in College Park, MD; the National Park Service Library in Harpers Ferry, WV; the Pennsylvania State Archives; the Archives of American Art; and the Library of Congress. I would also like to thank my family for their unwavering support and willingness to discuss New Deal culture and politics. This dissertation is dedicated to Rob, who fuels my love of history and is my partner in so many endeavors.

Introduction

In 1938, an Ohio artist working for the Federal Art Project (FAP) designed a poster encouraging viewers to enroll in a federally sponsored adult education program (figure 1). This poster links the viewer's actions with broader social needs by declaring: "This is an adult world; its problems are up to you!" Above this text, the designer included foliage, a page of text, a globe, and a compass similar to those used by architects, engineers, and urban planners. Collectively, these objects reinforce a connection between knowledge and social engagement. While the page of text symbolizes a process of education, the compass represents a medium for employing this knowledge. The world, which is signified by the globe, embodies both. It can be an object of study and a beneficiary of that learning.

Like the poster's direct address and bold text, these images urge viewers to take responsibility for the world's problems by increasing their knowledge and education. The sheet of paper, although illegible, is unfurled and open to the viewer. Similarly, the layering of objects in this poster gives the composition depth and draws the viewer into the image. Both the compass and the page of text seem to enter the viewer's space, reaching out and engaging him or her in the process of social literacy and reform.

The FAP was a division of the Works Progress Administration (WPA), a federal relief program designed to create jobs in the United States during the Great Depression.[1] Between 1935 and 1943, the WPA established poster divisions in more than seventeen states and

[1] The Works Progress Administration was renamed the Works Projects Administration in September 1939.

printed over two million posters from thirty-five thousand designs.[2] These posters, which could be commissioned for a nominal fee by any government agency, engaged some of the most pressing concerns of Americans during the New Deal.

My project, which is organized thematically, focuses on several social issues addressed repeatedly in the roughly 2200 extant WPA posters: leisure and recreation, conservation, health and disease, and public housing.[3] These issues, which were identified by New Deal agencies as central to the health and well being of the nation and its citizens, occupied an important place in the administration's social agenda. Likewise, they were an integral part of the broader cultural discourse concerning social welfare during the period.

As I suggest, these WPA posters worked to advance both personal and national renewal by promoting social literacy. Broadly defined, social literacy refers to the cultivation of knowledge, skills, and values consistent with social norms. Underlying most campaigns for social literacy is a desire to reconcile individual action with broader social ideals and objectives. According to its proponents, social literacy encourages good problem solving skills, socially responsible decision making, collaboration, social cohesion, and "appropriate" interactions and relationships. It also helps individuals understand and navigate the complexity of modern life.[4]

---

[2] See Christopher DeNoon, *Posters of the WPA* (Los Angeles: Wheatley Press, in association with the Univ. of Washington Press, Seattle, 1987), 7, 13, 22.

[3] DeNoon, *Posters of the WPA*, 3. DeNoon notes that approximately 2000 posters are still in existence. Since the publication of his book in 1987, however, more WPA posters have been discovered in archives and private collections.

[4] For a discussion of social literacy and its benefits, see James Arthur, John Davidson, and William Stow, *Social Literacy, Citizenship Education and the National Curriculum* (London: Routledge Falmer, 2000). For the relationship between visuals and literacy in current educational practices, see Mary Hamilton, *Literacy and the Politics of Representation* (New York: Routledge, 2012); and Laurie MacGillivray and Margaret Sauceda Curwen, "Tagging as a Social Literacy Practice," *Journal of Adolescent and Adult Literacy* 50, no. 5 (February 2007): 354-69.

The concept of social literacy gained currency during the 1970s and 1980s, leading some scholars to attribute the origins of the phrase to that period.[5] The expression, however, appears in articles on education and sociology written during the 1930s.[6] Likewise, many of the ideas it encompasses informed the work of reformers and New Deal officials. Akin to the notion of "social intelligence," which was endorsed during the Progressive and New Deal eras, the concept of social literacy played a central role in New Deal planning initiatives and contemporary efforts to encourage political, economic, and social reform.[7] For this and other reasons, it provides a useful framework for understanding the diverse and occasionally competing discourses – social, economic, political, and artistic – that informed the production of the WPA posters.

The WPA posters participated in the dialogue concerning social literacy in a number of ways. The posters promoted the social literacy of various government agencies by embodying their dedication to social welfare and rational planning. They also encouraged social literacy and, by extension, particular social behaviors by educating viewers on issues like health care and leisure. As the posters imply, social literacy fosters happier, healthier, and productive citizens, which government agencies linked to national growth and stability.

The promotion of social literacy was one of several ways the WPA posters worked to define, perpetuate, and manage a culture of knowledge during the New Deal. Knowledge, which can be acquired formally or informally through study, investigation, observation, or

---

[5] The authors James Arthur, John Davidson, and William Stow, for example, explain that the phrase social literacy was introduced in the early 1980s by Mary Kalantzis and Bill Cope. See Arthur, Davidson, and Stow, *Social Literacy, Citizenship Education and the National Curriculum*, 3.

[6] See, for instance, Walter V. Kaulfers, "Outcomes as Objectives," *The French Review* 9, no. 3 (Feb. 1936): 227. *The French Review* was published by the American Association of Teachers of French.

[7] See Francis J. Brown, "Social Planning through Education," *American Sociological Review* 1, no. 6 (Dec. 1936): 935.

experience, implies an awareness or understanding of a subject or process. Like social literacy, it is temporally and culturally bound – a social construction situated in a particular time and place. In examining its relationship to social welfare, I consider how the WPA posters worked to motivate viewers and encourage reform by shaping public knowledge of contemporary social issues. I also address the various ways these posters frame the cultivation and application of knowledge, both the viewer's and that of contemporary experts, who played an important role in the government's planning efforts during the 1930s. In exploring these topics, I ask a number of questions: How is knowledge presented as a mechanism for understanding, engaging with, and ordering the modern world? What types of knowledge and experiences do these posters and their commissioning agencies advocate and why? Do the posters privilege particular individuals, groups, or interests? Finally, what are some of the limitations and tensions inherent in these appeals?

As I argue, the WPA posters were sites of negotiation in which knowledge and education were repeatedly re-envisioned, both formally and conceptually, in the process of promoting social literacy and envisioning a politically, economically, socially, and environmentally sustainable future for the nation and its citizens. In doing so, these works legitimized various forms of knowledge and ways of knowing. They also positioned knowledge and social literacy at the center of the government's efforts to define and manage the relationship between self and society in modern America.

As the following chapters indicate, the visual characteristics of these posters were central to their social function. Designers worked to translate complex social goals into simple, legible forms that would be easily mass-produced, capture the viewer's attention, and convey a message quickly and effectively. Together, images and text worked to encourage

social literacy and shape the public's understanding of various social issues and ideals. They also assisted government officials in negotiating controversies surrounding their social policies and programs by envisioning seemingly straightforward and optimistic solutions to contemporary social problems.

—•—

This study represents the first in-depth, scholarly analysis of the WPA posters. Although historians have written extensively on other New Deal art projects, including prints produced by the FAP's graphic arts division, few have focused exclusively on the WPA's posters.[8] Furthermore, what has been published offers little contextualization for the works beyond the circumstances surrounding their production. Christopher DeNoon's *Posters of the WPA* (1987), for instance, provides an excellent introduction to the WPA and outlines some of the major themes and subjects linking the posters. His work, however, does not attempt an extensive analysis of the posters or their themes within a broader cultural context.

The only other book-length project dedicated to the WPA posters, Ennis Carter's *Posters for the People: Art of the WPA* (2008), limits its analysis of the works to a descriptive, five page introduction. The essay discusses the posters as paradigms of socially responsible design, an approach that oversimplifies both their production and reception. Like the larger

[8] The literature on other New Deal art projects is extensive. Some important works in the field include: Belisario R. Contreras, *Tradition and Innovation in New Deal Art* (Lewisburg: Bucknell Univ. Press, 1983); Jonathan Harris, *Federal Art and National Culture: The Politics of Identity in New Deal America* (New York: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1995); Karal Ann Marling, *Wall-to-Wall America: A Cultural History of Post-Office Murals in the Great Depression* (Minneapolis: Univ. of Minnesota Press, 1982); Barbara Melosh, *Engendering Culture: Manhood and Womanhood in New Deal Public Art and Theatre* (Washington: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1991); Richard D. McKinzie, *The New Deal for Artists* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton Univ. Press, 1973); and Marlene Park and Gerald E. Markowitz, *Democratic Vistas: Post Offices and Public Art in the New Deal* (Philadelphia: Temple Univ. Press, 1984). For an excellent study of the FAP's Graphic Arts Division, see Helen Langa, *Radical Art: Printmaking and the Left in 1930s New York* (Berkeley: Univ. of California Press, 2004).

New Deal administration, which some critiqued for doing too little and others for doing too much in respect to social reform, the WPA posters would have resonated in complex ways within their social environment.

In addressing the form and content of these posters in the context of contemporary political and social debates, my dissertation expands our understanding of the important role visual culture played in the government's attempts to define and communicate its social agenda to the public. My project, however, does not provide a comprehensive survey of the WPA posters. The approximately 2200 extant WPA posters deal with a wide range of subjects and issues, which engaged the specific concerns and objectives of the agencies commissioning them. Although this number is a fraction of the roughly two million posters printed by the FAP, it necessitates certain omissions and a degree of selectivity.

I focused my study of these posters on their engagement with knowledge for several reasons. Because the definition of knowledge varies over time and from one social group to another, this approach offers a rich framework for examining contemporary ideals, both physical and ideological. It also enhances our understanding of the various ways government entities worked to bridge the divide between theory and practice, encouraging social reform by shaping the public's understanding of and response to contemporary social issues.[9] As historian Clarence Karier has argued, "the history of the idea of progress, and of its corollary social meliorism, cannot be adequately treated without consideration of education as a vehicle

[9] As Holger Cahill explained in a proposal addressing FAP projects at the New York World's Fair, certain "leaders of social thinking… believe that our greatest needs are an awakened social consciousness and a method for bridging the gap between doing and thinking, between theory and practice, in educational and creative activity." See Holger Cahill, "Proposal for Art Projects at the NY World's Fair," July 1938; National Art Centers; Box 9, General Records, 1935-1940; Records of the Works Progress Administration, Record Group 69; National Archives at College Park, College Park, MD.

of social reform."[10] My project addresses this history by looking at some of the ways WPA posters encouraged social change by endorsing a culture of knowledge during the New Deal.

This approach extends the scholarship on socially engaged art produced during the New Deal, much of which has focused on social realism and the work of leftist artists.[11] As scholars have noted, these artists used their work to address adverse social conditions and challenge the political structures that maintain inequity. The WPA posters, in contrast, tended to uphold capitalist ideals and many existing social traditions in the process of addressing contemporary concerns and encouraging public action. The overt nature of their appeals also distinguishes the posters from many of the government sponsored films and photographs that have been discussed at length by scholars, including those produced by the Farm Security Administration (FSA).

In exploring the various ways these posters promote the dissemination, cultivation, and application of knowledge, my project builds on the work of several scholars who have discussed the educational mission of the FAP. In *For the Millions: American Art and Culture between the Wars* (2004), A. Joan Saab suggests that the aesthetic and educational goals of the FAP linked the making, buying, and appreciation of art with democratic ideals. This process, she argues, contributed to art's "desacralization" during the 1930s and transformed the ways artistic value was determined.[12] Like Saab, historian Victoria Grieve focuses on the democratization of art in *The Federal Art Project and the Creation of Middlebrow Culture* (2009). As she explains, the FAP encouraged a middlebrow conception of the arts in its

[10] Clarence J. Karier, *The Individual, Society, and Education: A History of American Educational Ideas* (Urbana: Univ. of Illinois Press, 1986), xxi.
[11] See, for instance, Andrew Hemingway, *Artists on the Left: American Artists and the Communist Movement, 1926-1956* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2002) and Langa, *Radical Art*.
[12] See A. Joan Saab, *For the Millions: American Art and Culture between the Wars* (Philadelphia: Univ. of Pennsylvania Press, 2004).

attempts to educate Americans about art and design and strengthen the domestic art market by "redefining art as a commodity within economic and intellectual reach of all Americans."[13] According to Grieve, contemporaries saw art as a way to promote individual fulfillment and growth, elevate the taste of the American public, and encourage a sense of social connection.[14]

My project expands on their work by addressing various ways government agencies used art to promote social literacy in a range of interrelated arenas, including leisure, conservation, health, and public housing. The government's attempts to democratize art and shape the public's aesthetic sensibilities were, in fact, part of a larger effort to encourage social and economic reform through the cultivation, application, and dissemination of knowledge. My project examines the role WPA posters played this broader initiative.

This approach offers a number of new insights into the relationship between New Deal art, education, and social reform. Among these, it broadens our understanding of the democratic ideals informing the government's social agenda and its efforts to address contemporary problems. The WPA posters envision a number of paradigms, which are often specific to the social issue being addressed. Some encouraged viewers to take an active role in learning about and solving the "world's" problems. Others urged individuals to seek the expertise of professionals like doctors and urban planners. My project examines the various ways government agencies used the WPA posters to define and naturalize these and other behaviors, linking national stability with the public's ability to respond appropriately and constructively to the rapidly changing demands of modern life.

---

[13] Victoria Grieve, *The Federal Art Project and the Creation of Middlebrow Culture* (Urbana: Univ. of Illinois Press, 2009), 2-6.
[14] Ibid., 22.

My project also enriches our understanding of New Deal culture by foregrounding some of the diverse ways government officials characterized knowledge and literacy in addressing the economic and social exigencies of the 1930s and early 1940s. As scholars have noted, New Deal agencies were influenced by Progressive-Era reformers, many of whom embraced education as a catalyst for social change. Both Grieve and Saab, for instance, link the FAP with the social and educational philosophies of pragmatic and Progressive-Era intellectuals like John Dewey. Dewey was one of the most important social thinkers of the early twentieth century and had a significant influence on the educational goals of the FAP, leading Grieve to suggest that the "FAP was an attempt to realize Dewey's ideas regarding the integration of art and life, and the rejection of art for art's sake."[15] As Dewey and others argued, art had educational value, making it an important tool for social reform.[16] Like other forms of education, it could improve the welfare of the nation and its citizens by teaching individuals to think critically and rationally about their jobs, leisure time, environment, health, and social responsibilities, among other things.

The FAP posters exemplify this progressive tradition in a number of ways. As administrators explained, the posters link art with the everyday by addressing some of the most pressing issues of the New Deal years. In working to fulfill their social mission, the posters equate education and social change, establishing a relationship between knowledge and experience. Likewise, many resonate with the pragmatic emphasis on progress,

---

[15] Cahill, in fact, took classes with Dewey in New York City. See Grieve, *The Federal Art Project,* 10-11, 95, 101. See also Saab, *For the Millions*, 13, 21; and John L. Elias and Sharan B. Merriam, *Philosophical Foundations of Adult Education* (Huntington, NY: R.E. Krieger Publishing Company, 1980), 48.

[16] See: Grieve, *The Federal Art Project*, 34; Saab, *For the Millions*, 12; Karier, *The Individual, Society, and Education*, 148; Elias and Merriam, *Philosophical Foundations of Adult Education*, 47, 49, 50; and Joseph F. Kett, *The Pursuit of Knowledge Under Difficulties: From Self-Improvement to Adult Education in America, 1750-1990* (Stanford, CA: Stanford Univ. Press, 1994), 293, 399.

utilitarianism, and action. This commitment shapes the content of the posters as well as their designs, which strive for functionality rather than a specific ideal of beauty.

A close look at these posters, however, suggests that pragmatic and progressive philosophies were only two of *many* factors influencing the design and production of these works, as well as their engagement with knowledge and education. While both Grieve and Saab acknowledge that the democratization of art was a complex and occasionally contradictory process, their focus on aesthetic experience and the institutional goals of the FAP provides a limited picture of the diverse ways WPA artists and government agencies conceptualized, utilized, and promoted knowledge and education as a solution to contemporary social issues. As the following chapters indicate, the WPA posters engaged a much wider range of discourses in promoting social literacy.

The administration's commitment to knowledge and education was motivated by a number of factors. The depression had caused poverty, discontent, and uncertainty, as well as demands for change from groups with diverse social and political agendas. The convention of using knowledge and education as instruments of social change, which was widely embraced during the Progressive Era, set a precedent for government agencies working to address these problems. Government officials saw the dissemination and application of knowledge as an effective way of reconciling individual and national needs. Knowledge, they suggested, could mobilize and empower Americans, instilling them with a sense of purpose and hope. As they explained, it could also assist the government in revitalizing the nation both socially and economically. Knowledge and social literacy gave citizens the tools to navigate the demands of modern life, contributing to national stability. They could also create a sense of unity among disparate people by reinforcing national goals and values, which was crucial for

countering the unstable social climate and critiques from conservative members of congress and groups like the American Medical Association.

Although the administration was united in its commitment to promoting knowledge and social literacy, government officials defined these concepts in different ways. The New Deal administration was characterized by a continual process of evaluation and change. Likewise, New Deal administrators were motivated by multiple objectives and educational philosophies.[17] The WPA posters, as a result, engaged a range of disparate needs and agendas: artistic, political, social, and economic. They also embodied various and occasionally competing perspectives on the management, dissemination, and application of knowledge, which was understood in relation to the specific social issues being addressed. The posters, for instance, provide a conflicting picture of the relationship between seeing and knowing. While some of the conservation posters discussed in chapter three imply that vision contributes to the generation of knowledge, WPA posters dealing with health and illness challenge this understanding.

I suggest the WPA posters should be seen as sites of encounter and negotiation in which knowledge and education were shaped and reconfigured to meet a number of historically specific goals. This approach, which is consistent with Foucault's assertion that knowledge or "knowledge traditions" should be envisioned in the plural, expands and complicates our understanding of the role education played in the government's efforts to

[17] See, for example, Saab, *For the Millions*, 11, 14. See also Andrew Hemmingway, "Cultural Democracy by Default: the Politics of the New Deal Arts Programmes," *Oxford Art Journal* 30, no. 2 (2007): 272; Grieve, *The Federal Art Project*, 92; and Harold W. Stubblefield and Patrick Keane, *Adult Education in the American Experience: From the Colonial Period to the Present* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Publishers, 1994), 230.

encourage social reform.[18] It also highlights the multiple ways these posters resonated within their historical contexts, working both for and against the rhetoric of consensus employed by New Deal agencies.

—•—

This dissertation is an interdisciplinary effort that borrows from art history, environmental history, critical race studies, and gender studies, among other fields. The questions I have chosen to explore, however, stem primarily from the posters themselves. In each chapter, I address the content of the posters and the visual strategies designers employed in the context of broader cultural concerns. This approach offers a number of insights into the motivations prompting the creation of the posters. It also foregrounds some of the ways government agencies used visuals to advance their social agenda and ensure social stability during the Depression.

Several archival collections facilitated my analysis, including the National Archives in College Park, Maryland; the Smithsonian's Archives of American Art; the Chicago Historical Society; the Pennsylvania State Archives; the National Park Service Library in Harpers Ferry, WV; and Duke University's John W. Hartman Center for Sales, Advertising, and Marketing History. These collections provided valuable material on the design and production of the WPA posters, the administration of the poster divisions, and the relationship between the poster units and other WPA art projects. They were also important sources of information on some of the agencies commissioning the posters, including the Pennsylvania Game Commission and the National Park Service.

---

[18] For a discussion of Foucault and the concept of "knowledge traditions," see Peter Burke, *A Social History of Knowledge II: From the Encyclopédie to Wikipedia* (Cambridge: Polity, 2011), 5.

Similarly, journals like *Nature Magazine, Architectural Record,* and *Survey Graphic* provided information that was indispensable for situating the posters in a broader cultural context. Because the WPA posters are intertextual works integrally connected with other images, texts, and objects, an analysis of these publications was essential for understanding contemporary attitudes toward social welfare and government planning, among other issues. Likewise, these journals contained a number of articles on public outreach and publicity, which offered important insights into the relationship between visual culture and social reform.

My dissertation has been shaped by the understanding that design, like politics, engages many and sometimes competing discourses. As the artist and theorist Jan Van Toorn has noted, designers often work to neutralize any related "conflicts of interest by developing a mediating concept aimed at consensus."[19] My project, which focuses on the goals and concerns prompting the production of these posters, addresses this practice by considering various ways the WPA posters worked to articulate and shape power structures, generate and maintain narratives, and naturalize ideology.

New Deal administrators considered this process of consensus building crucial for ensuring the political, economic, and social welfare of the nation and its citizens. As some asserted, constructive leisure habits, the use and provision of adequate housing, and good health resulted in happier and more productive citizens, which was important for strengthening the nation both economically and socially. Others maintained that the wise use of natural resources was essential for securing the nation's future. Officials used the WPA

[19] Jan Van Toorn, "Design and Reflexivity," in *Graphic Design Theory*, ed. Helen Armstrong (New York: Princeton Architectural Press, 2009), 102.

posters to achieve support for these and other initiatives, furthering their social agendas while negotiating critiques surrounding their involvement in private lives of Americans.

The democratization of knowledge, however, was an uneven and selective process. Despite their seemingly straightforward messages, the WPA posters embody contradictions that engaged with the complex culture in which they were produced. Some of the WPA's health posters, for example, destabilize the physical and social ideals they promote through the illustration of outwardly controlled and healthy bodies by suggesting that illnesses like tuberculosis cannot be detected visually. In foregrounding these inconsistencies, my project highlights the multiple ways WPA posters might have resonated within their contemporary context.

Likewise, the WPA posters worked to naturalize specific knowledge and behaviors in addressing contemporary concerns. This involved a process of negotiation between reform and tradition that was informed by longstanding assumptions and prejudices concerning race, gender, and class. As the following chapters indicate, the posters promote norms and values that conformed to white, middle-class ideals, rendering existing social inequities problematically invisible and seemingly irrelevant to the issues being addressed.

As the posters indicate, government officials were selective in the issues they chose to raise in their public communications. James McCamy, author of a 1939 book on federal publicity, noted that the government's promotional efforts involved "discreet silences as well as public announcements."[20] These silences were one way the WPA posters worked to promote a rhetoric of consensus and mask disputes regarding the government's social

[20] James L. McCamy, *Government Publicity, Its Practice in Federal Administration* (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1939), 35.

programs. They also reveal some of the tensions inherent in the process of promoting knowledge and social literacy as a solution to reform. An analysis of these omissions, therefore, provides important insights into the government's attempts to negotiate the complex and highly contested social, political, and economic terrain of the 1930s and early 1940s.

The WPA posters, which promote standards of knowledge and literacy that were consistent with the goals of their commissioning agencies, can be characterized as propaganda. Although scholars have disagreed over the precise definition of propaganda, the term is generally used to describe communication that works deliberately to influence the attitudes, opinions, and actions of its audience. Propaganda, in other words, aims to manage individual behavior by shaping the way people understand an issue or situation. Like the WPA posters, it promotes a specific agenda and is often selective in the information it presents.

The term "propaganda" was initially neutral and used to describe a range of material, from public health statements to political notices. By the late 1920s, however, the word had acquired a negative connotation, leading one author to note that it had become an "epithet of contempt and hate."[21] This sentiment was solidified during the late 1930s as propaganda became associated with publicity campaigns initiated by the fascists and Nazis. While some New Dealers continued to use the term neutrally, many equated propaganda with deceit and political manipulation.

[21] Harold D. Lasswell, "The Function of the Propagandist," *International Journal of Ethics* 38, no. 3 (April 1928): 260.

Government officials attempted to negotiate the controversies surrounding propaganda, in part, by equating their outreach campaigns with public education. Although the WPA posters share formal similarities with visuals produced by the Nazis and fascists, and were characterized as propaganda by some of their commissioning agencies, the WPA worked to distance the posters from the term's negative connotations by emphasizing their educational value.[22] As government officials suggested, federal communication campaigns were designed to equip individuals with the knowledge they needed to make informed and rational choices. For these officials, this distinguished the administration's outreach campaigns from foreign efforts and addressed the concerns of critics like Marjorie Van de Water, who characterized propaganda as an "assault against intelligence" that replaces reason with "blinded emotion."[23]

The contemporary concerns regarding propaganda were part of a broader dialogue about visual culture that was taking place during the New Deal era. The number of visuals in the public realm - from movies and advertisements to posters - rose steadily throughout the early twentieth century. This trend was accompanied by growing anxieties about the influence these works were having on the public. The increasing professionalization of graphic design and advertising had reinforced a widespread confidence in the persuasive power of visual communication. This conviction, combined with the uncertainty of the depression, fueled heated debates over the form and content of visual material.

---

[22] A 1936 report issued by the FAP, for instance, described conservation posters produced for the New York State Conservation Department in Albany as propaganda. See "Report of Federal Art Projects Operating in New York State Counties" (August 3, 1936); New York State; Box 58, Reports of the Exhibition Department, 1936-1937; Records Related to Publicity and Exhibitions, 1936-1937; Records of the Work Projects Administration, Record Group 69; National Archives at College Park, College Park, MD.

[23] Marjorie Van de Water, "Propaganda: An Insidious Assault Upon the Intelligence, Psychology Warns You How to Recognize It," *The Science News Letter* 34, no. 15 (October 8, 1938): 234.

My project highlights some of the ways the WPA posters engaged this discourse in promoting the government's social agenda. In combining a close visual and contextual analysis of the posters, it expands our understanding of the relationship between form and content in modern design, highlighting the significant influence design practices had on the social messages being communicated. It also foregrounds some of the ways government agencies worked to navigate the hazy, but contentious boundaries between education, political communication, and propaganda in the process of fulfilling their social goals and promoting a culture of knowledge during the New Deal.

—•—

The first chapter of my dissertation provides essential background information and context for the thematic studies that follow. Specifically, it situates the FAP's commitment to the cultivation and application of knowledge within its broader social mission, addressing this mission in the context of contemporary debates concerning socially engaged design. As this chapter suggests, in equating the "modern" poster with functionality and usefulness, FAP artists advanced design as a mode of problem solving akin to knowledge in its ability to promote social literacy and manage the relationship between self and society in modern America.

Chapter two focuses on WPA posters that promote reading, which was one of the most popular leisure activities during the period. As I argue, these posters engaged contemporary concerns over a perceived decline in knowledge and skills, which leisure professionals linked to both personal and national welfare. As critics asserted, Americans were squandering their leisure time with passive pursuits like the movies, which contributed to "spectatoritis" and other social ills. Responding to these concerns, the WPA posters worked to educate viewers

on mastering the "art of living," which was a social ideal predicated on intellectual and emotional fulfillment. In the process, they also characterized reading as a practice that could help to define and disseminate democratic principles.

Chapter three addresses posters the WPA produced for state and federal organizations concerned with the conservation of natural resources. As this chapter explains, these posters promote social literacy as a tool for negotiating a balance between the use and preservation of America's natural resources. In the process, these posters present viewers with several models for understanding and interacting with nature. Some imply that preservation is dependent on an informed mode of "seeing" that requires an awareness of wilderness etiquette and an appreciation of the natural world. Others encourage viewers to "see" or know America by traveling to the national parks. While showcasing the government's commitment to conservation, these works reveal some of the tensions inherent in negotiating use and preservation in their occasionally problematic relationship to ecological ideals endorsed by contemporary conservationists.

Offering a different picture of the relationship between knowledge and reform, chapter four concentrates on WPA posters dealing with health-related issues like cancer, syphilis, and tuberculosis. As this chapter indicates, these posters use a range of graphic techniques to expand the viewer's understanding of contemporary health problems and promote the knowledge and lifesaving technology of medical experts. In doing so, they advance knowledge as a tool for uniting viewers, medical professionals, and government officials in the fight against illness. Many of the social and physical ideals these posters envision, however, reveal deeply embedded cultural anxieties concerning disease and its regulation in specific populations. Moreover, the posters convey a complex and somewhat contradictory

picture of the role vision can play in advancing the nation's knowledge of health problems. Like the WPA's conservation posters, these works nuance our understanding of the relationship between visual culture and social reform by exemplifying the multiple and often competing goals of their commissioning agencies.

Chapter five addresses WPA posters designed to educate Americans on the availability and benefits of planned housing. Like the health posters discussed in chapter four, the WPA's housing posters link social reform with the specialized knowledge of professionals. Specifically, they foreground the expertise of architects and urban planners by visualizing the physical, social, and aesthetic benefits of modern planning. As these posters indicate, modern planning fosters functional and healthy environments, social stability, and a visual restructuring of the urban landscape, the aesthetic appearance of which reformers viewed as a measure of social order and civility. In promoting this understanding, the posters suggest the depression-era housing crisis was a national problem with a straightforward, physical solution realized through the knowledge of planning experts. This approach assisted officials in negotiating the often contentious debates surrounding the government's housing projects by downplaying broader economic, political, and social factors contributing to the creation of the slums.

Together, these chapters exemplify a number of ways government agencies used posters to promote – both explicitly and indirectly - knowledge and social literacy as a solution to contemporary social problems by endorsing government planning, a reliance on experts, and the cultivation of viewers' skills and cultural competence. As the posters suggest, knowledge is a vital component of everyday practice and integral to a number of social discourses. Likewise, it is an ordering mechanism that can be employed in a variety of

ways for the benefit of both the nation and its individual citizens. In the process, these posters provide crucial insights into some of the ways New Deal administrators worked to address contemporary social problems by constructing a culture of knowledge responsive to particular social needs.

Chapter 1
The World Wants New Knowledge and Skills

In his 1939 book *Knowledge for What?: The Place of Social Science in American Culture*, the sociologist Robert Lynd observed that an emphasis on the acquisition of knowledge was a "marked characteristic" of contemporary culture.[1] This trend was encouraged by New Deal administrators who organized a number of unprecedented initiatives designed to educate Americans, including literacy programs, homemaking classes, vocational training, youth projects, and cultural programs like the FAP, which they saw as closely "allied and identified with social and educational enterprise."[2] In doing so, these officials drew from and perpetuated a longstanding faith in the ability of education to address a range of needs and concerns.

A 1937 poster produced by the Ohio FAP exemplifies this emphasis on knowledge and education (figure 1). The poster shows the earth surrounded by text that declares "the world wants new knowledge and skills." This statement is accompanied by additional copy promoting adult education. Together, these elements imply that the "world" will benefit if viewers enroll in the government's free, informal courses. In linking the viewer's actions with collective needs and desires, this poster blurs the boundaries between public and private. It also situates knowledge and skill at the forefront of social progress.

---

[1] Robert S. Lynd, *Knowledge for What? The Place of Social Science in American Culture* (New York: Grove Press, Inc., 1939), 114.

[2] Alex Williams (head of the FAP's national publicity office) discussing the Federal Art Project in a letter to Holger Cahill (4 March 1936); quoted in Harris, *Federal Art and National Culture*, 66. See also Stubblefield and Keane, *Adult Education in the American Experience*, 237, 246.

This is one of many WPA posters promoting knowledge as an ideal. As the following chapters illustrate, some of these works advance self-education as a path to both personal and national renewal. Others endorse the expertise of specialists like doctors and urban planners. In doing so, these posters legitimized various forms of knowledge and ways of knowing: literary, scientific, and professional as well as that gained from personal experience and exploration.

This chapter frames the FAP's commitment to the cultivation and application of new knowledge and skills within the Project's broader social mission, which included preserving the skills of American artists and uniting them with the broader public. It also addresses the posters in the context of contemporary debates regarding socially engaged design. As my study indicates, poster artists negotiated disputes over the characteristics of democratic art by distancing their discussion of the modern poster from specific stylistic trends. Equating modernism with functionality and usefulness, they asserted that the success of a modern poster had less to do with the style it was rendered in than its ability to address contemporary needs and engage the public.

In exploring these issues, this essay provides essential background information on the WPA, establishing a foundation for the chapters that follow. It also underscores the important connection between form, content, and context in modern poster design. As I argue, FAP artists approached design as a mode of problem solving akin to knowledge in its ability to promote social literacy and manage the relationship between self and society in modern America. Accordingly, the posters' formal qualities resonate in specific ways with the broader social issues being addressed.

The WPA and Poster Production

The production of these posters was integrally tied to the depression-era context in which they were created. After a decade of relative prosperity, America experienced one of the worst economic disasters of its history. Over a period of several days in October 1929, the New York Stock exchange suffered a severe crash that sent stock values plummeting. This incident was followed by an economic depression that devastated the lives of many for years to come.[3] By 1933, the year Franklin D. Roosevelt became President, nearly twenty-five percent of Americans were unemployed, thousands of banks had failed, and the gross national product had fallen from 103.6 billion to 55.7 billion dollars.[4]

The government initiated a number of relief programs in response to this crisis, including the WPA. Between 1935 and 1943, the WPA undertook a significant number of public works projects that resulted in the construction of buildings, roads, and parks, among other things. It also established several cultural projects under the aegis "Federal Project Number One." These included the Federal Theater Project, the Federal Music Project, the Federal Writers Project, and the Federal Art Project.

The majority of the WPA's posters were designed and printed by FAP artists, many of whom worked in official poster divisions.[5] The first poster division grew out of a Civilian Works Administration (CWA) project New York City Mayor Fiorello La Guardia launched to

[3] Although the 1929 stock market crash contributed to the economic problems of the 1930s, recent scholarship has argued persuasively that it was only one factor causing the Great Depression. See Lisa McGirr, "The Interwar Years," in *American History Now*, eds. Eric Foner and Lisa McGirr (Philadelphia: Temple Univ. Press, 2011), 135.

[4] US Government Spending, US Gross Domestic Product, 1929-1933. Accessed September 2, 2012. http://www.usgovernmentspending.com/spending_chart_1929_1933USb_13s1li011mcn__US_Gross_Domestic_Product_GDP_History.

[5] While most FAP posters were designed and printed by poster division artists, a small number were produced by state art projects without an official poster unit, like those in Colorado, Florida, Nevada and Oregon. Likewise, some of the posters discussed in this dissertation were produced by the WPA War Services Division.

promote various city initiatives. The "mayor's posters project" was taken over by the federal government in 1935, becoming the first of many poster units established by the FAP.[6] Because poster design was considered an "applied" or "practical" art, the FAP distinguished these poster units organizationally from their "creative" divisions, which encompassed mural and easel painting, sculpture, and fine art prints.[7]

The FAP was, foremost, an employment program created to provide jobs for artists during the Depression. The FAP employed over 5,000 individuals at its peak, drawing at least ninety percent of its personnel from relief.[8] Approximately 500 of these individuals worked in the Project's poster divisions.[9] While the number of people in each division varied, the New York City unit, which was the largest, employed approximately thirty-five designers, twenty printers, and ten to twelve film cutters at the height of its production.[10] Each FAP worker averaged between ninety-five and 110 hours of work per month and was paid a salary commensurate with his or her classification, which could range from "unskilled" to

---

[6] DeNoon, *Posters of the WPA*, 17, 60. DeNoon suggests that the development of the first poster division in New York City was facilitated by the fact that nearly one-third of the FAP's artists lived and worked in that local.

[7] The FAP's poster units had their own operating procedures that conformed to contemporary attitudes regarding the nature of creative work versus commercial. See "Federal Art Project Manual," October 1935; Technical Circulars WPA; Box 14; General Records, 1935-1940; Records of the Works Progress Administration, Record Group 69; National Archives at College Park, College Park, MD. See also Mary Curran; "Report of the FAP in Pennsylvania, October 1935-July 1938;" Pages 5-7; Curran Report; Box 1; General Records, 1935-1940; Records of the Works Progress Administration, Record Group 69; National Archives at College Park, College Park, MD.

[8] See the "Federal Art Project Manual," October 1935; Technical Circulars WPA; Page 1; Box 14; General Records, 1935-1940; Records of the Works Progress Administration, Record Group 69; National Archives at College Park, College Park, MD.

[9] Ennis Carter, Christopher DeNoon and Alexander M. Peltz, *Posters for the People: The Art of the WPA* (Philadelphia, PA: Quirk Books, 2008), 3.

[10] DeNoon, *Posters of the WPA*, 19.

"supervisory."[11] In New York, poster artists received between twenty-one and twenty-seven dollars per week.[12]

FAP posters could be commissioned by any government agency or tax supported institution, providing this "co-operating sponsor" confirmed the Project was not replacing services that would have otherwise been supplied by a private design firm or business.[13] The cost to the co-operating sponsor was nominal and varied depending on the division producing the posters, the quantity needed, the number of colors used, and the size of the finished product.[14] The dimension of these posters varied depending on the needs of the sponsor, although many measured 14 x 22".[15]

Initially, FAP artists painted posters by hand.[16] This method, however, was soon rejected due to the constraints it placed on productivity. Not long after the first poster division was established, New York artist Anthony Velonis introduced a silk-screen process that allowed FAP artists to produce multiple posters quickly and efficiently. Although some

---

[11] See "Questions and Answers on the WPA;" Page 12; Selma Rein; Box 11; General Records, 1935-1940; Records of the Works Progress Administration, Record Group 69; National Archives at College Park, College Park, MD. See also Saab, *For the Millions*, 40. Saab suggests that FAP artists averaged about 96 hours of work per month. The WPA publication estimates 110 hours per month.

[12] DeNoon, *Posters of the WPA*, 19.

[13] See: "Federal Art Project Manual," October 1935; Page 9; Technical Circulars WPA; Box 14; General Records, 1935-1940; Records of the Works Progress Administration, Record Group 69; National Archives at College Park, College Park, MD. See also "Allocation and Loan of Works of Art Produced under the WPA Art Program;" Page 1; Operational Procedures; Box 13; General Records, 1935-1940; Records of the Works Progress Administration, Record Group 69; National Archives at College Park, College Park, MD. As this report notes, "No work of art may be contracted for or may be allocated or loaned which will replace the usual service or activities provided for in the budget of such agencies or institutions."

[14] A June 1938 letter from Audrey McMahon to Thomas Parker suggests there were regional differences in poster costs during the early years of the FAP. "Audrey McMahon Letter to Thomas Parker, June 1938" and "Letter to FAP State Directors Regarding Co-sponsor Contributions, July 1938;" National Finance, 1937-40; Box 10; General Records, 1935-1940; Records of the Works Progress Administration, Record Group 69; National Archives at College Park, College Park, MD.

[15] DeNoon, *Posters of the WPA*, 9.

[16] Ibid., 17.

divisions continued to experiment with other printing processes, most chose silk-screening as their primary method of production.[17]

The FAP's use of silk-screening was indicative of an increasing interest in the process. Although screen printing had been employed for centuries, the number of artists using the method increased during the 1930s as they began to recognize its advantages.[18] The silkscreen process, for instance, allowed FAP artists to produce posters on a larger scale than they had with hand painting. The New York and Chicago divisions, the largest in the FAP, averaged approximately 600 posters per day. In Chicago, this resulted in the production of 600,000 posters for more than sixty city and state agencies between 1936 and 1940.[19]

The process was also economical.[20] The equipment needed for screen printing cost less than that for processes like lithography.[21] Silkscreen stencils, for example, were inexpensive compared to the plates for other printing methods and there were fewer costs associated with mounting materials because silkscreen frames could accommodate different

---

[17] The Pennsylvania unit, for instance, produced woodblock and lithographic prints in addition to silk-screens. A report issued by the NYC FAP also references a photographic process that had improved the reproduction of half tones and line drawings. See Mary Curran; "Report of the FAP in Pennsylvania, October 1935-July 1938;" Curran Report; Box 1; General Records, 1935-1940; Records of the Works Progress Administration, Record Group 69; National Archives at College Park, College Park, MD. See also Hyman Warsager, "Graphic Techniques in Progress," in *Art for the Millions: Essays from the 1930s by Artists and Administrators of the WPA Federal Art Project*, ed. Francis O'Connor, (Greenwich, Connecticut: New York Graphic Society, LTD, 1973), 141; and "Methodology, Federal Works Agency, Works Projects Administration Arts Program, New York City WPA Art Project;" Page 67; Box 63; Records of Federal Art Projects in NY, NJ, and OH, 1934-42; Records of the Works Progress Administration, Record Group 69; National Archives at College Park, College Park, MD.

[18] J. I. Biegeleisen and E. J. Busenbark, *The Silk Screen Printing Process* (New York: McGraw-Hill Book Co., 1938), 3. In a 1938 memo to "Art Center Directors," Thomas Parker recommended *The Silk Screen Process* as an "instructive and useful" reference for further information on screen printing. Memorandum to Art Center Directors from Thomas C. Parker, 12 Sept 1938; Selma Rein; Box 11; General Records, 1935-1940; Records of the Works Progress Administration, Record Group 69; National Archives at College Park, College Park, MD.

[19] See DeNoon, *Posters of the WPA*, 18, 22; and Ralph Graham, "The Poster in Chicago," in *Art for the Millions: Essays from the 1930s by Artists and Administrators of the WPA Federal art Project*, ed. Francis O'Connor (Greenwich, Connecticut: New York Graphic Society, LTD, 1973), 181.

[20] John T. DeLemos, *Planning and Producing Posters* (Worcester, Mass: Davis Press, 1943), 43.

[21] Biegeleisen and Busenbark, *The Silk Screen Printing Process*, 4, 76.

thicknesses of paper. These advantages allowed the FAP to produce a large number of posters for a relatively small financial outlay. In 1937, for example, the New York City division printed 38,200 posters for the low cost of 753 dollars.[22]

The mass production of these works facilitated their wide distribution. Agencies commissioning the posters hung them in a variety of public institutions, including community centers, libraries, health clinics, hospitals, and schools.[23] Seeking a large audience, they also placed them on street kiosks and public transportation as well as in shop windows and highly trafficked areas like cafes, clubs, hotels, railroad stations, subways, and bus stations.[24] The New York City Park Department, for instance, displayed several thousand posters promoting the ice and roller skating facilities at Flushing Meadow Park in subways, busses, and trolley cars.[25]

Co-operating sponsors would also use the posters to communicate with specialized audiences. According to a 1941 report, posters commissioned by the New York City

---

[22] DeNoon, *Posters of the WPA*, 22.

[23] As Ralph Graham explained, "The motor coaches carry our posters on the front and sides at least six months of the year; the "L" interurbans, railroads and stations, art museums throughout the country, grade schools, high schools, libraries, settlement houses, community centers, and traveling exhibits all display our posters from time to time. The various neighborhoods of the city are also reached by means of the local merchant, who donates space in his window to show our posters." See Graham, "The Poster in Chicago," in *Art for the Millions*, ed. O'Connor, 181.

[24] In an attempt to reach tourists, agencies would sometimes exhibit posters in area hotels. Posters advertising an exhibition of Index work in Chicago, for instance, were posted in hotels and other locations throughout the city. See Memo from Mary Morsell to "Office Staff," February 8, 1937; Index of American Design, 1937; Box 5; General Records, 1935-1940; Records of the Works Progress Administration, Record Group 69; National Archives at College Park, College Park, MD. Similarly, posters promoting an exhibition of WPA work in Oklahoma City were placed in a variety of places: hotels, bus stations, railroad stations, cafes and clubs. See "Recommendations, WPA Oklahoma City Art Gallery;" Oklahoma; Box 15; General Records, 1935-1940; Records of the Works Progress Administration, Record Group 69; National Archives at College Park, College Park, MD.

[25] Press Release, New York City WPA, March 25, 1941; Records of the Division of Information; Records of the Works Progress Administration, Record Group 69; National Archives at College Park, College Park, MD. Likewise, seventy-five FAP posters promoting an exhibition at the Phillips Memorial Gallery were posted in Washington D.C. streetcars. See: Memo from Thomas Maulsby to Nina Collier, June 25, 1936; Selma Rein, 1936; Box 11, General Records, 1935-1940; Records of the Works Progress Administration, Record Group 69; National Archives at College Park, College Park, MD.

Department of Docks were distributed to foreign consulates.[26] Other sponsors displayed FAP posters at conferences, expositions, and trade shows. The U.S. Travel Bureau, for example, hung posters by Alexander Dux, Martin Weitzman, and John Wagner at the National Sportsmen's Show, the Detroit News Travel Exposition, the National Automobile Show, and the Boston Winter Sports Exposition.[27]

In addition to these locations, which were chosen by the co-operating sponsors, the FAP hung posters in museums, galleries, and exhibition venues like the New York World's Fair (see figure 2). These exhibitions allowed the FAP to promote the quality and social relevance of the Project's work.[28] As a FAP gallery guide explained, these displays enabled the public to "see, discuss, and pass opinion upon the results of the FAP."[29] While documentation addressing the reception of these exhibitions is limited, several articles suggest they were well received. Reviewing an exhibition of WPA posters produced in New York and New Jersey, for instance, the *New York Times* noted that a "high average is maintained, indicating distinct and most gratifying progress in the field."[30]

---

[26] "New York City WPA Art Project, Activities and Accomplishments," 1941; Page 1; Box 65; Records of Federal Art Projects in NY, NJ, and OH, 1934-42; Records of the Works Progress Administration, Record Group 69; National Archives at College Park, College Park, MD.

[27] Press Release, Department of Information, NYC WPA Art Project, 1 Nov 1939; Records of the Division of Information; Records of the Works Progress Administration, Record Group 69; National Archives at College Park, College Park, MD.

[28] In the New York Gallery, the exhibitions would last from 10 days to two weeks. See "WPA Guide to The Federal Art Project Gallery;" Page 3; Selma Rein; Box 11; General Records, 1935-1940; Records of the Works Progress Administration, Record Group 69; National Archives at College Park, College Park, MD. For a statement on poster exhibitions and demonstrations at the New York World's Fair, see Olive Lyford Gavert, "The WPA FAP and the New York World's Fair, 1939-1940," in *The New Deal Art Projects An Anthology of Memoirs*, ed. Francis V. O'Connor, (Washington, D.C. Smithsonian Institution Press, 1972), 252.

[29] "WPA Guide to The Federal Art Project Gallery;" Page 3; Selma Rein; Box 11; General Records, 1935-1940; Records of the Works Progress Administration, Record Group 69; National Archives at College Park, College Park, MD.

[30] *New York Times* article, quoted in DeNoon, *Posters of the WPA*, 23

The FAP and Education

The emphasis on knowledge in these posters was consistent with the FAP's educational mission. This mission influenced the project on a number of levels, shaping its employment goals as well as its programs and products. Moreover, it reinforced the FAP's status as viable cultural program by aligning the Project's work with broader social goals.

FAP administrators associated the employment of artists and designers with the development and preservation of professional expertise. As FAP Director Holger Cahill explained, the demand for American art had decreased because of the depression, forcing artists to face "the prospect of want, idleness, and inevitable loss of skill."[31] By providing employment rather than direct relief payments, the FAP hoped to preserve and even improve the skills of the nation's artists.[32] As administrators asserted, this better prepared artists for reemployment in the private sector by allowing those "returning to private industry [to] do so with more knowledge in their profession and greater confidence in themselves."[33]

In addition to conserving the nation's human resources, the FAP aimed to educate Americans by producing high quality artwork of social value. An important aspect of the

[31] Holger Cahill, "Metropolitan Museum of Art Lecture," March 28, 1937; Box 15; General Records, 1935-1940; Records of the Works Progress Administration, Record Group 69; National Archives at College Park, College Park, MD. Similarly, Robert Cronbach, a sculptor working for the FAP, explained: "In 1936, in the middle of the Depression, the private market for contemporary art - painting or sculpture - was almost nonexistent. Private galleries, individual collectors, museums, all were practically frozen as far as sales were concerned." Robert Cronbach, "The New Deal Sculpture Projects," in *The New Deal Art Projects An Anthology of Memoirs,* ed. Francis V. O'Connor, (Washington, D.C. Smithsonian Institution Press, 1972), 139. See also: "WPA Guide to The Federal Art Project Gallery;" Page 2; Selma Rein; Box 11; General Records, 1935-1940; Records of the Works Progress Administration, Record Group 69; National Archives at College Park, College Park, MD.

[32] "Questions and Answers on the WPA;" Selma Rein; Box 11; General Records, 1935-1940; Records of the Works Progress Administration, Record Group 69; National Archives at College Park, College Park, MD.

[33] Richard Floethe, "Posters," in *Art for the Millions: Essays from the 1930s by Artists and Administrators of the WPA Federal art Project*, ed. Francis O'Connor, (Greenwich, Connecticut: New York Graphic Society, LTD, 1973), 178. See also Mary Curran, "Report of the FAP in Pennsylvania, October 1935-July 1938;" Curran Report; Box 1; General Records, 1935-1940; Records of the Works Progress Administration, Record Group 69; National Archives at College Park, College Park, MD. Curran, who was the Director of the Pennsylvania FAP, felt that "commercial artists" had even more opportunity for employment in the private sector than creative artists.

FAP's educational mission was instilling the public with an appreciation of the arts. In doing so, administrators suggested, the Project was working to address a perceived disconnect between art and life. As Cahill asserted, America was in a state of "cultural erosion far more serious than the erosion of the Dust Bowl." This disturbing trend, he explained, affected every aspect of the nation's social life and compromised its citizens' ability to experience the world in all of its breadth.[34]

According to project administrators, FAP posters played a significant role in countering this state of affairs by making art accessible to the broader public. Likewise, administrators hoped the distribution of well-designed posters would facilitate the placement of other art in schools "apathetic" about securing work from the WPA.[35] Reporting some success in this effort, a FAP publication explained that the work of the Nassau County poster project "has been instrumental in opening up a strictly Republican county to WPA Federal Art Project Service."[36]

FAP artists and administrators claimed that posters and other art forms were also an effective medium for facilitating broader social change. As FAP artist Daniel Defenbacher asserted, art contributes to the "development of civilization" by influencing "our dress, our conduct, and our environment" in the same way that "medicine influences our diet, our

[34] Holger Cahill, "American Resources in the Arts;" Box 15; General Records, 1935-1940; Records of the Works Progress Administration, Record Group 69; National Archives at College Park, College Park, MD.
[35] Mary Curran, "Report of the FAP in Pennsylvania, October 1935-July 1938;" Curran Report; Box 1; General Records, 1935-1940; Records of the Works Progress Administration, Record Group 69; National Archives at College Park, College Park, MD.
[36] "Facts of Special Interest Concerning Work in New York County Art Projects;" Box 58; Records of Federal Art Projects in NY, NJ, and OH, 1934-42; Records of the Works Progress Administration, Record Group 69; National Archives at College Park, College Park, MD.

clothes, and our habits."[37] Likewise, Cahill argued that art was an important way of knowing and experiencing the world. Because of this, he explained, it could play a transformative role in the cultural and economic life of the nation.[38]

Contemporaries suggested that art could serve a range of social functions. It could unify and strengthen national identity by encouraging a sense of patriotism, community, and duty.[39] It could also bring order to the public realm by creating shared references and modeling behavioral ideals associated with democratic citizenship.[40] As Ralph Graham explained, FAP posters instructed individuals on how to enjoy and improve themselves both "materially and culturally."[41] Similarly, an FAP report noted that its posters had worked to educate the public on "better citizenship, public health, municipal cleanliness," and safety laws, among other things.[42]

The social and educational orientation of these posters was consistent with the FAP's goal of uniting artists with the American public. As scholars have noted, one way the FAP

---

[37] Daniel S. Defenbacher, "Art in Action," in *Art for the Millions: Essays from the 1930s by Artists and Administrators of the WPA Federal Art Project*, ed. Francis O'Connor, (Greenwich, Connecticut: New York Graphic Society, LTD, 1973), 224, 226. Likewise, as the Governor of New York, Franklin D. Roosevelt suggested that advertising "is essentially a form of education" and as such encourages the "progress of civilization." Franklin D. Roosevelt quoted in Stephen Fox, *The Mirror Makers: a History of American Advertising and Its Creators* (New York: William Morrow, 1984), 300.

[38] See Holger Cahill, "Federal Art Project," Box 15; General Records, 1935-1940; Records of the Works Progress Administration, Record Group 69; National Archives at College Park, College Park, MD; and Holger Cahill. "American Resources in the Arts;" Page 15; Box 15; General Records, 1935-1940; Records of the Works Progress Administration, Record Group 69; National Archives at College Park, College Park, MD. See also Grieve, *The Federal Art Project*, 13, 30, 101, 107-8; and Terry A. Cooney, *Balancing Acts: American Thought and Culture in the 1930's* (New York: Twayne Publishers, 1995), 99.

[39] Francis O'Connor, *Art for the Millions: Essays from the 1930s by Artists and Administrators of the WPA Federal Art Project* (Greenwich, Connecticut: New York Graphic Society, LTD, 1973), 16-17. See also Langa, *Radical Art*, 43.

[40] Holger Cahill, "American Resources in the Arts;" Box 15; General Records, 1935-1940; Records of the Works Progress Administration, Record Group 69; National Archives at College Park, College Park, MD.

[41] Graham, "The Poster in Chicago," in *Art for the Millions*, ed. O'Connor, 181.

[42] "Narrative Survey of Educational Aspects of WPA Federal Art Project;" Box 15; General Records, 1935-1940; Records of the Works Progress Administration, Record Group 69; National Archives at College Park, College Park, MD.

worked to achieve this objective was by aligning their work with contemporary needs and experiences.[43] As Cahill explained, the "project has held to the idea of the unity of art with the common experience, the continuity between …art and the everyday events, doings, sufferings, that are universally recognized to constitute experience." It is because of this, he continued, "the project has encouraged the closest possible collaboration between the artist and the public for which he works."[44]

The designer Richard Halls alluded to this mission in a poster he produced for the U.S. Travel Bureau (figure 3). The poster depicts a mountainous landscape with a Native American and four striped teepees on a green field that is shaped like an artist's palette. Among its possible connotations, this correlation implies that the arts are the foundation or bedrock on which America is built – an integral component of the American environment. It also references the important role art and other visuals play in shaping our understanding of social issues like nature and travel.

As this work suggests, the FAP's social mission was a motivating force behind the production of its posters. According to FAP reports, the poster divisions united artists with

---

[43] See: Holger Cahill, "Federal Art Project," Box 15; General Records, 1935-1940; Records of the Works Progress Administration, Record Group 69; National Archives at College Park, College Park, MD; Holger Cahill. "Address at Art and Democracy Dinner," 7 July 1938, New York City; Box 15; General Records, 1935-1940; Records of the Works Progress Administration, Record Group 69; National Archives at College Park, College Park, MD; Holger Cahill, "Metropolitan Museum of Art Lecture," March 28, 1937; Box 15; General Records, 1935-1940; Records of the Works Progress Administration, Record Group 69; National Archives at College Park, College Park, MD; and Holger Cahill, "American Resources in the Arts," in *Art for the Millions: Essays from the 1930s by Artists and Administrators of the WPA Federal Art Project*, ed. Francis O'Connor, (Greenwich, Connecticut: New York Graphic Society, LTD, 1973), 38. See also: Francis V. O'Connor, *The New Deal Art Projects An Anthology of Memoirs* (Washington, D.C. Smithsonian Institution Press, 1972), 5; O'Connor, *Art for the Millions*, 16; Saab, *For the Millions*, 15, 33; Langa, *Radical Art*, 46, 24; and Bram Dijkstra, *American Expressionism: Art and Social Change 1920-50* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, Inc. in association with the Columbus Museum of Art, 2003), 11.

[44] See Holger Cahill, "American Resources in the Arts," in *Art for the Millions*, ed. O'Connor, 40. See also Holger Cahill, "Metropolitan Museum of Art Lecture," March 28, 1937; Box 15; General Records, 1935-1940; Records of the Works Progress Administration, Record Group 69; National Archives at College Park, College Park, MD.

everyday experience by producing "campaigns and programs of public and social value." This included waging "pictorial wars against vandalism, noise, crime and disregard of public property," among other contemporary problems.[45]

The FAP's educational mission benefited the project in a number of important ways. It worked to engender public support for the government's reform efforts and reinforced the FAP's status as a viable cultural project. It also assisted the FAP in negotiating ideological debates surrounding the nature of visual communication by distancing its work from an association with propaganda. During the early twentieth century, individuals began to question the nature of propaganda and the responsibility graphic designers shared in its production. This questioning grew to suspicion during the 1930s as Americans became aware of the important role visual culture played in promoting the political and social agendas of Hitler and Stalin. As the distrust of propaganda increased, critics like Congressman John Taber began to question New Deal publicity efforts and accused the administration of generating propagandistic material, despite Roosevelt's claims to the contrary.[46]

---

[45] "Federal Art Project Manual," October 1935; Technical Circulars WPA; Box 14; General Records, 1935-1940; Records of the Works Progress Administration, Record Group 69; National Archives at College Park, College Park, MD. See also FAP Report; Page 3; Form Wires and Letters, 1935; Box 5; General Records, 1935-1940; Records of the Works Progress Administration, Record Group 69; National Archives at College Park, College Park, MD; "Narrative Survey of Educational Aspects of WPA Federal Art Project;" Box 15; General Records, 1935-1940; Records of the Works Progress Administration, Record Group 69; National Archives at College Park, College Park, MD; and Graham, "The Poster in Chicago," in *Art for the Millions*, ed. O'Connor, 181. As Ralph Graham maintained, the "artist and the public have come to know each other and to realize the definite need of each for the other" through the work of the FAP's poster divisions.

[46] McCamy, *Government Publicity*, 5. Similarly, the managing editor of *American Mercury* equated the administration's publicity efforts to Nazi propaganda and referred to President Roosevelt as "Der Fuhrer." See Gordon Carroll, "Dr. Roosevelt's Propaganda Trust," *American Mercury* XLII, no. 165 (September 1937); quoted in McCamy, *Government Publicity*, 137. Roosevelt, in fact, rejected "propaganda" as a form of public harassment and believed most Americans were rational and would support his programs if they were properly informed. Richard W. Steele, *Propaganda in an Open Society: The Roosevelt Administration and the Media, 1933-1941* (Westport CT: Greenwood Press, 1985), 6, 7.

This concern over the boundaries between art and propaganda infiltrated the art community. Alfred Frankfurter, editor of *Art News*, warned readers that art must not become "the mouthpiece...of any political ideology of the present or the future. The unchained idealism of 1937," he explained, "must not become the servile repression of 1940 or after."[47] In light of statements like this, it is not surprising that FAP administrators and designers emphasized the educational goals of the project and its posters. As historians Johanna Drucker and Emily McVarish have noted, graphic designers working during the early twentieth century favored "information sharing" over the production of material that was overtly propagandistic.[48]

The Campaign for Knowledge

The FAP's engagement with knowledge and education, however, goes beyond its social mission and the didactic intent of its posters. As the following chapters illustrate, the WPA posters suggest that the cultivation and application of specific knowledge and skills can ameliorate many of the problems associated with modern life, including economic instability, tedium, illness, urban decay, crime, juvenile delinquency, and the destruction of natural resources. In doing so, they advance knowledge as a tool for countering the disorder and dislocation many associated with the Depression and, more broadly, modernity. They also imply that knowledge provides a framework for defining and managing the relationship between self and society.

---

[47] Alfred M. Frankfurter, "The Year in Art: A Review of 1937," *ARTnews* (January 1, 1938): 11.
[48] Johanna Drucker and Emily McVarish, *Graphic Design History: A Critical Guide* (Upper Saddle River, NJ: Pearson Prentice Hall, 2009), 254. See also Inger L. Stole, *Advertising on Trial: Consumer Activism and Corporate Public Relations in the 1930s*, History of Communication (Urbana, Ill: Univ. of Illinois Press, 2006), 98.

As a number of scholars have noted, the relationship between self and society was the basis of considerable debate during the 1930s.[49] The economic crisis sparked a reevaluation of corporate capitalism and liberal ideals, including the creed of rugged individualism that had been a dominant force in American political, economic, and social thought during the Progressive Era. An increasing number of reformers and intellectuals stressed the necessity of government involvement in addressing the needs of the nation's citizens. In *New Frontiers* (1934), which was published during his tenure as U.S. Secretary of Agriculture, Henry Wallace explained that the "need henceforth is not to learn how to compete with each other for enough of this world's goods, but to learn how to live with each other in abundance." It is the government's duty, he maintained, "to make individual and group interest coincide."[50]

While some saw the government's reform efforts as a threat to personal liberty, Wallace believed that federal involvement in social welfare was consistent with the maintenance of individual freedoms. Likewise, Lynd argued that national planning could enhance the freedom of Americans by reducing waste and promoting a sense of security.[51] Like many, Wallace and Lynd supported an expansion of government programs within a framework that preserved the opportunity for personal growth and action.[52]

The FAP engaged this debate over the relationship between self and society in a number of ways. A desire to reconcile the individual and the collective informed the FAP's social mission and its commitment to bridging the gap between artists and the broader

---

[49] See, for instance, Cooney, *Balancing Acts*, 44; Saab, *For the Millions*, 8; and Richard H. Pells, *Radical Visions and American Dreams: Culture and Social Thought in the Depression Years* (New York: Harper and Row, 1973) 53-4, 82, 169.
[50] Henry Wallace quoted in Pells, *Radical Visions*, 80.
[51] Pells, *Radical Visions*, 124.
[52] Cooney, *Balancing Acts*, 56.

public.[53] It also shaped the Project's approach to artistic production. One the one hand, the FAP maintained that poster divisions promoted a collaborative environment – with each poster passing through many hands before its completion - that encouraged "healthy anonymity" rather than "militant individualism."[54] On the other hand, project administrators did not ignore the importance of individual initiative and achievement. The FAP prided itself on allowing project artists to experiment with different techniques and styles to advance their work.[55] Moreover, despite rarely signing their posters, some designers were recognized in FAP exhibitions and reports. A WPA poster by Harry Herzog, for instance, was featured in a 1938 poster exhibition held at the Federal Art Project Gallery in New York City (see figures 4 and 2). While the poster was unsigned, its inclusion in the exhibition was a testament to the perceived quality of Herzog's design.

As the following chapters suggest, the posters' emphasis on knowledge and education can also be seen as an attempt to define and manage the relationship between self and society. Although the posters frame the benefits of knowledge in relation to the viewer's needs and experiences, all of them endorse activities and behavioral ideals reformers believed would stimulate the economy, encourage patriotism, and ensure social stability. Likewise, a number are explicit in linking the unity and success of the nation with the welfare and commitment of its constituents. Underlying the creation of these posters was the assumption that unhealthy, unproductive, and deviant behavior – behavior that might upset the balance between self and

---

[53] Grieve, *The Federal Art Project*, 167. See also Langa, *Radical Art*, 69.
[54] Progress Report, Federal Art Project, November 1937– 1 April 1938; Page 4; Woodward Memo, 1938; Box 8; General Records, 1935-1940; Records of the Works Progress Administration, Record Group 69; National Archives at College Park, College Park, MD.
[55] Audrey McMahon, "A General View of the WPA Federal Art Project in New York City and State," in *The New Deal Art Projects An Anthology of Memoirs*, ed. Francis V. O'Connor (Washington, D.C. Smithsonian Institution Press, 1972), 56.

society - can be controlled or prevented through the cultivation, dissemination, and application of knowledge. These posters strive for a democratic ideal that balances the values of individualism with broader economic and social goals. They also work to ease anxieties over the government's increasing involvement in the private lives of American citizens by countering the notion that centralized planning and resource management pose a threat to individual initiative or opportunity.

A WPA poster by Albert Bender engages many of these ideas (figure 5). The poster promotes the Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC), which was a New Deal relief program operational between 1933 and 1942. The Corp employed young men between the ages of eighteen and twenty-five on public projects designed to conserve and develop the nation's natural resources. The poster illustrates a smiling man with a pick-axe. This man is surrounded by text explaining that the CCC provides opportunities for employment, leisure, education, and health, which were all issues government officials linked to both personal and national stability. Robust, productive, and happy, the man embodies the personal benefits of CCC enrollment. This ideal citizen also exemplifies a balance between self and society in working for the good of the nation, an idea reinforced by the poster's patriotic hues.

The process of balancing self and society involved a negotiation between the modern and traditional. As scholars have noted, discourses concerning modernity are frequently informed by a backward looking tendency.[56] Similarly, the motivation for social reform is often predicated on a desire for economic and social stability. Exemplifying this tension, the WPA posters encourage social reform by promoting cooperation and endorsing traditional

[56] See Pells, *Radical Visions*, 86, 114, 367; and Cooney, *Balancing Acts*, 8. Cooney argues that the tendency to promote reform through the preservation and celebration of particular traditions and histories was a defining characteristic of New Deal culture.

norms and values. As Holger Cahill explained, "beyond providing employment, beyond producing art and art services… the work of the WPA Federal Art Project is conserving and enhancing fundamental human and cultural values."[57] In working to fulfill this goal, the posters upheld rather than challenged the existing economic, social, and political framework. This included reinforcing and perpetuating established attitudes toward race, gender, class, and family, which positioned the FAP and their posters at the center of broader power struggles over cultural authority.[58]

A WPA poster from Ohio, for instance, reinforces traditional divisions of labor by associating women with the domestic realm (figure 6). The poster promotes a three-month course in "meal planning, cooking, table service, laundry, cleaning, and childcare." As the poster explains, these household skills can lead to "jobs for you." Images of women surrounding this text clarify the audience for this poster and illustrate some of the tasks viewers can learn by enrolling in the training course. One of these vignettes illustrates a woman near a house with a landscaped yard, reinforcing the association between women and domestic work.

It is important to acknowledge, however, that viewers might have understood and reacted to these works in ways their designers or commissioning agencies would have never imagined or intended. The audience for these posters was diverse and each viewer's unique experiences and desires would have informed his or her interpretation of the works, endowing them with a range of meaning. Although largely outside the scope of this study, it is likely

[57] Holger Cahill, "Federal Art Project," Box 15; General Records, 1935-1940; Records of the Works Progress Administration, Record Group 69; National Archives at College Park, College Park, MD.
[58] As a number of scholars have noted, the process of defining knowledge is an assertion of power. See Burke, *A Social History of Knowledge II*, 5.

that some would have viewed the social solutions presented in these posters as inadequate, particularly since the Depression had challenged some people's confidence in reason and education, as well as the possibility of social reform through federal legislation or planning.[59]

Further complicating the issue of reception, the FAP based their understanding of the public they were trying to reach largely on speculation.[60] Critics asserted that government agencies were, on a whole, less systematic in appraising their audience than large advertising agencies like the J. Walter Thompson Company, who developed research programs to test consumer response to particular appeals. As the author James McCamy claimed, the government's attempts to analyze the audience for posters and other promotional initiatives were "of the roughest sort" and relied on intuition rather than a formal evaluation of their audiences' needs and interests.[61]

A New Deal for Design

Despite the speculative nature of their audience analysis, the FAP had confidence in the communicative ability of their posters, which they attributed to the high quality of their designs. As one report asserted, the continuous demand for posters confirmed their ability "to focus the attention of readers on their messages and get action."[62] As this statement suggests, the FAP was explicit in drawing connections between the form and function of a poster. As FAP designer Ralph Graham explained, the "importance of design was and continues to be stressed, for without this element a poster fails in its purpose - which is to startle the passerby

[59] Pells, *Radical Visions*, 53. See also Cooney, *Balancing Acts*, 10, 41.
[60] See Langa, *Radical Art*, 49-50.
[61] McCamy, *Government Publicity*, 35, 55.
[62] Press Release, Department of Information, NYC WPA Art Project, 1 Nov 1939; Page 22; Records of the Division of Information; Records of the Works Progress Administration, Record Group 69; National Archives at College Park, College Park, MD.

into looking at it, and, having looked, into retaining its message."[63] For Graham and other designers, the social value of a poster – its ability to educate the public, mobilize viewers, and incite action - was directly related to the quality of its design.[64] An analysis of contemporary attitudes toward design, therefore, is essential for understanding the various ways these posters worked to shape the public's knowledge of contemporary issues and promote social literacy.

To ensure the quality of its work, FAP administrators devised a centralized system for reviewing project proposals and designs. As the FAP manual explains, designs were usually approved by the State Art Supervisor or District Assistant Art Supervisor, the co-operating sponsor, and an advisory committee if there was one.[65] Likewise, project supervisors initiated strategies at the division level to ensure quality designs. New York City administrator Richard Floethe, for instance, would post job specifications in the department and invite artists to submit preliminary sketches for consideration. Floethe would then choose the best to show the co-operating sponsor, who would pick the final design.[66]

Proponents of the FAP praised the outcome of these efforts in their written reviews. The artist Sidney Kellner, for instance, commented on the high quality of FAP posters in a 1938 issue of *Signs of the Times*. As Kellner asserted, the "community value of these posters is inestimable, and the standard of taste, to say nothing of the requirements in poster design and printing, have been praised by both public and artist." "[I]f it were not for the amazing design quality invested in these posters," he continued, "which has raised them to the status of

[63] Graham, "The Poster in Chicago," in *Art for the Millions*, ed. O'Connor, 179.
[64] See J. I. Biegeleisen, *Poster Design* (New York: Greenberg, 1945), 91.
[65] "Federal Art Project Manual," October 1935; Technical Circulars WPA; Box 14; General Records, 1935-1940; Records of the Works Progress Administration, Record Group 69; National Archives at College Park, College Park, MD.
[66] DeNoon, *Posters of the WPA*, 25, 129.

a true art form, there would be no particular interest in them... The Poster Division is doing a valuable service to the profession in general and the consumer in particular, in trying to combine good craftsmanship and design with original ideas."[67]

Similarly, in a 1941 edition of *PM Weekly*, Elizabeth Sacartoff explained that FAP posters offered an alternative to the second rate works lining New York City subway cars. This "jabberwocky," she explained, was dominated by a high degree of conventionality and sentimentalism that recalled the work of Howard Chandler Christy, whose "cheesecloth-draped young girls made earnest appeals to patriots for one cause or another – except as art." The FAP countered this tendency, she asserted, by utilizing the best traditions in design to create posters more "vital" than any America had produced before.[68]

The emphasis FAP administrators, artists, and advocates placed on "quality" was informed, in part, by an increasing sense of professionalism governing the field of graphic design.[69] As Richard Floethe explained, in "recent years poster designing has become a profession… due to the combination of the new literature on modern poster designing, samples from abroad, and chiefly through the modern art schools."[70] With this shift, which took place during the 1920s and 30s, graphic designers began to assert their roles as specialists. The poster designer Tom Purvis, for example, equated graphic designers to doctors in a statement encouraging clients to stop "back-seat driving." Take your "problem to an expert," he urged, "as you would take your internal troubles to a doctor. Give him the

---

[67] Kellner quoted in Floethe, "Posters," in *Art for the Millions*, ed. O'Connor, 178. See also DeNoon, *Posters of the WPA*, 23.
[68] Elizabeth Sacartoff, "WPA's First-Class Posters Make First-Class Salesmen," *PM's Weekly* (August 17, 1941): 50.
[69] See Drucker and McVarish, *Graphic Design History*, 228.
[70] Floethe, "Posters," in *Art for the Millions*, ed. O'Connor, 177.

symptoms and leave technical problems to him."[71] According to Purvis, in other words, graphic designers were professionals skilled in a particular form of problem solving.

A number of WPA designers and administrators accompanied Purvis in suggesting that the input of a co-operating sponsor should be limited to ensure the quality of a design. In the FAP's New York City poster division, the sponsor's involvement was restricted to an initial exchange when the work request was submitted, a meeting to review the rough sketch, and in some cases another to approve the final design.[72] According to Anthony Velonis, this process helped division designers uphold the quality of their work.[73]

An overview of the extant posters suggests that FAP artists and administrators did not equate good design with a specific stylistic trend. This assessment is reinforced by their written statements and consistent with contemporary developments in poster design.[74] As the following discussion suggests, many artists equated the "modern" poster with functionality and usefulness - its ability to address contemporary needs and engage the public - rather than a particular formal trend. This approach was one way designers worked to negotiate debates over modernism's suitability for socially engaged and democratic graphics. It also equates design to a method of problem solving in which form and content, like knowledge, become tools for addressing broader social concerns.

---

[71] Tom Purvis, Frank Alfred Mercer, and William Gaunt, *Poster Progress* (London: The Studio, 1939), 9, 11-12. See also Leonard Richmond, *The Technique of the Poster* (London: Sir I. Pitman & Sons, Ltd, 1933), v. Richmond asserts that businessmen usually know very little about. "It is a pathetic business," he explains, "when a successful merchant, knowing his impregnable position in the bank, claims to be an authority on art, and often in the sacred name of art will demand pink-like cheeks and hands on artificially pretty little boys and girls, or will insist on a portrait of a young woman which, when completed down to his taste, is entirely severed from life and humanity."

[72] "Methodology, Federal Works Agency, Works Projects Administration Arts Program, New York City WPA Art Project;" Box 63; Records of the Works Progress Administration, Record Group 69; National Archives at College Park, College Park, MD.

[73] DeNoon, *Posters of the WPA*, 79.

[74] See Floethe, "Posters," in *Art for the Millions*, ed. O'Connor, 177.

FAP artists drew from a range of sources in creating their posters, which led Velonis to claim that there "had never been an art school as dynamic with so many crosscurrents."[75] Many were influenced by the work of contemporary designers like A.M. Cassandre, E. McNight-Kauffer, and Joseph Binder, whose work they saw in articles, books, and exhibitions.[76] A WPA poster produced in New York City, for instance, resembles *Power, The Nerve Centre of London's Underground*, which McNight-Kauffer designed for the London Underground in 1930 (see figures 7 and 8). Born in Montana, McNight-Kauffer moved to London after WWI and became one of Europe's most important poster designers during the 1920s and 30s. His work was showcased in a one-man show at The Museum of Modern Art in 1937 and reproduced in a number of contemporary publications, including *Modern Publicity*.[77]

McNight-Kauffer's striking design serves as a possible precedent for the WPA poster, which promotes a play by Arthur Arent that addresses the development and control of the electric industry. Like the poster by McNight-Kauffer, this work associates the word "power" with a machine-like form that occupies a central place in the composition. In both works, text and imagery lead the viewer from the upper-left side of the poster to the bottom right, creating a sense of dynamism and movement. Likewise, both use a similar color palette, bold type-face, and streamlined forms.

---

[75] Anthony Velonis quoted in DeNoon, *Posters of the WPA*, 75.
[76] DeNoon, *Posters of the WPA*, 24, 62, 74. See also Jim Heimann in DeNoon, *Posters of the WPA*, 110. In 1940 the New York City division printed a poster Binder designed for National Art Week. Similarly, Heimann notes that the FAP poster Foreign Trade Zone was inspired by Cassandre's Normandie and L'Atlantique posters.
[77] See, for instance, F. A. Mercer and W. Gaunt, *Modern Publicity: Annual of "Art and Industry"* (1938-39): 64.

In addition to drawing from specific artists, WPA designers engaged broader artistic movements like cubism, surrealism, constructivism, de Stijl, and the Bauhaus.[78] Bauhaus principles and designs were particularly influential due to the fact that a number of Bauhaus artists, including Laszlo Moholy-Nagy, Walter Gropius, and Herbert Bayer, relocated to America during this period. Richard Floethe, in fact, trained at the Bauhaus in Germany before moving to America and becoming head of the FAP's New York City poster division.[79]

A poster produced by an unknown designer working for the New York City FAP exemplifies this Bauhaus influence (figure 9). The work combines a number of geometric forms with text encouraging viewers to "know the world" they live in by attending free study groups organized by the Workers Education Project. This abstract, asymmetrical design is similar to an exhibition poster Joost Schmidt produced for the Bauhaus in 1923 (figure 10). In addition to the slanted arrangement of text and geometrical forms, both posters feature blocky type, minimal colors, and a significant amount of white space. Both designers also used positive and negative space creatively.

In this rich artistic environment, debates arose over the characteristics of socially responsible art, debates that reflected broader tensions in the art world. FAP artists and administrators, having a variety of political and aesthetic orientations, were not unified on what the process of democratizing art should entail.[80] Nor was there a consensus on what this art should look like. Some reconciled modernism with the goals of social critique and reform, as well as the perpetuation of traditional values, which many believed could provide a usable

[78] DeNoon, *Posters of the WPA*, 9, 24.
[79] Ibid., 25. Likewise, contemporaries were explicit in likening the FAP's design laboratory, which produced some posters, to the Bauhaus.
[80] Grieve, *The Federal Art Project*, 90. See also Saab, *For the Millions*, 8, 30.

foundation for the future. Others, however, suggested that modern forms were elitist and could be off-putting to particular audiences.[81] For Cahill and other FAP administrators, this type of deliberation was not incompatible with artistic production in a democracy. As Cahill explained, "democracies alone can afford to permit differences of opinion, even in esthetic matters."[82]

Many FAP designers, in fact, gravitated toward abstract and geometric forms. As the Director of the Pennsylvania FAP explained, project artists preferred posters "of a modern type" over "picturesque" designs.[83] These graphics were popular with contemporary designers for a number of reasons. Artists and critics suggested that "commercial" design was an excellent way of introducing new styles and forms to a public that possessed limited knowledge of modern art.[84] More importantly, proponents of modernism considered it an expression of the times and appropriate for promoting modern products and services.[85] Finally, some asserted that innovative forms were better at capturing the public's attention than naturalistic or picturesque designs. As one designer explained, the "poster which strikes the observer primarily with its suave beauty is apt to have a sedative rather than a stimulating effect."[86]

---

[81] Saab, *For the Millions*, 29. See also Langa, *Radical Art*, 70.
[82] Holger Cahill, "American Resources in the Arts;" Page 4; Box 15; General Records, 1935-1940; Records of the Works Progress Administration, Record Group 69; National Archives at College Park, College Park, MD.
[83] Mary Curran, "Report of the FAP in Pennsylvania, October 1935-July 1938;" Curran Report; Box 1; General Records, 1935-1940; Records of the Works Progress Administration, Record Group 69; National Archives at College Park, College Park, MD.
[84] Drucker and McVarish, *Graphic Design History*, 231.
[85] See Amos Stote, "Jean Carlu: Advertising Artist," *Print* 3, no. 1 (Spring 1942): 27-8.
[86] Gregory Brown in Richmond, *The Technique of the Poster*, 185.

Poster artists' experimentation with modern forms, however, was governed by concerns over the public's willingness to accept new artistic styles.[87] While some innovation was considered necessary for capturing the viewer's attention and elevating public taste, most designers did not want to violate standards of acceptability for fear of alienating the broader public. The artist S. J. Lamorna Birch, for instance, claimed posters that were too elaborate or "arty" could "fog the minds" of viewers.[88] Similarly, a number of FAP artists and administrators were cautious about the public's willingness to accept and understand certain forms. As Audrey McMahon noted, the Washington administration wanted works that were high in quality and original, but would not generate controversy.[89]

In negotiating debates over the role modernism could play in socially responsible design, many authors and artists divorced their discussion of the "modern" poster from specific stylistic trends, emphasizing instead the desired results of a well conceived design. The author J. I. Biegeleisen, for instance, avoids a discussion of style in addressing the modern, "creative" poster, which he defines as a work that uses symbolism to: educate and elevate public taste, appeal to the intellect rather than sentimentality, make an impression instead of telling a story, and attract the viewer through visually arresting forms.[90] For Biegeleisen, the success of a creative poster had less to do with the style it was rendered in than its ability to engage the public. Similarly, FAP artist Ralph Graham distanced poster design from contemporary stylistic debates when he declared that the "poster, serving the

[87] See Langa, *Radical Art*, 70, 104.
[88] S. J. Lamorna Birch in Richmond, *The Technique of the Poster*, 149.
[89] Audrey McMahon, "A General View of the WPA Federal Art Project in New York City and State," in *New Deal Art Projects*, ed. O'Connor, 59.
[90] Biegeleisen, *Poster Design*, 33-5.

public, is readily understandable to the man on the street. While it may go through phases in its healthy growth, it is free from the many isms that infest the allied arts."[91]

For many, therefore, a "modern" poster was characterized by its ability to attract the public's attention and address contemporary needs and desires.[92] The modern poster, in other words, translated information and ideals into terms viewers could understand and, potentially, act on. As the author Amos Stote noted, this required a certain amount of creative flexibility on the part of the designer. Discussing the work of the famous French poster artist Jean Carlu, Stote explained:

> Sound modern art in advertising is not straining after a new form of presentation. Time will prove there is nothing temporary about modern art as applied to the needs of business. The only changes which will occur in it will be to make it what, for want of a better term, may be called more modern. In other words, advertising design must be given a greater power, greater elasticity and adaptability, and greater economy in the directness of appeal. This must be done through the increasingly experienced and intelligent application of the dynamic qualities which exist in design. It will require increased simplicity of directness in its attacks upon mass attention. Modern airplanes, typewriters, bathtubs, and kitchen sinks are temporary in that they are constantly being improved in appearance and ability. Modern advertising art must follow the same procedure. It must be as advanced as are the wares and services for which it is put to work.[93]

In addressing the "dynamic" qualities of good poster design, some of which Stote hints at, the contemporary literature was remarkably consistent. Most books and journals, for instance, stressed the need for legibility. This emphasis, which had a precedent in the writings of Bauhaus designers like Herbert Bayer and László Moholy-Nagy, addressed a

---

[91] Graham, "The Poster in Chicago," in *Art for the Millions*, ed. O'Connor, 181.
[92] Purvis, Mercer, and Gaunt, *Poster Progress*, 11. See also Leonard Richmond, *The Technique of the Poster*, 11.
[93] Stote, "Jean Carlu," 29.

practical concern for artists charged with making posters to be viewed in passing.[94] Legible forms, they asserted, were necessary for communicating information with clarity and precision. "A good poster should not puzzle people," one designer explained, "it should be like a boxer's punch – straight, hard, and quick – and should deliver its message in a flash."[95]

Similarly, books and journals emphasized the need for simplicity in both content and form. Leonard Richmond, editor of a 1933 book on poster design, explained that a busy poster can be confusing and tiresome. Providing his readers with an example, he referenced a contemporary poster series that featured "battalions" of biscuits. Condemning the "commercial vulgarity" of these works, he proposed that one well-executed and appetizing biscuit would be more likely to entice the viewer and create a "hunger" for the product.[96] As authors like Richmond suggested, a designer could simplify a composition by economizing on the number of lines and colors employed.[97] Others advocated the use of silhouettes and pictograms, which would eliminate unnecessary details and promote understanding by increasing a work's legibility.[98]

This emphasis on simple, legible forms extended to typography. Most designers working during this period considered typography an integral component of their compositions.[99] Drawing from earlier designers like the Russian Constructivists, they

---

[94] Helen Armstrong, *Graphic Design Theory: Readings from the Field* (New York: Princeton Architectural Press, 2009), 11.
[95] Purvis and et. Al. "Various Views on Poster Technique, in Richmond, *The Technique of the Poster*, 131.
[96] Richmond, *The Technique of the Poster*, v.
[97] See also Biegeleisen and Busenbark, *The Silk Screen Printing Process*, 177, 180; and Biegeleisen, *Poster Design*, 25.
[98] See Biegeleisen, *Poster Design*, 37. See also DeLemos, *Planning and Producing Posters*, 13.
[99] See Jeannie Friedman, "WPA Poster Project: When Government Sponsors Art," *Print* (July/August 1978): 71. See also Rayner in Richmond, *The Technique of the Poster*, 33; J. I. Biegeleisen, *Poster Design*, 11. Herbert Bayer quoted in Armstrong, *Graphic Design Theory*, 44-5; and László Moholy-Nagy quoted in Armstrong, *Graphic Design Theory*, 34. As Moholy-Nagy explained: "Instead of using typography – as hitherto – merely as

suggested that lettering should harmonize with the pictorial elements of a poster. They also stressed the need for clarity and readability in choosing a typeface.[100] Many advocated san serif lettering, which was prized for its modern appearance and legibility. J. I. Biegeleisen and E. J. Busenbark, for instance, explained that "small lettering should be simple in style and without serifs, in order to make the copy more readable and easier to reproduce."[101]

Legibility and simplicity, however, were not the only prerequisites for delivering a message quickly and concisely. A poster, contemporaries asserted, must also be eye-catching to fulfill its social purpose. The FAP, in fact, considered this characteristic central to the function of a poster. As a Project report asserted, posters were an important means of communicating with the public because their "vivid exposition and appealing pictorial value" could deliver a message more effectively than the "printed word."[102]

Designers employed a number of techniques to make their compositions more dramatic and enticing. Many, for instance, used asymmetrical formats to create tension in a work and capture the public's interest.[103] Proponents of asymmetry suggested that its forcefulness and energy attracted viewers.[104] Others added that it was ideal for expressing the "diversity of modern life."[105]

---

an objective means, the attempt is now being made to incorporate it and the potential effects of its subjective existence into the contents."

[100] See Jan Tschichold quoted in Armstrong, *Graphic Design Theory*, 34. See also Herbert Bayer quoted in Armstrong, *Graphic Design Theory*, 44-5.

[101] Biegeleisen and Busenbark, *The Silk Screen Printing Process*, 177. See also Drucker and McVarish, *Graphic Design History*, 216.

[102] New York City WPA Art Project, Activities and Accomplishments," 1941; Page 1-Poster Division; Box 65; Records of Federal Art Projects in NY, NJ, and OH, 1934-42; Records of the Works Progress Administration, Record Group 69; National Archives at College Park, College Park, MD.

[103] Jim Heimann in DeNoon, *Posters of the WPA*, 110.

[104] J. I. Biegeleisen, *Poster Design*, 93.

[105] Jan Tschichold quoted in Armstrong, *Graphic Design Theory*, 37.

According to some, designers also needed to understand the benefits and limitations of a particular printing method to develop an eye-catching design.[106] Ralph Graham suggested that the limitations of the silk-screen process were actually an advantage to the poster artist.[107] As designers noted, the method was particularly suited for printing broad, flat areas of color - simple and legible forms that worked well in capturing the public's attention and communicating a message. [108] According to contemporary designers, the process was particularly suited for posters that would be seen from a distance or in a busy thoroughfare.[109]

Finally, in addition to stressing the need for legibility, simplicity, and visual appeal, artists and critics working during the 1930s asserted that a posters' design should correspond to the appeal being made.[110] To ensure this outcome, they explained, artists should study the product or service being promoted. After doing so, the designer can determine the best combination of forms and visual elements to symbolize a product or idea.[111] One essay, for instance, noted that experienced poster artists almost always shape their designs to the product or appeal. Some subjects, it argued, "will stand a fancy treatment; others are best dealt with

---

[106] See Anthony Velonis, *Technical Problems of the Artist: Techniques of the Silk Screen Process. Vol. 2: Methods other than Profilm*; Introduction; Technical Circulars WPA; Box 14; General Records, 1935-1940; Records of the Works Progress Administration, Record Group 69; National Archives at College Park, College Park, MD. See also John Place in Richmond, *The Technique of the Poster*, 12.

[107] Graham, "The Poster in Chicago," in *Art for the Millions*, ed. O'Connor, 181. Similarly, Anthony Velonis worked diligently to promote the aesthetic potential of the silkscreen process. Encouraging silkscreen artists to respect their medium in the same way a "painter esteems his canvas, paints, and brushes," Velonis maintained that the "silk-screen process… will undoubtedly play an important role in the future of the arts." To further this goal, Velonis established a silkscreen unit in the FAP's Graphic Arts Division and encouraged artists to produce screen prints alongside etchings, lithographs, woodblocks, and aquatints. He also wrote two pamphlets on the method, which were distributed to WPA art centers and became a primary source of technical information for FAP poster divisions. See Anthony Velonis, *Technical Problems of the Artist: Techniques of the Silk Screen Process. Vol. 2: Methods other than Profilm*; Introduction; Technical Circulars WPA; Box 14; General Records, 1935-1940; Records of the Works Progress Administration, Record Group 69; National Archives at College Park, College Park, MD.

[108] Biegeleisen and Busenbark, *The Silk Screen Printing Process*, 180.

[109] Horace Taylor in Richmond, *The Technique of the Poster*, 194.

[110] See, for instance, Purvis, Mercer, and Gaunt, *Poster Progress*, 15; and Andrew Johnson in Richmond, *The Technique of the Poster*, 149.

[111] Stote, "Jean Carlu," 29, 31-2.

in a plain matter-of-fact way. It is of no use treating a boiler poster in the way you might treat one for complexion cream."[112]

The evidence – both visual and archival - suggests that a significant number of FAP artists conformed to this approach. According to a 1939 newspaper article in *Democrat and Chronicle* (Rochester, NY), for instance, the poster artist Erik Hans Krause looked at dozens of health related books and pamphlets in preparing designs for a national health campaign. As the article explained, Krause considered the overall design of the poster in boiling the "wisdom" of this material "into short, pungent slogans that would convey terse warning or advice." "I spent so much time reading health literature," Krause joked, "that I began to feel ill myself."[113]

As the following chapters indicate, FAP artists like Krause drew from a variety of images, texts, and objects in designing their compositions. They also considered contemporary debates concerning social policy and reform. These posters, as a result, should be seen as intertextual works that link form and content with the broader cultural context. Design, in essence, became a flexible tool for promoting social literacy and managing the relationship between self and society. Likewise, it played an integral role in defining and perpetuating a culture of knowledge during the New Deal.

---

[112] Purvis, et al. "Various Views on Poster Technique, in Richmond, *The Technique of the Poster*, 131.
[113] Erik Hans Krause Papers, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, Microfilm Reel 3090, Frame 1245.

Chapter 2
The Art of Reading

In 1940, an artist working for the Federal Art Project in Chicago designed a poster encouraging viewers to use their local library (figure 1). Text on the poster indicates that resources at the library can increase both the depth and breadth of viewers' knowledge. Above this text, the designer has included the torso of a man with his shoulders tilted forward and his chin resting on a closed fist. The arm that extends from this hand connects the man's head with the word "knowledge," which is rendered in bold san-serif font directly below his elbow.

The man in this poster was modeled after the famous sculpture by Auguste Rodin titled *The Thinker* (figure 2). Rodin designed this figure for a portal known as *The Gates of Hell*, which was to become an entrance to the proposed École des Arts Décoratifs in Paris. This sculptured portal was inspired by Dante's *Inferno* and - fittingly for the threshold of an educational institution - includes a figure of the poet contemplating the fate of those around him. Although the portal was never cast during Rodin's lifetime, its brooding figure served as a model for *The Thinker*, which was cast over twenty times after 1902.

Rodin's canonical figure encourages a number of associations as it is re-envisioned in the WPA poster. Its inclusion in this work suggests that art is one of the subjects viewers can explore by reading a library book. It is also consistent with the poster's emphasis on knowledge. While the figure on *The Gates of Hell* contemplates sin and damnation, the modern thinker in the WPA poster ponders a range of subjects, engaging in an act of self-improvement and development. Finally, this artistic reference resonates with the

contemporary understanding that reading was itself an art form that required certain skills, including mental engagement. As educators argued, active reading benefited both the nation and its citizens by facilitating the cultivation of knowledge and expertise.

Compared to Rodin's sculpture, however, the WPA poster is much less sedate and meditative. The use of bold yellow and exaggerated chiaroscuro conveys a sense of energy reinforced by an exclamation point punctuating the highlighted text at the bottom of the poster. Likewise, the designer has cropped the sizeable and muscular figure closely, giving the work a feeling of strength and power that evokes the iconic WWII poster of Rosie the Riveter produced several years later (figure 3). These dynamic and eye-catching elements work to capture the viewer's attention. They also suggest that reading is both active and empowering - something the viewer can and should do.

This poster was one of many the WPA designed to promote reading. Of the extant WPA posters dealing with leisure, more than fifty address the subject in some way. Many of these works, which serve as the focus of this chapter, are general appeals designed to promote the pastime. Others encourage viewers to participate in reading clubs and informal classes or visit their local library. Several also publicize books written by the Federal Writers Project, including travel guide books and natural histories. Like the Chicago poster, all of these works promote reading as a fulfilling path to new knowledge and skills.

Reading was a popular pastime during the depression era. A 1934 study by the National Recreation Association reported that reading was the most common leisure activity of the individuals surveyed.[1] As the report explained, the depression had forced many

[1] 5002 individuals were surveyed in this study. See Louise Richardson, "Books and the More Abundant Life," *Recreation* 32, no. 5 (Aug 1938): 281. See also Pells, *Radical Visions and American Dreams*, 46; and Susan

Americans to pursue low-cost recreational pursuits that were available close to home. For those living day to day, reading represented an economic alternative to more expensive leisure activities.[2] Reading materials were also prevalent due to a recent growth in the print and publishing industries, which resulted in new publications like *Life* magazine.[3]

The popularity of reading, however, raises an important question. If reading was a common leisure pursuit, one already practiced by many Americans, why were so many WPA posters dedicated to promoting the pastime? As I argue, these posters engaged contemporary concerns over a perceived decline in standards of knowledge, skill, and contentment, which leisure professionals linked to both personal and national welfare. Addressing these concerns, the WPA posters worked to educate viewers on mastering what contemporaries called the "art of living," which was a social ideal predicated on intellectual engagement, emotional fulfillment, and "visual efficiency." In the process, the WPA posters characterized reading as a symbolic ground on which democratic principles could be defined, disseminated, and enacted.

Although reading has been a long-standing theme in artwork, relatively few scholars have addressed images of reading in visual culture. The studies that do are often broad in scope, covering centuries of artistic production, and concentrate on "high" art forms rather

---

Currell, *The March of Spare Time: The Problem and Promise of Leisure in the Great Depression* (Philadelphia: Univ. of Pennsylvania Press, 2005), 65.

[2] "Science and Recreation," *Recreation* 32, no. 5 (August 1938): 304.

[3] Currell, *The March of Spare Time*, 4. See also John B. Hench, *Books as Weapons: Propaganda, Publishing, and the Battle for Global Markets in the Era of WWII* (Ithaca: Cornell Univ. Press, 2010), 11. As Hench notes, there were many important developments in the publishing industry during the early twentieth century, including the establishment of the Modern Library (1917), the Book of the Month Club (1926), and early mass market paperback publishers like Pocket Books, Inc. (1939).

than widely circulated visuals like posters.[4] Furthermore, many focus on representations of women.[5] Like the scholarship exploring FAP leisure initiatives, which privileges the Project's community art centers, none of these studies examine the WPA's reading-related posters or address their relationship to the lively cultural debate concerning leisure during the New Deal.

In working to fill this gap, this chapter expands our understanding of the multiple social and political goals reading addressed during the 1930s and early 1940s. Furthermore, an analysis of the WPA's reading-related posters provides important insights into the role knowledge and education played in the government's broader social agenda. In both form and content, the posters indicate that leisure professionals saw reading as way to foster the intellectual and emotional skills Americans needed to understand and prosper in modern life. Likewise, the posters suggest that reading encourages a form of social literacy that can benefit both the nation and its citizens, promoting a balance between self and society.

The Problem of Leisure

The WPA's reading-related posters engaged widespread concerns over the leisure behavior of Americans. Although reformers focused on recreation prior to the 1930s, the "leisure problem" became an issue of increasing significance after the onset of the

[4] See, for instance, Garrett Stewart, *The Look of Reading: Book, Painting, Text* (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 2006).
[5] See: Stefan Bollmann and Karen Joy Fowler, *Reading Women* (London: Merrell, 2006); Kathryn Brown, *Women Readers in French Painting, 1870-1890: A Space for the Imagination* (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2012); Kate Flint, *The Woman Reader, 1837-1914* (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1995); and Christiane Inmann, *Forbidden Fruit: A History of Women and Books in Art* (Munich: Prestel, 2009).

Depression.[6] As contemporaries explained, decades of technological advances and increasing mechanization had improved workplace efficiency and contributed to a loss of jobs, increasing the amount of leisure time many possessed.[7] This situation was exacerbated during the Depression by widespread unemployment. With Americans having more "free" time than ever, leisure became a focus of public debate and a forum for addressing broader concerns related to education, technology, economic stability, social change, and democratic values, among other things.

Contemporaries were concerned that Americans were filling their leisure time with a variety of unwholesome and unproductive practices. As they suggested, this misuse of leisure time was detrimental to the mental and physical health of the nation's citizens and contributed to a general deterioration of social norms and values.[8] As one author explained, we all know people who "are completely bored and lost with extra time, or those who use their free time in such a way as to leave them physically exhausted and mentally sluggish."[9]

These reformers were especially worried about commercialized, mechanized, and "faddish" leisure pursuits like radio listening, automobile touring, and movie watching.[10] Movies were a particular source of concern because of their widespread popularity. The National Recreation Association's 1934 survey reported that movie watching was the third most popular leisure activity among those surveyed.[11] Despite the economic downturn, between 80 and 90 million people attended the movies each week during the late 1930s.

---

[6] Currell, *The March of Spare Time*, 3, 19. Variants on the phrase "leisure problem" were in common use during the period. See, for instance, Henry Durant, *The Problem of Leisure* (London: G. Routledge & Sons, 1938).
[7] Currell, *The March of Spare Time*, 20.
[8] See: Ibid., 2, 25; Cooney, *Balancing Acts*, 80; and Andrea Friedman, *Prurient Interests: Gender, Democracy, and Obscenity in New York City, 1909-1945* (New York: Columbia Univ. Press, 2000), 79.
[9] Daniel Carpenter, "Home Recreation," *Recreation* 32, no. 8 (Nov 1938): 459.
[10] Currell, *The March of Spare Time*, 4, 20.
[11] Ibid., 126.

Movie attendance, in fact, amounted to approximately twenty percent of the money Americans spent on recreation.[12]

Critics asserted that movies and other mass-mediated and commercial recreational activities were contributing to an increasing passivity among Americans that some referred to as "spectatoritis."[13] As they explained, many Americans were occupying themselves with empty and unrewarding pastimes orchestrated by commercial entities that were motivated by profits rather than a concern for the welfare of the nation or its citizens.[14] These activities, they suggested, were producing a nation of uninspired listeners and watchers rather than "doers."[15] In his 1932 book *Spectatoritis*, Jay B. Nash articulated the problem by posing a challenge to his readers. Would you, he asked, "turn to Nature to find a new type of slime mold, a new fern, a scarlet tanager or an hepatica? Would you turn to the romance of the microscope or to the world revealed by the telescope? Would you turn to reading the story of life that has been worked out in remote parts of the world? … Or would you drop back to your old reflexes and sleep – sleep in bed, before the radio, before the moving picture camera, or other places where the requirement is *Check your brains with your hat*?"[16]

Reformers and government officials believed the leisure problem was a national issue with broader social and political implications. Many, for instance, claimed that leisure influenced the economic stability of the nation.[17] As they explained, passive leisure activities contributed to the nation's economic troubles by encouraging apathy and inactivity. The

---

[12] Cooney, *Balancing Acts*, 74.
[13]See Jay B. Nash, *Spectatoritis* (New York: A.S. Barnes and Company, 1938). See also Evelyne Borst, "Too Many Spectators!," *Recreation* 35, no. 11 (Feb 1942): 682; and Currell, *The March of Spare Time*, 23, 155-6.
[14] See Nash, *Spectatoritis*, 5, 11. See also Friedman, *Prurient Interests*, 27.
[15] Friedman, *Prurient Interests*, 78-9. See also Karin Littau, *Theories of Reading: Books, Bodies and Bibliomania* (MA: Polity Press, 2006), 7.
[16] Nash, *Spectatoritis*, 14-15.
[17] Currell, *The March of Spare Time*, 5, 19, 25.

constructive use of leisure time, conversely, facilitated the development of skilled workers and citizens whose knowledge and abilities could help reinvigorate the ailing economy.

Some also linked the misuse of leisure time with larger social issues like crime and juvenile delinquency. As they suggested, these problems could be mitigated if the public's "restless urges" were redirected toward more productive pursuits.[18] An article in *Recreation* magazine explained that recreation helps "in the attack upon the very roots of crime by guiding and directing our younger generation – and for that matter, our grown population – along lines that build fine strong characters so occupied with happy, interesting pursuits that there is less time for unwholesome thoughts and actions."[19]

Contemporaries extended this idea to a range of supposedly unacceptable activities and behaviors. Some, for example, suggested that the constructive use of leisure time could prevent the spread of subversive social and political beliefs. Participation in pleasurable and productive leisure activities, they explained, occupied Americans and encouraged both happiness and self-fulfillment, which they linked to increased contentment with the federal government. As one writer explained, leisure opportunities that promote health, happiness, and personal growth "increase the satisfaction of our citizens in their own kind of government and protect them in this period of stress from following false social theories."[20]

---

[18] See, for instance, Paul V. McNutt, "Recreation and the National Morale," *Recreation* 33, no. 10 (January 1940): 545. McNutt, who was the Federal Security Administrator under Roosevelt, suggested that Americans needed to "apply their restless urges to mountain climbing, camping, swimming, sailing, sports, arts and crafts, music, nature study, drama, travel, and the many other forms of interesting leisure experience." See also Jay B. Nash, *Spectatoritis*, 37, 40; and E. T. Attwell, "Recreation for Colored Citizens in the New Democracy," *Recreation* 30, no. 10 (January 1937): 494.

[19] Hon. Henry Horner, "Making Leisure Time Count," *Recreation* 29, no. 9 (December 1935): 442. Similarly, Henry Waldman suggested that public recreation could be a powerful crime prevention program. See Henry S. Waldman, "Recreation and Crime," *Recreation* 32, no. 10 (January 1939): 548-9.

[20] Mrs. Eugene Meyer, "Recreation in Our Present Democracy," *Recreation* 29, no. 9 (December 1935): 439. Meyer was Chairman of the Recreation Commission in Westchester County, New York.

Federal Response to the Leisure Problem

Having identified a leisure problem, social scientists and reformers began to consider various solutions. The recent increase in leisure hours, they observed, had outpaced the public's ability to use this free time efficiently and intelligently. [21] Because of this, Americans were in need of guidance. The Governor of Illinois explained that it "takes leadership to urge them to follow a well chartered course that has a plan and an ultimate benefit for them."[22] As the following discussion indicates, the WPA posters were one way public officials worked to achieve this goal.

The economic downturn made it difficult for local groups to address the leisure problem adequately.[23] Likewise, many private organizations were not equipped to deal with the growing leisure needs that accompanied mass unemployment. This led a number of reformers and leisure professionals to stress the need for government involvement. As one commentator asserted, the "growth of slums, the economic stress of the times, the complexities of modern city life, the great amount of leisure time, the rise of unsupervised amusements and the enormous increase in juvenile delinquency and crime have all tended to make public recreation a government necessity."[24]

The New Deal administration responded to this situation by implementing the most extensive recreation program the country had ever seen. Administrators and leisure professionals saw this program, which targeted urban and rural areas as well as adults and children, as an important facet of the government's social agenda and essential to the

[21] E. T. Attwell, Director of the National Recreation Association's "Bureau of Colored Work," asserted that leisure time had "increased out of all proportion to training for its wise use." Attwell, "Recreation for Colored Citizens in the New Democracy," 491. See also Currell, *The March of Spare Time*, 20.
[22] Horner, "Making Leisure Time Count," 442.
[23] Currell, *The March of Spare Time*, 48.
[24] Waldman, "Recreation and Crime," 549.

preservation of democratic rights.[25] As the Director of the WPA's Recreation Section argued, "citizens in a true democracy have a right to expect" the provision of "useful" leisure pursuits "along with freedom of speech and worship, and the other guarantees of the Bill of Rights."[26]

The WPA played a central role in the government's recreation program, instigating a number of projects designed to enrich the leisure time of Americans.[27] Between twenty-two and thirty percent of the WPA's budget, in fact, was dedicated to this goal.[28] According to a 1939 publication on the WPA, educational workers conducted more than 100,000 classes a month for individuals eager to improve their aptitude with reading and writing, learn vocational and parenting skills, and become naturalized citizens, among other things. Likewise, recreational workers supervised activities in thousands of community centers, among other locations.[29] The WPA also built and renovated recreational facilities like libraries, swimming pools, game preserves, playgrounds, and athletic fields.[30]

---

[25] See Currell, *The March of Spare Time*, 8, 30, 48-50. As Currell notes, the desire to improve the leisure practices of Americans was not new to this period. The scope of government involvement in this effort, however, was unprecedented.

[26] G. Ott Romney, "Works Projects Administration" in "Federal Agencies in Education-Recreation Field," *Recreation* 34, no. 11 (February 1941): 648.

[27] A 1941 article in *Recreation* noted that the WPA employed almost forty thousand recreation leaders through the WPA Recreation Program and more than thirty thousand teachers in the adult education program. See "Federal Agencies in Education-Recreation Field," *Recreation* 34, no. 11 (February 1941): 648.

[28] Between 1935 and 1938, the WPA spent eleven percent of its budget on the construction of outdoor recreation facilities. Another eleven percent was spent on education, library projects, statistical surveys, recreation, and other white collar and professional projects. See "Questions and Answers on the WPA;" Page 7; Selma Rein; Box 11; General Records, 1935-1940; Records of the Works Progress Administration, Record Group 69; National Archives at College Park, College Park, MD. See also Currell, *The March of Spare Time*, 51. Currell notes that WPA Administrator Harry Hopkins allocated roughly thirty percent of the WPA budget toward recreation projects.

[29] See "Questions and Answers on the WPA;" Page 21; Selma Rein; Box 11; General Records, 1935-1940; Records of the Works Progress Administration, Record Group 69; National Archives at College Park, College Park, MD.

[30] According to an article in *Recreation* magazine, over 10,000,000 people a month participated in recreational activities made possible by the WPA. See "Increasing America's Recreational Facilities," *Recreation* 30, no. 9 (December 1936): 468. See also "Questions and Answers on the WPA;" Page 21; Selma Rein; Box 11; General Records, 1935-1940; Records of the Works Progress Administration, Record Group 69; National Archives at College Park, College Park, MD.

The FAP was an active participant in this "modern leisure time-movement."[31] Project employees taught classes in the Federal Art Galleries and worked in community art centers, where they held demonstrations, lectures, exhibitions, and activities in an attempt to raise the public's taste and encourage art appreciation.[32] They also made a number of posters for organizations and agencies concerned with recreation, including the reading-related posters under discussion here.[33]

Specialists asserted that promotional materials like the WPA posters were important tools for encouraging Americans to read.[34] Although the National Recreation Association had determined that reading was one of the most common leisure activities of the period, their 1934 survey indicated that many Americans would rather participate in activities like automobile touring and theater going if they could.[35] For this and other reasons, contemporaries suggested, publicity materials were vital. Posters and other promotional items

---

[31] A WPA report on recreation asserted that "professional artists need to be related somehow to the modern leisure-time movement." "Under the WPA," the document continued, "there is a splendid opportunity to bring America's cultural and recreational activities in closer harmony…" See the "Joint Statement of Policy Regarding Relations of Recreation and Cultural Activities of the Works Progress Administration;" Pages 2-3; General Memo; Box 7; General Records, 1935-1940; Records of the Works Progress Administration, Record Group 69; National Archives at College Park, College Park, MD.

[32] See: "Mr. Cahill's Lecture before the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York City, 28 March 1937;" Page 22; Box 15; General Records, 1935-1940; Records of the Works Progress Administration, Record Group 69; National Archives at College Park, College Park, MD; Memorandum from Ruth Reeves to Holger Cahill, 1 June 1936; Page 3; Ruth Reeves Reports; Box 4; General Records, 1935-1940; Records of the Works Progress Administration, Record Group 69; National Archives at College Park, College Park, MD; and "American Resources in the Arts" by Holger Cahill; Page 25; Box 15; General Records, 1935-1940; Records of the Works Progress Administration, Record Group 69; National Archives at College Park, College Park, MD.

[33] A 1937 project report, for instance, noted that the FAP had produced 3000 posters covering six subjects for the Adult Education Project. See Project Report, New York City FAP, 20 December 1936 – 20 January 1937; New York City; Box 58; Records of the Works Progress Administration, Record Group 69; National Archives at College Park, College Park, MD.

[34] See, for instance, McNutt, "Recreation and the National Morale," 545. McNutt explained that recreation programs must have "good public relations" to be successful.

[35] Currell, *The March of Spare Time*, 65.

helped professionals cultivate new readers and ensure the continued participation of others.[36] Likewise, they informed people about the services available at libraries, which offered a range of educational and civic development programs.[37]

The Art of Living

The production of the WPA's reading related posters, however, was motivated by more than a general desire to combat "spectatoritis" by encouraging participation in wholesome leisure activities. These posters addressed a perceived decline in standards of knowledge and education, which some claimed was being exacerbated by a misuse of leisure time. They also engaged contemporary concerns over the emotional well being of Americans by promoting reading as a fun and personally rewarding pastime. In doing so, the posters offer multiple insights into the various ways contemporaries linked reading to the "art of living," which involved the cultivation of both knowledge and happiness.[38]

Contemporary anxieties over the use of leisure time were aggravated by concerns that the intelligence, literacy, and skills of many Americans were decreasing, leaving them unable to contend with the changing demands of the modern era. As some suggested, this decline had contributed to the Depression by fueling a state of cultural lag in which technology had surpassed human ability.[39] It was imperative, therefore, that the trend be reversed. As Nash

---

[36] See, for instance, Elizabeth M. Smith, "News Stories, Lists, and Exhibits Aid in Publicity Experiment," *Bulletin of the American Library Association* 28, no. 10, part 1 (October 1934): 797. Smith was Chairman of the American Library Association's Publicity Committee.

[37] Beatrice Sawyer Rossell, "Publicity Clinic," *Bulletin of the American Library Association*, 32, no. 11 (October 15, 1938): 921. See also "Publicity Service Uncertain," *Bulletin of the American Library Association* 30, no. 9 (September 1936): 878.

[38] See Horner, "Making Leisure Time Count," 441-2. See also Marjorie Barstow Greenbie, *The Arts of Leisure* (Camden, N.J: McGraw-Hill Book Company, Inc., 1935), 263-274.

[39] Currell, *The March of Spare Time*, 27-8, 85.

explained, "Civilization is really a race between the acquiring of normality through interest-driven, integrative hobbies, and collapse through mental degeneration."[40]

As reformer's asserted, educational leisure activities contributed to the revitalization of society by encouraging the "re-creation" of the individual.[41] These pastimes, they maintained, could assist people in understanding many of the social changes taking place.[42] Likewise, they helped individuals cultivate the tools for participating in, and even constructing, the new "social order."[43]

For this and other reasons, planning officials stressed the need for leisure programs that included a diverse balance of experiences– physical, aesthetic, intellectual, and social.[44] A 1936 policy statement issued by WPA, for example, observed that physical activities had been the core of many recreational programs until recently. While physical development was important and fun, the statement explained, a "modern leisure-time program must also include aesthetic and intellectual experiences."[45]

Reading was an integral part of this leisure program. As contemporaries asserted, reading could increase a person's understanding of the modern world, making it orderly and

---

[40] Nash, *Spectatoritis*, 16.
[41] Contemporaries played on the meaning of "recreation," using it to signify a re-creation of the self. See Nash, *Spectatoritis*, 6. Nash explains that "re-creation" is to "create anew, … to restore to a good condition the body or mind, or refresh physically and mentally." See also "Improving our Rural Civilization," *Recreation* 33, no.9 (December 1939): 517.
[42] See "Federal Agencies in Education-Recreation Field," 647. See also Nash, *Spectatoritis*, 219-20; and Bruce B. Robinson, "The Professional in Recreation and His Responsibility for Personality Development," *Recreation* 32, no. 6 (September 1938): 323. Robinson argued that recreational workers are essentially educators.
[43] Louis Sobel, "Vocational Guidance Through the Organized Club," *Recreation* 29, no. 10 (January 1936): 511.
[44] See Hedley S. Dimock, "How Effective is Our Education for Leisure," *Recreation* 30, no. 9 (Dec 1936): 428. Dimock worked for George Williams College in Chicago.
[45] "Joint Statement of Policy Regarding Relations of Recreation and Cultural Activities of the Works Progress Administration;" Page 1; General Memo; Box 7; General Records, 1935-1940; Records of the Works Progress Administration, Record Group 69; National Archives at College Park, College Park, MD.

intelligible by clarifying his or her experiences.[46] It also addressed the problem of cultural lag by equipping individuals with new knowledge and skills. John W. Studebaker, the U.S. Commissioner of Education under Roosevelt, asserted that knowledge helped Americans adapt to the rapid transformations of modern life. "One of the reasons we are beginning to put so much emphasis on adult education," he wrote, "is that we have discovered that no matter how much stuffing is done in the schools, it cannot be adequate for the voyage through life in our swiftly changing world."[47]

A WPA poster produced by the New York City FAP addresses these goals and concerns by encouraging viewers to register for a study group held at the Henry Street Settlement, which was located in a poor and ethnically diverse neighborhood in the lower east side of Manhattan (figure 4). The poster illustrates a book between two machine gears. The book is open and its pages blank, which is a formal strategy that fulfills several purposes. In sacrificing the book's legibility, the designer has simplified the composition, increasing the viewer's ability to "read" the poster more effectively. These blank pages also generalize the appeal by allowing the book to accommodate the projected needs and interests of different viewers.

The juxtaposition of a book and machine gears resonates with contemporary concerns over the economic stability of the nation and works to distinguish reading from passive and unproductive leisure pursuits. This pairing implies that knowledge, which is symbolized by the book, can be "put to work" in an industrial setting. Moreover, the designer indicates that

---

[46] See Marjorie Barstow Greenbie, *The Arts of Leisure*, 195-6.

[47] John W. Studebaker quoted in Robert Kunzman and David Tyack, "Educational Forums of the 1930s: An Experiment in Adult Civic Education," *American Journal of Education* 111, no. 3 (May 2005): 326. See also H.S. Hemenway, "Let's All Go to School," *Recreation*, 30, no. 11 (February 1937): 539, 562. As Hemenway explained, adults "realize gaps in their preparation for living which need to be filled." "The changing aspects of modern civilization force every individual periodically to catch up…"

reading and knowledge are *central* to the industrial process by positioning the book between the two gears. This approach was consistent with the objectives of the WPA Workers Education Project, which commissioned the poster to attract working-class Americans. The poster suggests that education can lead to the cultivation or improvement of skills that might enhance the viewer's professional opportunities. It also implies that machines can be managed with the knowledge gained in leisure time, which was an empowering assertion due to the widespread belief that machines and technology had contributed to the increased leisure time people were experiencing.

It is significant, however, that this poster does not show people laboring. Rather, "work" is symbolized by streamlined and efficient-looking machine gears, distancing the poster from the drudgery of industrial life. For similar reasons, the poster highlights the informal nature of the study group. The use of the word "informal" distinguishes the program from more structured, compulsory schooling and hints at a learning process that is potentially enjoyable.[48]

The decision to frame reading and other educational pursuits as informal and pleasurable was a strategic move to entice participants. As contemporaries asserted, educators needed to make their leisure activities enjoyable if they wanted to cultivate and sustain the public's interest. The author Louis Wessel, for instance, maintained that educational activities needed to be fun and engaging. "Any program in education," he explained, "must be presented in a well-camouflaged form."[49] If it does not spark the interest

[48] In doing so, the poster echoes the rhetoric of contemporary leisure professionals. See, for instance, Ivah Deering, "Education Comes Alive," *Recreation* 32, no. 5 (August 1938): 294.
[49] Louis Wessel, "Education Versus Recreation," *Recreation* 30, no. 2 (May 1936): 94.

of the participant, another suggested, it is "doomed for failure."[50] Consistent with this conviction, materials designed to promote recreational activities often emphasized personal fulfillment, enjoyment, and adventure.[51]

Most of the WPA's reading-related posters exemplify this type of appeal, many to a greater degree than the work just described. A poster produced by the Pennsylvania FAP, for instance, shows a boy looking through a telescope at a smiling planet (figure 5). The boy, who is both literally and figuratively on top of the world, rests his hand on a book. Text surrounding this imagery explains that viewers should read an astronomy book because "stars are fun to know," an assertion reinforced by the poster's cheery color palette and cartoon-like imagery.

In addition to enticing viewers, the representation of reading as pleasurable and fulfilling engaged a growing concern over the emotional well-being of Americans. As specialists asserted, in the interest of both personal and national stability, educational activities like reading should encourage happiness and fulfillment as well as practical knowledge.[52] "More and more," one commentator noted, educational activities were for "the purposes of living and not merely for making a living."[53] Another explained that education should open up new "avenues of knowledge… beauty and inspiration." In doing so, it encourages people to explore their capabilities, enabling them to lead the "fullest" life possible. Education, the author asserted, should be a "road to happiness and satisfaction."[54]

---

[50] Sobel, "Vocational Guidance through the Organized Club," 94, 510.
[51] Cooney, *Balancing Acts*, 60.
[52] Hugh M. Woodward, "Recreation – A Philosophy of Joyful Living," *Recreation* 31, no. 10 (Jan 1938): 587.
[53] "Federal Agencies in Education-Recreation Field," 647. This statement was "authorized" by J.F. Rogers, MD, a Consultant in Hygiene for the U.S. Office of Education.
[54] Herbert Greer French, June 1939 commencement address delivered at the University of Cincinnati quoted in *Recreation* 33, no. 6 (September 1939): frontice page.

The emphasis professionals placed on personal fulfillment stemmed, in part, from fears that the depression and the increasing mechanization of society were taking a toll on the emotional well-being of Americans. As they suggested, recreational activities like reading could play an important role in countering the unhappiness, monotony, and disconnect that accompanied modern life by instilling Americans with a sense of excitement and gratification.[55] As the Chairman of the National Social Work Council explained, a major challenge of modern life was retaining a sense of adventure and personal development. "Birds must have air, fish water. What does the soul of man require? Music and drama and human relations and the creation of beauty and opportunity to adventure, to try to be courageous, to keep growing… For such things in part is the kingdom of leisure given and for such things will a wise civilization make provision. Why? That man may remain man and not be dried up by the machine he did himself create."[56] As the Chairman implied, enjoyable and stimulating leisure activities were a basic necessity that helped to ensure national stability.

The idea that reading and other leisure activities could counter the physical and mental hazards of an increasingly mechanized world compliments the notion that leisure could be used to master the machines themselves. Both goals, which are envisioned in various WPA posters, reinforce the understanding that reading can provide viewers with the tools, both emotional and intellectual, to negotiate the complexities of modern life. Reading, in other words, cultivates the skills and knowledge necessary for self-realization in a variety of arenas.

---

[55] See, for instance, Dorothy Canfield Fisher, "Schooling for Youth in the Light of Adult Education," *Recreation*, 32 no. 5 (August 1938): 266. See also William G. Robinson, "Correlation of Public and Private Agencies in the Recreation Field," *Recreation* 28, no. 12 (March 1935): 563; and Marjorie Barstow Greenbie, *The Arts of Leisure*, 268.

[56] Howard Braucher, "Keeping Adventure," *Recreation* 31, no. 10 (January 1938): 585.

These WPA posters, in effect, promote what a number of leisure professionals referred to as the "art of living," which was a flexible and somewhat ambiguous concept that encompassed a variety of goals.[57] The word "art," however, is vital to understanding the expression's significance. Among its many definitions, art has been seen as the result of skills and knowledge acquired through study, observation, and experience. It has also been associated with imagination and personal expression. In likening existence to an art form, therefore, the "art of living" implies that life can be a beautiful and rewarding experience if practiced with skill, intelligence, and creativity. For leisure professionals, constructive activities like reading could contribute to the art of living by encouraging both literacy and imagination.

Some saw the art of living as a fundamental part of the American dream or "way." Howard Braucher, for instance, argued that the American dream was not defined by material goods like automobiles, radios, and clothes. It was the opportunity Americans had, through constructive activities like reading, to develop the inner strength and capacity to "do things" and "go places." "The American way of life" he explained, "has always … moved toward beauty, music, sport, richness in living. Church spires, school bells, art galleries, parks, playgrounds, swimming holes, libraries, choruses, symphonies; art and living – the art of living – have always been a very real part of the dream."[58]

---

[57] See Henry Horner, "Making Leisure Time Count," 441-2; and Thomas E. Rivers, "Recreation and the American Way of Life," *Recreation* 33, no. 3 (June 1939): 121.

[58] Howard Braucher, "What is the American Way of Life," *Recreation* 30, no. 12 (March 1937): 569. See also Rivers, "Recreation and the American Way of Life," 121.

The Art of Reading

The WPA's reading-related posters assisted viewers in mastering the art of living by promoting reading practices that were consistent with national goals and objectives. Some, for instance, recommend particular subjects or writers. Likewise, many encourage active reading by linking the pastime with adventure and discovery, as well as intellectual, creative, and social engagement. In educating viewers on socially constructive reading habits, which one author described as the "art of reading" in an extension of the metaphor just described, these posters worked to foster the development of knowledgeable, resourceful, and happy citizens.

Many of the WPA posters worked to educate viewers on the art of reading by encouraging them to explore particular authors or issues. A poster produced for the Statewide Library Project in Illinois, for example, shows a woman outdoors on what appears to be a blustery March day (figure 6). A red book is tucked under her arm and others, inscribed with the names of authors, occupy the space around her.[59] Although text on the bottom of the poster encourages viewers to read the books *they* have always meant to, these books serve as both suggestions and paradigms. Although the majority of these literary figures worked prior to the twentieth century, the woman's geometric form implies that they are appropriate choices for the well-versed, modern American.

According to leisure professionals, this type of guidance was important for a number of reasons. As they argued, the abundance of available reading material made the process of

[59] The authors represented are: Sir Walter Scott (Scottish, 1771-1832); Alexandre Dumas (French, 1802-1870); William Thackeray (English, 1811-1924); Charles Dickens (English, 1812-1870); Jane Austen (English, 1775-1817); Leo Tolstoy (Russian, 1828-1910); Samuel Langhorne Clemens (aka. Mark Twain, American, 1835-1910); T.S. Eliot (American/English, 1888-1965); Nathaniel Hawthorne (American, 1804-1864).

selection both necessary and difficult. "Although we like to be left alone in selecting our reading," one commentator explained, "we are so surrounded by a deluge of printed material that there is danger of drowning in a sea of printers' ink. The sheer quantity of book production makes plain the necessity for selection."[60]

Furthermore, New Deal reformers and educators did not consider all reading material equal in terms of quality or influence. This conviction was informed by longstanding fears, dating to the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, regarding the reading habits of Americans. Although specialists maintained that Americans were reading too little rather than too much, which was the crux of prior concerns, they were consistent with earlier reformers in focusing on the quantity of reading material Americans consumed. Like their predecessors, they were also worried about the quality of this material.[61] This concern was a motivating force behind the establishment of programs like the Book of the Month Club, which was founded in 1926.[62] It is also implicit in the rhetoric of many reformers, who argued that books should do more than amuse. In the words of contemporary leisure professionals, books should cultivate "high ideals and right thinking," as well as "mental, moral, and spiritual growth."[63] Reading, in other words, should be edifying as well as entertaining.

Like the WPA poster just described, contemporary leisure journals often made specific reading suggestions. More often, they recommended general subject areas. These included the classics and biographies of "great" individuals, as well as books on topics like economics,

---

[60] Richardson, "Books and the More Abundant Life," 281. See also Littau, *Theories of Reading*, 45.
[61] Littau, *Theories of Reading*, 37, 78.
[62] For more information on the Book of the Month Club see Janice A. Radway, *A Feeling for Books: The Book-of-the-Month Club, Literary Taste, and Middle-Class Desire* (Chapel Hill: Univ. of North Carolina Press, 1997).
[63] See Dessa M. Fultz, "Making the Story Hour 'Go,'" *Recreation* 35, no. 2 (May 1941): 69; and Mildred Walton, "Professional Reading and its Values," *Recreation* 32, no. 8 (Nov 1938): 484. Mildred Watson was the Supervisor of the Special Activity Program of the University Hospital in Ann Arbor, MI. Dessa Fultz directed the playground story telling program for the Los Angeles Board of Education.

international relations, science, and conservation.[64] Unlike dime novels, comics, and magazines, these texts symbolized a higher level of cultivation and achievement.[65] According to educators, they also required individuals to engage actively in the reading process, which promoted learning and independent thinking. As one commentator explained, "Things you can comprehend without effort, such as magazines and newspapers, require a minimum of reading. You need very little art. You can read in a relatively passive way." Good reading material, in contrast, challenges individuals to "make the effort to understand."[66]

In working to educate viewers on the art of living, a number of WPA posters promote general fields of study. Several, for instance, encourage viewers to read books on science. One of these posters, which was designed by Shari Weisberg for the Illinois FAP, features a book, a microscope, and a disembodied eye surrounded by six half circles, which radiate outward in a concentric pattern (figure 7). Text above and below this image implies that reading is one way a viewer can work at "keeping up with science."

Reformers and educators claimed that science provided insights and knowledge that could assist Americans in managing modern life.[67] Because of this, many leisure professionals encouraged a program of science education, which included reading books that dealt with biology, zoology, botany, geology, and famous scientists, among other subjects. This type of study, they suggested, was particularly important for children. As an article in

---

[64] See Greenbie, *The Arts of Leisure*, 197. As Greenbie asserted, "We have to tear ourselves loose from this fine spun enchantment of sounds and pictures, and really think out the fundamentals for ourselves. Here is the place for the reading of books on economics and psychology and philosophy, and indeed on the whole art of living."
[65] See "Regarding Comic Magazines," *Recreation* 35, no. 11 (February 1942): 689. In this essay, *Recreation* magazine reported on a study by George Hecht, the President and publisher of *Parents Magazine*. The study revealed that seventy-five percent of children's leisure reading was spent on comic magazines, a trend Hecht felt was detrimental to their development. See also Currell, *The March of Spare Time*, 22.
[66] Mabel A. Bessey and Isabelle P. Coffin, *Active Reading* (New York: D. Appleton-Century Co. Inc. 1941), x.
[67] Cooney, *Balancing Acts*, 45.

Recreation magazine explained, among its benefits, the study of science contributes to a child's development and promotes a "keener interest in life."[68]

Individuals and organizations concerned with recreation and education defined "science" in broad terms. Boston's Elizabeth Peabody House, for instance, addressed nature, astronomy, photography, chemistry, physics, biology, and the mechanics of "common things" in the science camps they ran for children.[69] Nature study, in particular, was a popular activity and discussed repeatedly in magazines like *Recreation*. As contemporaries suggested, the study of nature encouraged aesthetic pleasure and furthered conservation efforts by educating individuals on the "proper utilization" of natural resources.[70] It also enhanced individuals' powers of observation.[71] This expanded their awareness of the "grand ensemble" and provided a link to America's past by teaching them how to read the "stories written in the rocks, the plants and the animate creatures."[72] For these and other reasons, contemporaries suggested that nature study was particularly useful for urbanites who spent most of their time in supposedly "unnatural" commercial and industrial environments.[73]

Accordingly, nature study was referenced in a number of WPA posters, including one produced by the Pennsylvania FAP (figure 8). This poster depicts a boy and a girl standing on a flower-covered patch of grass under an abstract tree. This imagery is accompanied by text encouraging viewers to "take a book on nature" because "it's fun to grow things." This statement can be understood in multiple ways. It implies that books can help a person grow

---

[68] H. Henry Platt, "Science Indoors and Out," *Recreation* 33, no. 1 (April 1939): 47. Platt was the Director of the Science Department at the Peabody House.
[69] H. Henry Platt, "Science Indoors and Out," *Recreation* 33, no. 1 (April 1939): 9.
[70] Wessel, "Education versus Recreation," 73.
[71] See Gladys M. Relyea, "Some Possibilities in Science for the Leisure Time of Adults," *Recreation* 29, no. 7 (October 1935): 361.
[72] Earl L. Poole, "A Program of Education through Recreation," *Recreation* 34, no. 4 (July 1940): 248.
[73] See Currell, *The March of Spare Time*, 56.

things in nature, an interpretation reinforced by the garden tools the two children carry as well as the trees and flowers that surround them. It also suggests that an individual's understanding and enjoyment of nature can grow through reading. The notion that books aid in the cultivation of knowledge and happiness is confirmed by the fact that the two children appear healthy and happy in their outdoor environment, flourishing like the living things that surround them.

This ambiguity provides the viewer with several options for nature study. According to leisure professionals, individuals could use books in tandem with the investigation of natural objects and environments, consulting them between or during nature outings to learn about their discoveries.[74] Books could also, if necessary, serve as a substitute for empirical study if an individual could not visit a natural site in person. As one writer explained, the depressed economy had forced many to satisfy their cravings for exploration and discovery in the natural world through reading.[75] The FAP poster accommodates both possibilities. Books, the poster suggests, can provide readers with the knowledge they need to interact with nature successfully. They also offer readers a way to increase their knowledge of nature vicariously.

A Passport to Adventure and Discovery

In addition to guiding viewers in the selection of appropriate reading materials, a number of WPA posters worked to combat the leisure problem by envisioning reading as an active pursuit linked to adventure and discovery. These works are consistent with the rhetoric

[74] C. Frances Loomis, "Camp Fire Girls Learn to See," *Recreation* 34, no. 4 (July 1940): 236.
[75] Poole, "A Program of Education through Recreation," 248.

of leisure professionals who maintained that reading is a multifaceted endeavor that employs and cultivates a range of skills necessary for mastering the "art of living," including intelligence and imagination. As one author explained, the "art of reading includes all the same skills that are involved in the art of discovery: keenness of observation, readily available memory, range of imagination, and, of course, a reason trained in analysis and reflection."[76]

The science poster produced in Illinois exemplifies this approach (figure 7). In pairing a book and a microscope, this poster suggests that reading can both inform and elucidate scientific discoveries. Likewise, it implies that viewers can integrate thought and action by applying and testing the knowledge they obtain through reading. Reading, in effect, can engender new ways of seeing and understanding the world if approached with purpose.

The poster's formal elements support this message. The half-circles surrounding the eye accentuate a connection between the book and the microscope by linking the two. The circles also animate the poster, reinforcing our understanding that reading is a dynamic and active process. This impression is strengthened by the fact that the designer combined geometric forms, which can be associated with reason and order, with more expressionistic, painterly elements. Like the use of concentric circles, this variation enlivens the composition and, consequently, our understanding of the reading process. Reading, this poster suggests, involves both intellect and a spirit of creativity.

By associating reading and education with scientific investigation, this poster visualizes a constructive alternative to the passive leisure pursuits contemporaries criticized. Drawing from progressive philosophers like John Dewey, whom he described as "forward

[76] Bessey and Coffin, *Active Reading*, 4.

looking," Nash argued that action and education go hand in hand.[77] As he explained, there "is no education without acting, there can be no acting without education."[78] For Nash and many others, the educational and restorative benefits of leisure time stemmed primarily from "doing" and creating.

Some of the WPA posters indicate that this process of discovery and engagement could be mental as well as physical. A poster produced by the Chicago FAP, for instance, envisions reading as an active process of mental exploration (figure 9). The poster, which promotes a story club sponsored by the WPA Library Center, shows a boy and a girl who have embarked on a trip around the world. The children are traveling by book, which follows a curved trail that runs from the top of the poster to the bottom. This route has taken the children over a mountainous and tree-lined landscape, which they gaze at from an elevated vantage point.

This work suggests that reading is an act of discovery that cultivates both imagination and knowledge. In turning the book into a mode of transport, the designer implies that reading can facilitate flights of imagination that carry the reader to new places. Reinforcing this understanding, the landscape below the children is a visual embodiment of the reading process. It symbolizes, in other words, a creative interpretation of the book's content.

As a number of New Dealers asserted, leisure activities that encouraged imagination and creativity fostered resourceful, engaged, and competent citizens. According to the Secretary of the National Recreational Association, constructive leisure activities could enrich a person's character, making them "more independent, original, creative, self-reliant, [and]

[77] Nash, *Spectatoritis*, 227.
[78] Ibid., 29-30, 62-4, 83.

thoughtful." Passive pastimes, in contrast, encouraged dependence, submissiveness, and disinterest, resulting in citizens with "less sparkle."[79]

This poster, however, also suggests that reading can enhance a person's knowledge of other people and places. The children's literary adventure has, in fact, given them a new and empowering perspective. As this depiction implies, books can elevate viewers and help them "go places" by increasing their knowledge of the world.

In equating books with travel, this poster is consistent with other outreach programs organized by leisure professionals, who maintained that literature could expand a reader's intellectual horizons by educating them about other cultures. *Recreation* magazine, for example, published several essays about reading clubs that encouraged the cultivation of knowledge through literary "traveling." One of these articles described a group called "The Airplane Ride Club," which had a storyteller whose tales helped children "see" how the people of other countries lived.[80] A different essay addressed several reading clubs organized by the Free Library in Moorestown, New Jersey. As the article explained, one of the library's reading programs had children follow "book trails" to the sea, the mountains, and "other alluring places."[81] Another offered a literary "trip around the world" that encouraged participants to learn about different countries.

The emphasis on travel and discovery in the WPA posters also resonates with contemporary attitudes toward the closing of the American frontier, which the famous historian Frederick Jackson Turner linked to the ingenuity and individualism many associated

---

[79] Howard Braucher, "Getting the Spirit of Recreation into the Human Relations of Government," *Recreation* 31, no. 11 (February 1938): 633. Similarly Jay Nash suggested that imaginative play was crucial for countering spectatoritis and encouraging the healthy development of children. See Nash, *Spectatoritis*, 222.
[80] Fultz, "Making the Story Hour 'Go,'" 70.
[81] Hannah Severns, "Gay Tours to Far-away Lands," *Recreation* 30, no. 12 (March 1937): 583-6. Severns was a librarian at the Moorestown, N.L. Free Library.

with America. As some professionals argued, constructive leisure pursuits preserved America's frontier spirit by offering an outlet for pioneering individuals in search of adventure.[82] Others suggested that the field of leisure was itself broaching new frontiers in promoting the art of living, which encouraged personal fulfillment through education and discovery. Howard Braucher, for instance, declared that unexplored frontiers existed despite the closing of America's physical borders. "There are and continue to be," he suggested, "frontiers worth dreaming about – frontiers of living, of freedom of the spirit, of the pursuit of happiness.[83] The "story hour" poster engages these ideas by suggesting that reading promotes creative and free spirits through mental exploration and discovery.

The WPA, in fact, produced a number of posters encouraging viewers to increase their knowledge of other people and places through reading. As the prevalence of these works suggests, leisure professionals considered "traveling" through books and developing an understanding of other cultures an important part of being an educated individual in the modern world. This assessment is reinforced by posters like the one designed by Fred Rentschler, which was discussed in the introduction to this dissertation (see figure 1, introduction). Pairing a page of text with a globe, the poster declares: "this is an adult world; its problems are up to you!"

Several of the extant WPA posters extend this travel metaphor by suggesting that reading can transport viewers back in time. A poster produced by the Illinois FAP, for instance, depicts a knight in armor surrounded by fleur-de-lis (figure 10). The knight has a sword hanging from his belt and holds a flag, which rests on the ground by an open book.

---

[82] See, for instance, McNutt, "Recreation and the National Morale," 545.
[83] Howard Braucher, "Our America," *Recreation* 34, no. 6 (September 1940): 341.

Text at the top of the poster indicates that this book is a "passport to adventure." This statement implies that books can transport readers to new and exciting realms. They can also bring the past to life by allowing individuals to engage with historic figures. Reinforcing this notion, the designer has used the same color on the book and the background behind the figure. This formal device links the two and suggests that the knight is a visual embodiment of the text - a symbol of the adventure that books offer.

A number of WPA posters are even more explicit in associating books with a knowledge of historical people, places, and events. A text-centric poster from Chicago, for example, foregrounds a quote from the English writer Joseph Addison, who stated that "books are the legacies that genius leaves to mankind."[84] By implying that books preserve important vestiges of the past, this and other WPA posters speak to contemporary concerns regarding the loss of traditional values and norms. Holger Cahill articulated these concerns when he asked: "Is the progress that can be measured in terms of automobiles, movies, the radio, giving us anything worthwhile to take the place of the values that are being lost? How are we to replace the useful folkways, the coherent community interchange and expression, the coordinated community activities of earlier American days?"[85] Answering this query, several WPA posters suggest that books structure and communicate knowledge and tradition across generations. Books, they indicate, are repositories of usable wisdom that can assist individuals in negotiating the art of modern living.

---

[84]This and other posters mirrored the rhetoric of educators like Edwin Embree who suggested that books "are the greatest inheritance of the new generations" because they "preserve the wisdom and the beauty of the race, and carry it as a living, ever growing steam." Edwin Embree quoted in Currell, *The March of Spare Time*, 85.

[85] Proposal for WPA Community Art Center Submitted by Holger Cahill, July 1938; National Art Centers; Box 9; General Records, 1935-1940; Records of the Works Progress Administration, Record Group 69; National Archives at College Park, College Park, MD.

A Community of Readers

Holger Cahill echoed a fear of many New Dealers in suggesting that commercial and mechanized leisure pursuits were undermining traditional community values. This concern led many to stress the need for community building activities in a well-planned leisure program. As Cahill explained, the "development of community participation seems absolutely essential if the American people is [sic] to be provided with a well-rounded education and a civilized leisure."[86]

A number of the extant WPA posters address this goal by emphasizing the social nature of reading. Several, for example, illustrate people in pairs reading or applying their newly acquired knowledge. The WPA poster promoting "story hour club," for instance, showcases two children sharing a literary adventure (figure 9). Likewise, the Pennsylvania poster endorsing nature books depicts a boy and a girl outdoors (figure 8). Countering traditional conceptions of reading as a private and individualistic enterprise, these posters suggest that the pastime can be participatory and social.[87] In doing so, they distinguish reading from passive leisure pursuits and reinforce the idea that social engagement is an integral part of the art of living.

Other posters - like the one produced for the WPA Workers Education Project - encourage viewers to participate in classes or reading groups where they would interact with other people (figure 4). For Cahill and others, these groups engendered a sense of community and belonging. As one writer explained, "In the old days in New England they had the

[86] "Mr. Cahill's Lecture before the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York City, 28 March 1937;" Page 26; Box 15; General Records, 1935-1940; Records of the Works Progress Administration, Record Group 69; National Archives at College Park, College Park, MD.
[87] Karin Littau notes that solitary reading has, historically, been seen as a mark of individualism. Littau, *Theories of Reading*, 18.

Lyceum where lectures on cultural subjects were given. We have the same today in spite of the movies, the radio and the automobile. We want to meet together with our neighbors and learn something new. It is called adult education but it comes from the same cultural urge the old New Englanders had."[88] As this statement implies, the educational and social aspects of these elective classes made them a welcome alternative to more commercialized and mechanized leisure pursuits.

Contemporaries suggested that study groups and classes were particularly important for youth. Not only were these leisure pursuits educational, they provided a constructive and supervised form of socialization. In *Recreation for Girls and Women*, for instance, Ethel Bowers asserted that it is much better for potential partners to meet at a study club, community center, or other reputable forum than a "public dance hall, street corner or on a 'blind date' auto ride."[89]

A WPA poster commissioned by the National Youth Administration (NYA) encourages this type of socialization in promoting free classes for young people (figure 11). The poster illustrates a woman and man emerging from an urban landscape. The woman, who is located above a cluster of tall skyscrapers, has three books and a pen in her hand. The young man at her side is situated over several industrial buildings and holds a geometric object that resembles a machine gear. As the poster implies, the NYA's classes encourage social interaction while providing viewers with the knowledge or "facts" they need to achieve their professional aspirations and rise above the problems that accompany urban life. The

[88] Charles J. Storey, "Painless Adult Education," *Recreation* 32, no. 6 (September 1938): 373.
[89] Ethel Bowers quoted in Currell, *The March of Spare Time*, 154-5.

poster's red, white, and blue color scheme suggests that both acts are consistent with national goals.

Seeing with the Brain

In the process of educating Americans on the art of living, several WPA posters foreground the important role that vision plays in the process of reading and the generation of knowledge. In doing so, these posters engaged contemporary concerns over the increasingly visual character of modern leisure pursuits. As historians have noted, leisure professionals associated movies and other mass-mediated, visual pastimes with a rise in mental complacency.[90] According to these scholars, contemporaries were worried that these activities were encouraging mindless reaction rather than contemplation and understanding.

The WPA posters provide important insights into the way leisure professionals both defined and addressed the problem. A number of these posters link vision with mental engagement and acuity. In doing so, they reinforce the viewer's understanding that reading is an active and intellectually engaging leisure pursuit. They also shift the focus of the debate from the visual nature of pastimes like reading to the way Americans were *engaging* with these visual materials. The problem, these works suggest, is the mode and character of sight being employed.

Several WPA posters emphasize the important role that vision plays in the art of reading and the cultivation of knowledge by featuring eyes or eyeglasses. The science poster, for example, illustrates a prominently placed eye surrounded by concentric circles (figure 7). The designer has given this eye equal weight in the composition relative to the book and

[90] See, for instance, Currell, *The March of Spare Time*, 26, 84.

microscope, which suggests that seeing, reading, and experimentation work in tandem to increase scientific knowledge.

Similarly, a poster produced for the Hempstead New York Health Department addresses the relationship between vision and reading (figure 12). The poster depicts a young boy with a book open on the table before him. The boy, however, is not looking at the book but a sheet of white paper held by a woman standing to his right. Both of these figures overlap a large text panel that resembles an eye chart. The text tells the viewer that John, who we assume is the boy below, "is not really dull. He may only need his eyes examined."

Each of these posters foregrounds the important role vision plays in the act of reading. Significantly, these works also frame vision as a tool for intellectual engagement. The poster promoting eye exams, for instance, implies that visual disorders can lead to "dullness" or a lack of mental ability. In doing so, it establishes a link between vision and intellect that is consistent with the need to promote reading as an active and mentally engaging leisure activity.[91]

This and other WPA posters resonate with the rhetoric of vision specialists who maintained that seeing was part of a larger mental process. An article in *Visual Digest*, for example, explained that eyes are not cameras but part of a broader system in which sensations are transmitted from the retina via "energy" or "signals" to the brain where they are interpreted.[92] Claiming that sight is contingent on mental engagement, these professionals

[91] Karin Littau explains that literary experts in the "modern" period have typically approached reading as a mental exercise. Littau, *Theories of Reading*, 3.
[92] Robert Foster Ash, "A Discussion of Some New Thinking Relative to Vision as a Function," *Visual Digest* 5, no. 4 (Spring Issue 1942): 27-8. See also Carl F. Shepard, "The Art of Seeing," *Visual Digest* 2, no. 2 (Sept., Oct., Nov. 1938): 21.

asserted that individuals can only "see" when their minds are alert and seeking information.[93] One author, for example, argued that individuals see with their minds rather than their eyes. The eye, he noted, "focuses upon and makes an image of any object the mind wishes to examine, analyze or interpret."[94] Another commentator went even further by suggesting that the primary value of the eyes "is to allow [the] mind to learn things about the external world."[95]

Professionals maintained that this process was learned and could be disrupted by a number of factors, resulting in a lack of "visual efficiency."[96] Because of this, they explained, individuals must learn to see with skill and expertise. One leisure professional, describing the benefits of this process, asserted that proper training of the eye contributes to "many forms of active self amusement." These included the exploration of nature and economics, the use of telescopes or microscopes, and participation in summer school courses.[97]

Some suggested that "seeing" with the brain required imagination or "vision," meaning foresight or perceptiveness. As an essay in *Visual Digest* explained, "The wings of fancy take us over the mountains or roam the valley – the magic carpet that can hold in view the cascading grandeur of the Niagara, or call to our side our loved ones in visual form. … it

---

[93] E.G. Chambers, "Vision and Psychology," *Visual Digest* 4, no. 3 (Dec. 1940, Jan., Feb. 1941): 29. See also A.M. Skeffington, O.D., "The Eye is a Sense Organ Not a Camera," *Visual Digest* 3, no. 2 (Sept., Oct., Nov. 1939): 11.
[94] Ben Field, "Sight is an Adventure," *Visual Digest* 1, no. 1 (Aug. 1937): 35. This article was reprinted in a later edition of *Visual Digest*. See: Ben Field, "Sight is an Adventure," *Visual Digest* 4, no. 1 (June, July, Aug. 1940): 25.
[95] A.M. Skeffington, O.D., "The Eye is a Sense Organ Not a Camera," *Visual Digest* 3, no. 2 (Sept., Oct., Nov. 1939): 11.
[96] See Marguerite Thoma, O.D. "Relation of Visual Disorders to Educational Achievements," *Visual Digest* 3, no. 2 (Dec., Oct., Nov. 1939): 4-7. See also Shepard, "The Art of Seeing," 20.
[97] Greenbie, *The Arts of Leisure*, 31.

is imagination which shows us how to see with our brain."[98] "Imagination implies vision," the author declared, without which people "perish." The WPA poster by Shari Weisberg advances this ideal in the process of promoting the "story hour club" (figure 9). As this work suggests, the children's active engagement with reading has facilitated a flight of fancy that carries them over a mountainous and tree lined landscape, which represents a visualization of the books content. The children are, in fact, "seeing with their brain."

In light of the contemporary discourse concerning vision, the eye in the science poster also takes on heightened significance. As art historians have noted, the eye was a popular theme in modern art and used to symbolize and explore a variety of objects and issues.[99] Surrealists like René Magritte, for instance, used eyes as symbols of their dreams and fantasies. While WPA designers were undoubtedly influenced by the work of these artists, the eye in this poster resonates in specific ways with contemporary debates concerning the relationship between vision and knowledge. More specifically, it promotes vision as an active mental process. The piercing blue eye is wide-open and attentive. Likewise, it is surrounded by concentric circles that can be seen as "signals" being transmitted to the brain for interpretation. This understanding is reinforced by the fact that the eye is not associated with a physical body. As the literary scholar Karin Littau has noted, this type of disembodiment is consistent with a mentalist attitude.[100]

In linking vision with mental engagement, these posters distanced reading from mass-mediated pursuits like the movies, which some suggested were impairing people's ability to

---

[98] C. W. Woodmansee, "The Main Traveled Highway to the Mind," *Visual Digest* 1, no. 2 (Sept 1937): 18. This article was originally printed in the *Journal of the American Optometric Association.* Woodmansee was a researcher at the National Institute of Visual Learning in New York City when this article was published.
[99] See Carla Gottlieb, "Three New Themes in Twentieth Century Art," *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 21, no. 2 (Winter 1962): 182-5.
[100] Littau, *Theories of Reading*, 57.

properly engage with and derive meaning from the multitude of signs and symbols around them. As Nash explained, "We have multiplied the mechanisms for the carrying of symbols, but the spectator has lost his opportunity to learn the meanings of these symbols. The picture on the screen, the voice of the radio, the printed page and even the telephone merely convey symbols; the meaning must be supplied by the individual's interpretation of these symbols." As he suggested, this process required skills that "may be pyramided until they reach artistic heights, or they may be neglected until the individual degenerates into a mere lolling, hopeless victim of spectatoritis."[101] By framing vision as a mental activity that promotes knowledge and contemplation, the WPA posters encourage viewers to strive for "artistic heights" in this process. They also affirm the role constructive visual pastimes like reading can play in a modern leisure program.

Weapons for Democracy

Contemporary efforts to address the leisure problem were intertwined with increasing concerns over the preservation and dissemination of democratic ideals. The WPA posters address these concerns by encouraging specific reading behaviors and promoting the pastime as a mechanism for defining, strengthening, and enacting democratic principles. In doing so, however, they strike a somewhat uneasy balance between individual rights and national needs - a tension that characterized many New Deal programs.

Leisure experts, educators, and government officials argued that the future of American democracy depended on the cultivation of informed and capable citizens who were

[101] Nash, *Spectatoritis*, 119-20.

able to manage the pressures and changing social conditions of modern life.[102] Democracy, in other words, was contingent on citizens skilled in the art of living. As these individuals explained, reading and other educational pastimes could play an important role in revitalizing American democracy by encouraging knowledgeable, skilled, and well-adjusted citizens.[103] Likewise, reading could engender a form of national literacy that united Americans and prepared them for democratic citizenship. Speaking to both goals, one commentator asserted that "healthful and intelligently directed recreation" encourages qualities that are necessary for good citizenship, including "courage, confidence, initiative, self-control, enthusiasm, fair play, honesty, loyalty, cooperation and self-expression." [104]

A poster produced in Chicago articulates some of these links (figure 13). The poster, which was designed for the Statewide Library Project, shows two smiling youth in front of an open book. These young people are surrounded by graphic elements rendered in red, white, and blue, which symbolize the American flag. Accompanying this imagery, text on the poster reads "Books for Young America." This statement, although seemingly straightforward, is rich with subtext. It implies that these young people represent the future of America. Combined with the patriotic symbolism, it also indicates that books can help educate youth in a manner consistent with national goals and principles. Reinforcing this understanding, the young people have red mouths and blue stars for eyes. These stars resonate with the

---

[102] See, for instance, Howard Braucher, "Recreation Workers and the Preservation and Development of Democracy," *Recreation* 30, no. 6 (September 1936): 281. See also Currell, *The March of Spare Time*, 6.
[103] See, for instance, McNutt, "Recreation and the National Morale," 546. See also Carl A. Marsden, "A WPA Program of Adult Education, Schuylkill County, Pennsylvania," *Journal of Educational Sociology* 10, no. 9 Adult Education (May 1937): 559. Marsden asserted that "education alone can stimulate that renaissance which is imperative if our democracy is to survive."
[104] Horner, "Making Leisure Time Count," 442. See also Braucher, "Recreation Workers and the Preservation and Development of Democracy," 281. Braucher asserted that recreational activities "give self-training for democracy."

contemporary discourse surrounding vision by linking sight with the internalization of American ideals, which signals a process of mental engagement. As the poster suggests, reading has helped these children embody the democratic principles symbolized by the flag. It is a forum for learning about and participating in national life.

Expanding on this notion, several WPA posters suggest that reading has global implications. A FAP poster produced in Chicago, which promotes public library week, advances this idea (figure 14). The poster shows a red book on a white shape that represents the United States. This image is surrounded by concentric circles that radiate outward, illuminating a dark world. Pictorially, this light area works to accentuate the red book. Symbolically, this rendering implies that the knowledge gained by reading can spread like a beacon, enlightening everything in its wake.

Text below this image suggests that American principles, which are exemplified by the public library, animate this process. This text resonates with the broader goals of recreational professionals, who aimed to popularize or "democratize" constructive leisure activities like reading. It also invites the viewer to consider the mission of public libraries, which many considered "American" institutions because of their commitment to democratic outreach. It is not just the dissemination of knowledge that this poster envisions but the spread of democracy.

Contemporary concerns over the preservation and dissemination of democratic ideals, which inform this and other WPA posters, were fueled by a growing unease over international events. As a number of scholars have noted, Americans became increasingly concerned with

world affairs as the 1930s progressed and totalitarian powers gained momentum in Europe.[105] In response to threats abroad, organizations in both the public and private sectors began active campaigns to strengthen and advance the principles of democracy. Education played an important role in this process. Groups like the Education Policies Commission (EPC) began to promote education as an important tool in the fight for democracy.[106] By extension, many saw leisure as an avenue for educating the public on contemporary issues and countering totalitarian efforts abroad.

As the war intensified, the idea that books could help protect American interests and ideals became even more pervasive. President Roosevelt, popularizing a slogan coined by the publisher W.W. Norton and adopted by the Council on Books in War Time, explained that "books are weapons in the war of ideas."[107] Accordingly, publishers and government officials organized programs to distribute reading material both at home and abroad.[108] As these individuals asserted, books could be used to disseminate information about the war and build morale among American civilians and service personnel. They could also assist in neutralizing Nazi propaganda by educating people from other countries about democracy and America's role in the war.

A poster designed by the WPA War Services Division in NYC participated in this process by encouraging Americans to visit the Schomburg Collection at the New York Public Library (figure 15). The poster, which declares that "books are weapons," depicts three African American figures - two dressed in military garb and the other shown in profile.

---

[105] See: Cooney, *Balancing Acts* 83; Kunzman and Tyack, "Educational Forums of the 1930s," 321; Pells, *Radical Visions,* 293; and Currell, *The March of Spare Time,* 49.
[106] Kunzman and Tyack, "Educational Forums of the 1930s," 321-2.
[107] Hench, *Books As Weapons,* 5, 23, 45.
[108] Ibid., 15, 45, 69-70.

Written across the face of the largest figure are suggested reading topics: "The Negro in National Defense/Africa and the War/Negro History and Culture."

This poster appeals to viewers on a number of levels. It works to generate support for the war effort by encouraging Americans to read about national defense and the allied campaign in Africa. It also promotes a sense of inclusion by encouraging African Americans to see themselves as an integral part of the war effort and the nation at large. Finally, it suggests that books can empower viewers by arming them with knowledge about important political, cultural, and historical issues.

Among its many functions, the emphasis on the democratization of knowledge that informs this and other WPA posters worked to distinguish New Deal leisure programs from their European counterparts. New Deal administrators had, in fact, looked to European models in shaping their leisure programs and policies.[109] WPA Director Harry Hopkins, for instance, traveled to Europe in the early 1930s to study various social programs, including *Kraft durch Freude* (Strength through Joy), which was a Nazi leisure initiative. While American leisure programs were undoubtedly influenced by these "foreign" experiments, administrators attempted to distinguish them as uniquely American.[110] As Hopkins explained, it "is clear that we have to do this in an American way" rather than "copying foreign schemes."[111]

For professionals like Hopkins, this meant aligning America's leisure programs with democratic precepts. Above all, professionals argued, Americans must be given the freedom

[109] Currell, *The March of Spare Time,* 48.
[110] Kunzman and Tyack, "Educational Forums of the 1930s," 321.
[111] Harry Hopkins quoted in Currell, *The March of Spare Time*, 47.

to make their own decisions regarding their free time.[112] Leisure programs, they noted, should not control or dictate. As Nash explained, the "free man sets up for himself standards to be attained; he lays out for himself a course and follows it; he uses his intellect to guide this freedom."[113] Opportunities for constructive leisure activities should be made available, he continued, "but the individual must make the choice if there is to be real art."[114] As Nash's statement suggests, freedom of choice was seen as an integral part of the art of living.

Books were particularly poignant symbols of freedom during this period. This was, in part, due to a book burning campaign the Nazis initiated in Germany and Austria during the early 1930s. This campaign targeted works that were "un-German" in nature, which included anything the Nazis characterized as anarchist, pacifist, communist, Jewish, or otherwise subversive. This campaign reached a highpoint in May 1933, when the German Student Association burned approximately 25,000 books in an act that would become synonymous with Nazi censorship and social control.[115]

Several WPA posters address this issue directly. One depicts a pile of burning books with a Nazi swastika intertwined in the flames (figure 16). Referencing the title from a book by Sinclair Lewis, which was adapted for the stage by the WPA's Federal Theater Project, this poster explains that "It Can't Happen Here." "We read books instead of burning them."

For many, therefore, addressing the leisure "problem" meant reconciling democratic principles like freedom and individualism with national goals concerning the recreational

---

[112] See Nash, *Spectatoritis*, 58-9, 98, 258; and Extract from the Annual Report for the Year of 1938 (Recreation Division, Chicago Park District) quoted in "Freedom in Recreation," *Recreation* 33, no. 10 (January 1940): backcover.
[113] Nash, *Spectatoritis*, 107.
[114] Ibid., 233.
[115] This event remained in U.S. consciousness throughout the war period. On May 10, 1942, for instance, NBC broadcast a radio program by Stephen Vincent Benet titled "They Burned the Books." See Hench, *Books as Weapons*, 49.

activities of Americans.[116] Their aim, in other words, was to establish democratic leisure programs while simultaneously directing the public's recreational activities. As one educator explained, the goal is "freedom and liberty but not license."[117] Nash, putting it another way, asserted that "we want the horse to run, but we are interested that he takes the right direction."[118]

Publications on leisure were fairly consistent on how to achieve this goal. As leisure professionals maintained, their role was to introduce Americans to constructive leisure activities and educate them on how to choose pastimes intelligently.[119] This approach, they argued, preserved an individual's freedom of choice. It also expanded rather than limited the potential for personal growth and expression by exposing people to new and more productive leisure activities. As one commentator explained, "In America we are trying valiantly to use recreation to free the mind in order that our people may find for themselves a new orientation toward a new environment."[120]

Promotional materials like the WPA posters were an important way leisure professionals attempted to achieve these goals. The posters work to guide viewers by foregrounding reading as a constructive leisure activity and modeling specific reading practices. They also encourage voluntary participation by envisioning reading as a fun and personally rewarding experience.

---

[116] See Currell, *The March of Spare Time*, 49, 55, 58.
[117] Marsden, "A WPA Program of Adult Education, Schuylkill County, Pennsylvania," 555.
[118] Nash, *Spectatoritis*, 99.
[119] See: Howard Braucher, "Freedom," *Recreation* 31, no. 8 (November 1937): 457. See also Braucher, "Recreation Workers and the Preservation and Development of Democracy," 281; and McNutt, "Recreation and the National Morale," 543.
[120] Mrs. Eugene Meyer, "Recreation in Our Present Democracy," *Recreation* 29, no. 9 (December 1935): 439.

Some professionals, however, suggested that the democratic reformation of American leisure habits was more complicated and problematic than many acknowledged. In their view, contemporary leisure programs were characterized by an often uneasy balance between freedom and control. As one explained, most youth programs embody a "curious mixture of individualism and collectivism" that exemplifies the "conflict between the freedom of the individual and the compulsion of the community."[121] For many, this conflict stemmed from a desire for social control, which ultimately threatened the democratic rights of Americans when acted on.[122]

The play movement, in fact, emerged in the late nineteenth century as an attempt to shape the leisure time of working-class Americans in accordance with middle-class values. By the early twentieth century, this form of social control had extended to the broader populous.[123] As historian Susan Currell has noted, New Deal leisure programs often reinforced dominant opinions regarding class, gender, and race.[124] Likewise, despite the rhetoric of democracy that infused modern leisure initiatives, very few overturned traditional social hierarchies or the inequities that accompanied them.

This tension between freedom and control informed the production of the WPA posters and, on occasion, their form and content. The poster illustrating the woman surrounded by books provides a good example (figure 6). As the poster suggests, March is a good month to "read the books you've always meant to read." This phrasing implies that book selection is an individual choice consistent with democratic ideals, which are

---

[121] Charles P. Taft, "Tomorrow's Citizens," *Recreation* 30, no. 7 (October 1936): 336.
[122] See Currell, *The March of Spare Time*, 9.
[123] Ibid., 14.
[124] Ibid., 11, 189.

symbolized by the poster's red, white, and blue color scheme. The fact that this poster promotes reading at all, however, is an attempt to reconcile individual leisure habits with national needs and goals. Moreover, the promotion of specific authors provides a framework for the selection of literary material, one that seeks to direct individual choice. While some would have seen this approach as an attempt to introduce Americans to new leisure opportunities, others might have viewed it as a form of social control.

Similarly, the science poster designed by Shari Weisberg exemplifies Nash's assertion that leisure professionals should provide direction while encouraging people to "run" (figure 7). In promoting the exploration of science, the poster encourages the development of intelligent, engaged, and valuable citizens, a notion reinforced through the poster's patriotic hues. At the same time, the appeal is general enough to give viewers freedom of choice within that broad subject area.

While concerned with democratic ideals, the agencies commissioning these posters aimed to shape the behavior of Americans by educating them on the art of living. In doing so, the posters frame reading as a civilizing force that improves one's intellect and interpretive skills. Likewise, in equating reading with the cultivation of creativity, imagination, and personal satisfaction, the posters work to channel self expression into a socially acceptable form. The posters, in sum, attempt to manage the leisure behavior of Americans by equating reading with opportunities for personal growth and social engagement.

As these posters suggest, the democratization of knowledge was a complicated and often uneven process. This understanding becomes even more apparent as the following chapters extend our insights into the various ways government officials linked knowledge and education to personal and national progress. Likewise, the posters discussed in these chapters

enlarge, add to, and occasionally challenge many of the themes and issues raised here, expanding our understanding of the way contemporaries envisioned knowledge as a tool for comprehending and engaging with the modern world during the New Deal.

Chapter 3
Posters, Preservation, and Ecological Blindness

In a speech he gave at the Metropolitan Museum of Art in March 1937, Holger Cahill drew from the rhetoric of the conservation movement in discussing the goals of the Federal Art Project. "Biologists," Cahill noted, "have a saying that if the gap between the organism and its environment is too wide the organism dies. During the past seventy-five years the breach between the American artist and the public has been widening."[1] Just as the "[c]onservation of the Nation's resources has in our time become a major function of government," he explained, the Federal Art Project facilitates "the conservation of the skills and talents of artists."

Uniting these goals, the WPA produced a number of posters for state and federal organizations concerned with the conservation of natural resources. One of these works, which was commissioned by the National Park Service, depicts a streamlined car traveling down a narrow wooded road at night (figure 1). The car's large yellow headlights illuminate a deer and fawn leaping across the road in front of the vehicle. The centrally located pair evokes a family, which humanizes the animals and works to establish a link with the viewer. Moreover, these dark brown deer contrast with the blue and yellow that dominates the rest of the composition, underscoring their significance and heightening the drama of the scene.

Underneath the deer, the designer has included bold white text demanding viewers "don't kill our wildlife." While this statement suggests the car represents a threat to the

[1] "Mr. Cahill's Lecture before the Metropolitan Museum of Art," New York City, March 28, 1937; Page 1, 9; Box 15, Technical Circulars to Friends of Federal Art; General Records, 1935-1940; Records of the Works Progress Administration, Record Group 69; National Archives at College Park, College Park, MD.

animals, the poster is ultimately ambiguous about the outcome of this encounter. The text addresses viewers directly, implying that they are responsible for the fate of these animals and encouraging them to identify with the driver of the car. The opaque window of the vehicle reinforces this notion by obscuring the car's interior, allowing viewers to imagine themselves behind the wheel gazing at the deer ahead, which are importantly still alive and animated. In placing the responsibility for these animals on the viewer, the poster works to reconcile the preservation of America's natural resources with tourism in the national parks. In doing so, it promotes Franklin Roosevelt's notion of "resource stewardship," which linked conservation to both public and private action.[2]

Visuals have occupied an important place in the history of environmental reform, mobilizing support for a variety of conservation efforts and helping individuals define and understand nature. Despite this, few scholars have focused on the role visual culture played in debates concerning conservation during the New Deal. Although this period is often neglected in histories of environmental reform, this gap in the scholarship is also indicative of a relative shortage of studies dealing with the visual culture of conservation and environmentalism.[3] An important exception is a recent anthology by Alan C. Braddock and Christoph Irmscher titled *A Keener Perception: Ecocrticial Studies in American Art History*, which includes essays addressing ecocritical concerns like "environmental interconnectedness, sustainability, and justice in cultural interpretation."[4] Even this work,

---

[2] A. Dan Tarlock, "Rediscovering the New Deal's Environmental Legacy," in *FDR and the Environment*, eds. David B. Woolner and Henry L. Henderson (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), 170.
[3] As historian A. Dan Tarlock has noted, discussions of the modern environmental movement have traditionally neglected the years between 1920 and 1950. See Tarlock in Woolner and Henderson, *FDR and the Environment*, 157.
[4] Alan C. Braddock and Christoph Irmscher, *A Keener Perception: Ecocritical Studies in American Art History* (Tuscaloosa: Univ. of Alabama Press, 2009), 3, 9. As Braddock and Irmscher note, the only "major" art

however, provides a limited overview of the interwar period, with none of the chapters addressing visuals produced by the New Deal administration.

The 1930s and early 1940s were, in fact, important years in the history of environmental reform and protection. The country experienced a number of devastating environmental disasters during this period, including floods in the Mississippi Valley and massive dust storms that forced thousands of individuals from their homes, killed wildlife, and caused extensive ecological damage throughout the Great Plains. Many attributed these tragedies, which were exacerbating the social and economic hardships of the Depression, to environmental mismanagement and poor farming practices.[5] Addressing these and other conservation issues, the New Deal administration enacted a number of programs and policies to restore and manage the nation's natural resources. The government promoted wilderness and wildlife protection, for example, by expanding the national park and forest systems. It passed legislation like the Soil Conservation and Domestic Allotment Act (1936) and established work relief programs like the Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC), which employed individuals on environmental protection and "improvement" projects.[6] And finally, it financed the creation of posters and other visuals that worked to shape the public's knowledge of and engagement with nature.

---

historical works to adopt an ecocritical approach before the publication of their anthology were Greg Thomas' *Art and Ecology in Nineteenth Century France: The Landscape of Theodore Rousseau* (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 2000) and a special issue of the *Art Journal* titled "Art and Ecology" [*Art Journal* 51, no. 2 (1992)], which focused on contemporary art.

[5] Finis Dunaway, *Natural Visions: The Power of Images in American Environmental Reform* (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 2005), 103. See also John F. Sears, "Grassroots Democracy: FDR and The Land," in *FDR and the Environment*, eds. David B. Woolner and Henry L. Henderson (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), 15; and Sarah Phillips, "FDR, Hoover and the New Rural Conservation, 1920-1932," in *FDR and the Environment*, eds. David B. Woolner and Henry L. Henderson (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), 141.

[6] See James R. Lyons, "FDR and Environmental Leadership," in *FDR and the Environment*, eds. David B. Woolner and Henry L. Henderson (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), 211-12. See also Paul Sutter, "New Deal Conservation: A View from the Wilderness," in *FDR and the Environment*, eds. David B. Woolner and Henry L. Henderson (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), 93.

The historian Finis Dunaway is one of the few scholars to apply an ecocritical approach to government sponsored art produced during the New Deal. His book *Natural Visions: The Power of Images in American Environmental Reform* dedicates three chapters to documentary films the government produced during the 1930s: *The Plow that Broke the Plains* (1936), *The River* (1937), and *The Land* (1942). As Dunaway argues, these films "tried to challenge the utilitarian calculus of American politics by infusing public debate with beauty and passion."[7] In addressing this issue, he explores the various ways these films linked conservation with "questions of seeing" by using panoramic camera shots and other cinematic devices to shape how people viewed and defined the natural world.[8] My chapter builds on and complicates his work by providing a more nuanced analysis of the role visual perception played in the discourse surrounding conservation during the 1930s. It also applies an ecocritical approach to posters with diverse primary objectives, from promoting tourism to wildlife preservation, a tactic that expands our understanding of the government's efforts to reconcile conservation with broader social, economic, and political goals.

As I argue, the WPA posters promote literacy – both the government's and viewer's - as a tool for negotiating a balance between the use and preservation of America's natural resources. This process, however, was not without its tensions. Linking visual perception with knowledge of the natural world, the posters present viewers with several models for "seeing" or experiencing nature, some of which conflicted with ecological ideals endorsed by contemporary conservationists. In doing so, the posters highlight the complexity of

[7] Dunaway, *Natural Visions*, xviii.
[8] Ibid., xvi, xvii.

environmental management during the New Deal and underscore links between the varied and sometimes competing objectives of the New Deal administration.

Enjoy Don't Destroy

New Deal conservation efforts, which involved individuals and agencies with diverse agendas, were far from unified or consistent.[9] As Jay Norwood Darling noted, "Conservation as a national principle has no substance or co-ordination… Fourteen agencies in the Federal Government and forty-eight states with some semblance of an official organization in charge of conservation! But they are like so many trains running on single-track roads, often in opposite directions and without any train dispatcher or block system."[10]

Consistent with the multiple objectives of their commissioning agencies, the WPA posters adopt several approaches to reconciling the personal, social, and economic benefits of activities like hunting and nature travel with the protection of America's natural resources. As this chapter indicates, some envision a balance between use and preservation achieved through the knowledge and expertise of government agencies. Others provide viewers with models for knowing and interacting with nature that worked to balance outdoor recreation with the protection of wildlife and wilderness areas. All, however, promote knowledge and literacy as important tools for aligning public and private goals.

---

[9] See Sutter in Woolner and Henderson, *FDR and the Environment*, 95, 98. See also John C. Miles, *Wilderness in National Parks: Playground or Preserve* (Seattle: Univ. of Washington Press, 2009), 17, 20; and Angela Miller, "The Fate of Wilderness in American Landscape Art: The Dilemmas of 'Nature's Nation," in *A Keener Perception: Ecocritical Studies in American Art History*, eds. Alan C. Braddock and Christoph Irmscher (Tuscaloosa: Univ. of Alabama Press, 2009): 105.

[10] Jay Norwood "Ding" Darling, "Desert Makers," *Country Gentleman* 105 (October 1935) quoted in Theodore W. Cart, "'New Deal' for Wildlife: A Perspective on Federal Conservation Policy, 1933-1940," *The Pacific Northwest Quarterly* 63, no. 3 (July 1972): 116. Darling served as Chief of the Bureau of Biological Investigation in 1934 and 1935. He was also a cartoonist for the Des Moines *Register* (1913-49) and the New York *Tribune* (1917-49).

Posters designed for the National Park Service exemplify the complex interplay between these objectives. The Park Service was established by the National Park Act on August 25, 1916 with a mission that encompassed both use and preservation. As the Park Act notes, the Service was formed to "conserve the scenery and the natural and historic objects and the wild life therein and to provide for the enjoyment of the same in such a manner and by such means as will leave them unimpaired for the enjoyment of future generations."[11] This objective provided a foundation for the Park Service's programs and policies during the New Deal. As Park Service Director Arno B. Cammerer explained in 1938, the national parks are "wilderness preserves where true natural conditions" were being conserved for the "higher uses of inspiration, science, history and recreation."[12]

This dual mission informed the WPA posters produced for the Park Service, including several promoting tourism. As the following discussion indicates, the idealized scenes depicted in these travel posters served a number of purposes. They encouraged Americans to expand their knowledge of the nation by traveling to the national parks. They also promoted the Park Services' knowledge or expertise in maintaining the nation's natural resources. In the process, these works engaged a range of assumptions regarding the social value of tourism and the significance of the American landscape. Because of this, they offer important insights into the government's approach to conservation during the New Deal.

One of these posters features the Old Faithful geyser in Yellowstone National Park (figure 2). Emphasizing the unfettered character of the natural environment, this famous landmark is depicted at the point of eruption, its tall column surrounded by billowing plumes

[11] See Miles, *Wilderness in National Parks*, 29-31.
[12] Arno B. Cammerer, "Maintenance of the Primeval in National Parks," *Appalachia* 22 (1938-9): 207-8.

of steam. Streaks of lighter blue below and behind the geyser accentuate its soaring verticality, reinforcing a sense of movement and drama in the image. While this seemingly unspoiled landscape lacks people, the poster lists some of the recreational opportunities available in the park, which include nature walks, field trips, camp fire programs, and nature talks.

The desire to preserve natural environments like Yellowstone existed alongside a widespread belief that excursions to national parks and other natural sites offered a number of personal and social benefits. Like reading about the natural world in books, nature outings provided urbanites with wholesome and enriching reprieves from the hardships of the Depression and city life by clearing "the cobweb's and rust of civilization."[13] Likewise, they strengthened the economy by generating revenue in the form of tourist dollars. Finally, some asserted that traveling promoted social cohesion by expanding an individual's knowledge of the nation. Equating national identity with a common history rooted in the landscape, these individuals suggested that increased knowledge of America's natural areas encouraged patriotism and informed citizens. Because of this, New Deal officials saw the national parks as mechanisms for countering some of the unrest and despondency caused by the Depression.

The WPA posters encourage viewers to "know" their nation by presenting them with a canon of tourist destinations associated with identifiable natural features like Old Faithful. In representing these iconic landmarks, WPA designers drew from longstanding traditions of landscape painting. The American artist Thomas Moran, for instance, painted scenes of Yellowstone that he saw on an expedition with the Hayden Geological Survey in 1871,

[13] Ibid., 213.

including several geysers.[14] These works sparked widespread interest in Yellowstone by introducing Americans to a western landscape of beauty and natural abundance. They also played an important role in early efforts to preserve the nation's natural resources, contributing to the establishment of Yellowstone as the first national park on March 1, 1872.[15]

Moran's paintings of the west, like many of the WPA travel posters, envision sublime landscapes. Since the eighteenth century, writers and artists have associated the sublime with awe-inspiring natural features like mountains, waterfalls, and canyons. For these individuals, sublime environments signified many things: grandeur, vastness, mystery, power, and, for some, the divine. For most, however, these sublime landscapes exemplified nature at its most wild and uncultivated, making them powerful symbols for enticing tourists and conveying the benefits of conservation.[16]

In drawing from this aesthetic tradition, the WPA posters were consistent with contemporary promotional campaigns initiated by railroad companies, automobile organizations, tourist bureaus, and others. The Yellowstone poster, for instance, resembles elements of a 1934 advertisement promoting rail travel to the park (figure 3).[17] Like the poster, this ad includes a view of Old Faithful from a distance. The geyser is shown erupting

---

[14] See, for instance, Moran's *Castle Geyser, Upper Geyser Basin* of 1871 or *Old Faithful* of 1873.

[15] Joni Louise Kinsey, *Thomas Moran and the Surveying of the American West* (Washington, DC: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1992), 54, 62. As Kinsey notes, Moran's work played an important role in Congress' decision to make Yellowstone the nation's first national park on March 1, 1872.

[16] During the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, writers often used the terms "beautiful," "picturesque," and "sublime" indiscriminately. They can, however, be generally distinguished as follows: the "beautiful" refers to cultivated nature that reflects the civilizing influence of humans; the "sublime" refers to wild and uncultivated nature, and the "picturesque" is used to describe both sublime and historic scenes, among other things. See Robert L. McGrath, *Art and the American Conservation Movement* (Boston: U.S. Dept. of the Interior, National Park Service, Northeast Museum Services Center, 2001), 73. See also Roderick Nash, *Wilderness and the American Mind* (New Haven: Yale Univ. Press, 1967), 47, 57, 152.

[17] The original source of this clipping is unknown. It was included in the Records of the National Park Service at the National Archives in College Park Maryland. See: Parks General Publicity and Statistics Publicity, March 16, 1934-April 30, 1934; Box 325; O-501; Second Subseries, Central Classified Files, 1933-1949; Records of the National Park Service, Record Group 79; National Archives at College Park, College Park, MD.

in a vertical column of water and steam countered by horizontal streaks in the sky. As the ad explains, this "sublime spectacle is a play that takes your mind off humdrum matters – and fills it with the soaring song and beauty of Nature. It lifts you up from the pavements into Paradise. Takes you from the work a day world to the sphere of infinite grandeur." It is, the ad declares, the "World's Greatest Drama." Like the WPA poster, this advertisement promotes Yellowstone as a sublime landscape that offers both beauty and entertainment.

In promoting travel to the national parks, the WPA posters were part of a burgeoning tourism industry that contributed to a substantial growth in commercial development both in and around wilderness areas like Yellowstone. As historian Paul Sutter has noted, restaurants, billboards, shops, gas stations, and other signs of commercial culture populated most of the major tourist routes leading to the national parks.[18] Similarly, the government instigated a significant number of building projects in the parks to facilitate auto travel and encourage outdoor recreation.[19] A large number of these initiatives were carried out by the CCC, which completed more building projects in the national parks between 1933 and 1942 than the Park Service had undertaken since its inception in 1916.[20] In addition to creating roads and trails, the Corp constructed a number of museums and interpretive sites. They also built park lodges, hiking shelters, cabins, sanitary facilities, and other amenities for visitors.[21] This expanding infrastructure, combined with high unemployment levels and a decrease in the amount of money Americans had to spend on more expensive leisure activities, encouraged a

---

[18] Paul Sutter, *Driven Wild: How the Fight against the Automobiles Launched the Modern Wilderness Movement* (Seattle: Univ. of Washington Press, 2002), 37.
[19] Sutter in Woolner and Henderson, *FDR and the Environment*, 87. See also Sutter, *Driven Wild*, 4.
[20] Miles, *Wilderness in National Parks*, 73.
[21] See Neil M. Maher, *Nature's New Deal: The Civilian Conservation Corps and the Roots of the American Environmental Movement* (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 2008), 71, 73. As Maher notes, by 1935, the National Park Service oversaw approximately 120,000 CCC enrollees stationed in hundreds of camps throughout the nation.

substantial growth in park visitation. As the Park Service reported, visits to the national parks grew from approximately 4 million in 1934 to over 7 million by the summer of 1935.[22]

Although these developments generated revenue for local economies, wilderness advocates were concerned about the aesthetic and environmental effects they were having on the landscape. As conservation groups like the Sierra Club, the Mountaineers, the National Parks Association, and the Wilderness Society argued, this growing infrastructure posed a serious threat to the nation's natural resources and the experience of the parks.[23] While many, including the Wilderness Society, recognized the need for roads to facilitate outdoor recreation, they were troubled by the number and scope of current developments. They were also concerned about the growing number of tourists and automobiles this infrastructure encouraged.

Autos had been a significant presence in the parks since 1916, when the National Park Service was established in the Department of the Interior. Under the leadership of Stephen Mather, who was the director of the Park Service between 1917 and 1929, the Service built a system of roads to increase the public's access to wilderness areas.[24] This network encouraged a rise in park visitation from 198,606 in 1910 to over 1.7 million in 1925. It also facilitated a substantial increase in the number of automobiles entering the national parks. In 1918, the parks accommodated approximately 54,000 private vehicles. This number grew to

[22] Maher, *Nature's New Deal*, 67. See also McCamy, *Government Publicity*, 159.
[23] Miles, *Wilderness in National Parks*, 73, 89. See also Sutter in Woolner and Henderson, *FDR and the Environment*, 87, 89, 92.
[24] Miles, *Wilderness in National Parks*, 25-6, 40.

roughly 368,000 by 1925 and continued to increase during the New Deal, fueled by an expansion of roads and tourist amenities.[25]

Wilderness advocates asserted that this rise in auto tourism was impairing one's ability to experience the landscape with any sense of intimacy.[26] They were also concerned about the effect tourism was having on the ecosystems of the parks.[27] This concern was informed by the growing field of ecology, which promoted a biocentric approach to the environment premised on the assumption that all life forms are interconnected and have intrinsic value. This understanding began to occupy an increasingly important place in the public discourse concerning conservation during the late 1930s. As a result, scientists, wilderness advocates, and the popular press joined forces in promoting the need for ecological balance.[28]

Although the Park Service was committed to accommodating and encouraging tourism in the parks, they recognized the problems outdoor recreation and automobiles posed for the preservation of wildlife and wilderness areas. This awareness, combined with competition from the Forest Service and pressure from activists, led the Service to increase its engagement with the planning and management of wilderness areas in the national parks.[29] As early as 1918, Mather established the Landscape Engineering Department to restore overused parkland and "naturalize" roads, trails, and other signs of development. As New Deal relief programs increased the number of building projects in the parks, the Department hired more landscape architects to oversee the developments and ensure the preservation of "natural features." By

[25] Ibid., 34-7, 89.
[26] Sutter, *Driven Wild*, xi, 38, 41.
[27] Tarlock in Woolner and Henderson, *FDR and the Environment*, 163.
[28] Maher, *Nature's New Deal*, 10, 169.
[29] Miles, *Wilderness in National Parks*, 66, 100, 107.

the mid 1930s, the Park Service employed hundreds of landscape architects, who worked to downplay the presence of roads and other developments in the parks.[30]

As historian Brian Black has noted, the landscape became both "a product and symbol of" an aesthetics of efficiency. Although this aesthetic concerned some environmental advocates, including one who objected to the "administrative fashion" endeavoring to "barber and manicure wild America as smartly as the modern girl," it was characteristic of the Park Service's aim to find a middle ground that would address the recreational needs and desires of their constituents while ensuring the protection of America's natural resources.[31] As Cammerer explained in 1938, "a proper balance between conservation, and use without destruction is being worked out."[32]

Despite Cammerer's suggestion that this process of negotiation was ongoing, the WPA's travel posters promote the Park Services' success in reconciling tourism with the conservation of natural resources. Minimizing both the aesthetic and environmental ramifications of tourism, the sublime scenes illustrated in the park posters censor most evidence of people or commercial development. The Yellowstone poster, for instance, lacks tourists despite listing some of the park's recreational activities. Similarly, a WPA poster promoting the Grand Canyon highlights the natural wonders of the site, downplaying references to tourism or auto travel (figure 4). This work is rendered in soft but striking hues that accentuate the striations of the sublime rock formations that are the focus of the poster. These natural features are layered in the image, imparting a sense of depth and vastness that is

[30] Sutter, *Driven Wild*, 50, 110.
[31] Robert Sterling Yard quoted in Black in Woolner and Henderson, *FDR and the Environment*, 41; and Sutter in Woolner and Henderson, *FDR and the Environment*, 91-2. See also Susan R. Schrepfer, *Nature's Altars: Mountains, Gender, and American Environmentalism* (Lawrence, Kansas: Univ. Press of Kansas, 2005), 99.
[32] Cammerer, "Maintenance of the Primeval in National Parks," 210.

reinforced by a segment of the Colorado River running from the left foreground of the scene through the landscape.

This poster differs in significant ways from a similar scene depicted on the cover of a 1934 conference program designed for the Park Service (figure 5).[33] Unlike the WPA poster, this cover documents tourism and development in the park by including people, a car, a bus, and the El Tovar, a hotel on the southern rim of the Canyon. The WPA poster, in contrast, obscures these features in the landscape, masking them in a very literal way with the flat area of mauve that serves as a backdrop for text identifying the view and implying that the Grand Canyon National Park is "a free government service," a statement that emphasizes the Park Services' role in maintaining this wilderness area. Unlike the conference program, which was designed for Park officials familiar with the realities of tourism, the WPA poster appealed to the broader public by envisioning an idealized and unadulterated landscape sustained through the knowledge and expertise of Park officials.

The aestheticization of this scene was consistent with the romantic rhetoric of some nature enthusiasts, who described natural environments like the Grand Canyon in artistic terms. An article in *Nature Magazine*, for instance, personified nature and likened it to an artist. As the author explained, "Nature, the greatest creative artist, has made these wonders of colored sculptures, rocky granite mountains and glaciers like no others in the world for size. Nature, the great painter, has colored Yellowstone and blued the crater of a sunken

[33] "Proceedings of [the] Joint Council of National Park Operators and Superintendents held at Grand Canyon National Park, Arizona – May 1-5, 1934;" Box 3, O-1.1, General Records; Second Subseries, Central Classified Files, 1933-1949; Records of the National Park Service, Record Group 79; National Archives at College Park, College Park, MD.

volcano lake."[34] Another article described the Grand Canyon and other natural formations as the "handicraft of weather." "Freezing and thawing temperatures, wind and rain erosion, and the scouring action of water running along the surface of the earth after it fell from the skies, slowly sculptured…the sublime, marvelously modeled, Grand Canyon of the Colorado – the most stupendous chasm in the world."[35]

The equation of art and environment has a long history. Lacking museums or a formal artistic culture, early Americans likened the landscape to the masterpieces of European art and architecture.[36] These comparisons endured and, as the previous quotes suggest, informed a number of promotional pieces and essays generated during the 1930s. A WPA poster commissioned by the U.S. Travel Bureau, which was a part of the National Park Service, exemplifies this trend (figure 6). This poster is composed of several distinct sections: the background illustrates two sublime and snowcapped mountains, the middle ground contains a landscape dotted with trees, and the foreground includes a Native American on horseback riding toward four striped teepees situated on a green field. As noted in chapter one, the designer Richard Halls rendered this field in the shape of an artist's palette, which calls attention to the aesthetic quality of the scene and implies that this Montana landscape is an American masterpiece worthy of preservation.

This travel poster, like others produced by the WPA, envisions a landscape that simultaneously encourages tourism, promotes the Park Service's preservation efforts, and validates the need for continuing conservation. By illustrating environments free of cultivation and commercial exploitation, the posters suggest that tourism is not inconsistent

[34] Patten Beard, "Our National Scenery in Travel Poster," *Nature Magazine* 26, no. 3 (September 1935): 145.
[35] Ivan E. Houk, "The Handicraft of Weather," *Nature Magazine* 30, no. 6 (December 1937): 347-8.
[36] McGrath, *Art and the American Conservation Movement*, 34.

with the preservation of the American landscape.[37] These sublime scenes confirmed the Park Service's ability to manage and preserve the Nation's natural resources. They also reinforced the importance of the Service's knowledge and expertise by putting a recognizable face on the project of conservation and documenting the benefits of scenic preservation, which was one of the founding premises of the American conservation movement and central to the mission of the Park Service.[38] They depict a landscape worth seeing and therefore saving.

Going, Going, Going

Advocates for wildlife and wilderness conservation realized that there were limits to what the government could achieve on its own. As these individuals argued, conservation necessitated the involvement and dedication of individual Americans.[39] Linking environmental degradation and the destruction of wildlife to a lack of knowledge, some suggested that conservation also required a commitment to public education.[40] Addressing these issues, government agencies commissioned WPA posters to encourage resource stewardship and an awareness of wilderness etiquette. Like the travel posters, these works endorse knowledge as a mechanism for negotiating a balance between use and preservation.

The Park Service poster attributed to Wagner, which encourages viewers to protect wildlife, exemplifies this type of outreach (figure 1). Wildlife had been an important issue for conservationists since the nineteenth century.[41] The federal government, however, took an

---

[37] See McGrath, *Art and the American Conservation Movement*, 41-3. See also Dunaway, *Natural Visions*, xviii.
[38] See McGrath, *Art and the American Conservation Movement*, 34.
[39] See Nash, *Wilderness and the American Mind*, 197. See also Sutter in Woolner and Henderson, *FDR and the Environment*, 98.
[40] Sears in Woolner and Henderson, *FDR and the Environment*, 15.
[41] See Mimei Ito, "Seeing Animals, Speaking of Nature: Visual Culture and the Question of the Animal," *Theory Culture and Society* 25, no. 4 (2008): 121. See also Mark V. Barrow, Jr., "Science, Sentiment, and the

increasingly active role in wildlife conservation during the 1930s. In addition to expanding and improving the nation's wildlife refuges, the New Deal administration organized conferences and passed a number of important legislative acts designed to manage and fortify the nation's wildlife resources. These included the Taylor Grazing Act (1934), the "Duck Stamp" Act (1934), the Wildlife Coordination Act (1934), the National Forest Refuge Act (1934), and the Pittman-Robertson Federal Aid in Wildlife Restoration Act (1937).[42]

These efforts were inspired by a number of important developments. The growing field of ecology influenced the way many understood their relationship to animals by reinforcing the idea that all life forms are interdependent. This knowledge was coupled with - and heightened - contemporary concerns regarding particular species, whose numbers had decreased or been depleted over the last several decades. The near decimation of the bison in the nineteenth century, for example, was followed by the extinction of a number of species, including the Tule shrew (1905), Arizona jaguar (1905), Merriam's elk (1913), passenger pigeon (1914), Carolina parakeet (1918), Banks Island wolf (1920), and Southern Rocky Mountains wolf (1935).

As wildlife advocates asserted, animals needed protection from some hunters and fishermen, two groups that were growing in number, increasingly mobile, and better equipped

---

Specter of Extinction: Reconsidering Birds of Prey during America's Interwar Years," *Environmental History* 7, no. 1 (January 2002): 71.

[42] The Taylor Grazing Act of 1934 was written to prevent overgrazing and soil deterioration on public grazing lands and to stabilize the livestock industry by ensuring the orderly use, improvement, and development of public ranges. The "Duck Stamp" Act of 1934 provided revenue for waterfowl restoration by requiring duck hunters to buy a federal license. The Wildlife Coordination Act of 1934 authorized interdepartmental efforts concerning wildlife conservation. The National Forest Refuge Act of 1934 permitted the designation of national forest land as wildlife refuges. Finally, the Pittman-Robertson Federal Aid in Wildlife Restoration Act of 1937 authorized the use of tax revenue from the sale of sporting arms and ammunition for federally approved wildlife conservation projects. See Cart, "'New Deal' for Wildlife," 115.

than ever.[43] Conservationists also suggested that animals were being endangered by the destruction of their breeding and feeding habitats, as well as the increasing number automobiles traversing the nation.[44] Citing an article from *Science* magazine, *Pennsylvania Game News* reported that over 7,000 birds and animals were being killed every day by automobiles in the United Sates. "In recent years has come the speed craze," the author declared, "and the machines of man are taking a greater toll along the highways and byways than can be imagined by most lay observers."[45]

As the author explained, automobiles, water pollution, forest fires, and other man-made threats to natural resources contributed to "dramas in the wild," which he defined as a byproduct of man's "instinct to hunt and his unfortunate habit of tampering with or destroying…the environment so necessary to wildlife."[46] Visualizing this drama, the article included a photograph of deer posed in front of a car (figure 7). The photograph appears to document an event that has just transpired, its close cropping focusing the viewer's attention on the car's headlights and the dead deer below, its contorted and upturned body held in place by a hind leg hooked to the metal bumper of the vehicle. Like the WPA poster by Wagner, this dramatic composition was arranged to communicate the effect autos can have on wildlife. As the article suggests, however, the drama in this photograph was not just a graphic ploy used to capture the viewer's attention. It was also a sign of ecological disaster in the context of the period's environmental discourse.

---

[43] Ibid., 113.
[44] See United States, Daniel B. Beard, Charles Newton Elliott, and Walter A. Weber, *Fading Trails: The Story of Endangered American Wildlife*, prepared by a Committee of the United States Department of the Interior: National Park Service, Fish and Wildlife Service (New York: The Macmallan Company, 1942), ix.
[45] Leo A. Luttringer, Jr., "Dramas of the Wild," *Pennsylvania Game News* 10, no. 5 (August 1939): 13-4.
[46] Ibid., 12-5.

The dramatic scene depicted in Wagner's poster serves both purposes - to capture the viewer's attention and signify an impending tragedy. It is significant, however, that this spectacle has not reached its finale in the WPA poster, which is intentionally ambiguous about the fate of the deer. In keeping with the dual mission of the Park Service, the poster does not condemn tourism or the existence of the car in the landscape. Rather it proposes that viewers proceed with caution to avoid enacting dramas in the wild. Moreover, the poster suggests the viewer's commitment to resource stewardship has national implications. Its use of the word "our," which implies collective ownership and responsibility, indicates that the preservation of these deer concerns all Americans. The poster blurs the boundaries between public and private in advocating a balance between use and preservation.

Similarly, a WPA poster by Walter Weber promotes resource stewardship by alluding to a potential "drama in the wild" (figure 8). This poster was commissioned by the National Park Service and Biological Survey to support National Wildlife Week.[47] The work depicts two big-horned sheep, which are standing on the side of a snowy mountain and looking directly at the viewer. The mountain is rendered on a diagonal so severe that the landscape appears unstable, as if the snow and the sheep might slide down the hill and out of the image. Reinforcing this suggestion and imparting a sense of urgency, text underneath the animals reads "going, going, going" in a font that increases in size from left to right.

Consistent with directives issued by the Park Service, this poster balances its flat and streamlined forms with a degree of visual fidelity that encourages viewers to empathize with

[47] The production of conservation-minded posters was particularly important for the Bureau of Biological Survey, which had been a source of controversy since its establishment in the late nineteenth century. Some naturalists, for instance, called the organization the "Bureau of Destruction and Extermination" due to the large-scale poisoning of pests and predators they began in 1909. See Cart, "'New Deal' for Wildlife, 114.

the animals. In an October 1935 memo, the Acting Chief of the Park Service's Wildlife Division asked Weber to submit sketches for a wildlife poster featuring the bighorn. As the memo explains, the Park Service wanted a poster to replace an earlier version that was rejected for being inauthentic and failing to emphasize the animal's head, which supposedly embodied the bighorn's "striking character."[48] Weber was a logical choice for the project. After earning a degree in zoology and botany from the University of Chicago in 1927, the artist worked as a scientific illustrator at the Field Museum for several years before joining the Park Service as a wildlife technician in 1935. After two years in this capacity, working in both Texas and Oklahoma, Weber moved to Washington DC and became the Park Services' chief scientific illustrator.[49] Weber's background would have assisted him in reconciling contemporary trends in modern poster design with the Park Services' desire to capture the "authentic" form and character of the bighorns.

The animals in this poster resemble the sheep in an illustration Weber did for the book "*Fading Trails: The Story of Endangered American Wildlife*" (figure 9). The illustration depicts five bighorns in a rocky, mountainous landscape. Like the animals in the WPA poster, these sheep look directly at the viewer, drawing us into the image and to the animals' expressive faces. A caption under the illustration explains that the "slow, deadly decline" of the mountain sheep continues.

---

[48] Memorandum for Mr. Weber from Willis King, Acting Chief of the Wildlife Division, Department of the Interior, National Park Service (October 22, 1935); Publicity, Posters, Bighorn; Box 7, Entry P87, Publications, Big Game of Our National Parks to Roadside Clean-up and Fire Hazard, 1934; Records of the Washington Office of the Wildlife Division, 1934-1936; Records of the National Park Service, Record Group 79; National Archives at College Park, College Park, MD.

[49] See "Walter A. Weber, 72, Dies; Geographic Wildlife Artist," *Washington Post*, 13 Jan 1979, Section C6. This obituary notes that Weber received a conservation award from the Department of the Interior in 1967 for his illustrations, which inspired "wider interest in our native wildlife."

Fading Trails was written, in part, to secure support for wildlife conservation.[50] Developed with input from a joint committee of individuals from the Department of the Interior's National Park Service and Fish and Wildlife Service, the book provides an overview of wildlife policy in the United States from the "primitive days" through 1942, when the book was published. It also discusses various endangered species, including the mountain sheep. Humanizing the animals and emphasizing their important role in the life of the nation, the book explains that the "dramatic stories" of these "vanishing Americans" could help secure the public's support for wildlife protection.[51] This support, the authors assert, will play a crucial role in determining whether future generations will have to "stand by a fence and watch a few lonely bighorns as one might gaze at a habitat group in a museum" or if they will "be able to take their cameras on the backs of old fashioned burros and stalk some wholly wild sheep in the beautiful high country of the United States."[52]

Like the illustration in *Fading Trails*, the WPA poster dramatizes the story of the bighorns in an attempt to engage the broader public and cultivate support for these vanishing Americans. In depicting "wild sheep in the beautiful high country," the poster also aligns the Park Service and Biological Survey with a specific wilderness ideal, one that corresponds to the outdoor experience endorsed in *Fading Trails* and pictured in the travel posters discussed earlier. In a memorandum to the Chief of the Park Service's Research and Education Branch, Wildlife Division Chief George W. Wright suggested that the Service's promotional materials should attempt to present "a picture of conditions as they were before the arrival of the

[50] "Summary of Wildlife Conservation in the National Park Service, 1939-40;" Pages 3-4, Wildlife Division, Box 135, Central Classified Files, 2nd Subseries, General Records; Records of the National Park Service, Record Group 79; National Archives at College Park, College Park, MD.
[51] United States, Beard, Elliott and Weber, *Fading Trails*, 29, 39.
[52] Ibid., 57.

whites." Images of semi-tame animals in developed areas, he asserted, undermined this wilderness aesthetic and were "sub-standard" for the Park Service. "The occasional sight of a perfectly wild animal in its natural environment is worth more than contact with many semi-tame creatures in artificial surroundings. There are many places in the country where people who want their wildlife-impressions en masse can get them; there are few areas where a primitive picture can be obtained."[53]

As this statement implies, government officials were interested in promoting the National Parks as places where tourists could encounter wild animals and "primitive" environments, which were defined by a lack of development. Similarly, it suggests that the wilderness ideal visualized in Weber's poster was intertwined with the Park Service's recreational mission. As park officials recognized, wild animals and "primitive" environments appealed to a number of outdoor enthusiasts. In addition to promoting the preservation of the bighorn, therefore, Weber's poster was working to maintain a particular type of wilderness experience for park tourists. As if acknowledging the presence of these individuals in the landscape, the bighorns in the WPA poster look directly at the viewer.

Like the deer in Wagner's poster, the future of these animals is uncertain. The image, however, is a hopeful one that suggests the bighorns can be saved. Weber does not conclude the phrase "going, going, going" with the word "gone." Likewise, the mountain sheep remain in the picture despite the fact they stand on unstable ground. The direct gaze of these animals

[53] December 26, 1935 memorandum from George W. Wright to Isabelle Story. Publicity, National Park Service, Miscellaneous; Box 7, Entry P87, Publications, Big Game of Our National Parks to Roadside Clean-up and Fire Hazard, 1934; Records of the Washington Office of the Wildlife Division, 1934-1936; Records of the National Park Service, Record Group 79; National Archives at College Park, College Park, MD. The Research and Education Branch was a subsidiary of the National Park Service's Public Relations Division.

involves the viewer in this outcome, a link that works to reconcile the presence of humans in natural areas with the need to preserve endangered wildlife.

Acres Fit and Unfit

For many conservationists, the growing infrastructure supporting tourism was only part of a broader problem leading to preservation issues in the national parks. In his 1935 essay "Land Pathology," the conservationist Aldo Leopold explained that parks are "overcrowded hospitals trying to cope with an epidemic of esthetic rickets; the remedy lies not in hospitals, but in daily dietaries. The vast bulk of land beauty and land life, dispersed as it is over a thousand hills, continues to waste away under the same forces as are undermining land utility."[54] According to Leopold, Americans were drawn to national parks and other federally protected environments because the larger landscape was in a state of deterioration, both aesthetically and functionally.

Addressing this issue, the WPA produced several posters dealing with the conservation of private lands. These posters worked to expand the viewer's knowledge of environmental issues, in part, by modeling good conservation practices. In this respect they differed from the iconic photographs taken by Farm Security Administration (FSA) employees like Dorothea Lange and Arthur Rothstein, who focused on the devastating consequences of poor land practices in their poignant images of unproductive farms and destructive dust storms.

A WPA poster commissioned by the Prairie States Forestry Project, which was based in Lincoln, Nebraska, exemplifies this approach (figure 10). Designed by Joseph Dusek of

[54] Aldo Leopold quoted in Sutter, *Driven Wild*, 92, 94-5.

the Chicago Federal Art Project, the poster encourages the prevention of soil erosion through the planting of trees on Midwestern farms. This work is divided in half vertically, juxtaposing two disparate landscapes shown from an aerial vantage point that allows viewers to assess the relative merit of each scene. On the left side of the poster, Dusek depicts a barn with two silos situated on a thriving farm lined with trees. The right side, in contrast, includes a building surrounded by barren and seemingly infertile land. This juxtaposition suggests that tree planting will improve both the productivity and aesthetic quality of the landscape. This is reinforced by text included on the poster, which frames the benefits of these conservation efforts in human terms. As the poster explains, "trees prevent wind erosion, save moisture, protect crops, [and] contribute to human comfort and happiness." Consistent with this statement, each building conveys a different degree of cheer and affluence. The building on the right is darker, smaller, and situated further back in the image than the barn on the left, distancing it from the viewer and reinforcing its inhospitable character. In contrast, the bright white barn on the left is located closer to the front of the picture plane and the viewer. Attractive and inviting, this scene symbolizes prosperity.

Soil conservation occupied an important place in contemporary discourse for a variety of reasons, including the devastating dustbowl in the Great Plains. Equating soil erosion with the erosion of society, Roosevelt explained that the "history of every Nation is eventually written in the way in which it cares for its soil."[55] In an attempt to address soil conservation, the New Deal administration conducted surveys on soil erosion, established agencies like the Soil Conservation Service, produced documentaries, created demonstration sites to educate

[55] Franklin D. Roosevelt, "Statement on Signing the Soil Conservation and Domestic Allotment Act," March 1, 1936. Accessed November 18, 2011. John T. Woolley and Gerhard Peters, The American Presidency Project (Santa Barbara, CA), http://www.presidency .ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=15254.

farmers, and enacted legislation like the Soil Conservation and Domestic Allotment Act (1936).[56] They also commissioned publicity materials like the WPA poster designed by Dusek.

Many of these initiatives were meant to educate the public on land use and involve farmers in the process of conservation.[57] In a 1931 speech, Roosevelt explained that the government "must take steps, with approval of the governed, to see that plans become realities." This involves, he argued, the "larger problem of getting men, women and children… to go along with a program and carry it out." The WPA poster participates in this process by outlining the economic and aesthetic benefits of planting trees, which include the protection of crops and the enhancement of "human comfort." Providing a visual equivalent for the title of Roosevelt's speech, which was "Acres Fit and Unfit," it also served a didactic function in modeling both good and bad farming practices.

By implying that proper land management can ensure a "fit" and productive landscape, this poster resonated with the rhetoric of professionals who used health metaphors in addressing conservation issues. In his 1936 book *Rich Land, Poor Land*, the liberal economist Stuart Chase explained that soil erosion is "an earth disease" that spreads if left

[56] Congress passed the Soil Conservation and Domestic Allotment Act in 1936, which paid farmers for restricting production and practicing soil erosion control on the land they planted. This was followed by the Agricultural Adjustment Act in 1938, which encouraged conservation practices and the retirement of marginal land in an attempt to stabilize agricultural prices and curb surplus production. As Richard Andrews notes, the legacy of these conservation programs is mixed. The programs did not curtail overproduction on acreage that remained in production. They also encouraged, among other things, an increase in the use of mechanization and chemicals, monocropping, large agribusinesses, and groundwater depletion due to more intensive production methods like center pivot irrigation. See Richard N. L. Andrews, "Recovering FDR's Environmental Legacy," in *FDR and the Environment*, eds. David B. Woolner and Henry L. Henderson (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), 223, 227-8. See also Maher, *Nature's New Deal*, 60, 123, 156; Black in Woolner and Henderson, *FDR and the Environment*, 39; and Dunaway, *Natural Visions*, 9.

[57] Dunaway, *Natural Visions*, 35. See also Phillips in Woolner and Henderson, *FDR and the Environment*, 108.

unchecked.[58] Similarly, the Chair of the National Planning Board's Water Resources Committee used comparable language to stress the need for preemptive action in soil conservation. "Just as with bodily diseases such as cancer or tuberculosis which can be cured only in the early stages," he noted, "so it is with soils built up through the ages."[59] In equating soil erosion to a disease, these individuals were drawing from a broader discourse that linked health and national stability, which will be discussed to a greater extent in the next chapter. Specifically, they indicated that soil erosion was a disease that threatened to undermine the health of the nation, a suggestion that reinforced the national nature of the issue and worked to justify the government's involvement in the conservation of private lands.

In promoting resource stewardship through the fit/unfit model, this poster bridges the gap between public and private. As government officials and environmental advocates like Leopold argued, the nation's conservation needs extend beyond public lands.[60] This idea had its roots in Progressive-Era conservation efforts, many of which were based on the assumption that private property had a social or public component.[61] Dusek's poster reinforces this idea by suggesting that the planting of trees contributes to "*human* comfort and happiness" rather than the *farmer's* comfort and happiness. More inclusive in its implications, the word human hints at the broader, national benefits of soil conservation.

[58] Stuart Chase quoted in Maher, *Nature's New Deal*, 60.
[59] Morris Cooke (1935 congressional committee hearing speech), quoted in Maher, *Nature's New Deal*, 60.
[60] For further information on Leopold's attitude toward this see Sutter, *Driven Wild*, 9.
[61] Tarlock in Woolner and Henderson, *FDR and the Environment*, 170.

Look Before You Shoot

The production of these WPA posters suggests that agencies like the Prairie States Forestry Project and the National Park Service had confidence in the ability of visuals to promote conservation and a greater knowledge of nature. Many of these posters, however, go even further in linking resource stewardship to visual perception. A number suggest that wildlife preservation is dependent on a particular *type* of seeing, one informed by a knowledge of wilderness etiquette and the natural world. In doing so, these posters promote visual literacy as a tool for negotiating a balance between use and preservation.

Scholars have credited Aldo Leopold with validating sight as an essential instrument for understanding nature.[62] One of the most influential conservationists of the twentieth century, Leopold published a number of articles on environmental issues during the 1930s, as well as the first textbook on wildlife management.[63] Influenced by the science of ecology, Leopold's theories of environmental ethics differed from the utilitarian approach to conservation espoused by Gifford Pinchot and others. Leopold viewed wildlife management as a way to restore and maintain biological diversity in the environment rather than a mechanism for propagating game. Similarly, he considered wilderness conservation a tool for perpetuating healthy biotic communities.[64] As Leopold asserted, biological balance was predicated on the ability of humans to supplement their felt experience of nature with knowledge of the biotic community.[65]

---

[62] See, for instance, Ito, "Seeing Animals, Speaking of Nature," 130.
[63] See Aldo Leopold and Allan Brooks, *Game Management* (New York: C. Scribner's Sons, 1933).
[64] For more information on Leopold see Curt Meine, *Aldo Leopold: His Life and Work* (Madison, WI: Univ. of Wisconsin Press, 1988).
[65] Ito, "Seeing Animals, Speaking of Nature," 131.

Leopold summarized some of his beliefs on the relationship between humans and the natural world in *A Sand County Almanac* (1949), which was published a year after his death. In this book, which sold over two million copies, Leopold stressed the important role sight played in establishing a sustainable relationship with the natural world. As he asserted, humans "can be ethical only in relation to something we can see, feel, understand, love, or otherwise have faith in."[66] Although many of the WPA posters deviate from Leopold's environmental ideals, they are consistent with the conservationist in emphasizing the importance of sight as a tool for engaging with and knowing nature. In doing so, they expand our understanding of the complicated role visual perception played in the discourse surrounding conservation during the 1930s.

A WPA poster commissioned by the New York State Conservation Department exemplifies this emphasis on sight (figure 11). Targeting hunters, the work tells viewers to "LOOK" before shooting. The poster depicts a man, with a gun in his hand, looking at a doe on the ground. The doe, in turn, fixes her gaze on the gun pointed at her flank. The close proximity of the hunter to the doe, combined with his grim expression and downturned head, suggests the animal has been shot. As the hunter stands contemplating the doe, she lies helplessly with an innocent and submissive air that accentuates his wrongdoing and appeals to the viewer by humanizing the animal.

Reinforcing the significance of the hunter's actions, the poster explains that "dead does don't breed." This "game fact" does not denounce hunting. It does, however, suggest that the shooting of does will have a detrimental effect on the future of the deer population

[66] Aldo Leopold and Charles Walsh Schwartz, *A Sand County Almanac, and Sketches Here and There* (1949; reprint, with an introduction by Robert Finch, New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1987): xxvi.

and, by extension, the number of deer available for later hunting expeditions. In doing so, the poster works to balance outdoor recreation with the preservation of wildlife by appealing to both the emotions and the self-interests of hunters. As the Federal Art Project reported, WPA posters of this sort constituted one of the Department's "first line of propaganda for conservation work."[67]

As the poster implies, the success of this conservation effort rests on two important factors: knowledge of hunting ethics and the ability to distinguish between various animals visually. In pairing these two conditions, the poster promotes an informed mode of looking consistent with contemporary attitudes concerning the relationship between vision and knowledge, which was addressed in the last chapter. In a 1935 article for *The English Journal*, for instance, the educator Luella Cook maintained that "an observant person is more than a seeing person, he is an understanding person." Referencing John Dewey, she argued that an understanding person sees more than objects, "he perceives meaning, significance, resemblance and relationship."[68] In keeping with this assertion, the WPA poster suggests that vision and knowledge work in tandem to help hunters understand the meaning of their actions, an animal's significance to the future of the deer population, and the relationship this and other conservation efforts have to the broader public good.

A series of posters the WPA produced for the Pennsylvania Game Commission implies a similar relationship between "looking," knowledge, and the preservation of wildlife.

---

[67] "Report of Federal Art Projects Operating in New York State Counties" (August 3, 1936); New York State; Box 58, Reports of the Exhibition Department, 1936-1937; Records Related to Publicity and Exhibitions, 1936-1937; Records of the Work Projects Administration, Record Group 69; National Archives at College Park, College Park, MD. See also "Facts of Especial Interest Concerning Work in New York County Art Projects;" New York State; Box 58, Reports of the Exhibition Department, 1936-1937; Records Related to Publicity and Exhibitions, 1936-1937; Records of the Work Projects Administration, Record Group 69; National Archives at College Park, College Park, MD.

[68] Luella B. Cook, "An Experiment in Observation," *The English Journal* 24, no. 25 (May 1935): 381.

One of these posters showcases the red-shouldered hawk, which was a protected species in Pennsylvania (figure 12). Text on the poster identifies the bird and asks viewers not to "shoot protected hawks." As the poster implies, the viewer can achieve this goal by learning to "know" or recognize different hawks visually, which the poster encourages by providing two views of the bird. One of the hawks is situated on a branch that extends over three schematically rendered trees. The other is shown in flight.

This type of appeal, which places both vision and knowledge at the forefront of wildlife preservation, was common in hunting journals produced during the period. An image in *Pennsylvania Game News*, for example, depicts three hawks in flight (figure 13). Like the hawk in the WPA poster, this rendering was meant to help sportsmen identify airborne birds. In both works, the hawks are illustrated on an unadorned background that evokes the sky. Their wings are spread, giving viewers a better picture of the distinct patterning that characterizes each bird. As the caption under the illustration explains, hunters should learn to recognize these "harmful species" – the goshawk, cooper's hawk, and sharp-shin hawk – before "shooting at any hawks whatsoever."[69] Importantly, these were the only species of hawks not protected under a 1937 ruling by the Pennsylvania state legislature.

The goshawk, which is one of the "harmful" birds shown in this illustration, was the focus of a poster the WPA produced for the Pennsylvania Game Commission (figure 14). This poster shows the goshawk perched on a branch, its yellow feet gripping the limb assertively. Unlike the red-shouldered hawk in the poster just discussed, this bird has a red

[69] Leo A. Luttringer, Jr., "Outlaws of the Air – Or Are They? The Answer to Those Who Say that the Only Good Hawk is a Dead One," *Pennsylvania Game News* 9, no. 4 (July 1938): 11. Luttringer was in charge of public information for the Pennsylvania Game Commission.

eye and is represented with its beak slightly ajar. The goshawk is identified by text under its tail that states it is an unprotected species and fair game for hunters.

The goshawk and its physical characteristics were discussed in a number of journals dealing with hunting and outdoor recreation. An article in *Pennsylvania Game News*, for instance, encouraged hunters to participate in the "worthwhile work" of reducing the goshawk population and explained that these destructive and "merciless killers" can be identified by their distinctive markings. "Feathers on the back of an adult," the author noted, "are slaty blue; tail is the same color but a shade darker, with five blackish bands. Lower parts are white with numerous narrow, slaty bars and vertical, black lacings. The most conspicuous feature is the white stripe over the eye, extending to the back of the head. Eyes are usually red in the mature bird, but occasionally they are yellow."[70]

The WPA poster, however, visualizes more than the physical characteristics of the goshawk. Like the bighorns and deer discussed earlier, the birds in these WPA posters are rendered expressively to convey their "character." The goshawk, for instance, is tilted forward at a severe angle that gives the bird an aggressive appearance accentuated by its fiery red eye, large yellow feet, and open beak. In highlighting the assertive nature of this bird, the poster exemplifies a description of the goshawk that appeared in *Nature Magazine*, which explained that one of the bird's favorite pastimes was to "sit on a limb of a lodgepole, silhouetted against the sky, and make unpleasant remarks to fishermen…"[71] Consistent with this and other journal articles, many of which portrayed the goshawk as a nagging and

[70] W. M. Dippold, "Hunting Goshawks," *Pennsylvania Game News* 5, no. 12 (March 1935): 10-1. See also "Goshawk Bounty," *Pennsylvania Game News* 3, no. 8 (November 1932): 3.
[71] Alfred M. Bailey and Robert J. Niedrach, "A Day with a Nesting Goshawk," *Nature Magazine* 31, no. 1 (January 1938): 40.

ruthless predator, the WPA poster illustrates a noticeably less inviting and friendly bird than the red-shouldered hawk in the work discussed earlier.

The expressive character of animals and animal renderings was addressed in a number of contemporary journals. As an article in *Nature Magazine* explained, a "bird portrait should be more than a matter of correctness of plumage and proportions. Suppose one were to paint Washington with a sinister scowl, or Lincoln with the mental and moral appearance of Simon Legree!"[72] As the author suggested, the character of a bird can provide insight into the animal's nature and worth. Because of this, he noted, artists should be attuned to the personalities and expressive tendencies of birds they depict.

The humanized animals in the WPA posters, therefore, fulfill several objectives. They appeal to the viewer's emotions, which conservationists like Leopold claimed was important for encouraging "receptivity" in the broader public.[73] They also reinforce the link between visual perception and conservation by suggesting individuals can increase their knowledge or understanding of wildlife through close and informed visual analysis. The expressive portrayal of the hawks in the WPA posters, for instance, helps viewers distinguish between various species visually.

Like Weber's rendering of the bighorns, these bird posters work to reconcile the eye-catching and flat forms of modern poster design with the need to convey an animal's physical and mental characteristics accurately. This relationship between the functional and artistic goals of these posters becomes apparent when comparing them to the work of John James

---

[72] Edmund J. Sawyer, "Expression in Birds," *Nature Magazine* 34, no. 5 (May 1941): 275.
[73] Aldo Leopold, "Conservation Esthetic," *Pennsylvania Game News* 9, no. 5 (August 1938): 31. This article originally appeared in *Bird-Lore*. See Aldo Leopold, "Conservation Esthetic," *Bird-Lore* 40, no. 2 (March-April 1938): 101-9. See also Nash, *Wilderness and the American Mind*, 197; and Sutter in Woolner and Henderson, *FDR and the Environment*, 98. *Bird-Lore* was a popular journal of ornithology and the official publication of the Audubon society.

Audubon, whose life and bird "portraits" were the subject of several articles published in *Pennsylvania Game News*.[74] Like Audubon's goshawk, the goshawk in the WPA poster is situated against a white background and grasps a branch meant to symbolize the bird's natural habitat (figure 15). Beyond this, the works differ considerably. The WPA poster features large text rendered in a variety of fonts and colors, which were meant to capture the viewer's attention and convey the poster's message quickly and effectively. Similarly, the goshawk in the WPA poster is more abstract than Audubon's. Its stylized feathers are aligned in neat rows and its body patterned in a manner that gives the bird a two-dimensional appearance. The poster strikes a balance between modern graphic trends and the visual fidelity needed to fulfill the social and educational purpose of the piece, which was working to reconcile use and preservation by teaching hunters to distinguish between protected and unprotected hawks visually.

In working to increase the viewer's knowledge of various hawks, these WPA posters engaged a debate that divided conservationists during the interwar period. In the 1920s, a group of nature enthusiasts began a campaign to protect hawks and other predatory birds from individuals who saw them as a threat to livestock, game, and songbirds. These bird advocates, who were primarily ornithologists and serious birdwatchers, worked to secure protective legislation for predatory birds and challenge bounty incentives aimed at reducing their numbers.[75]

These individuals employed a variety of arguments in making their case for the protection of raptors. Evoking the rhetoric of ecologists, who stressed the interconnectedness

---

[74] See "John James Audubon," *Pennsylvania Game News* 10, no. 5 (August 1939): 8-9. See also Brooks Atkinson, "Audubon – The Perfect Bird Man," *Pennsylvania Game News* 6, no. 4 (July 1935): 14.
[75] Barrow, "Science, Sentiment, and the Specter of Extinction," 69-72.

of all organisms, they condemned the intentional destruction of any species. They also cited studies examining the feeding habits and stomach contents of hawks in asserting that these birds were not a serious threat to wildlife or livestock.[76]

Finally, these advocates argued that predatory birds had aesthetic value. Bird watching had become an increasingly popular leisure activity for middle- and upper-class Americans throughout the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Active participants in the campaign to protect predatory birds, these individuals suggested that the aesthetic pleasure of watching raptors justified their preservation. Just as sublime landscapes were likened to artistic masterpieces, some equated birds with works of art and the act of seeing a bird to the process of looking at a painting. As one commentator asserted, "The destruction of a great work of art calls forth genuine condemnation, in spite of the fact that it may conceivably be reproduced, or even excelled. But how about the creature that has been millions of years in the making, which, once gone, is gone forever."[77] Like some landscapes and works of art, the beauty and character of these predators were used to justify their preservation.

In establishing a hierarchy of value among hawks, however, these WPA posters fall short of ideals articulated by bird advocates who ascribed to the ecological principle that all organisms are integral components of the biological community and should be protected. Instead, these WPA posters adopt a middle ground between unlimited hunting rights and the complete protection of predatory birds. In doing so, they promote knowledge as a tool for negotiating, however controversially, the conservation of wildlife with the economic and recreational desires of hunters and farmers.

---

[76] Ibid., 71.
[77] Ibid., 70.

This approach is not surprising for an organization like the Pennsylvania Game Commission, which served a diverse public that included hunting enthusiasts. By December 1940, the Pennsylvania Game Commission had purchased over 240,000 posters from the WPA. A number of these were included in exhibitions organized by the Commission. Others were made available free of charge to Boy Scouts, hunters, garden clubs, 4-H clubs, farm youth groups, and other members of the community.[78]

A January 1941 article in *Pennsylvania Game News*, which was written by Eagle Scout J. Frank Ritter, Jr., features a photograph of two Boy Scouts hanging a WPA poster on a large tree in a wooded landscape (figure 16). The poster, which is the focal point of the photograph, encourages viewers to "protect our birds." As the article explains, the poster was one of over 1900 the Boy Scouts placed in stores, farms, parks, and forests throughout Pennsylvania in an attempt to promote wildlife conservation and encourage the prevention of forest fires.[79] These posters, Ritter notes, were part of a broader campaign the Scouts initiated to educate rural property owners, farmers, hunters, and the "average citizen" on the preservation of wildlife and wilderness areas.[80] As Ritter asserted, "Without our forests our social as well as political life would surely be at a standstill. It is our duty as loyal and true

[78] The Commission reproduced a number of these poster designs in *Pennsylvania Game News*, which they published for hunting enthusiasts. Seth Gordon, "Marching Forward," *Pennsylvania Game News* 11, no. 9 (December 1940): 27.

[79] J. Frank Ritter, Jr., "Conservation and Scouting," *Pennsylvania Game News* 11, no. 10 (January 1941): 12. In addition to giving the "protect our birds" poster to the Boy Scouts for distribution, the Commission displayed the poster in several farm shows during the early 1940s. See "Game Commission Exhibit at Farm Show," *Pennsylvania Game News* 11, no. 12 (March 1941): 17 and "Wildlife Exhibit," *Pennsylvania Game News* 10, no. 12 (March 1940): 16-7.

[80] This campaign included radio broadcasts, talks to farmers and other community members, and the publication of articles in *The Harrisburg Evening News* and the *Harrisburg Telegraph*, as well as *Pennsylvania Game News*. See Ritter, "Conservation and Scouting," 12.

Americans to do all in our power to protect our forests, to conserve our national resources, to build and keep America what it has and will always be – the greatest country in the world."[81]

As this statement suggests, Ritter and his fellow Boy Scouts used the WPA posters to bridge the public and private, shaping individual behavior for the good of the nation. Ritter's statement also alludes to the broad range of interrelated environmental, social, and economic concerns motivating the production and distribution of the WPA posters. These issues were articulated in a number of sources throughout the 1930s. As an article in *Pennsylvania Game News* explained, the restoration of wildlife contributed to individual happiness and the "economic rehabilitation of our land."[82] Another observed that natural areas supply industries with resources and enable sports like hunting.[83] As these statements indicate, contemporaries associated the preservation of the environment and wildlife with the perpetuation of recreational opportunities. They also linked the protection of natural resources with the nation's economic stability. Conservationists and government officials argued that birds, for instance, protected crops, orchards, and forests by eating harmful insects and the seeds of noxious weeds.[84] Citing the U.S. Department of Agriculture, one wildlife advocate explained that insects cost farmers $1,105,000,000 in produce annually, a loss that could be reduced if Americans worked to protect and propagate insect eating birds.[85]

Likewise, a number of environmental advocates suggested that young people, like the Boy Scouts depicted in the *Pennsylvania Game News* photograph, profited from participating in conservation programs. These initiatives, one author argued, promoted a better

[81] Ibid., 31.
[82] "Why our Wildlife is Worth Saving," *Pennsylvania Game News* 9, no. 1 (April 1938): 15.
[83] Myron E. Shoemaker, "Education in Conservation," *Pennsylvania Game News* 11, no. 3 (June 1940): 26.
[84] Several of the extant WPA posters are explicit in linking, both visually and textually, birds with the destruction of harmful insects.
[85] "The Value of Birds to Man," *Pennsylvania Game News* 4, no. 12 (March 1934): 11.

understanding of the relationship between man and nature, encouraging the next generation of conservationists.[86] Another suggested that an involvement in conservation projects could enhance a youngster's physical and mental health, as well as their "vocational fitness," sense of civic responsibility, and "command of fundamentals."[87] A similar sentiment was expressed in a *Pennsylvania Game News* editorial, which equated social deviance with a disregard of conservation practices. As the author explained, a survey of the early lives of inmates in reformatories and penitentiaries reveals "one violation of the conservation laws after another – a disregard of law which paved the way for future criminal careers."[88]

Tourism and Ecological Color Blindness

Like the wildlife images just described, the travel posters produced for the National Park Service suggest that sight is an important tool for engaging with the natural world. They are also similar to the wildlife posters in providing viewers with a framework for seeing and knowing nature. In doing so, however, the travel posters complicate our understanding of the role visual perception played in negotiating a balance between use and preservation. In working to accommodate the needs of prospective tourists, these posters present viewers with several paradigms for seeing and experiencing nature, some of which conflicted with ecological ideals articulated by contemporary conservationists. Accordingly, these works exemplify some of the tensions inherent in the process of reconciling use and preservation.

---

[86] Myron E. Shoemaker, "Educator's Place in Conservation," *Pennsylvania Game News* 11, no. 6 (September 1940): 27. See also "Feed the Birds," *Pennsylvania Game News* 4, no. 9 (December 1933): 8.
[87] Harold G. Gerper, "Junior Conservation Education," *Pennsylvania Game News* 11, no. 3 (June 1940): 30.
[88] "Youth in Conservation," *Pennsylvania Game News* 9, no. 4 (July 1938): 1.

The links between seeing and tourism - or sightseeing - is explicit in a number of WPA posters. The travel poster by Richard Halls, for instance, includes bold text encouraging viewers to "See America" (figure 6). Although the sublime landscape illustrated above this text symbolizes the type of scene one might find in Montana, its streamlined and abstracted forms suggest the poster was not intended as a substitute for seeing the site in person. This distinguishes the work from nineteenth-century photographs and landscape paintings by artists like Thomas Moran, which some contemporaries saw as an acceptable alternative to actual travel.[89]

This approach was consistent with other tourism campaigns launched during the 1930s, some of which appealed to potential tourists by emphasizing the distinction between seeing a representation of the landscape and viewing the actual landscape in person. As an article in *Nature Magazine* explained, travel posters provide viewers with a refreshing "glimpse of the beauty of Nature" that "comes like a breath of wind that has passed over mountains to give us strength and renewed youthful vigor." Although the article explains that these posters provide a moment of "reprieve for burdened urbanites," it insists they are not replacements for the "real thing of collecting memories and experiences and joys that come with visiting each and every glorious wonder [that] is ours in this New World."[90] For the author of this essay, these natural features are American masterpieces worthy of seeing personally.

The same sentiment is articulated in a Union Pacific brochure, the cover of which depicts an artist and his easel situated on a ledge overlooking a panoramic landscape (figure

[89] See McGrath, *Art and the American Conservation Movement*, 44.
[90] Beard, "Our National Scenery in Travel Poster," 146.

17). The brochure, which features drawings of the Grand Canyon, explains that artists' renderings can give you "glimpses" of the beauty that can be found in the parks and illustrate some of the activities you can enjoy while there. It asserts, however, that renderings and even photographs of the parks can never capture their true "loveliness." "*Seeing* the beauties of [the]…National Park," it explains, "is the only way a person may ever be convinced that such beauty can exist."[91]

The emphasis this literature places on seeing a landscape in person is consistent with the commercial aims of the material and the social value placed on tourism. It also alludes to an interest in the various ways Americans were "seeing" or experiencing the landscape, which was a process integral to both tourism and conservation. Addressing the tourist experience, the Union Pacific brochure suggests that there are several ways of seeing the sights in the Grand Canyon National Park. The "lazy" way, the brochure explains, involves relaxing on the verandas of tourist villas and sightseeing near the rims of the canyons. The more "energetic exploring" way of touring is to travel by foot or horseback on park trails, which can take visitors to more remote areas of the park and to "higher, more commanding spots."[92]

Presenting the tourist with a range of sightseeing options, the travel posters produced by the WPA illustrate both forms of seeing discussed in the Union Pacific brochure. Consistent with "energetic exploring," a number of the extant travel posters show figures immersed in wilderness areas, contemplating nature. A WPA poster designed by Martin Weitzman, for instance, includes a man on horseback in the lower left corner of the image

[91] Union Pacific Brochure. Taken from: Parks General Publicity and Statistics Publicity, December 4, 1934-May 31, 1935; Box 325, O-501; Second Subseries, Central Classified Files, 1933-1949; Records of the National Park Service, Record Group 79; National Archives at College Park, College Park, MD.
[92] Ibid.

(figure 18). The figure gazes at the scene before him, which is dominated by several snowcapped mountains. Like this man, the figures in WPA travel posters are always small in scale, emphasizing the monumental character of the landscapes that surround them. Likewise, most are solitary or shown in small groups, minimizing the presence of humans in the landscape and promoting a sense of wilderness. Finally, these figures are always shown on foot or on horseback. For many, these forms of travel evoked the frontier past, romanticizing exploration and reinforcing a sense of distance from modern life. They were also favored by environmentalists like Aldo Leopold, who suggested that so called "primitive" forms of travel were the best way of knowing nature.[93] Not only did they allow access to areas cars could not reach, they encouraged a more intimate relationship with the landscape.

The horse, in particular, was common in publicity materials produced for the Park Service.[94] Its presence in these promotional pieces was encouraged, in part, by an increase in groups like "Trail Riders of the Mountains," whose advisory council included Park Service dignitaries like Horace M. Albright, Arno B. Cammerer, Arthur E. Demaray, and Isabelle Story. As an article in the *National Parks Bulletin* asserted, the Trail Riders exposed people to the "priceless beauty that lies hidden from the casual motorist," encouraging a "love of out-doors life." Likewise, they promoted the preservation of national parks and forests, the protection of historic sites "related to the early explorers and pioneers," and the "study and conservation of birds, wild animals and alpine flowers."[95]

---

[93] Sutter, *Driven Wild*, 79.
[94] William WycKoff and Lary M. Dilsaver, "Promotional Imagery of Glacier National Park," *The Geographical Review* 87, no. 1 (January 1997): 18.
[95] See "The First Chapter of the 'Trail Riders of the Mountains' Organized in Glacier National Park," *National Parks Bulletin* 13, no. 64 (December 1937): 13-4. At the time this article was written, Horace M. Albright was the former Director of the NPS, Arno B. Cammerer the current Director of the NPS, Arthur E. Demaray the

This article also suggests that trail riding fosters an "interest in Indian customs, costumes and traditions."[96] References to Native Americans were prevalent in articles and other publicity materials promoting the national parks, including the WPA posters. A poster publicizing the Yosemite National Park, for instance, advertises "Indian demonstrations" along with other attractions and educational opportunities (figure 19). Similarly, the WPA poster by Richard Halls shows four teepees and a Native American on horseback (figure 6).

Like the poster by Halls, this promotional material often represents Native Americans as divorced from modern life, contemplating nature or engaged in traditional activities like hunting and horseback riding.[97] For many New Dealers, Native Americans were "living history." As such, they offered a glimpse of the American past, a vision of a preindustrial culture living in harmony with nature. Many environmentalists, in fact, saw Native American culture as a paradigm for contemporary conservation efforts. As an article in *Nature Magazine* explained, "Indian and game, feather and furred, lived together and prospered exceedingly well until the white man came from across the seas with firearms and steel traps in the interest of trade, sartorial vanity and national aggrandizement." The article goes on to suggest that Native Americans' "philosophy of the wild" and their conservation practices show a greater understanding of nature than "our own frantic gestures to replenish a depleted wilderness."[98]

As a number of scholars have noted, the conception of Native Americans as remnants of a fading, pre-industrial era discounts the complexity of their culture and history of land use,

---

Associate Director of the NPS, and Isabelle Story the Chief of the Research and Education Branch of the National Park Service's Public Relations Division.

[96] Ibid., 14.

[97] Wycoff and Dilsver, "Promotional Imagery of Glacier National Park," 9.

[98] Tony Lascelles, "Indians and Game," *Nature Magazine* 31, no. 1 (Jan 1938): 20-1.

as does the traditional definition of "wilderness" as an environment untouched by civilization.[99] Nevertheless, Native Americans were associated with a wilderness tradition that both tourists and conservationists valued during the 1930s and 40s. Native Americans were symbols of wilderness akin to the sublime landscapes and wildlife depicted in the WPA posters - spectacles that came to define the tourist experience. They also represented a more "authentic" national past, which was divorced from the economic hardships and instability of modern America and embodied ideals that could unite Americans and revitalize the nation. For this and other reasons, Native Americans were figures worthy of preservation, like the landscapes and wildlife they were associated with.

The WPA poster by Weitzman draws from these associations in crafting its wilderness aesthetic. The man, alone in his reverie and immersed in the undeveloped landscape, embodies the freedom and sense of isolation that many associated with a "primitive" wilderness experience, one distinguished from the hustle and bustle of city life. Moreover, Weitzman has merged the figure with his surroundings by rendering him in serene hues similar to those used in the landscape. Integrated with his environment, the figure becomes a model for the unity of man and nature.

Like this work, most of the WPA travel posters illustrating people promote the "energetic exploring" mode of seeing and knowing the landscape. Others, however, correspond to the "lazy" form of sightseeing referenced in the Union Pacific brochure. These posters exemplify a detached approach to interacting with the landscape that can be associated with auto tourism and other forms of passive sightseeing.

---

[99] See, for instance, Miles, *Wilderness in National Parks*, 16. See also Miller in Braddock and Irmscher, *A Keener Perception*, 100; and Sutter, *Driven Wild*, 11-2.

Although the extant travel posters minimize the presence of autos in the landscape, in keeping with the Park Services' recreational mission, they reference motor travel in various ways. Like the poster promoting Yosemite, a number list auto caravans among the park's services (figure 19). Others allude to motor travel visually. A poster promoting the Smoky Mountain National Park, for instance, showcases a road that extends from the foreground into the image (figure 20). While the road is unoccupied and understated, text written across its surface clarifies its role in the work. Like the park's nature walks, hikes, and lectures, the road is "a free government service" that allows visitors to "enjoy the great smokies all the more."

This poster situates the viewer on the road, suggesting that the sublime mountains in the background represent one of the scenic views a visitor would see if traveling by auto through the park. The viewer has a different relationship with the landscape in this work than in the poster designed by Weitzman, which places the viewer on the same ground as the figure on horseback (figure 18). In Weitzman's poster, the large scale of the mountains and the body of water at their base suggest the viewer has ventured to, as the Union Pacific brochure put it, one of the "higher, and more commanding spots" in a remote area of the park.

Of the two forms of "seeing" illustrated in the WPA posters, this active, energetic mode of tourism was closer to the type of wilderness experience encouraged by conservationists like Bob Marshall and Aldo Leopold. Marshall, for instance, argued that "environments of solitude," like that promoted in the Montana poster, encouraged contemplation and awakened an individual's senses, inspiring both awe and rapture.[100] This process, in turn, helped individuals understand the interconnectedness of all living things and

[100] Nash, *Wilderness and the American Mind*, 203.

the need for environmental preservation. For Marshall, a true wildness experience involved more than seeing "ordinary manifestations of ocular beauty." It engaged all the senses and involved immersing oneself in the natural world.[101]

Similarly, Aldo Leopold advocated a mode of seeing or perception informed by ecology and based on an immersion in the landscape.[102] As he asserted, the close observation and study of nature could heighten a person's knowledge of the processes and relationships sustaining the natural environment. For Leopold, this practice had a complicated relationship to, but was not entirely inconsistent with, outdoor recreation. As he explained:

> [R]ecreation…is not the outdoors, but our reaction to it. Daniel Boone's reaction depended not only on the quality of what he saw, but on the quality of the mental eye with which he saw it. Ecological science has wrought a change in the mental eye. It has disclosed the origins and functions for what to Boone were only facts. It has disclosed the mechanisms for what to Boone were only attributes. We have no yardstick to measure this change, but we may safely say that, as compared with the competent ecologist of the present day, Boone saw only the surface of things. The incredible intricacies of the plant and animal community – the intrinsic beauty of the organism called America, then in the full bloom of her maidenhood – were as invisible and incomprehensible to Daniel Boone as they are today to Mr. Babbitt. The only true development in American recreation resources is the development of the perceptive faculty in Americans. All of the other acts we grace by that name are, at best, attempts to retard or mask the process of dilution.[103]

For Leopold, outdoor recreation could lead to a heightened sense of perception and a well developed "mental eye," qualities that were essential for understanding nature and the need for environmental preservation. According to Leopold, however, many Americans were driven by a shallow notion of beauty. Viewing nature through the windshields of their cars and from the verandas of their hotels, they had become "ecologically color blind" and unable

---

[101] Bob Marshall quoted in Sutter, *Driven Wild*, 217.
[102] Leopold, "Conservation Esthetic," 5. See also Sutter, *Driven Wild*, 93, 98.
[103] Leopold, "Conservation Esthetic," 5.

to look beyond the surface of what lay before them.[104] Advocating an integration of ecology and aesthetics, he encouraged a sense of "wonder" and a respect for nature's "workmanship" based on a deeper understanding of the processes and relationships underlying its existence.[105]

In the context of these critiques, the sublime becomes a complicated and potentially problematic representational technique.[106] Although the sublime landscapes in the WPA posters epitomized a wilderness aesthetic, and promoted the Park Services' expertise in maintaining the nation's natural resources, they were ultimately used to perpetuate the commercial culture designers censored in their selective representations of the American landscape. While early conservationists saw tourism and advertising as ways to engender support for the preservation of wilderness and wildlife, some New Dealers criticized publicity materials for their role in the overpopulation of wilderness areas.[107] As these individuals asserted, promotional pieces like the WPA posters were threatening nature by turning it into another consumer good. As Leopold explained, the advertising and promotion of wilderness areas "tends to defeat any deliberate effort to prevent their growing still more scarce."[108]

Likewise, when used to promote the passive form of sightseeing Leopold and other conservationists criticized, these sublime scenes encouraged a superficial and detached mode of interacting with nature. They supported, in other words, a mode of viewing oblivious to the intricacies of the natural world. This "ecological blindness," as Leopold described it,

---

[104] Sutter, *Driven Wild*, 38, 93.
[105] Nash, *Wilderness and the American Mind*, 199. Leopold discussed this issue in an address titled "The State of the Profession," which he gave to the Wildlife Society in 1940. See also Susan L. Flader, "A Biographical Study of Aldo Leopold: Thinking Like a Mountain" *Forest History* 17, no. 1 (April 1973): 20-1.
[106] As a number of scholars have argued, the "sublime" and "wilderness" are constructs that change over time with the shifting needs and desires of humans. As such, they should be addressed in the context of their particular historical milieu. See, for instance, Dunaway, *Natural Visions*, xix and Miller in Braddock and Irmscher, *A Keener Perception*, 105.
[107] Sutter, *Driven Wild*, 100, 140.
[108] Leopold, "Conservation Esthetic," 5.

contributed to the need for posters like that designed by Wagner, which encouraged viewers to be more aware of the world beyond their windshields (figure 1).

Conservationists framed environmental problems in terms of a paradox. As Aldo Leopold suggested, the "paradox of the twentieth century" was that humans kept developing new tools and technologies without simultaneously learning how "to live on a piece of land without spoiling it."[109] The WPA posters discussed in this chapter attempt to reconcile this paradox by educating Americans on conservation practices and providing a framework for interacting with the landscape. In promoting the preservation of both natural and human resources, however, the posters present a complicated and potentially controversial picture of the relationship between "seeing" and knowing, one that engaged contemporary debates surrounding preservation and the varied goals of New Deal conservation efforts.

[109] Leopold quoted in Dunaway, *Natural Visions*, 111.

Chapter 4
Marching On To Health

In the February 1936 issue of the *American Journal of Public Health*, Dr. Iago Galdston of the New York Academy of Medicine likened health education to an art form. As he explained, "[i]n all crafts and arts - and health education may be considered such - effectiveness calls for a knowledge of the nature and competencies of the tools, an appreciation of the character of the design, and an understanding of the quality of the material to be fashioned."[1] For health professionals like Galdston, the successful design and utilization of "tools" like posters were critical for addressing the health needs of the nation, which had become a pressing concern after the onset of the Depression.

Responding to this need, the WPA produced a number of posters dealing with health-related issues like cancer, syphilis, and tuberculosis. One, which was commissioned by the Bureau of Social Hygiene, encourages viewers to "stamp out syphilis and gonorrhea" by having a blood test and examination (figure 1). Reinforcing this message, the poster shows a man looking and pointing directly at the viewer, recruiting the onlooker into the fight against venereal disease. The man's pose is similar to the one Uncle Sam assumes in the famous WWI recruiting poster designed by James Montgomery Flagg. Whereas Uncle Sam encourages patriots to head straight for the nearest recruiting station, the man in the WPA poster asks the viewer to go to a doctor or the Department of Health.

Unlike Flagg's representation of Uncle Sam, the man in this poster is rendered in an abstract and streamlined manner that conveys a sense of modernity consistent with the

[1] Iago Galdston, "The Psychologic Factors of Health Education," *American Journal of Public Health* 26 no. 2 (February 1936): 171.

poster's emphasis on modern medical science. The left side of the man's face is composed of geometric forms that suggest strength and resolve. The right side of his face, in contrast, is featureless. It is comprised of a flat plane of color that signifies a blotting out or erasure, which corresponds to the poster's assertion that syphilis and gonorrhea need to be "stamped out." This rendering implies that the idealized and outwardly healthy man who appears in this poster could be infected with syphilis or gonorrhea, a possibility that reinforces the need for medical care. In referencing a recruiting poster illustrating Uncle Sam, this work also indicates that the defeat of syphilis and gonorrhea has national implications.

As scholars like Allan Brandt and Sander Gilman have shown, different cultures and historical periods have produced unique visual records of their medical "truths," which are shaped by social and cultural factors.[2] While scholars have begun to explore representations of health and disease from other time periods, little has been written on health-related images produced during the New Deal - a time when government agencies and private groups were inundating the nation with images of health and the body. This chapter works toward filling this gap by addressing some of the ways WPA posters attempted to shape the public's knowledge of health and disease during the period.

As this chapter indicates, the WPA posters use a range of graphic techniques to promote the benefits of medical expertise and expand the viewer's understanding of contemporary health problems. In the process, I argue, they advance knowledge as a tool for bridging the divide between public and private - uniting viewers, medical professionals, and government officials in the fight against illnesses like tuberculosis, cancer, and syphilis. This

[2] See Allan M. Brandt, *No Magic Bullet: A Social History of Venereal Disease in the United States Since 1880* (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1985) and Sander L. Gilman, *Disease and Representation: Images of Illness from Madness to AIDS* (Ithaca: Cornell Univ. Press, 1988).

approach, however, was not unproblematic. The social and physical ideals these posters envision reveal deeply embedded cultural anxieties concerning disease and its regulation in specific populations. Moreover, they convey a complex and somewhat contradictory picture of the role that vision could play in advancing the nation's knowledge of health problems. While visualizing specific social and physical ideals, for instance, the posters simultaneously reject vision as a viable tool for diagnosing and treating illness. In doing so, these posters nuance our understanding of the relationship between visual culture and public health, one that acknowledges the multiple and often competing goals of their commissioning agencies.

WPA Posters and Public Health

The WPA produced health related posters for a number of government agencies, including the U.S. Public Health Service and state, city, and county health departments. These agencies commissioned the posters to address a variety of concerns regarding the depression and its effects on the health of the nation's citizens. Although the mortality rates associated with many diseases remained static throughout the 1930s, and even declined in some parts of the country, studies suggested that the majority of Americans – all but the wealthiest – lacked appropriate medical care.[3] Moreover, health professionals reported that individuals who had suffered the greatest drop in their standard of living experienced a substantial increase in illness. A survey conducted between 1935 and 1936 by the U.S. Public

[3] Jonathan Engel, *Doctors and Reformers: Discussion and Debate over Health Policy, 1925-1950*. Social Problems and Social Issues (Columbia, SC: Univ. of South Carolina Press, 2002), 65, 100-1, 110.

Health Service, for instance, revealed that the rate of disabling illness was sixty-eight percent higher among those on relief than those with an annual family income over 3000 dollars.[4]

As health professionals asserted, these illnesses resulted in a loss of individual income. They also posed a variety of social and economic costs to the nation. Businesses and industry suffered decreases in productivity due to sick workers, threatening an already troubled economic environment. Likewise, illness undermined national unity by adding to the despair and dislocation many were experiencing due to the depression.

As public health officials organized to address this crisis, they began to assess their ability to connect with and influence the public, which was crucial for encouraging social literacy. Some, including Surgeon General Hugh Smith Cumming, were critical of prior outreach efforts. As Cumming maintained, many Americans were not benefiting from the knowledge of public health officials, a reality he described as a "defect in our social relationships."[5] Addressing this problem, health officials began to expand and improve their outreach initiatives, exploring the possibilities of mass education and developing techniques to evaluate their programs.

Posters played a significant role in these educational campaigns. As specialists maintained, posters and other forms of mass communication were an effective way of capturing the public's attention, increasing social awareness, and securing support for public

---

[4] Josephine Roche, "Medical Care as a Public Health Function," *American Journal of Public Health* 27 no. 12 (December 1937): 1223. See also "6,000,000 Found Ill in Day by Survey of National Health," The *New York Times*, Jan 17, 1938; pg. 2. The *New York Times* article, however, reports this statistic as sixty percent.

[5] Surgeon General Cumming quoted in "We are not Discouraged," *American Journal of Public Health* 25, no. 8 (August 1935): 966.

health initiatives.[6] Pauline Brooks Williamson, a division chief at the Metropolitan Life Insurance Company, asserted that visual materials could reinforce the benefits of certain health practices and assist in establishing long-term patterns of healthy living.[7] Similarly, the public health advocate Savel Zimand wrote that "measures of prevention and control of preventable diseases succeed only as rapidly as public opinion is ready to support these measures." Mass education, he argued, helps build an "informed public opinion" and encourages community support.[8]

Working to educate and mobilize the public, health professionals displayed WPA posters in a variety of venues throughout the United States, including clinics, health departments, schools, libraries, and community centers.[9] According to FAP progress reports, some of these posters were included in health related exhibitions.[10] Exhibition development was discussed repeatedly in journals and books published during the New Deal. Health educators suggested that a well conceived exhibition had the power to attract and hold the attention of the general public, making it a valuable medium for conveying health information. As members of the American Public Health Association's Committee on the

---

[6] See W. P. Shepard, "Recent Progress in Health Education," *American Journal of Public Health* 27, no. 5 (May 1937): 457. See also Sophia S. Halsted, "The Nutritionist in a City Public Health Program," *American Journal of Public Health* 28, no. 7 (July 1938): 853.

[7] See Pauline Brooks Williamson, "Visual Education for Schools," *American Journal of Public Health* 28, no. 3 (March 1938): 278-282. Williamson was Chief of the School Health Bureau Welfare Division at Metropolitan Life Insurance Company.

[8] Savel Zimand quoted in "What to do in Health Education," *American Journal of Public Health* 25, no. 7 (July 1935): 868.

[9] The extant health posters were produced in Illinois, New York, Louisiana, Ohio, Oklahoma, and Pennsylvania. Some commissioning agencies made the posters available to the broader community of health professionals. The December 1936 edition of the *American Journal of Public Health*, for instance, noted that WPA posters could be purchased through the Hempstead, New York Board of Health for ten cents each (less if ordered in quantity). See "'The Health Officer' for November," *American Journal of Public Health* 26, no. 12 (December 1936): 1228.

[10] The New Jersey poster division, for instance, produced a number of exhibition pieces for the New Jersey Department of Health. See, for instance, "Form 35A, February 1, 1937." Box 64, Reports of the Federal Art Project for New York State, New York City, and New Jersey, 1935-39; Records of the Work Projects Administration, Record Group 69; National Archives at College Park, College Park, MD.

American Museum of Hygiene asserted, exhibitions were a new and effective way of communicating "the scientific basis upon which medicine and public health rest."[11]

Knowledge and the Doctor/Patient Relationship

Like the poster produced for the Bureau of Social Hygiene, a majority of the health-related WPA posters appealed to the public by promoting the expertise of medical professionals (figure 1). More specifically, they suggest the medical community has the knowledge and science to diagnose and treat illness if *viewers* take the initiative to seek this expertise. In doing so, these posters establish a reciprocal relationship between the viewer and medical expert. Health, the posters suggest, is contingent on both acting on a specific framework of knowledge.

The WPA posters foreground the expertise of medical professionals in a variety of ways. Many include symbols of their work like microscopes, stethoscopes, lab coats, x-rays, and syringes. Similarly, a cancer poster commissioned by the Women's Field Army features a twin-serpent caduceus entwined around a blood red sword, which is a traditional emblem of the medical community (figure 2). Evoking military rhetoric, this poster pairs this image with text asking viewers to fight cancer "with knowledge." In doing so, the poster suggests that medical expertise is an important weapon against cancer.

Similarly, some emphasize the life-saving technology doctors have at their disposal. A WPA poster produced in New York City, for instance, shows three red arrows inscribed with text that reads "surgery," "x-rays," and "radium" (figure 3). These arrows point to the

[11] Louis I. Dublin and Homer N. Calver, "Health Education for the Millions," *American Journal of Public Health* 28, no. 2 (February, 1938): 118.

left side of the poster, where the treatments are illustrated in black circles. The right to left movement of the arrows, which contradicts normal reading patterns, creates an engaging tension in the image reinforced by the use of strongly contrasting colors. Moreover, the bright red of the arrows is repeated in the text above, linking them with the word "only." This connection implies that surgery, x-rays, and radium – all treatments administered at a doctor's office or clinic - are the *only* safe weapons against cancer. This suggestion is confirmed by text at the bottom of the poster, which tells viewers that they should not trust their lives to other methods.

Finally, the WPA posters promote the medical community's knowledge and expertise by focusing on the advantages of early detection and treatment. A FAP poster from New York suggests that cancer can be cured if diagnosed and treated in its early stages (figure 4). Stressing the need for timely medical attention, the designer repeats the term "early" several times throughout the image. As the poster explains, "*early* is the watchword for cancer control" – "*early* treatment" and "*early* diagnosis" can cure "*early* cancer." This message is reinforced visually through a rising sun in the lower left corner of the poster and a centrally placed rooster, whose open beak appears to be emitting the words "cancer control."

This work, like the majority of the extant WPA posters dealing with cancer, was commissioned by the U.S. Public Health Service in cooperation with the American Society for the Control of Cancer, both of which were committed to educating the public on the benefits of early detection and treatment. Cancer had become a primary cause of death as the mortality rates from infectious diseases declined and Americans began to live longer.[12] As

[12] By the late 1920s, death rates from communicable diseases had declined substantially. John Duffy, *The Sanitarians: A History of American Public Health* (Urbana: Univ. of Illinois Press, 1990), 235, 263. See also

cancer assumed a prominent place in the pantheon of public health concerns, the federal government increased its subsidies for cancer control and research. Title VI of the Social Security Act provided funds to states for the creation of new cancer programs, increasing the number of state initiatives from three to sixteen between 1935 and 1940.[13] Similarly, the National Cancer Institute Act of 1937 authorized the U.S. Public Health Service to create a research institute dedicated to the diagnosis, prevention, and treatment of the disease.[14] Along with these initiatives, health organizations began intensive campaigns to educate the public about cancer and its treatment. As the Association of Schools of Public Health explained, these agencies designed their educational campaigns to "encourage early diagnosis and treatment, to supplant misconceptions with helpful knowledge, and to overcome resort to quackery."[15] This stance resonates with statements issued by the American Society for the Control of Cancer, which took a leading role in cancer education during the period.[16] As the Society asserted, cancer could be managed if individuals were taught the danger signals, responded to symptoms by visiting a physician, and agreed to treatment.[17]

The emphasis on early diagnosis and treatment, however, was not limited to educational campaigns dealing with cancer. A poster commissioned by the Chicago Municipal Tuberculosis Sanitarium encourages viewers to get tested "now" rather than later

---

Nancy Tomes, *The Gospel of Germs: Men, Women, and the Microbe in American Life* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard Univ. Press, 1998), 242.

[13] Engel, *Doctors and Reformers*, 151.

[14] "The National Cancer Institute," *American Journal of Public Health* 27, no. 12 (December 1937): 1288. See also Bert Hansen, *Picturing Medical Progress from Pasteur to Polio: A History of Mass Media Images and Popular Attitudes in America* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers Univ. Press, 2009), 217. This research institute was established in Bethesda, Maryland.

[15] Association of Schools of Public Health, "The Need for Intensive Educational Campaigns in Cancer," *Public Health Reports* 55, no. 15 (April 12, 1940): 653.

[16] Duffy, *The Sanitarians*, 264.

[17] Kirsten Gardner, *Early Detection: Women, Cancer, and Awareness Campaigns in the Twentieth-Century United States* (Chapel Hill: Univ. of North Carolina Press, 2006), 24.

(figure 5). This poster depicts a robust girl with a smile on her face and her arms extended in a gesture of triumph. The text surrounding the girl explains that good grades and good habits go together, suggesting this young woman is a model of behavior who has accomplished both. In pairing this claim with text that tells viewers to get a test, the poster implies that tuberculosis testing should be a part of one's routine, a habit that will lead to health and success.[18] The poster also proposes that bodily health and academic accomplishment are contingent on the expertise of medical professionals, a suggestion reinforced by the doctors' names at the bottom of the poster.

In promoting early detection, this poster plays to the strengths of the medical community. Prior to the early 1880s, physicians did not consider tuberculosis contagious. Rather, they believed the disease was hereditary and could be triggered by a particular environment or lifestyle.[19] Doctors claimed, for instance, that inclement weather could threaten the health of an individual predisposed to the disease.[20] Likewise, certain occupations were thought to encourage tuberculosis, including the more sedentary professions of law, ministry, and teaching. Robert Koch repudiated these notions with the discovery of the tubercle bacillus in 1882. While health professionals continued to assert that bad environments and factors like malnutrition could exacerbate the disease, Koch's work proved

[18] The historian James C. Whorton notes that the equation of health with professional achievement was common in advertisements of the 1920s and 1930s, although these advertisements differed in the health practices they endorsed. See James C. Whorton, "Eating to Win," in *Fitness in American Culture: Images of Health, Sport, and the Body, 1830-1940*, ed. Kathryn Grover (Amherst: Univ. of Massachusetts Press, 1989), 110.
[19] See Barbara Bates, *Bargaining for Life: A Social History of Tuberculosis, 1876-1938* (Philadelphia: Univ. of Pennsylvania Press, 1992), 328; Duffy, *The Sanitarians*, 179, 198; and Sheila M. Rothman, *Living in the Shadow of Death: Tuberculosis and the Social Experience of Illness in American History* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins Univ. Press, 1995), 3.
[20] Rothman, *Living in the Shadow of Death*, 4.

that the tubercle bacillus was the root of the problem.[21] This breakthrough inspired new ways of detecting and combating tuberculosis, which came to be understood as communicable and preventable. By the late 1930s, skin tests and x-rays were widely available and had improved the medical profession's ability to diagnose the disease in its early stages.[22]

Early detection was particularly important for treating tuberculosis because researchers had not found a vaccine or drug to eradicate the disease.[23] Infected patients often entered a sanitarium, like the one commissioning this WPA poster, where they were treated with prolonged rest, a special diet, and fresh air. Although some recovered, others did not. Consequently, most health campaigns focused their efforts on preventing contagion and identifying cases in their early stages, when the chances of survival were greater.[24] The WPA posters, therefore, were consistent with educational materials produced by organizations like the National Tuberculosis Association (NTA), which emphasized the benefits of early detection and treatment. As the NTA explained, "To go to the doctor promptly because of a cough that hangs on, loss of weight, or fatigue, is good; to go to him before these evidences of actual danger appear is still better. It pushes the fight back nearer to its source. Modern weapons, such as the tuberculin test and the X-ray, together with modern ways of using these weapons practically and economically must be made known to, and accepted by, the people if

[21] See, Bates, *Bargaining for Life*, 328.
[22] See Tomes, *Gospel of Germs*, 239; and Bates, *Bargaining for Life*, 328. See also Louis I. Dublin, "No More Tuberculosis by 1960!" *Survey Graphic* 30, no. 1 (January 1941): 30.
[23] See Tomes, *Gospel of Germs*, 115. See also Bates, *Bargaining for Life*, 328, 331.
[24] As the Surgeon General Thomas Parran explained, the only way to prevent new cases was to find tuberculosis "early when it is easy to cure." Thomas Parran, "No Defense for Any of Us," *Survey Graphic* 27, no. 4 (April 1938): 249.

we are to clinch the fight."[25] For the NTA, this approach represented a way to present the "modern" facts and inspire a respect for medical science.[26]

In emphasizing early detection and treatment, therefore, the WPA poster was acknowledging the boundaries of medical knowledge and playing to the profession's expertise. It was also engaging recent shifts in health education. With the advent of the "new public health" movement during the Progressive Era, specialists began to reconsider earlier approaches, which focused primarily on environmental factors and hygiene. Inspired by medical advances and a growing confidence in the ability of health professionals, these officials began to foreground the importance of doctors and medical researchers.[27] As historian John Duffy has explained, "science rather than sanitation now seemed to be the solution to sickness and disease."[28]

Specialists recognized, however, that medical knowledge alone was not enough to address contemporary health issues. The successful implementation of this expertise depended on public participation, which the posters' emphasis on early detection encouraged by shifting much of the responsibility for controlling and potentially curing illness onto the viewer. As historian Kirsten Gardner has noted, "[e]ducational campaigns never undermined the power of the physician to cure the disease and instead placed the burden of detection on individual behavior."[29] By placing the responsibility for seeking early treatment on the viewer, the WPA posters downplay any role physicians might share in negative medical outcomes. Conversely, they suggest that a positive resolution to health problems like cancer

[25] "Same Slogan but Different Emphasis," *American Journal of Public Health* 26, no. 3 (March 1936): 295.
[26] "Fight Tuberculosis with Modern Methods," *American Journal of Public Health* 25, no. 2 (February 1935): 217-8.
[27] Tomes, *Gospel of Germs*, 239.
[28] Duffy, *The Sanitarians*, 196.
[29] Gardner, *Early Detection*, 12, 35, 105.

and tuberculosis necessitates the participation of both medical experts and viewers, who are asked to act on knowledge gleaned from the posters.

Designs for Health

WPA designers used a variety of graphic techniques to enhance social literacy and promote the benefits of medical knowledge. Like other WPA posters, these works drew from a variety of pictorial and stylistic sources, from abstraction and cartoons to Otto Neurath's system of typographic communication. All, however, worked to educate the viewer and reduce the fear and stigma surrounding disease through designs that appeal to both the intellect and emotion. As the following discussion indicates, contemporaries considered this approach an important way of engaging viewers and directing them toward socially productive ends.

In promoting the benefits of early detection, a number of WPA artists gravitated toward streamlined and geometric forms, which suggest the medical community offers a modern approach to preventing and treating illness. The cancer poster commissioned by the U.S. Public Health Service and the American Society for the Control of Cancer, for instance, showcases a limited palette of highly contrasting colors applied in broad, flat planes (figure 4). Two of these planes divide the background on a diagonal that enlivens the poster and heightens its visual appeal. These planes become backdrops for text rendered in sans-serif font, which reinforces the modern aesthetic of the poster and is consistent with the streamlined forms of the rooster and sun.

Similarly, a WPA poster designed by Charles Verschuuren utilizes geometric and abstract forms in motivating viewers to see a physician (figure 6). The poster depicts a figure

whose face is composed of various lines and rectangular shapes. The figure, who could be a patient or a doctor dressed in a white lab coat, is surrounded by broad planes of color, bold san-serif text, and various geometric elements, including one that resembles a medical test tube. The assertive text and geometric forms in this poster work to capture the viewer's attention and reinforce the urgency of the message being conveyed. As the poster contends, viewers should tell their physician who they have exposed to syphilis.

Like the syphilis poster discussed earlier, the figure in this work is divided in half (see figure 1). A light brown color links the word "syphilis" with the right side of the man's face, suggesting a connection between the two. As with the other poster, this two-toned rendering hints at something darker below the figure's seemingly healthy and pure exterior. The poster implies, however, that this threat can be allayed with the help of a physician.

Some argued that modern forms like those in this poster made health issues accessible to a general audience. L. C. Messick, Director of Public Health Education in Dover, Delaware, maintained that modern designs were good for alleviating "any atmosphere of gloom and foreboding."[30] Others believed that modern graphics communicated a progressive spirit suitable for addressing science and medicine. Included among this group, the graphic designer Herbert Bayer asserted that modern design "was the most appropriate expression of progress, and… would help people understand the rapid advancements in science and technology."[31]

This streamlined aesthetic, however, was not without its critics. A 1941 essay in the *American Journal of Public Health* stated that new syphilis posters produced by the Public

[30] "They Aim to Please in Delaware," *American Journal of Public Health* 28, no. 6 (June 1938): 777.
[31] Herbert Bayer quoted in R. Roger Remington and Lisa Bodenstedt, *American Modernism: Graphic Design 1920 to 1960* (New Haven, CT: Yale Univ. Press, 2003), 130.

Health Service were “a bit too modernistic” and "arty."[32] While the authors encouraged the elimination of “all mossbacked technics,” they warned health professionals that some audiences were not conditioned to looking at modern art. Because of this, the authors suggested that traditional illustrations might be more effective in conveying health messages.

Exemplifying this debate and the varied preferences of individual designers, the WPA posters employ a range of stylistic techniques to convey the benefits of early diagnosis and treatment. The poster commissioned by the Chicago Municipal Tuberculosis Sanitarium, for instance, uses a cartoon-like figure to embody the benefits of medical knowledge and expertise (figure 5). As some contemporaries maintained, cartoons were a non-threatening way to engage the viewer and broach sensitive subjects. As early as the 1910s, health workers began experimenting with cartoons as a way to educate both children and adults.[33] This practice was perpetuated in subsequent decades and promoted as an effective educational technique in publications of the 1930s and 1940s. A 1941 essay in *Survey Graphic*, for instance, suggested that the cartoon-like quality of the animated film “Goodbye, Mr. Germ” was effective because it taught children about disease without frightening them.[34] Similarly, the use of cartoon-like imagery in the Chicago poster reinforces its optimistic message that tuberculosis testing will lead to success and happiness.

Despite their stylistic differences, these WPA posters suggest that designers embraced the use of emotional appeals in promoting medical science. This approach was consistent

---

[32] D.B. Armstrong and John Lentz, “Publications and Posters,” *American Journal of Public Health* 31, no. 7 (July 1941): 737. See also Erik Hans Krause Papers, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution [Mircofilm Reel 3090, Frame 1218]. An undated, unsigned letter in the Erik Hans Krause papers indicates that Krause’s modern designs (see figures 12 and 20) were the subject of some consternation. Calling the German born Krause a “pocket edition of Hitler,” the author suggested that his abstract posters were grotesque monstrosities incomprehensible to both adults and children.

[33] Tomes, *Gospel of Germs*, 220.

[34] Dublin, “No More Tuberculosis by 1960!” 33.

with statements issued by a number of health professionals, who considered emotional entreaties indispensable for encouraging compliance. As an article in the *American Journal of Public Health* argued, "good health behavior needs motivation." "Our message," the author explained, must "arouse curiosity, enlist sympathy, and impart information which leads to action."[35] Using similar rhetoric, Dr. Iago Galdston claimed that educational materials should convey information while engaging "the innate emotional motives and psychological drives of the individual." They must, he noted, appeal to the audience's emotions by way of his or her intellect.[36]

A WPA poster commissioned by the New York City Department of Corrections exemplifies this ideal in combining statistical information with formal elements designed to elicit emotion (figure 7). As the poster explains, "syphilis strikes one out of ten adults." Reinforcing this fact visually, the work includes ten figures in the bottom right corner of the poster. One of these individuals has been hit by a bolt of black lightening, which descends dramatically from the upper left corner of the poster. The figure struck with syphilis is distinguished from his companions in both color and size, a formal device that heightens both the drama and communicative function of the group.

Like other WPA posters, this work drew from the International System of Typographic Picture Education (ISOTYPE), which was discussed repeatedly in American publications dealing with health related issues and had a substantial influence on graphic

[35] Raymond H. Greenman, "Incentives and Methods in Health Education - Adult Level the Medical Society View," *American Journal of Public Health* 30, no. 10 (October 1940): 1212.
[36] Galdston, "The Psychologic Factors of Health Education," 172.

designers during the 1930s.[37] ISOTYPE was a method of visual communication developed by the Austrian philosopher, sociologist, and political economist Otto Neurath (1882-1945). [38] The system relied on simple, two-dimensional symbols to convey basic facts and quantitative information (see figure 8). As envisioned by Neurath, these symbols could be used alone or combined to create narratives that conveyed relationships among things. They could, for instance, be placed on a map to show geographical distribution or arranged in rows to express statistical relationships. When used in multiples, they were often rendered in contrasting colors to distinguish between particular groups or figures.

In designing his system, Neurath drew from the methods of advertisers. As Neurath explained, "Modern man is conditioned by the cinema and a wealth of illustrations… If one wants to spread social knowledge, one should use means similar to modern advertisements."[39] Like these modern ads, Neurath's educational materials were intended to be understood quickly by individuals who were potentially busy, distracted, or in transit. Rather than selling a product, however, his aim was to promote social awareness or "enlightenment," as a contemporary account described his goal.[40]

For Neurath, science, politics, and art were intimately connected. As he argued, "visual impressions" had become an important part of the modern era and could assist the

---

[37] See "Pictorial Diagrams," *American Journal of Public Health* 25, no. 1 (January 1935): 94; and "Otto Neurath, Social Showman," *American Journal of Public Health* 27, no. 1 (January 1937): 81. The January 1935 edition of the *American Journal of Public Health* promoted Neurath's work and instructed its readers on where to find examples of diagrams in Neurath's style. Two years later, the same journal told its readership that the ISOTYPE was an international language that bridged all education levels and could be used to convey a variety of messages, making it "peculiarly adapted for popular health education."

[38] This pictorial language was called the Vienna Method of Pictorial Statistics initially. It was renamed the International System of Typographic Picture Education (ISOTYPE) in 1935.

[39] Otto Neurath quoted in Robert J. Leonard, "'Seeing is Believing': Otto Neurath, Graphic Art, and the Social Order," *History of Political Economy* 31(1999 Supplement): 466.

[40] "Social Showman," *Survey Graphic* 25, no. 11 (November 1936): 618.

broader public in understanding a variety of scientific and social issues. According to Neurath, these pictographs constituted an easily interpreted language that could bridge national borders and appeal to the uneducated and illiterate better than text.[41] Neurath believed ISOTYPES had the potential to collapse social and geographic barriers, "humanizing and democratizing the world of knowledge and intellectual activity."[42] They could also expand the public's social awareness, influencing an individual's actions and ultimately transforming the social order.[43]

Neurath believed the ISOTYPE held particular promise for the field of public health and promoted the system in the United States. He wrote several articles discussing the use of pictographs in health education and completed a book titled *Health Education by Isotype*, which was published by the American Public Health Association in 1939.[44] Neurath and his associate Marie Reidemeister also visited the United States in late 1936 and early 1937 to consult with public health professionals, including officials from the New York Public Schools, the New York Maternity Center, and the National Tuberculosis Association.[45] During this trip, Neurath and Reidemeister attended the American Public Health Association's 1936 annual conference in New Orleans, where Neurath presented a paper at a meeting of the Health Education Section.[46]

---

[41] Nader Vossoughian and D'Laine Camp, *Otto Neurath: The Language of the Global Polis* (Rotterdam: NAi Publishers, 2008), 49, 59, 87.
[42] See Otto Neurath, "Visual Education: A New Language," *Survey Graphic* 26, no. 1 (January 1937): 25-8.
[43] Vossoughian and Camp, *Otto Neurath*, 57-8.
[44] For an example of an article, see Neurath, "Visual Education: A New Language."
[45] "Otto Neurath, Social Showman," 81.
[46] See "Three Important Events," *American Journal of Public Health* 26, no. 10 (October 1936): 1038. See also "Otto Neurath, Social Showman," 81.

As Neurath's method grew in popularity, variations emerged that adhered to his aesthetic while abandoning some of the principles on which that aesthetic was based.[47] The designer Rudolf Modley, for instance, developed pictograms based on Neurath's graphics while rejecting some of the philosophies underlying his method. Modley, who had worked with Neurath in Vienna, expressed reservations about the feasibility of developing an *international* picture language. Describing Neurath's goal as utopian, Modley argued that pictorial symbols should be designed with specific audiences in mind. He claimed that these symbols must be developed by "national schools" and accepted by each country's inhabitants before an international system could be created from the best elements of each local initiative.[48]

Adapting Neurath's system to the American context, Modley established Pictorial Statistics Incorporated in New York City and began creating graphics for organizations and agencies throughout the United States, including the U.S. Public Health Service. Surgeon General Thomas Parran wrote a groundbreaking article on syphilis that featured a number of diagrams designed by Pictorial Statistics, including a possible precedent for the FAP syphilis poster mentioned previously (figures 7 and 9).[49] Like the FAP poster, Modley's design shows an arrow pointing to one of ten men in the image, with the accompanying text explaining that "syphilis strikes one out of every 10 adults." In both, the diseased man is rendered in white to distinguish him from his companions.

---

[47] See D.B. Armstrong and John Lentz, "Pictographs – "Handle with Care," *American Journal of Public Health* 31, no. 5 (May 1941): 512.
[48] Rudolph Modley quoted by Evart G. Routzahn in a review of Modley's 1937 book *How to Use Pictorial Statistics*. Evart G. Routzahn, "How to Use Pictorial Statistics – By Rudolf Modley," *American Journal of Public Health* 28, no. 6 (June 1938): 785-6. See also Charles R. Crawley, "From Charts to Glyphs: Rudolf Modley's Contribution to Visual Communication," *Technical Communication* 41, iss. 1 (February 1994): 20.
[49] See Thomas Parran, "The Next Great Plague to Go," *Survey Graphic* 25 no. 7 (July 1936): 406.

In using pictograms to engage the viewer on an emotional level, the designer of the FAP poster went further than Modley in modifying Neurath's visual program. The poster exemplifies a trend described in a 1941 issue of the *American Journal of Public Health*, which explained that the use of pictographics had moved beyond statistical interpretation to "dramatize facts, ideas, and situations."[50] The FAP designer transformed the arrow in Modley's diagram into a lightning bolt and organized the poster on a diagonal, creating a striking composition accentuated by strongly contrasting colors. While Modley acknowledged the emotional potential of images, his composition shows a stricter adherence to the systematic and dispassionate approach advocated by Neurath, who was committed to scientific empiricism and rejected the use of sentiment or emotion in his work.[51]

The FAP poster also exhibits a reliance on text that both Neurath and Modley sought to minimize. Neurath and Modley maintained that visuals should be the primary medium for communication in graphic design, with text playing a secondary role if any. As Neurath explained, "visual aids do not merely act as illustrations or as eye-bait…they are part of the explanations themselves."[52] Similarly, Modley claimed that a good pictograph can tell a story without the aid of text.[53] While the written word has a function in Modley's syphilis diagram, the horizontal line of figures dominates the composition visually. This differs from the FAP poster, in which text plays a prominent role. Not only does it fill a larger percentage of the picture plane than the text in Modley's illustration, it is rendered in bolder font, heightening

[50] Armstrong and Lentz, "Pictographs – 'Handle with Care,'" 512.
[51] See Leonard, "Seeing is Believing," 471. See also Vossoughian and Camp, *Otto Neurath*, 132.
[52] Otto Neurath quoted in Leonard, "'Seeing is Believing," 452.
[53] See Armstrong and Lentz, "Pictographs – 'Handle with Care,'" 512.

its visual appeal. The result is a dramatic composition that uses both text and imagery to convey information and engage the viewer's emotions.

There was, however, some disagreement over the specific emotions that should be encouraged by educational materials like the WPA posters. A number of health professionals believed that the cultivation of fear was necessary for ensuring compliance. Thomas Parran, for instance, maintained that "[t]he only good patient is the frightened patient…"[54] Using fear to incite action and instill a sense of responsibility in the public, the educational materials commissioned by these individuals highlighted, among other things, the threat of misery or death that accompanied illness.[55] Others, however, argued that fear-based appeals were counterproductive and adopted a more positive tone in their educational materials.[56] For these individuals, the goal was to represent the menace of disease without intimidating or discouraging the viewer. *Hygeia*, a health magazine published by the American Medical Association, explained that educational materials should reassure rather than frighten, avoid creating a "neurotic" concern with disease, encourage optimism without obscuring the seriousness of health issues, and replace fear and ignorance with "an attitude of alertness and courageous intelligence."[57]

The majority of the extant WPA posters adhere to this latter, more optimistic approach. In combining dramatic and emotionally engaging elements with factual information, these posters worked to empower viewers and incite action rather than anxiety.

---

[54] Parran quoted in Suzanne Poirier, *Chicago's War on Syphilis, 1937-40: The Times, the Trib, and the Clap Doctor. With an Epilogue on Issues and Attitudes in the Time of AIDS* (Urbana: Univ. of Illinois Press, 1995), 158.
[55] Ibid., 13, 159.
[56] Tomes, *Gospel of Germs*, 220, 243.
[57] D. B. Armstrong and John Lentz, "By Way of Evaluation," *American Journal of Public Health* 31, no. 3 (March 1941): 271.

Similarly, while warning the public on the dangers of particular illnesses, they provide reassurance by suggesting the medical profession can offer both treatment and information.

In keeping with this approach, none of the WPA posters represents figures with a high degree of naturalism. Although a lack of naturalism is characteristic of many silk-screens, it can also be seen as distancing device. The use of flat and abstracted bodies, as well as cartoon-like forms, allows viewers to disassociate themselves from the figures illustrated. These figures have the potential to be less intimidating than those represented with a high degree of naturalism.

Likewise, while the extant WPA posters allude to illness as a potential threat, they are rarely explicit in illustrating the symptoms of disease, a tactic that reinforces the need for medical testing and reduces the fear and stigma associated with illness. For example, the syphilis poster by Charles Verschuuren makes an oblique reference to the presence of infection by linking the man's face with the word syphilis through flat planes of light-brown color (figure 6). The poster, however, does not represent outward signs of disease. In downplaying these visible markers, the poster universalizes the problem and underscores the need for medical treatment. It also avoids encumbering the viewer with fear.

Similarly, a tuberculosis poster from Chicago externalizes the danger illness poses and avoids inscribing the tubercular body with signs of pathology (figure 10). The poster depicts three runners making their way toward a goal that reads "GOOD HEALTH." In the process, each must overcome a hurdle labeled malnutrition, heart disease, and tuberculosis respectively. Although all of these health problems represent an impediment, tuberculosis is the only illness that actually stops a runner, who is shown with his arms outstretched as he

falls to the ground. This man, however, appears to be a model of physical health despite stumbling. He is muscular and tan, with no outward signs of infection.

In linking medical testing with good health, the poster points to a shift in the health profession's understanding of tuberculosis and the role that medical technology played in its detection. Before the discovery of the tubercle bacillus, doctors based their diagnosis on observable physical symptoms like coughs and fever.[58] Similarly, the progression of tuberculosis was verified through its outward inscription on the body. Doctors were trained to look for an initial "ruddiness" of the face, which would evolve to a "deathlike paleness," before proceeding to the "'glowing hectic flush'" that characterized the final stage of the disease.[59] Because symptoms did not appear immediately, medical professionals were rarely able to detect or treat tuberculosis in its early stages.[60] This changed as their knowledge of the disease advanced and skin tests and x-rays became widely available.[61]

The seemingly healthy figure in the WPA poster underscores the diagnostic advantages of laboratory testing and medical science over physical observation. In doing so, it is consistent with other outreach materials produced during the period. A poster commissioned by the National Tuberculosis Association, for instance, emphasizes the lack of physical symptoms characteristic of the disease in its early stages (figure 11). The poster features the upper half of a muscular and seemingly robust man with his hands on his hips and elbows extended. Blocks of text above and below the figure explain that an X-ray will detect tuberculosis despite the fact that "healthy looks" can hide the disease. The words "healthy

---

[58] Rothman, *Living in the Shadow of Death*, 3, 6.
[59] Ibid., 4.
[60] Bates, *Bargaining for Life*, 328.
[61] See Tomes, *Gospel of Germs*, 239; Bates, *Bargaining for Life*, 328; and Dublin, "No More Tuberculosis by 1960!" 30.

looks" and "you" are written in cursive font that contrasts with the modern, san-serif typeface of the word "x-ray," accentuating a distinction between the two methods of diagnosis. This understanding is reinforced by an x-ray depicted in the lower left corner of the poster. The x-ray shows two spots rendered in the same color of red as the man, linking the two and exposing the deception in his healthy appearance. This work, like the WPA poster, promotes medical science as a path to health and fitness.

In addition to confirming the need for medical treatment, the seemingly healthy figure in the WPA poster works to reduce the fear and stigma surrounding disease. Unlike earlier health campaigns, which often depicted victims as isolated and easily recognized by their outward symptoms, this tuberculosis poster avoids stigmatizing the man by representing him as ailing or disfigured.[62] Rather, it normalizes a discussion of disease by equating the man with an athlete and health to a race that can be won or lost.

The stigma surrounding disease is openly confronted in several WPA posters, including one from Rochester, New York (figure 12). This poster depicts a man and a woman with their heads bowed in disgrace. The stylized figures are rendered in black, signifying the shame and fear that text below indicates may destroy their future. The poster attempts to relieve the stigma associated with syphilis by supplanting it with a new concern: the destruction of health and happiness that could occur if the viewer fails to get a blood test. As the poster implies, it is not the disease that has the potential for destruction but a lack of action due to "false" anxieties.

This poster, in addressing the stigma associated with syphilis, worked to transcend the moralism pervading earlier syphilis campaigns. Endorsing a new paradigm in public health

[62] See Brandt, *No Magic Bullet*, 184. See also Poirier, *Chicago's War on Syphilis*, 16.

education, Thomas Parran and other health officials suggested that syphilis could only be defeated if it was discussed openly with nomenclature that did not imply judgment.[63] According to the *American Journal of Public Health*, euphemistic references like "social disease" and "social hygiene," which had appeared in earlier campaigns, handicapped the fight against syphilis by implying that the problem was moral rather than physical.[64] In using the term "syphilis" and addressing the disease openly, therefore, this and other WPA posters worked to normalize a subject many considered unfit for polite conversation.[65] In doing so, they were following the directive of health officials like Parran, who asserted that syphilis needed to be addressed in medical and scientific terms in the same "ranks as cancer, tuberculosis, and pneumonia."[66]

Self and Society

In working to educate the public and promote the benefits of medical knowledge, these posters engaged a number of concerns regarding the relationship between public and private during the New Deal. Specifically, the posters assisted public officials in negotiating critiques concerning the government's involvement in health care and the private lives of Americans. Likewise, they addressed anxieties over the maintenance of traditional norms and values, which reformers linked to national stability. In doing so, these posters worked to shape the viewer's social and political knowledge in ways that extend beyond specific health concerns.

---

[63] Brandt, *No Magic Bullet*, 135-6, 141.
[64] "Misrepresenting a Public Health Situation," *American Journal of Public Health* 26, no. 3 (March 1936): 290. See also Brandt, *No Magic Bullet*, 137.
[65] Poirier suggests that syphilis was a taboo subject in many circles as late as 1937. Poirier, *Chicago's War on Syphilis*, 6.
[66] Thomas Parran quoted in Poirier, *Chicago's War on Syphilis*, 20. See also Brandt, *No Magic Bullet*, 136.

These posters engaged widespread debates over the government's role in health care by foregrounding the expertise of medical professionals and the national nature of the health problem. Conservative doctors led by the American Medical Association were critical of the government's involvement in public health, which had increased substantially during the Depression.[67] These medical professionals argued that government intervention, taken too far, would be tantamount to soviet-style collectivism, destroying the autonomy of the medical profession, damaging the traditional doctor and patient relationship, and ultimately undermining the quality of medical care.[68] Foremost among their concerns was the prospect of a nationalized health insurance plan, the merits of which was under debate during the New Deal years. Some, however, also expressed unease about the boundaries between public health care and private medicine. While most doctors accepted the health department's traditional role in disease prevention, many resisted the government's involvement in medical care for any but the indigent.[69] As the President of the New York Medical Society explained: "In general we believe that treatment of all conditions, when patients are not under custodial care by governments, should be referred to private physicians. For instance, competitive treatment clinics should be avoided in venereal disease work. Diagnostic clinics? Yes! Treatment-No!"[70]

Public health officials responded in a variety of ways to these and other concerns over the government's involvement in health care. Some claimed that their initiatives were designed to complement those of the medical profession and described the two groups as

---

[67] Brandt, *No Magic Bullet*, 144, 160.
[68] Engel, *Doctors and Reformers*, 70.
[69] Ibid., 119. See also Paul Starr, *The Social Transformation of American Medicine* (New York: Basic Books, 1982), 271.
[70] Charles H. Goodrich, "The Health Department in the Field of Medicine from the Standpoint of a Private Practitioner," *American Journal of Public Health* 28, no. 8 (August 1938): 926.

partners in the pursuit of better health.[71] Others stressed the national nature of health-related issues. As these officials argued, all Americans shouldered the responsibility for illness in the form of economic costs and lost productivity, among other things. Moreover, many emphasized the fact that diseases like tuberculosis can be transmitted from person to person, linking an individual's health and behavior to the wellbeing of the nation as a whole.[72]

Finally, countering critiques that the government's involvement in health care was socialistic or totalitarian, public health officials stressed the fact that their programs and educational materials aligned with the principles of democracy. Thomas Parran, evoking the Declaration of Independence, asserted that health protection is the "inalienable right" of all American citizens.[73] Similarly, an editorial in the *American Journal of Public Health* suggested that health education was consistent with the democratic principles of a free society dedicated to individual initiative and enterprise. As the authors explained, health education "plays a vital part in sustaining and justifying our way of living" and is the best defense against "the growing trends toward socialization, collectivism, dictatorship and totalitarianism, both abroad and at home."[74]

The WPA posters assisted officials in negotiating concerns over the government's involvement in public health in a variety of ways. The posters, for example, worked to alleviate concerns over the mandate of public health departments by promoting the knowledge and expertise of the medical community. They also focus on specific diseases and issues

---

[71] See, for instance, R. H. Riley, "The Health Department in the Field of Medicine," *American Journal of Public Health* 28, no. 3 (March 1938): 303.
[72] See Tomes, *Gospel of Germs*, 115, 127-9, 134.
[73] Parran, "No Defense for Any of Us," 251.
[74] D. B. Armstrong and John Lentz, "An 'Editorialette:' Health Education in a Free Society," *American Journal of Public Health* 31, no. 12 (December 1941): 1318.

rather than broad-based health reforms. As historian Paul Starr has noted, narrowing the objectives of public health campaigns made them more politically acceptable.[75]

Not surprisingly, the WPA posters address issues that presented the medical community in the best light. Fewer than five extant WPA posters, for instance, mention gonorrhea compared to the more than thirty focusing on syphilis. A growing confidence in the medical profession's ability to detect and treat syphilis was a major impetus behind the national anti-syphilis campaign.[76] Gonorrhea, in contrast, was largely absent from public discourse although it was four times more prevalent than syphilis.[77] This absence is due, in part, to the fact that gonorrhea was largely untreatable before the availability of sulfonamides during the early 1940s. Campaigns against the disease, therefore, failed to promote the medical profession to the same degree as those dealing with syphilis.

Reinforcing the legitimacy of government involvement, the posters define public health as a national issue. Referencing the colors of the national flag, many are rendered in red, white, and blue. Others employ war related rhetoric and imagery. The syphilis and gonorrhea poster discussed at the beginning of this chapter references the famous WWI recruitment poster designed by James Montgomery Flagg (figure 1). Likewise, several WPA posters indicate that medical expertise is a "weapon" against illness (see figures 2 and 3).

Similarly, a poster designed by the Chicago FAP, which petitions employers to "enlist employees in a campaign" against the enemy syphilis, equates the battle against disease with war (figure 13). The poster implies that the fight against syphilis is a war being fought on the

---

[75] Starr, *The Social Transformation of American Medicine*, 191, 196, 289. The focus on specific diseases and issues also reflected the increasingly diverse agendas of the government agencies charged with managing public health. See also Tomes, *Gospel of Germs*, 241; and Engel, *Doctors and Reformers*, 94.
[76] Poirier, *Chicago's War on Syphilis*, 6.
[77] Ibid., 154.

home front, a link the artist reinforces visually by including a head clad in a gas mask and battle helmet. Looming over the workers, this figure suggests that syphilis poses an immediate danger. This work embodies an otherwise invisible threat, making disease an ominous "other" that can be identified and potentially defeated.[78] It also reduces the culpability of those infected. The disease itself becomes the enemy rather than the diseased.

In referencing war and appealing to the viewer's sense of patriotism, these WPA posters reinforce rhetoric used by public officials in the New Deal administration. As historian William Leuchtenburg has explained, war and wartime mobilization were common metaphors during the 1930s for the struggle against economic hardship and the deployment of New Deal programs.[79] President Roosevelt, for instance, used war metaphors to discuss the nation's economic situation and garner support for the New Deal.[80] Similarly, Thomas Parran described syphilis as an enemy and explained that "men and munitions are needed on a national scale to deal with the problem."[81]

These war metaphors served a number of purposes in the context of New Deal health campaigns. This rhetoric lent a sense of urgency to the requests made by health officials, who were trying to mobilize Americans to seek early treatment and identify infected partners, among other things. It also suggested that the fight against disease must be united and national in scale, justifying federal involvement in the health of the nation. As health

---

[78] For more discussion of disease as the "other," see: Tomes, *Gospel of Germs*, 117; Poirier, *Chicago's War on Syphilis*, 110, 161; and Gilman, *Disease and Representation*, 262.
[79] William E. Leuchtenburg, *The FDR Years: On Roosevelt and His Legacy* (New York: Columbia Univ. Press, 1995), 35.
[80] Ibid., 60, 70. As Roosevelt stated in his 1933 inaugural address, "the larger purposes will bind upon us all as a sacred obligation with a unity of duty hitherto evoked only in time of armed strife. With this pledge taken, I assume unhesitatingly the leadership of this great army of our people dedicated to a disciplined attack upon our common problem."
[81] Brandt, *No Magic Bullet*, 145.

professionals argued, the proliferation of disease undermined the stability of the nation in the same sense as the invasion of a foreign enemy. As such, both war and disease demanded government management and the compliance of Americans.

Besides appealing to the viewer's sense of patriotism and civic duty, many of the posters reinforce the need for both individual and federal involvement by engaging contemporary concerns over a perceived loss of traditional norms and values. As these works suggest, illness has the potential to undermine normative conceptions of gender and family, which are presented as ideals despite efforts to frame diseases like syphilis in a scientific manner free of moral judgment. This approach increases the viewer's knowledge of these norms at the same time it conveys the broader consequences of illness. As a number of contemporaries asserted, the perpetuation of these norms was essential for countering the depression-era climate of instability and ensuring the future of the nation.

The men depicted in the WPA posters, for instance, represent an ideal that countered the perceived loss of manhood accompanying the unemployment and displacement caused by both the depression and illness. A WPA poster from Chicago illustrates a worker and a doctor in front of industrial smoke stacks (figure 14). Targeting employers, the poster asks the viewer to participate in the fight against syphilis by helping employees obtain blood tests. The doctor on the right side of the poster is taller than the industrial worker, which alludes to his important role in administering the test and "finding" syphilis. Both the doctor and the worker are set against a blue rectangle with a grid inscribed on its surface. This geometric block of color, which separates the industrial smokestacks from the two figures, conveys a sense of modernity appropriate to a medical setting. Although the doctor's height and vertical stance signal his jurisdiction over the scene, both figures are depicted as solid, stoic, and

manly. As historian Barbara Melosh has noted, representations of labor were infused with ideologies of manhood during the Depression.[82] The iconography of the manly worker, which drew from the rhetoric of the American labor movement, was meant to suggest physical strength, mastery, and control over one's destiny. In this and other WPA posters, this ideal worked to engage viewers by offering an alternative to the illness and suffering associated with diseases like syphilis.

Although the WPA posters target men and women equally, men are the only figures illustrated in posters referencing industrial work. When they are shown working, women are employed in domestic jobs, reinforcing traditional divisions of labor. Furthermore, many of the women in these health-related posters are shown with men or children, reinforcing associations between women, marriage, and childbirth. One draws from traditional Madonna and child iconography in illustrating a seated woman with her baby (figure 15). The designer has situated the pair against a blue and black background. Black is used on the bottom and right side of the poster. It is also used for the word "syphilis" located just below the two figures. This repetition of color links the disease with the black background, which surrounds the two-toned child rendered in white and grey. The grey can be seen as a protective barrier that envelopes the child, leaving only its head and a portion of its body exposed. The juxtaposition of grey and white could also foreshadow a future in which the child, if not protected from syphilis, becomes an emaciated and diminished version of its former self. In either case, the poster does not suggest that a syphilitic future is inevitable. The child is, in fact, protected by its mother, whose gaze is fixed on the threat before her. Moreover, the mother is surrounded by a bright blue color, which conveys a sense of optimism that is

[82] See Melosh, *Engendering Culture*, 83-97.

reinforced through text at the bottom of the poster. As this text suggests, your family can be protected by having them examined and treated.

In utilizing the Madonna and child motif, this poster engages widespread concerns over the effects that both the Depression and disease were having on women, children, and families. While the mortality rates among women and infants declined significantly during the first decades of the twentieth century, the onset of the Depression slowed this reduction, a development that troubled some health workers.[83] Public officials saw the health of women and children as integrally linked to the social and economic life of the nation. As Thomas Parran explained, "Better care during pregnancy and childbirth, protection of the health of children, good nutrition and sound physical development in youth, protection against the acute communicable diseases, control of tuberculosis, syphilis, pneumonia, cancer and other catastrophic diseases, all assume an importance to the community as a whole."[84] For Parran and others, illnesses like syphilis undermined the social and economic stability of the nation, generating costs in the form of pensions, relief payments, and reduced productivity, among other things.

Addressing this crisis, health workers expanded their services and educational campaigns targeting women and children.[85] Dr. J. H. Mason Knox explained that the mortality rates of women and infants "can be decreased when leading citizens are informed

---

[83] Milton Kotelchuck, "Safe Mothers, Healthy Babies: Reproductive Health in the Twentieth Century," in *Silent Victories: The History and Practice of Public Health in Twentieth-Century America*, ed. by John W. Ward and Christian Warren (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 2007), 113.
[84] Thomas Parran, "Relationship of Maternal and Child Health to the General Health Program," *American Journal of Public Health* 28, no. 3 (March 1938): 260.
[85] The Social Security Act aided this process by granting federal subsidies for health care.

and organize to promote corrective measures…"[86] Like the WPA poster, many of these educational campaigns stressed the parents', and more often the mother's, responsibility in ensuring the health of their families. Although text on the poster targets a universal audience in stating that "your wife or husband" should be examined, it is a woman shown with the child in the image. This representation reinforced traditional attitudes concerning the responsibilities of motherhood. In his 1906 publication *Infant Mortality: a Social Problem*, George Newman argued that the "problem of infant mortality is not one of sanitation alone, or housing, or indeed of poverty as such, but mainly a question of motherhood."[87] Consistent with this statement, historian Wendy Kozol has observed that the Madonna and child motif was prevalent in work by WPA artists.[88] With its appeal to maternalism, this reference was a poignant way to reinforce traditional gender norms and incite action in the broader public.

Like this work, a number of WPA posters reinforce the importance of family by foregrounding conventional notions of heterosexual marriage. While some reference wives and husbands, such as the poster just described, others illustrate men and women in pairs. One, which encourages the viewer to "prevent syphilis in marriage," depicts a man and a woman standing inside a wedding band (figure 16). Four lines intersect this band and recede into the distance, providing a path for the couple. These lines, which converge on the term "marriage," suggest that the route to matrimony is the prevention of syphilis. Syphilis testing was, in fact, a necessary path to marriage in many states. In 1935, Connecticut passed a law

---

[86] J. H. Mason Knox, Jr., "Reduction of Maternal and Infant Mortality in Rural Areas," *American Journal of Public Health* 25, no. 1 (January 1935): 74.
[87] Newman quoted in Milton Kotelchuck, "Safe Mothers, Healthy Babies," 107.
[88] See Wendy Kozol, "Madonnas of the Fields: Photography, Gender, and 1930s Farm Relief," *Genders* 2, no. 2 (1988): 1-23.

requiring a blood test and physical exam before marriage.[89] By 1938, twenty-six states had enacted laws that prohibited the marriage of infected people, although some of these states only tested prospective grooms.[90]

In presenting marriage as an ideal worthy of protection and promoting specific gender norms, this WPA poster engaged New Deal concerns over the perceived loss of traditional values and practices. Organizations like the American Social Hygiene Association argued that increased rates of venereal disease were due, in part, to the disruption of normative family values. According to the Association, depression-era transience led to neglected children, prostitution, and social instability, all factors contributing to increased rates of infection.[91] This assertion resonated with previous campaigns against syphilis. Venereal diseases had been seen as a symbol of social instability and decay since the late nineteenth century.[92] Moreover, they had long been equated with deviant behavior and immorality.

Health and Social Regulation

As the WPA posters suggest, the process of promoting medical expertise and mobilizing Americans to seek early diagnosis and treatment was not unproblematic. As Sander Gilman and others have noted, representations of health and disease reveal contradictions in our understanding of these issues and engage with social and political conflicts, including those involving race, gender, and class.[93] They can also, I add, expose

[89] Brandt, *No Magic Bullet*, 147.
[90] Poirier, *Chicago's War on Syphilis*, 66.
[91] Brandt, *No Magic Bullet*, 131.
[92] Ibid., 5-6, 120, 131.
[93] See Gilman, *Disease and Representation*, 270. See also Brandt, *No Magic Bullet*, 17.

tensions in the various ways New Deal agencies approached knowledge as a solution to contemporary health issues like cancer, syphilis, and tuberculosis.

In the process of reinforcing the benefits of medical knowledge and working to normalize a discussion of illness through the depiction of outwardly healthy bodies, the WPA posters visualize specific physical and social ideals. These ideals reveal deeply embedded cultural anxieties concerning disease and its regulation in specific populations, including youth, the working class, and minorities. Moreover, they contribute to a complex and occasionally contradictory picture of the role that vision or sight played in advancing the nation's knowledge of health problems during the new Deal. Specifically, while visualizing social and physical ideals meant to educate and motivate viewers, the posters reject vision as a tool for diagnosing and treating illness. In doing so, they expose the sometimes contradictory nature of the culture of knowledge that New Deal officials were trying to promote.

As noted earlier, the fate of the nation and the health of its citizens were closely connected in the minds of health professionals. For this and other reasons, the body became a site of both concern and aspiration, symbolizing the potential for both personal and national renewal. In emphasizing the healthy body, which lacked any signs of illness, the WPA posters provided both a physical and social model for viewers. As Sander Gilman has explained, "physicians often see beautiful patients as exemplary or 'good' patients, patients who will follow doctor's orders and therefore will regain health."[94] For both physicians and public health professionals, the healthy body was sterilized, controlled, and free of outward defects. It did not transgress social norms.

[94] Ibid., 6.

Modern design, when used to represent the human figure, evokes this bodily ideal. As Lisa Cartwright has argued, stylized and flat forms adhered to the modernist demand for clarity and countered a vision of the body as uncontrolled and disobedient.[95] This can be seen in the poster by Charles Verschuuren, which is comprised of lines and geometric forms that give the figure a sense of regularity and solidity (figure 6). Whether this individual symbolizes a doctor or syphilitic patient, he represents an alternative to the disorder and disintegration associated with disease.

The depiction of regulated and controlled bodies, however, was not limited to posters utilizing the "disciplinary techniques of scientific modernism" that Cartwright describes.[96] The cartoon-like figures depicted in a WPA poster from Chicago, for example, also embody this ideal (figure 17). The poster, which is rendered in patriotic hues, shows a group of young people advancing in a military style formation. Commissioned by the Chicago Municipal Tuberculosis Sanitarium, the poster implies that a tuberculosis test facilitates this "march on to health." Countering traditional stereotypes of the frail tubercular patient, the youth appear confident and controlled in their unified procession. This ordering of robust figures suggests the efficiency of a healthy body and the commitment and determination needed to overcome illness. It can also be seen as a metaphor for national health. The bodies of these young people are standardized, with two figures repeated to form the line of eight. Lacking facial features and other distinguishing characteristics, they represent the future of the social body and imply that a viewer's individual strides toward health will have a collective effect on the

[95] Lisa Cartwright, *Screening the Body: Tracing Medicine's Visual Culture* (Minneapolis: Univ. of Minnesota Press, 1995): 91, 108.
[96] Ibid., 108.

strength and wellbeing of the nation. In suggesting a seemingly positive outcome, the poster was an assertion of optimism in a time of crisis.

Despite the government's efforts to distinguish their social initiatives from "foreign" programs and propaganda, the orderly and controlled bodies depicted in this and other WPA posters resemble contemporaneous works produced by the Nazis and Fascists. As historian Wolfgang Schivelbusch has suggested, there were similarities in the visual and verbal rhetoric each regime used to mobilize the public and encourage voluntary participation in social programs.[97] They often, for example, symbolized national strength and cohesion though the illustration of healthy and controlled but active bodies. American designers might have encountered these models in a variety of locations. In Chicago, where many of the WPA health posters were produced, this included the Italian building at the 1933-4 Chicago World's Fair.

While many of the WPA posters appeal to a general audience, the social and physical ideals they illustrate engaged contemporary concerns regarding specific populations. The process of regulation inherent in the illustration of ordered and aestheticized figures, therefore, can be seen as an assertion of control over these groups. Young people, for instance, played a prominent role in the WPA posters and other educational material produced by public health officials. Like the poster just described, a FAP poster from New York City illustrates young adults (figure 18). The poster shows the outline of a young man and woman, who are positioned above text addressing the links between youth and syphilis. This text appeals to a broad audience in suggesting that youth are both at risk and potential risks to

[97] As Schivelbusch has noted, until recently, scholars overlooked similarities between the New Deal, Fascism, and National Socialism. See Wolfgang Schivelbusch, *Three New Deals: Reflections on Roosevelt's America, Mussolini's Italy, and Hitler's Germany, 1933-1939* (New York: Henry Holt and Co., 2006): 14, 98.

others. The poster also encourages young people to consult a reputable physician and know the hazards involved in their coupling, which is symbolized by the overlapping pair in the image. Despite their potential union, the young people are rendered in a linear, streamlined fashion and show no outward signs of disease. Like the youth in the tuberculosis poster just described, they convey a degree of wholesomeness and control that suggests their health and behaviors can be managed with "special attention," as text on the poster suggests (see figure 17).

Concerns over the relationship between youth and syphilis were fostered, in part, by a rising rate of infection among the group and anxieties over youth culture. Reformers associated new music and dances like the "toddle" with a deterioration of sexual mores and imprudent behavior, which they believed made youth more susceptible to sexually transmitted diseases.[98] These anxieties were exacerbated by the fact that urban areas like New York were considered centers of illness and misconduct, sexual and otherwise.[99] Syphilis was a particular concern for the Department of Correction, which commissioned this work and a significant number of the extant syphilis posters produced in New York City. Health professionals suggested that criminals, like some young people, were susceptible to syphilis because of their purportedly deviant and immoral behavior. According to Dr. Morris Fishbein, editor of the *Journal of the American Medical Association*, there "may be from seven to ten out of every hundred persons in the US who are infected [with syphilis], but

[98] See Brandt, *No Magic Bullet*, 126-9.
[99] Ibid., 21.

among the criminal elements and the very dregs of human society from thirty to forty out of every hundred are found to be infected."[100]

This concern over the behavior and bodily health of particular social groups extended to the working class. A number of the extant WPA posters, for instance, address the problem of syphilis among industrial workers. Several of these posters target employers in an attempt to eradicate the disease. A syphilis poster discussed earlier, for example, encourages employers to "find" the disease among their employees (figure 14). A model of compliance, the industrial worker illustrated in this poster submits to a blood test being administered by a doctor. The worker's deference to the doctor is reinforced in the physical relationship between the two. The doctor is taller than the industrial worker and looks down on the man as he administers the test. Moreover, the two figures are remarkably similar in appearance, a link that alludes to their shared goals and values. The worker, in other words, exemplifies a behavioral and physical norm consistent with that of a white, middle-class professional.

Other WPA posters appeal directly to workers in an attempt to educate them on the costs of syphilis. One, which depicts an industrial worker below a giant bucket of molten metal, associates syphilis with a loss of pay (figure 19). It also links the fate of industry and the fate of the worker by suggesting syphilis can be a "menace to industry." The poster, however, implies that the future is in the viewer's hands. The text warns viewers not to "lose their pay" - hopeful phrasing that suggests this conclusion is not inevitable. The man, who appears to be strong and healthy, is also shown at work. He provides a social and physical model for the viewer that suggests a positive outcome for industry.

---

[100] Fishbein quoted in Brandt, *No Magic Bullet,* 157.

The link between industrial workers and syphilis in these WPA posters engages contemporary concerns over the relationship between health and economic stability. With the 1936 appointment of Thomas Parran as United States Surgeon General, syphilis gained a place of prominence in the discourse concerning public health. Equating the health of Americans with the health and prosperity of the nation, Parran and other health officials began to stress the broader social and economic costs of syphilis and other venereal diseases. As they noted, the treatment of patients in private and public clinics cost taxpayers approximately 15 million dollars annually. Moreover, taxpayers spent between 40 and 50 million dollars each year for the care of syphilitics confined to institutions.[101]

Although Parran stressed the fact that syphilis affected all segments of society, his concern over the economic health of the nation led him to target the working class. As he explained, "industrial plants see to it that their machinery is constantly inspected and kept in the very best running order. But all too many of us rely on the natural course of events as regards the most important element in the success of that business, namely, the human machine."[102] Expressing a similar sentiment, President Roosevelt explained that a decrease in syphilis cases "would do much to conserve our human resources and would reduce considerably the present large costs for the community care of the disastrous end-results of the venereal diseases."[103] According to Parran and others, these end-results included

[101] Ibid., 133.
[102] Parran quoted in Brandt, *No Magic Bullet*, 134.
[103] Roosevelt quoted in Brandt, *No Magic Bullet*, 143.

diminished productivity, workplace accidents, and an increased reliance on worker's compensation.[104]

In light of these concerns, it is not surprising that industrial workers occupy a prominent place in the extant health posters referencing specific occupations, whereas white collar workers are absent except for the doctors responsible for treatment. As the statements by Parran and Roosevelt suggest, many considered the "conservation" of human resources crucial to the well-being of American industry and the nation as a whole. For this and other reasons, these syphilis posters attempt to shape the behavior of industrial workers by illustrating both physical and social ideals.

In addition to revealing concerns over youth and the working class, the idealized bodies depicted in the WPA posters reinforced deeply embedded cultural assumptions regarding the relationship between public health and race. Health professionals working during the period were concerned about the high rate of disease among certain minority groups, particularly African Americans. As Thomas Parran explained, African Americans were three to six times more likely to contract tuberculosis and syphilis than other Americans.[105] Similarly, the health professional Louis Dublin noted that the African American "population constitutes our chief reservoir of tuberculosis, and it is among them that the bulk of preventative and curative effort must be directed."[106]

Although health professionals like Parran and Dublin recommended that health campaigns target African Americans, most of the figures in the WPA posters are white or

---

[104] Brandt, *No Magic Bullet,* 133. For a discussion of syphilis testing in Chicago's industrial sector see Poirier, *Chicago's War on Syphilis*, 124-5.
[105] Parran, "No Defense for Any of Us," 198.
[106] Dublin, "No More Tuberculosis by 1960!" 33. Louis I. Dublin was a vice-president and statistician at the Metropolitan Life Insurance Company. See I. S. Falk, "Louis I. Dublin: November 1, 1882-March 7, 1969," *American Journal of Public Health* 59, no. 7 (July 1969): 1083-5.

abstracted to a degree where race is indeterminable. As scholars have explained, the omission of racial difference was characteristic of health campaigns initiated during this period. Historian Suzanne Poirier, for example, has noted that racial minorities did not occupy a visible role in anti-syphilis campaigns even though the public health service hoped to reach these groups and worked with leaders from minority communities.[107] Similarly, the American Cancer Society designed its educational campaigns for white, middle-class Americans, despite articulating a desire to reach a broader population.[108]

The poster by Erik Hans Krause, which shows two stylized figures rendered black, is one of the few exceptions (figure 12). Even this poster, however, reinforces whiteness as an ideal by using black to represent shame and fear rather than racial diversity. Like the majority of the WPA posters, this work subjects all viewers to a white, middle-class standard. As it suggests, a healthy, normative body is not only controlled and free of outward defects, it was white.

In promoting whiteness as a paradigm, these WPA posters expose a number of prejudices governing the understanding of illness. Likewise, they fail to address important social and economic obstacles contributing to high rates of disease among African Americans, including poverty and a lack of medical resources. As health officials like Parran recognized, impoverished living conditions and a lack of social services were important factors contributing to the health problems of African Americans, heightening their susceptibility to various illnesses.[109]

---

[107] Poirier, *Chicago's War on Syphilis*, 144, 199.
[108] Gardner, *Early Detection*, 9, 14.
[109] Parran, "No Defense for Any of Us," 197, 251. See also Claudia Marie Calhoon, "Tuberculosis, Race, and the Delivery of Health Care in Harlem, 1922-1939," *Radical History Review* iss. 80 (Spring 2001): 102.

Although the WPA posters avoid these issues, they place the responsibility for early treatment on the viewer by promoting the advantages of medical science and early diagnosis. This implicates African Americans and other minority groups in the high rates of illness plaguing their communities by implying that their health problems are the result of inactivity, noncompliance, or an inherent defect in their constitution. Syphilis and gonorrhea, in particular, were often associated with disadvantaged groups and seen as signs of moral laxness, despite attempts to reduce the stigma surrounding the diseases.[110] Some health professionals, for example, perpetuated longstanding prejudices concerning black sexuality by attributing the high rate of syphilis among African Americans to unrestrained sexual mores and a lack of morality. Dr. J. H. Mason Knox exemplified this tendency in crediting the high mortality rate of southern blacks to their "lower moral and sanitary standards."[111]

Moreover, some maintained that biological difference heightened the susceptibility of African Americans to disease.[112] As Thomas Parran asserted, years of exposure had enabled white people to develop a heightened immunity to particular diseases. African Americans, he declared, were handicapped by the fact that "tuberculosis and syphilis are relatively new to him as a race; that is, his people have been exposed to these diseases for some three or four generations at the most as compared with exposure of the white race."[113] Similarly, Dr. Kendall Emerson, Director of the National Tuberculosis Association in New York, explained that "there may be biological factors of unrecognized significance" influencing the medical

[110] Poirier, *Chicago's War on Syphilis*, 7, 141.
[111] Knox, "Reduction of Maternal and Infant Mortality in Rural Areas," 73.
[112] See Brandt, *No Magic Bullet*, 158.
[113] Parran, "No Defense for Any of Us," 197.

profession's ability to eliminate tuberculosis, a disease that plagued African American communities.[114]

This discourse, like the healthy and robust bodies depicted in the WPA posters, resonated with aspects of the eugenic movement. The movement, which was popular in both America and Europe during the early decades of the twentieth century, worked to "improve" the genetic quality of the population. To this end, its proponents advocated a wide variety of actions, from euthanasia and the forced sterilization of "unfit" populations to selective reproduction. Although scientists had begun to question the legitimacy of eugenic thought by the 1930s, its underlying ideas continued to have a significant influence on popular culture throughout the period.[115] As historian Susan Currell has explained, contemporaries were worried that the Depression was symptomatic of a broader affliction plaguing the nation and evoked the rhetoric of eugenicists in addressing economic recovery.[116]

Eugenic thought was integrally tied to anxieties over the nation's health. In an effort to eliminate hereditary disease and fashion stronger and healthier citizens, eugenicists concerned themselves with the supposed "fitness" of various populations. In doing so, they linked racial degeneration with physical deformity and disease. Conversely, they associated national health and superiority with white Americans of Anglo-Saxon or Nordic ancestry. These

---

[114] Kendall Emerson, "The Future of the Program for Tuberculosis Control," *American Journal of Public Health* 25, no. 6 (June 1935): 710.

[115] As scholars have noted, eugenic thought was reinforced and spread, among other ways, through printed propaganda and exhibitions like the 1933-4 Chicago World's Fair, the New York World's Fair, and "Eugenics in New Germany," which toured the United States between 1934 and 1935. See Robert W. Rydell, "Fitter Families for Future Firesides': Eugenics Exhibitions between the Wars" in *World of Fairs: The Century-of-Progress Expositions* (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1993): 38-58. See also Susan Currell and Christina Cogdell, eds, *Popular Eugenics: National Efficiency and American Mass Culture in the 1930s* (Athens, OH: Ohio Univ. Press, 2006).

[116] Currell, "Introduction," in *Popular Eugenics,* 3.

notions infiltrated the visual culture of the 1930s and manifested themselves, among other ways, in depictions of white Americans as paragons of fitness and achievement.

Although the WPA posters were not promoting the eugenics movement, the healthy, controlled, and white figures depicted in many of these works embody some of its ideals. The young people in the tuberculosis poster produced in Chicago, for instance, exemplify physical and behavioral norms espoused by eugenicists in both America and Europe (figure 17). White, healthy, and seemingly self-assured, these youth symbolize a prosperous future for the nation, one characterized by stability and advancement. This notion is reinforced through the use of patriotic hues and the steadfast, forward march of these bodies, which signify both personal and national progress.

Similarly, a poster produced by the German born Erik Hans Kraus evokes eugenic ideals in referencing classical traditions (figure 20). The poster, which promotes eye health, shows the profile of a white woman with large eyes and wavy hair. This woman, who is surrounded by a planet and stars, resembles a classical sculpture. Neoclassical references were common in the visual culture of the interwar period and appear in a number of WPA posters.[117] Classicism, which was first popularized in Europe after WWI, epitomized order, clarity, self-mastery, longevity, and balance, as well as physical perfection and purity.[118] It

[117] See Mary K. Coffey, "The American Adonis: A Natural History of the 'Average American' (Man), 1921-1932," in *Popular Eugenics: National Efficiency and American Mass Culture in the 1930s*, ed. Susan Currell and Christina Cogdell (Athens, OH: Ohio Univ. Press, 2006), 192, 194. See also Kerry Soper, "Classical Bodies versus the Criminal Carnival: Eugenics Ideology in 1930s Popular Art," in *Popular Eugenics: National Efficiency and American Mass Culture in the 1930s*, ed. Susan Currell and Christina Cogdell (Athens, OH: Ohio Univ. Press, 2006), 283-5.

[118] Kenneth E. Silver. *Chaos & Classicism: Art in France, Italy, and Germany, 1918-1936* (New York: Guggenheim Museum, 2010): 6-20, 23, 32, 35.

also symbolized democracy and humanism, among other things.[119] In the WPA posters, these associations represented an alternative to the disintegration associated with disease. The classicized body also worked to counter the uncertainty and disorder of the Depression by providing viewers with a symbol of endurance and solidity. In combining the classical figure with modern sans-serif font, the poster by Kraus suggests that these ideals can provide a foundation for prosperity and health in the modern era.

The physical and social ideals presented in this and other WPA posters, however, exist in tension with the suggestion that vision plays a limited role in our ability to diagnose and treat illness. Although Kraus' poster relies on visual elements in working to influence the behavior of viewers and reinforce particular physical and social norms, it implies that we can only glean "information" - not understanding or knowledge – through our eyes. Like other WPA posters, it suggests that true knowledge or insight comes from medical science.[120]

The conflict between vision and knowledge articulated in this work is inherent in many of the WPA posters representing figures. The syphilis poster produced in Chicago, for instance, provides a visual model for the viewer in the idealized and manly industrial worker (figure 14). At the same time, the poster undermines a fixed reading of the man by suggesting he might be infected with syphilis, a disease that can only be found with the help of a doctor

[119] As historian Wolfgang Schivelbusch has argued, although some scholars associated neoclassicism with the Third Reich and other totalitarian regimes, it actually served radically different political systems, including liberal democracy. Schivelbusch, *Three New Deals*, 3-4, 9.

[120] See Erik Hans Krause Papers, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution [Mircofilm Reel 3090, Frames 1273 and 1280]. While Kraus' work does not reference the medical profession specifically, this poster was exhibited alongside others that did, which implied viewers could "take care" of their eyes with medical assistance. This poster, for instance, was shown in a 1938 poster exhibition held at the Federal Art Project Gallery in New York City. It was exhibited with posters addressing cancer and tuberculosis that referenced medical science.

and a blood test. In doing so, the poster acknowledges a possibility that would destabilize the very physical and social ideals it seeks to promote.

The tensions in this and other WPA posters engage, among other things, the numerous and often competing agendas of the public health agencies commissioning them. As the posters suggest, health officials were working to motivate viewers through the production of graphics that communicated a sense of progress, modernity, and optimism. These posters also assisted these officials in negotiating anxieties over the government's role in health care by reinforcing traditional cultural values and norms, promoting the national nature of public health issues, and extolling the benefits of medical experts. In working to educate the public and fulfill these various goals, however, the WPA posters reveal deeply-rooted cultural assumptions and tensions surrounding health and illness. These tensions and ambiguities provide a valuable picture of the complex role that both visual culture and knowledge played in managing public health during the New Deal.

Chapter 5
One Third of the Nation – Ill Housed

In a 1940 article published in *Survey Graphic*, Charles Abrams argued that the government's involvement in public housing was at a crossroads. An expert on urban planning, Abrams asserted that the government must gain the support of the public to ensure the continuation of its housing programs. "Public opinion," he maintained, "must be roused to demand continuing action."[1]

Accompanying the article was a reproduction of a WPA poster that Anthony Velonis designed for the New York City Housing Authority (figure 1). As Abrams suggested, publicity materials like this played an important role in educating the public on the need for planned housing and cultivating support for the government's housing programs.[2] The poster illustrates a modern development with a landscaped courtyard - an urban version of the suburban green spaces that were popular during the period. Above this housing project, which evokes the order and functionality associated with International Style architecture, Velonis depicted a slum overlaid with a large black "X." Dark and crowded compared to the scene below, this illustration shows a woman pushing a baby carriage near two tenement buildings strewn with laundry. It also includes an elevated train and a garbage can full of waste, which symbolize the bad smells, sights, and sounds that coincide with living in the slums. Reinforcing the visual distinction between these two scenes, text on the poster explains that "better housing" is the solution to infant mortality in the slums.

---

[1] Charles Abrams, "Housing and Politics," *Survey Graphic* 29, no. 2 (February 1940): 91.
[2] Ibid., 92.

This poster is one of many the WPA produced to educate Americans on the need for and the benefits of planned housing. As Abrams' article suggests, promotional materials like these played an important role in the government's attempts to generate support for housing reform during the 1930s and early 1940s. While scholars have explored debates shaping the evolution of New Deal housing programs and have addressed some of the social goals prompting the design and construction of different housing developments, few have focused on the visual strategies reformers and government officials used to communicate the need for planned housing to the broader public.[3] Because visuals were such an important part of the promotional materials generated by reformers and public officials, an analysis of their role in housing reform is essential for understanding the diverse ways government agencies worked to shape the public's knowledge of housing issues and secure support for their various projects.

The WPA's housing posters appealed to potential housing tenants, as well as the broader public, by visualizing the physical, social, and aesthetic benefits of planned housing. Linking knowledge and reform, these posters imply that the contemporary housing crisis is a national issue with a straightforward physical solution realized through the expertise of government planners. This approach served an important legitimizing function for the

[3] Elizabeth Bloom Avery's dissertation "New Deal Photography and the Campaign for Public Housing" (Ph.D. diss., Univ. of Chicago, 2002) is one of the only studies to focus on the visual culture of public housing during the New Deal. In this work, Avery argues that depression-era reformers employed a visual rhetoric of "banality" in photographs to depict urban housing as an architectural and economic problem. My project expands our understanding of this understudied topic by bringing new primary sources into the dialogue, sources that differ from the photographs addressed in Avery's study in their decisive *lack* of banality. Conversely, a number of good studies have been published on the social and political history of New Deal housing projects and policies. In addition to Gail Radford's often cited *Modern Housing for America: Policy Struggles in the New Deal Era* (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1996), see: Gwendolyn Wright, *Building the Dream: A Social History of Housing in America* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1981); Christine M. Boyer, *Dreaming the Rational City: The Myth of American City Planning* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1986); and Richard Plunz, *A History of Housing in New York City* (New York: Columbia Univ. Press, 1993).

government. It worked to justify the government's intervention in public housing by using a formal language consistent with suburban ideals and contemporary trends in architecture. Similarly, it assisted officials in negotiating the often contentious debates surrounding the government's housing projects by downplaying broader economic, political, and social factors contributing to the creation of the slums.

Like the health posters discussed in chapter four, the WPA's housing posters link social reform with the specialized knowledge of professionals. In doing so, these posters engage a range of social issues, many of which were discussed in prior chapters. Linking housing reform with nature, good health, and wholesome leisure, among other things, these posters highlight important connections between the government's social initiatives. They also exemplify the diverse ways knowledge was envisioned as a solution to some of the most pressing social issues of the New Deal.

A National Housing Crisis

A majority of the approximately twenty-five extant housing posters were designed and printed by WPA artists in New York City, Cleveland, and Pennsylvania.[4] These posters, which were commissioned by a number of different agencies, engage widespread concerns

[4] Cleveland, which established the country's first public housing authority in 1933, was second only to New York in housing reform during this period. The Cleveland Metropolitan Housing Authority (CMHA), later renamed the Cuyahoga Metropolitan Housing Authority, took an active role in the construction and management of low-rent housing developments after the passing of the Wagner-Steagall Act in 1937. Their responsibilities expanded even further in 1940, when they assumed the administration and maintenance of the Cedar-Central apartments, Outhwaite Homes, and Lakeview Terrace from the Public Works Administration (PWA), two of which are depicted in WPA posters. In 1933, Cleveland also sponsored the first national conference on slum clearance, which was attended by members of the National Association of Housing Officials, among others. Ernst Bohn, the first president of this organization, was a Cleveland City Councilman and instrumental in securing the three PWA housing developments for the city. See Richard Pommer, "The Architecture of Urban Housing in the United States during the Early 1930s," *Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians* 37, no. 4 (December 1978): 244-6.

over a perceived housing crisis exacerbated by the Depression. By the early 1930s, reformers and government officials saw the nation's housing situation as critical. There had been a dramatic drop in new building initiatives since the 1920s, which increased unemployment in thousands of housing related businesses, from real estate firms to industries supplying materials like lumber and cement. Furthermore, defaults on home mortgages and foreclosures were widespread due to the financial crisis, a situation that left many lenders in financial ruin. When President Roosevelt took office in 1933, forty-nine percent of the national home mortgage debt was in default and there were more than 1000 home foreclosures per week.[5] Adding to the problem, many homes were considered a threat to public health and safety, failing to meet "minimum standards of decency."[6]

In an effort to revitalize the housing and home finance industries, the New Deal administration established a number of important housing programs. In 1933 and 1934 respectively, it created the Home Owners Loan Corporation (HOLC) and the Federal Housing Administration (FHA), both of which focused on stimulating the construction and maintenance of individual homes. The HOLC purchased and refinanced mortgages that were in default or foreclosure from mortgage lenders. It also established a neighborhood rating system to assist lenders in determining the risks associated with mortgage financing. Similarly, the FHA increased the maximum allowable mortgage, extended the mortgage terms

[5] Alexandra Griffith Winton, "'A Man's House is his Art': The Walker Art Center's Idea House Project and the Marketing of Domestic Design, 1941-1947," *Journal of Design History* 17, no. 4 (2004): 380-1. See also Radford, *Modern Housing for America*, 76, 88; and Kenneth T. Jackson, *Crabgrass Frontier: The Suburbanization of the United States* (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1985), 193.
[6] Alfred K. Stern, "Housing: A Ten-Year Program," *Survey Graphic* 25, no. 1 (January 1936): 23.

on amortized loans, and provided lenders with federal insurance against mortgage default, all of which encouraged home building and purchases.[7]

The administration also established the Housing Division of the Public Works Administration (PWA) in 1933, which subsidized large-scale public housing for persons of low to moderate income. Initially, the Housing Division offered low-interest loans to limited-dividend corporations for the construction of urban housing. In 1934, however, it discontinued this practice and began its own construction projects, building fifty-one housing developments throughout the country during its four years of existence.[8] With the passing of the Wagner-Steagall Act in 1937, the United States Housing Authority (USHA) took over the administration of the federal housing program. Charged with revitalizing the construction industry, the Housing Authority provided public authorities with low-interest, long-term loans for the construction and maintenance of new housing.

The administration's involvement in public housing was fraught with contention. As one reformer explained, the "need for human shelter is a matter of common knowledge and agreement. But a step beyond this broad generalization takes us into a confusion of facts, prejudices, and heated difference of opinion."[9] A number of housing reformers and government officials argued that government intervention was necessary for reviving the ailing construction industry, reinstating American jobs, and ensuring the economic stability of the nation, among other things. Others, however, maintained that the government's involvement in public housing would create competition for private industry and lead to

---

[7] Neither the HOLC nor the FHA built homes or lent money directly to home owners.
[8] Loula D. Lasker, "Three Years of Public Housing: Where do we go From Here?" *Survey Graphic* 26, no. 2 (February 1937): 78. See also Radford, *Modern Housing for America*, 91; and Lyle John Woodyatt, "The Origins and Evolution of the New Deal Public Housing Program" (Ph.D. diss., Washington Univ., 1968), 143-4.
[9] Stern, "Housing: A Ten Year Program," 23.

unwelcome regulations. There were also debates over the design and quality of the developments, the cost of planned housing, and slum clearance, among other issues. A few even equated the administration's housing initiatives to the social planning of fascist and communist powers in Europe.

To counter these critiques and generate support for the government's housing programs, reformers and officials organized exhibitions, held public lectures, published essays, and produced a variety of promotional materials designed to educate Americans on the availability and benefits of planned housing. As the Associate Editor of *Survey Graphic* explained, "New York is learning, as other cities will, that drastic steps are needed to wake up the conscience of the country." Cultivating demand for good houses, she asserted, is the "best assurance that they will be provided."[10] Similarly, the housing reformer Catherine Bauer argued that the housing crisis could only be relieved by involving individuals who would benefit from building and living in better homes.[11] The WPA posters participated in this process by targeting new housing tenants. They also appealed to the broader public by highlighting the physical and social benefits of planned housing, which reinforced the necessity of both housing reform and government planners.

The Promotion of Urban Planning

As discussed in chapter three, the sublime scenes depicted in the WPA's travel posters promote the knowledge and expertise of the National Park Service by exemplifying its ability to manage the use and preservation of America's natural resources. Similarly, WPA posters

[10] Lasker, "Three Years of Public Housing," 116.
[11] Radford, *Modern Housing for America*, 182.

link urban housing reform with government expertise by highlighting the benefits of modern planning. This approach was consistent with the predilections of housing reformers and officials, many of whom were architects and urban planners.[12] It also engages a wide-spread confidence in the power of knowledge and expertise to address a number of social problems.

As contemporaries asserted, modern planning was critical for ensuring both social stability and national progress. As the reformer Eva Whiting White stated, "conditions which give every evidence of causing lowered vitality and lack of ambition, which put a premium on vice and crime, and challenge our civic life, [should] be replaced by such a development of city planning, zoning, and housing that the next generation shall have, to the full, opportunities for constructive home influences and normal community life."[13] Similarly, an article in *American City* noted that the success and growth of a community, as well as the sense of security and civic pride its residents feel, all depend on "the plan."[14]

In emphasizing the importance of urban planning, which was a relatively new field of specialization, some of the extant WPA posters showcase elevation drawings, blueprints, and models.[15] A poster by Benjamin Sheer, for instance, illustrates an elevation drawing of a modern apartment building on a blue scroll that resembles an architect's blueprint (figure 2). The scroll overlaps an image of brown tenements with exposed bricks and laundry strewn between them. These dingy buildings stand in sharp distinction to the modern structure,

---

[12] See Radford, *Modern Housing for America*, 31. Radford notes that architects and urban planners constituted a large percentage of the housing reformers during the New Deal, whereas physicians and charity workers had initiated many of the earlier efforts in housing reform.

[13] Eva Whiting White quoted in Ronald C. Tobey, *Technology as Freedom: The New Deal and the Electrical Modernization of the American Home* (Berkeley: Univ. of California Press, 1996), 102.

[14] "Visualizing Possible Rural and Urban Transformations through Proper Planning," *The American City* 49 (October 1934): 56.

[15] Although individuals had been concerned with urban planning for some time, it emerged as a professional field in the early 20th century. The first U.S. conference on city planning was held in Washington, DC in 1909.

which is rendered in a bright white that can be seen as symbolizing lightness, cleanliness, and health. Intertwined with the tenements is the shadowy figure of Death, who carries a sickle that slices through the buildings below. Text inscribed on this figure and underneath the modern housing project explains that better housing is "the solution to infant mortality in the slums."

This elevation drawing and blueprint, which represent fundamental elements of the architect's idiom, symbolize both the planning process and its physical result. This approach was endorsed by individuals like the sociologist and political economist Otto Neurath, who encouraged his colleagues to promote the practical and scientific aspects of urban planning. As Neurath argued, the housing problem should be humanized but not in "contradiction to a serious and scientific attitude."[16] Similarly, Charles Abrams explained that "[h]ousing is no longer an emotional issue alone. It has gone past that initial stage. Now, for its fullest measure of success, it requires public familiarity with techniques, procedures, alternatives, methods, norms, and concepts. It requires a public able to distinguish substance from oratory, a public that must know not only why we need housing but what kind of housing, where, at what cost, for whom."[17] Consistent with Abrams assertion, Sheer's poster combines the emotionally charged figure of Death with the language of modern planning. This reinforces the benefits of planned housing, as well as government planners, by communicating what substantive housing looks like and why it is necessary.

---

[16] Otto Neurath, "Visual Representation of Architectural Problems," *Architectural Record* 82, no. 1 (July 1937): 58.

[17] Abrams, "Housing and Politics," 92. Abrams was affiliated with the New York City Housing Authority, which commissioned the poster by Benjamin Sheer.

While this WPA poster promotes the planning process by incorporating an elevation drawing and blueprint, others depict structures that resemble the three-dimensional models popular with reformers, architects, and urban planners during the 1930s. In his poster for the New York City Housing Authority, for instance, Velonis illustrates a scale model of a housing development shown from above (figure 1). Evoking the rationalism and expertise of the architect and planner, this model contrasts with the flat and less substantive line drawing representing the slums. Similarly, a poster produced by Earl Schuler for the Cleveland Metropolitan Housing Authority helps viewers visualize the benefits of planned housing by providing them with a bird's eye view of five model-like structures (figure 3). Schuler has illustrated tiny people on the landscaped grounds surrounding these buildings, an inclusion that highlights the social benefits of the planning process.

Poster designers and housing reformers would have been familiar with three-dimensional models from a variety of sources. In addition to their appearance in advertisements, models were discussed in magazine articles addressing urban planning and architecture. They were also showcased in housing exhibitions, planning meetings, and even plays. A landmark exhibition on International Style architecture, which was held in 1932 at The Museum of Modern Art (MoMA) in New York City, featured a number of models, including one of a housing development by the German architect Otto Haesler. Similarly, in its living newspaper "One Third of a Nation," the Federal Theater Project paraded scale models of developments across the stage to underscore the necessity of planned housing.

Most of the WPA posters illustrating model-like structures provide the viewer with a bird's eye view of the development. This elevated vantage point allows viewers to assess the relationship between a building and its surrounding environment. It also assisted government

officials in promoting the benefits of housing reform by helping viewers evaluate the relative merits of a plan. As MoMA director Alfred Barr, Jr. explained, aerial views can serve as "instructive critiques of contemporary city planning."[18] Similarly, the modern architect Le Corbusier noted that an "airplane eye" helps people understand the need for new approaches to urban planning and architecture.[19]

The architectural historian Adnan Morshed has linked this aerial perspective to a modernist conception of visuality that emerged during the early twentieth century. According to Morshed, this visual logic was premised on the assumption that individuals would gain a better understanding of forms and relationships by seeing a picture or landscape in its entirety. It empowers viewers by improving their "intellection" and allowing them to see the structure (or lack thereof) underlying the scene below. [20] For WPA designers, this mode of visuality would have been consistent with the communicative objectives of the posters, which were working to increase the viewer's knowledge of housing issues and promote the expertise of urban planners.

An Urban Paradox

In addition to showcasing elevation drawings, blueprints, and models, the extant WPA posters promote the knowledge and expertise of government planners by highlighting the

---

[18] Museum of Modern Art (New York, N.Y.), Alfred Hamilton Barr, Henry Russell Hitchcock, Philip Johnson, and Lewis Mumford, *Modern Architects* (New York: Museum of Modern Art, W.W. Norton & Co, Inc., 1932), 17.

[19] Adnan Morshed, "The Aesthetics of Ascension in Norman Bel Geddes's Futurama," *Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians* 63, no. 1 (March 2004): 79.

[20] Morshed, "The Aesthetics of Ascension," 78-9, 81. See also: Franco Minganti, "1939: Flying Eyes. Flight, Metropolis, and Icons of Popular Imagination," *Storia Nordamericana* 7, iss. 1 (1990): 93-103; and Hyungmin Pai, *The Portfolio and the Diagram: Architecture, Discourse, and Modernity in America* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 2002): 255.

physical benefits of modern housing. Some, for instance, juxtapose modern developments with tenement buildings and other symbols of slum life. Many also foreground the existence of outdoor green spaces in new housing projects, which contemporaries saw as a solution to some of the concerns regarding health and leisure discussed in previous chapters. This approach suggests that the housing crisis is a national problem with a simple, physical solution. It also resonates with the environmental determinism popular among early twentieth-century reformers, many of whom posited a causal relationship between a person's environment and his or her physical and mental well-being.[21]

Like the poster by Benjamin Sheer, a number of the WPA posters reinforce the need for planning by contrasting, either visually or textually, modern housing projects with tenements. The WPA poster by Velonis, for instance, focuses on the physical differences between "better housing" and the slums, which one reformer defined as housing so inadequate that the health, safety, and morals of its inhabitants are endangered (figure 1).[22] Velonis visualizes this distinction by providing the onlooker with an exterior view of each environment. The dark and cluttered image of the slums shows the woman with a baby carriage near a trashcan brimming with waste, a juxtaposition that reinforces the link between slums and infant mortality. The modern development, in contrast, has a large central courtyard and smaller green spaces interspersed throughout. This open and ordered environment represents a physical "solution" to the crowded and unhealthy slum scene illustrated above.

---

[21] The housing historian Gail Radford calls this process "design determinism." See Radford, *Modern Housing for America*, 124.

[22] Edith Elmer Wood, *Slums and Blighted Areas in the United States* (Reprint of 1935 P.W.A Housing Division Bulletin No. 1. Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1938), 3.

The depiction of slums in this and other WPA posters had a precedent in socially engaged artwork produced during the early twentieth century. Although relatively few artists produced images of slums during the 1930s and 40s, earlier works by artists and photographers like Jacob Riis and Lewis Hein had raised the public's awareness of urban tenements.[23] Although these works differ from the WPA posters in important ways, including their inattention to illustrating planning solutions, they paved the way for socially engaged visuals produced during the 1930s.

The convention of pairing slums and modern developments was common in government publications addressing housing reform and planning principles. For many government officials, this approach was an effective way of communicating the benefits of modern planning to a broad audience. The FHA, for instance, used comparisons in their technical bulletins to help readers visualize good and bad planning principles.[24] These comparisons addressed a variety of issues, including lot shape and size, street layouts, block length, and building placement.

Likewise, the posters' juxtaposition of slums with planned housing resonates with statements issued by a number of public officials, who identified a contemporary "paradox" embodied by the existence of both slums and modern developments in urban areas like New York City. In addressing delegates at the 1936 Forum on Current Social Problems, New York Mayor F. H. LaGuardia used the term to describe a disjuncture between the reality many Americans experienced and the type of life science and technology had made possible.

---

[23] Francis O'Connor, *Art for the Millions*, 23.

[24] See for instance, United States Federal Housing Administration, *Technical Bulletin No. 5: Planning Neighborhoods for Small Houses* (Rev. ed. Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1938). See also United States Federal Housing Administration. *Technical Bulletin No. 7: Planning Profitable Neighborhoods* (Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1938).

According to LaGuardia, this paradox was exemplified by the continuing existence of "firetrap, disease breeding, dismal tenements" despite the fact that "ventilation and fireproofing, decoration and landscaping have progressed to the stage of blueprints and design for sanitary, cheerful, comfortable housing."[25]

Similarly, a brochure published by the New York City Housing Authority describes New York as a city of paradoxes containing both skyscrapers and slums.[26] Summarizing this contradiction visually, the brochure pairs this assertion with a photograph of a tenement building in front of a modern skyscraper (figure 4). Like a number of the tenements depicted in WPA posters, this building is strewn with laundry, which hangs over cluttered fire escapes. Its rough texture stands in sharp contrast to the lighter, taller building behind it. This work, quite literally, sets the need for housing reform in relief by juxtaposing a modern structure with one in disrepair.

Leon Carlin uses a similar format in a WPA poster promoting "One Third of a Nation," a play produced by the WPA's Federal Theater Project (figure 5). This poster, like the photograph just described, depicts two tenement buildings in front of tall skyscrapers. These skyscrapers are situated at a slight diagonal that gives the scene a sense of tension. Moreover, their abstraction conveys a remoteness and detachment that reinforces their literal and figurative distance from the tenements below. Carlin has superimposed a white skull on the front of one of these tenement buildings, foreshadowing the demise of the individuals depicted and situating the blame for this unfortunate outcome on the physical environment. Two of these figures are symbolically located in the mouth of the skull. The other two, a

[25] F. H. La Guardia quoted in "Mayor La Guardia on 'The New Way of Living,'" *The American City* 51 (October 1936): 5.
[26] New York City Housing Authority, *First Houses* (New York: New York City Housing Authority, 1935), 3.

mother and child, are walking up a hill that can be read as a metaphor for the struggles and hardships they face.

The play this poster promotes was written to garner support for the government's involvement in housing reform and was shown in a number of cities throughout the United States, including Philadelphia, New York City, Cincinnati, and Seattle. The playwright, Arthur Arent, took the title from Roosevelt's second inaugural address, in which the President explained that one of the greatest challenges to American democracy was the one third of the nation that remained "ill-housed, ill-clad, ill-nourished." Endorsing government intervention, the play exposed the high rate of illness in the slums, corruption in the housing market, and the inequity that characterized the relationship between slum landlords and their tenants.[27] Underscoring this injustice, the play drew attention to discrepancies between wealth and poverty in the urban environment. Toward the end of the production, images of the Brooklyn Bridge and Park Avenue were projected on the stage. A loudspeaker explained to the audience that many considered New York City one of the wealthiest metropolitan areas in the world. The images that followed, however, showed the pushcarts, "dirty" yards, barred windows, old fashioned water closets, garbage cans, and dead rats that one might find in the slums. "A million and three-quarter people look at these every day of their lives" the loudspeaker declared. "Garbage, filth, disease, crime, slums." Carlin's WPA poster visualizes this paradox by juxtaposing wealth and poverty in the form of skyscrapers and slums. The poster, however, is more than a summary of the play for theater audiences. Providing a succinct and dramatic statement of the inequality existing in urban environments,

[27] See Arthur Arent, "One Third of a Nation: A Living Newspaper about Housing," in *Federal Theater Plays* (New York: Random House, 1938).

and conveying the effects of this situation on women and children, the poster becomes a statement for housing reform and urban planning in its own right.

Outdoor Living

In addition to juxtaposing modern developments with tenements, many WPA posters foreground the physical benefits of the planning process by showcasing outdoor green spaces, which contemporaries associated with wholesome and healthy living. The WPA poster designed by Anthony Velonis, for instance, provides the viewer with an exterior view of the housing development (figure 1). This perspective draws attention to the project's central courtyard and smaller green spaces, which Velonis associated with "better housing."

The emphasis on green space in this poster was consistent with the efforts of other New Deal agencies, which dedicated significant resources to the development of natural spaces in new housing developments and highlighted the benefits of these areas in their publications. Bulletins issued by both the FHA and the USHA, for instance, emphasized the need for green spaces and provided specific guidelines for their landscaping and maintenance.[28] Similarly, natural areas were central to the three "greenbelt" towns built by the Resettlement Administration during the 1930s: Greenbelt, Maryland; Green Hills, Ohio; and Greendale, Wisconsin.[29] These towns, which were constructed for low income families,

[28] See, for instance, United States Federal Housing Administration, *Technical Bulletin No. 5: Planning Neighborhoods for Small Houses*. See also, United States Housing Authority, *Design of Low-Rent Housing Projects: Planning the Site* (Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1939).

[29] For a good overview of the greenbelt towns see Joseph L. Arnold, *The New Deal in the Suburbs: a History of the Greenbelt Town Program, 1935-1954* (Columbus: Ohio State Univ. Press, 1971). See also: Arnold R. Alanen and Joseph A. Eden, *Main Street Ready-Made: The New Deal Community of Greendale, Wisconsin* (Madison: State Historical Society of Wisconsin, 1987); Cathy D. Knepper, *Greenbelt, Maryland: A Living Legacy of the New Deal* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Univ. Press, 2001); Zane L. Miller, *Suburb: Neighborhood*

were referenced in government bulletins dealing with the design of low rent housing.[30] Drawing from the garden city movement, which emerged during the late nineteenth century, planners arranged these suburban greenbelts in superblocks divided by open areas and surrounded by strips or "belts" of green land.[31]

Among their many advantages, these green spaces provided a place for outdoor recreation, which reformers believed would have a positive effect on both the physical and mental health of housing tenants.[32] Like reading books and traveling to the national parks, these areas allowed individuals to increase their knowledge of and engagement with nature. Housing officials, like other reformers, saw nature as a cure for many of the problems associated with urbanization. As they suggested, aesthetically pleasing natural spaces offered individuals relief from the chaos and artificiality of urban life. Likewise, they represented a wholesome alternative to the commercialized leisure pursuits that were contributing to the contemporary leisure "problem" discussed in chapter two. As housing reformers explained, the need for "outdoor living areas" had intensified as industrialization and the economic depression increased the amount of leisure time people possessed.[33] Lewis Mumford, for example, argued that greater leisure time had increased the periods people spent both in and

---

and Community in Forest Park, Ohio, 1935-1976 (Knoxville: Univ. of Tennessee Press, 1981); and Mary Lou Williamson, ed., *Greenbelt: History of a New Town, 1937-1987* (Norfolk, VA: Donning Publishers, 1987).

[30] See, for instance, United States Housing Authority, *Design of Low-Rent Housing Projects*, 19.

[31] See Carol A. Christensen, *The American Garden City and the New Towns Movement* (2nd ed. Ann Arbor, MI: UMI Research Press, 1986), 1, 55, 71, 78; and K. C. Parsons, "Clarence Stein and the Greenbelt Towns Settling for Less," *Journal of the American Planning Association* 56, no. 2 (1990): 178. The concept of the garden city is attributed to the Englishman Ebenezer Howard, who published *Garden Cities of Tomorrow: A Peaceful Path to Real Reform* in 1898. The Regional Planning Association of America (RPAA) helped popularize the movement, in a revised form, in the United States.

[32] See, for instance, "Basic Principles of Healthful Housing: Preliminary Report, Committee on the Hygiene of Housing, American Public Health Association," *American Journal of Public Health* 28, no. 3 (March 1938): 359.

[33] As a USHA bulletin on low rent housing explains, the "entire open area of a project should be thought of as outdoor living area for use by the project population." See United States Housing Authority, *Design of Low-Rent Housing Projects*, 57. See also: Museum of Modern Art, *Modern Architects*, 184.

around the home, a situation that mandated "new and happier" planned environments that included gardens and playgrounds. Outdoor spaces, he asserted, were essential to the modern house - part of its "equipment" that must be planned for and financed.[34]

Visualizing these benefits for the viewer, a number of WPA posters illustrate what seem to be healthy and happy individuals making use of outdoor areas. A WPA poster promoting the Cedar-Central Apartments in Cleveland, for instance, shows children playing on recreation equipment near apartment buildings rendered like architectural models (figure 6).[35] This landscaped play space provides a backdrop for text that assures the viewer that "your children like these low rent homes." This phrasing, which implies that these children are the viewer's, personalizes the appeal and encourages potential tenants to imagine themselves in the scene. Reinforcing this suggestion graphically, the dramatic perspective of the buildings directs the viewer to a boy situated at the top of a slide in the upper left corner of the poster. The slide and the landscaped area below extend toward the foreground of the image, drawing the onlooker into the scene. Similarly, a girl on the slide moves toward the viewer. Like the other children in the poster, she is abstracted and stylized, becoming a blank slate on which viewers can project their hopes for the future.

The natural spaces depicted in this and other WPA posters, however, were not just for recreation. As reformers explained, they also promoted better air circulation and light.[36] The white space found in many WPA posters translates this ideal into visual terms. Both the

---

[34] Museum of Modern Art, *Modern Architects*, 183-4. Mumford was one of the most prominent architectural and cultural critics of the era and was associated with the Regional Planning Association of America (RPAA).
[35] The PWA's early projects in Cleveland had a large ratio of open space to buildings. See Pommer, "The Architecture of Urban Housing," 247. Although the Library of Congress suggests this work was produced between 1936 and 1940, the fact that it is identified with the CMHA and stamped November 1940 on its verso, suggests it was produced after the CMHA took over operation of the development in 1940.
[36] Housing reformers and public health official were adamant about the need for proper light and air in new housing projects. See for instance, United States Housing Authority, *Design of Low-Rent Housing Projects*, 19.

Cedar-Central poster and the poster designed by Velonis contain a significant amount of white space, which alludes to the open and airy quality of the developments (figures 6 and 1). Similarly, a poster commissioned by the New York City Housing Authority shows an abstract building and landscaped space surrounded by white (figure 7). This graphic convention focuses the viewer's attention on the building and conveys the spaciousness of its surrounding environment. Reinforcing this impression of openness, the green space and four trees separate the viewer from the building. This natural area extends toward the foreground of the image, drawing the viewer in while simultaneously establishing a sense of distance that accentuates its expansiveness.

This poster promotes a film on "First Houses," which was a development that evolved from tenements in the city's lower east side. A publicity brochure issued by the New York City Housing Authority explains that the development was "predicated upon the philosophy that sunshine, space and air are minimum standards to which every American is entitled."[37] In developing the site, the city demolished every third tenement building to make room for gardens and playgrounds. They also dedicated 6,500 square feet at the west end of the project for a playground run by the city's park department.[38] As the promotional brochure implies, these green spaces contributed to "modern, airy, sunlit apartments."[39]

In light of this statement, the landscaped areas and white space in posters like this one can be seen as signs of a development's modernity. Reformers and city officials equated "modern" planned housing with characteristics like green space, good ventilation, and lighting. The New York City Housing Authority, for instance, explained that a housing

[37] New York City Housing Authority, *First Houses*, 9.
[38] Ibid., 25. See also, Radford, *Modern Housing for America*, 156.
[39] New York City Housing Authority, *First Houses*, 25.

project had to ensure "sunlight, cross-ventilation, privacy, adequate space and play facilities for children" if it "was to be a modern development in the fullest sense of the term."[40] Similarly, technical bulletins produced by the FHA asserted that efficient and functional plans, which included green spaces, were a prerequisite for structures "fitted to present day modes of living."[41]

Reformers and public officials considered these elements crucial for the maintenance of good health. As the last chapter indicated, public health was at the forefront of the government's social agenda. Linking health and housing, reformers suggested that the density and congestion of the slums, which resulted in a lack of ventilation and sunlight, created unhygienic environments that encouraged the spread of illnesses like tuberculosis.[42] This, in turn, contributed to high death rates among tenement residents, particularly infants. As the Chairman of the American Public Health Association's Committee on the Hygiene of Housing explained, "while it is difficult or impossible to obtain a quantitative evaluation of the exact relation between housing conditions and mortality rates there are numerous aspects of' housing which, indubitably and in important degree, do influence human health in its physical, emotional and social aspects."[43]

The relationship between health and housing is addressed in the WPA poster by Velonis, which equates the darkness and clutter of the slums with infant mortality (figure 1).

---

[40] Ibid., 24-5.
[41] United States Federal Housing Administration, *Technical Bulletin No. 2: Modern Design* (Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1941), 1-2, 10.
[42] See Edith Elmer Wood, "That One Third of a Nation," *Survey Graphic* 29, no. 2 (February 1940): 84; and Edith Elmer Wood, *Slums and Blighted Areas in the United States*, 7-8. See also Christensen, *The American Garden City*, 38. Christensen notes that congestion was a primary concern of housing reformers during this period.
[43] C. E. A. Winslow, "Opportunities and Responsibilities of the Health Officer in Connection with the Federal Housing Acts," *American Journal of Public Health*, 28, no. 11 (November 1938): 1270.

Similarly, a poster commissioned by the New York City Housing Authority visualizes this connection for the viewer (figure 8). In keeping with the war references found in many health-related WPA posters, including the Pennsylvania poster encouraging viewers to "fight" cancer with knowledge, this work declares that "planned housing fights disease" (see ch. 4, fig. 2). Planned housing, which was associated with light and open spaces, is signified by a sun in the upper right corner of the poster. Beams of light from this sun stream down on a mass of abstract shapes representing germs. Where the rays of light overlap the mass, a visible transformation is seen. The sun's white rays turn the blue mass to yellow, lessening the visibility of the germs. Like the Chicago WPA poster discussed in chapter two, which envisions the spread of knowledge and democracy as radiating waves of light, this poster suggests that the applied expertise of planners can alleviate some of the health problems associated with urban housing (see ch. 2, fig. 14).

Like this work, a WPA poster by John Wagner uses white to signify purity, cleanliness, and the application of knowledge (figure 9). The poster is divided in half vertically. On the left side, which is labeled "rotten living," Wagner depicted a child standing in a doorway near a trashcan emitting fumes. The images and text on this side of the poster are rendered in white and set against a dark background that symbolizes the literal and figurative darkness the looming tenement buildings cast on the lives of those who live in them. The right side of the poster, in contrast, is bright white and includes text that reads "decent living through planned housing." The white on this half of the poster encourages a number of associations. Consistent with the poster just described, it symbolizes the application of planning expertise. Likewise, it evokes the good light, ventilation, cleanliness,

and purity reformers associated with modern housing. Finally, the use of white implies that planned housing is a bright alternative to life in the slums.

By associating the phrase "rotten living" with a squalid urban setting and "decent living" with planned housing, the poster draws a direct connection between an individual's environment and the way a person lives his or her life. In making this link, the image parallels WPA posters that associate the open and airy green spaces of new housing developments with better health and increased happiness. The phrases "rotten living" and "decent living," however, also have moralistic overtones that equate housing reform with the preservation of normative or "proper" social values.

Decent Living

Like Wagner's work, many of the WPA posters link the expertise of government planners with the maintenance of specific norms and values. Defining planned housing in social as well as physical terms, these works associate "decent" urban living with middle-class suburban ideals like family, propriety, security, and whiteness. This problematic vision of urban America worked to justify the government's intervention in public housing by appealing to individuals concerned with the heterogeneity and purported disorder of urban environments. It also associated modern planning with the reform of housing tenants, highlighting an enduring anxiety toward urban dwellers.

Reformers and housing officials considered the slums a threat to the economic and social welfare of the nation.[44] Among their alleged influences, the slums were charged with undermining workplace productivity, exacerbating an already depressed economic climate. According to reformers, inferior and unhealthy housing decreased morale, which reduced efficiency and productivity in the work place. It also contributed to industrial loss by perpetuating sickness and workplace absences.[45] Elaborating on this process, an article in the 1934 edition of *American City* claimed that slum tenants were unable to maintain the "standard of health, decency and self-respect on which all useful work must be founded." Insisting that the slums were a "menace" to the well-being of the nation, the author asserted that slum dwellers wanted to be reliable workers but couldn't because their situation had made them "feckless, spiritless, reckless [and] incompetent."[46]

Similarly, reformers and public health officials argued that housing had a direct influence on a person's ethics and sense of social responsibility, which were considered essential for a healthy democracy.[47] As they explained, good housing helped to deter juvenile delinquency, among other social ills, while substandard housing was a breeding ground for crime and bad character traits. Addressing this connection, a 1934 article published in *The American City* described a study on the social and economic costs of the slums that was conducted by the Cleveland Metropolitan Housing Authority. Making a case for housing reform, the article explained that twenty-one percent of the murders committed in Cleveland

---

[44] The New York City Housing Authority, for instance, asserted that the poor living standards experienced in the slums lowered the "health, security and welfare of the entire community." New York City Housing Authority, *First Houses*, 12.
[45] Wood, *Slums and Blighted Areas in the United States*, 15.
[46] Dugald Macfayden, "Slum Clearance as National Defense," *American City* 49 (March 1934): 48. Dugald Macfayden was a reformer from England.
[47] As Edith Elmer Wood explained, "Democracy and slums cannot live together." See Wood, "That One Third of a Nation," 88.

during the twelve years prior to the study occurred in one slum area. That same slum supplied seven percent of the boys seen in Cleveland's juvenile court between 1928 and 1931.[48]

For some, the moral hazards of slums were even greater than the health risks they posed. Equating crime and deviant behavior to a contagion, the housing reformer Edith Elmer Wood explained that "moral contact infection appears to be more perilous than physical."[49] For reformers like Wood, the slums put individuals at risk by placing them in close proximity to bad elements. The congestion in many tenements, they argued, drove young people onto the streets and into the arms of unsavory characters. As Wood explained, the "lack of play space for young children inside the crowded home and of yard space immediately outside it force them onto the street at an age when they ought to be still under close material care."[50]

These concerns were connected to the process of suburbanization. Throughout the 1920s and 30s, there was a substantial migration of individuals and industry from city centers to outlying suburban areas, which were growing at a significant rate. This phenomenon meant that the majority of new construction projects were taking place outside the urban center, exacerbating the lack of good housing in inner cities.[51] It also reduced the number of middle-class Americans in metropolitan areas, reinforcing the socio-economic disparity between cities and suburbs and aggravating longstanding anxieties regarding urban dwellers.[52] Suburbanization was encouraged by an anti-urban attitude that intensified as more middle and

---

[48] "Social and Economic Costs of Slums," *The American City* 49 (May 1934): 5.
[49] Wood, "That One Third of a Nation," 84-5. Wood's comments on the relationship between tenements and morality were cited in several journals published during the period. For an additional example see C. E. A. Winslow, "Housing as a Health Problem," *American Journal of Public Health* 27, no. 1 (January 1937): 59.
[50] Wood, "That One Third of a Nation," 84.
[51] Boyer, *Dreaming the Rational City*, 212, 214, 226, 234, 262. See also: Wright, *Building the Dream*, 195; Jackson, *Crabgrass Frontier*, 184; and Wood, *Slums and Blighted Areas in the United States*, 18. As Jackson notes, after 1925 almost all new industrial construction took place in the suburbs.
[52] Jackson, *Crabgrass Frontier*, 206, 244, 274. See also: Boyer, *Dreaming the Rational City*, 214, 244; Christensen, *The American Garden City*, 15-26, 61; and Wright, *Building the Dream*, 195, 218.

upper-class Americans left the city centers. For many of these individuals, the urban metropolis epitomized social alienation, squalor, deviance, and disease. The suburbs and greenbelt towns, in contrast, were equated with family values, stability, morality, and homogeneity.

Suburbanization, and many of the ideals it represented, were encouraged by New Deal programs and policies. The Roosevelt administration promoted suburban growth through highway construction, zoning ordinances, housing legislation, and financing like that provided by the FHA, which favored the insurance of loans for single family dwellings in suburban areas.[53] They also employed visuals like the WPA posters to encourage physical and social norms associated with suburban living. The green spaces, good lighting, and hygienic environments envisioned in the WPA posters were all physical ideals associated with suburban developments and promoted by greenbelt advocates and federal organizations like the FHA, which commissioned a number of promotional materials from the WPA.[54] Likewise, the posters promote social values and norms equated with middle-class suburban living, including racial homogeneity, family values, and social stability.

A number of these posters, for instance, promote planned housing as a physical solution to juvenile delinquency and crime, which were associated with urban areas. The link between juvenile delinquency and slums is addressed in several WPA posters commissioned by the New York City Housing Authority. One depicts two silhouettes - the smaller rendered

---

[53] Christensen, *The American Garden City*, 31. See also Jackson, *Crabgrass Frontier*, 56, 206. Jackson notes that the detached, single family house had emerged as a suburban norm by 1870.

[54] Monthly reports submitted by the New Jersey poster division list a variety of promotional materials produced for the FHA, including window display signs, "lettered cards for exhibitions," and advertising cards promoting builders, FHA mortgages, and approved lending institutions. See, for example, "Form 35A, December 31, 1936," "Form 35A, February 1, 1937," and "Form 35A, March 1, 1937." Box 64, Reports of the Federal Art Project for New York State, New York City, and New Jersey, 1935-39; Records of the Work Projects Administration, Record Group 69; National Archives at College Park, College Park, MD.

in black and the larger in blue (figure 10). These silhouettes, which overlap in the poster, represent a boy at two stages in his life. The smaller boy is shown stealing a piece of fruit, while the larger and older figure is depicted in a similar pose with a gun, suggesting that there has been a progression in the boy's misconduct. Text included on the poster confirms the boy's status as a juvenile delinquent and implies that the slums encouraged his criminal behavior. This connection is underscored by the fact that the word "slum" is positioned directly above the boy's gun, as if guiding his actions. Text and imagery work together to indicate that the boy is both a victim of his environment and a potential threat, a technique that accentuates and nuances the social costs of the slums for viewers.

Evoking similar sentiments, another WPA poster depicts a man with a gun towering above a row of tenement buildings (figure 11). Suggesting that the root of crime is environmental, this dynamic and asymmetrical composition includes text that reads "Eliminate Crime in the Slums through Housing." The black jacket of the criminal overlaps the tenement buildings below, a visual layering that has multiple connotations. The criminal, with his gun raised, can be seen as a threat that casts a shadow over the lives of the tenement dwellers. He can also be interpreted as projecting or emerging from the tenements themselves, reinforcing the notion that slums give rise to criminal behavior.

The figures in these WPA posters conform to popular representations of criminals and gangsters in the movies and in print. The criminal in the WPA poster just described, for instance, evokes the character "Baby Face" Martin in a poster promoting the 1937 film *Dead End: Cradle of Crime* (figure 12). Like the WPA poster, this work shows a gangster wearing a hat and wielding a gun. In both works, the gun is placed on or near buildings, which accentuates its threat to those inside. Describing the slums as a "refuge" for society's

"refuse," the movie poster explains that "sons of the slums" have no hope or future. They have reached a dead end. In both the WPA poster and the movie, which Motion Picture Daily described as a "potent sermon," the gangster becomes a symbol of the moral degradation that accompanies slum life and evidence of the need for housing reform.[55]

Similar representations appeared in contemporary architectural journals. An advertisement in the June 1941 edition of *Architectural Forum*, for instance, shows four figures dressed in black hats and coats that resemble the criminal in the WPA poster (figure 13).[56] As the ad explains, these four "enemies of beautiful walls" have been stymied by a protective coating of cement applied to the bricks in front of them. One of these criminals casts a shadow on the wall that evokes the WPA poster of the juvenile delinquent, whose silhouette is projected on a white background (figure 10). Both of these works recall the contrasting values and shadows that became the mainstay of film noir and were seen in pictures like Fritz Lang's *M* as early as 1931. As the film historians Janey Place and Lowell Peterson have explained, this cinematic shadowing was often used to suggest that a character had a darker side, an unstable and shadowy alter ego that was threatening to emerge.[57] When associated with criminals or juvenile delinquents like those depicted in the WPA posters, these dark values and shadows can also be seen as signifying an individual's murky moral foundation.

As these images suggest, the gangster had a considerable presence in mass culture during the 1920s and 1930s. Associated with metropolitan areas and the lower class, he

---

[55] Leonard J. Leff and Jerold L. Simmons, *The Dame in the Kimono: Hollywood, Censorship and the Production Code*, 2nd ed. (Lexington: The Univ. Press of Kentucky, 2001), 78.
[56] Similarly, an ad for Exide Emergency Lighting Systems depicts a gun toting bandit wearing a black hat and coat. See *Architectural Forum* (March 1937): 44.
[57] Janey Place and Lowell Peterson, "Some Visual Motifs of Film Noir," in *Film Noir Reader*, ed. Alain Silver and James Ursini (New York: Limelight Editions, 1996), 74-5.

became a medium for addressing concerns about the urban environment, contemporary values, and the relationship between self and society, among other issues. As historian David Ruth has noted, the gangster engaged a broader social discourse concerning criminality and free will. As he explains, moralists believed that crime and delinquency were the result of individual choice. Determinists, on the other hand, linked criminality to external forces like heredity and environment. This latter view had its origins with Progressive-Era reformers, many of whom suggested that crime and other social problems could only be managed with the help of experts trained to understand and address the specific issue.[58]

In suggesting that the physical environment was both the root of and the solution to a number of social problems, these posters reinforced the environmental determinism espoused by some reformers. Although the popularity of this approach began to wane during the 1920s, it was consistent with the government's desire to promote the expertise of urban planners. It also distinguishes these works from posters discussed in other chapters, which go further in placing the responsibility for social change on the viewer. This difference, however, is a matter of degree. By encouraging individuals to live in planned developments and support the government's continued involvement in public housing, the housing posters also acknowledge the role viewers play in the process of social reform.

Race, Outlook, and the "Normal" Family

Concerns about the moral character of slum dwellers were accompanied by anxieties regarding racial diversity and strife, which contemporaries associated with urban areas. As

[58] David E. Ruth, *Inventing the Public Enemy: The Gangster in American Culture, 1918-1934* (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1996), 1, 12, 14, 21, 23, 35.

the housing reformer Edith Elmer Wood explained, the "best known type of slum… is the neighborhood of mixed occupancy near the business center of the city."[59] As they did with crime and juvenile delinquency, the WPA posters suggest that planned housing can correct these urban "problems." In doing so, however, they reveal an ambiguity toward racial progress that exemplified many New Deal programs.

The government's housing programs and policies had a mixed effect on racial minorities. By 1940, African Americans had more influence in federal housing agencies than ever before, holding posts on twenty-two city and county housing authorities across the nation, where they worked to influence policy and educate their colleagues on the needs of minority groups.[60] Despite this, federal housing policies perpetuated racial segregation in a variety of ways. The HOLC, for instance, sanctioned a practice known as "red-lining" in using race and ethnicity as factors in determining the value of real-estate. Their appraisal methods, which rated neighborhoods with black residents as "hazardous," were emulated by local banks and government agencies like the FHA.[61] The FHA did not insure loans for projects that could be affected by an "adverse influence," which included "inharmonious racial groups."[62] They also encouraged the use of restrictive covenants as a means of preventing racial strife and declining property values.[63] These restrictive covenants, combined with discriminatory rental practices and an economic downturn that had exhausted

[59] Wood, *Slums and Blighted Areas in the United States*, 17.
[60] Stephen Grant Meyer, *As Long as They Don't Move Next Door: Segregation and Racial Conflict in American Neighborhoods* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 2000), 49, 57, 63.
[61] See Jackson, *Crabgrass Frontier*, 198-203, 207.
[62] Meyer, *As Long as They Don't Move Next Door*, 53.
[63] Wright, *Building the Dream*, 248.

the financial means of many individuals, limited where African Americans could find housing.[64] As a result, many were forced into overcrowded and decaying inner city ghettos.

Despite the fact that many minorities were in need of the "better housing" WPA posters promoted, none of the extant housing posters reference race or ethnicity textually. Moreover, like the health posters discussed in chapter four, most of the figures included in the housing posters are white or racially ambiguous line drawings, silhouettes, or cartoons. This lack of diversity promotes whiteness as an ideal. It also links the success of planned housing with a physical and ideological "whitening" of its tenants, which was exemplified in WPA posters like the one promoting Cedar-Central Apartments (figure 6).

The Cedar-Central poster illustrates one of the only racial minorities depicted in an extant housing poster. The poster shows five white children and a boy of color playing on park equipment. Four of the white children are on seesaws, with the fifth making her way down a slide. The boy is situated at the top of this slide some distance from the others. This physical separation downplays the threat of racial strife contemporaries associated with heterogeneous urban environments, revealing a lingering ambiguity toward the complexity and diversity of modern urban life.

The significance of this racial configuration becomes apparent when considering the history of the Cedar-Central Apartments, which was built by the PWA. Like many New Deal housing programs, the PWA had a conflicted relationship with minority groups. On the one hand, the PWA made strides placing minorities in new housing projects, with twenty-seven of their fifty-one developments accepting African American residents. They also had an official advisor who educated their administrators on the needs of the African American community

[64] Meyer, *As Long as They Don't Move Next Door*, 50-1, 62.

and helped define discriminatory employment practices in the construction industry.[65] On the other hand, a number of PWA policies perpetuated racial segregation. The Administration, for instance, mandated that new housing projects could not alter the racial composition of a neighborhood. As a result, African Americans were excluded from "white" projects and forced to locate in "mixed occupancy" or "negro" projects, which were often located in neglected parts of town.[66] Exacerbating the problem, African Americans frequently experienced discriminatory rental practices in "mixed occupancy" projects like the Cedar-Central apartments.

The Cedar-Central complex replaced tenement buildings that had housed an equal number of black and white residents in a racially mixed neighborhood. When the new development opened, however, only nine African Americans remained at the Cedar-Central projects, which housed over 650 individuals.[67] The discriminatory selection process forced many of the previous tenants into predominantly black parts of town near the city center, increasing the segregation of Cleveland's minority population. Although not built by the PWA, the same outcome was repeated at the Woodhill Homes in Cleveland, which had no African Americans on its initial list of tenants although the development had replaced a complex housing an equivalent number of black and white residents (see figure 3).

The predominance of white children in the Cedar-Central poster, therefore, hints at a system of residential segregation being perpetuated by discriminatory housing practices and

---

[65] Ibid., 53.
[66] Woodyatt, "The Origins and Evolution of the New Deal Public Housing Program," 111-2. See also: Radford, *Modern Housing for America*, 104; Christopher G. Wye, "The New Deal and the Negro Community: Toward a Broader Conceptualization," *The Journal of American History* 59, no. 3 (Dec., 1972): 623; and Wright, *Building the Dream*, 234. As Wright notes, this system of racial segregation was promoted by other housing agencies in addition to the PWA. It was not until 1962, she explains, that "an executive order prohibited the use of race as a criterion in public housing tenant selection."
[67] Wye "The New Deal and the Negro Community," 622-3, 629.

policies. It also alludes to an ideological "whitening" being reinforced through the planning process. As the architectural historian Carol Christensen has observed, the ideal neighborhood of the early twentieth century was characterized by a social as well as physical uniformity.[68] The Cedar Central poster equates this social goal with planned housing by envisioning behavioral ideals consistent with middle-class suburban norms.

A testament to the civilizing effects of planned housing, the boy in this poster appears both healthy and happy, with his arm extended in a welcoming gesture. He has both literally and figuratively risen to the opportunities that the modern housing development has offered. In doing so, he reinforces the understanding that planned housing facilitates both good behavior and personal achievement, which was a common assertion during the period. As the housing expert Charles S. Ascher asserted, "slum dwellers [do not] cause slums: there is plenty of evidence that any normal family will rise to a better opportunity, sometimes with tears of joy."[69] For Ascher and others, a "normal" family was one that conformed to white, middle-class ideals.

This poster reinforces the relationship between modern planning and normative behavior by placing the onlooker in a position similar to an ad for Alcoa Aluminum Windows (figure 14). In the Alcoa ad, the viewer is situated in a low rent housing project, looking down on three children playing in a landscaped area. Like the WPA poster, the ad gives viewers an elevated vantage point that allows them to supervise the children below. This perspective enables the viewer to fulfill an ideal of good parenting and reinforces the notion

---

[68] Christensen, *The American Garden City*, 65.

[69] Charles S. Ascher, "The Housing Authority and the Housed," in Duke University School of Law, "Low-Cost Housing and Slum Clearance: A Symposium," *Law and Contemporary Problems* 1, no. 2 (March 1934), 256. Ascher served as secretary and general counsel of the New York City Housing Corporation. He was also involved with the Sunnyside and Radburn housing developments in Queens and New Jersey.

that planned housing facilitates proper childrearing and the perpetuation of normative social values.

This work, like the WPA posters dealing with juvenile delinquency, was part of a broader effort to codify standards of childrearing and articulate the relationship between these practices and housing.[70] As a part of this undertaking, professionals created publicity materials designed to educate individuals on the proper environment for raising children. These materials addressed a variety of issues related to housing, including proper temperature regulation, ventilation, play space, living arrangements, and decoration. These publications also outlined standards for supervising youth, which required a physical environment that allowed parents to watch over their children. As an article published in the *American Journal of Public Health* explained, play spaces for young children should be "available within sight of the dwelling."[71]

Housing reformers and officials were explicit about the necessity of good "outlook" in modern housing developments. The PWA, which was responsible for developing the Cedar-Central Apartments, stressed its importance in its promotional literature. As the Administration explained, housing projects should ensure adequate "light, air, outlook, recreational facilities and garden setting."[72] For many reformers, these elements worked together to provide a safe and healthy environment for the residents of public housing, one conducive to the preservation of the American family and the development of well-adjusted and happy children.

---

[70] See Paul C. Luken and Suzanne Vaughan, "Standardizing Childrearing through Housing," *Social Problems* 53, no. 3 (August 2006): 317-8, 326.
[71] "Basic Principles of Healthful Housing," 359.
[72] See Woodyatt, "The Origins and Evolution of the New Deal Public Housing Program," 57. See also Radford, *Modern Housing for America*, 95; and Pommer, "The Architecture of Urban Housing in the United States," 246.

In equating a healthy home environment with the maintenance of "proper" norms and values, these housing reformers and officials were drawing on cultural traditions that dated to the nineteenth century. Likewise, the emphasis on surveillance in the domestic realm has a long and rich history.[73] New Deal reformers and officials, however, addressed this discourse in terms that were significant to a contemporary public seeking new solutions to the nation's housing crisis. The reformer Edith Elmer Wood, for instance, discussed the relationship between slums and youth in economic terms, equating the function of housing with industrial production. As Wood explained, "Houses are like factories. Their output is children – the citizens of tomorrow." She noted, however, that there was a troubling disparity between the investments being made in industry and housing. Unlike housing, she explained, industrial plants were constantly being modernized. Moreover, the health and safety of workers, unlike tenement dwellers, were protected by law. "Shall a nation do less to assure optimum quality in its citizens of tomorrow," she asked, "than a manufacturer does to produce high grade teakettles? Shall it throw less protection around the working conditions of those who raise its children than of those who produce its paper bags?"[74]

Wood was not alone in drawing correlations between housing and industry. A number of essays and promotional materials produced during this period compared housing with industrial production or machines.[75] This approach framed the need for planned housing in

---

[73] For more information on domestic surveillance during the nineteenth century see Anna Vemer Andrzejewski, *Building Power: Architecture and Surveillance in Victorian America* (Knoxville: Univ. of Tennessee Press, 2008).

[74] Wood, "That One Third of a Nation," 83.

[75] See, for instance, Anthony Bertram, *The House: A Machine for Living In*; *A Summary of the Art and Science of Homemaking Considered Functionally* (London: A & C Black, LTD, 1935). Betram's book was reviewed in the March 1936 edition of *Architectural Record* (page 11). This rhetoric was also found in advertisements commissioned by companies like Bell Systems. One such advertisement was included in *Architectural Record*. See Bell System Advertisement, *Architectural Record* 79, no. 2 (February 1936): 53.

terms that would appeal to a public concerned with the nation's economic security. It also engaged contemporary concerns over the efficiency and functionality of both public and private housing, issues that dominated discussions of modern planning. Ultimately, however, this rhetoric sought to strengthen normative values like family and productivity. Like the WPA posters, it encouraged modernization to reinforce tradition and reform to uphold stability.

Painting out Injustice

In addition to picturing the physical and social benefits of planned housing, the WPA posters promote the knowledge of government planners through the illustration of aestheticized and streamlined structures. Much like the use of white, which represented housing qualities like light, purity, and health, streamlining reinforced the expertise of planners in a number of ways. These forms exemplify the efficient and orderly structures achieved through the planning process. They also symbolized a visual restructuring of the urban landscape, which contemporaries linked to social justice and slum clearance, among other things. In highlighting the aesthetic benefits of modern planning, these posters worked to counter critiques surrounding the government's involvement in public housing. They also, problematically, decontextualized concerns like slum clearance and housing design, which were pivotal issues in the often contentious debates surrounding public housing.

The planned houses illustrated in the WPA posters are flat or block-like buildings comprised of basic geometric forms. The deliberate streamlining of these structures contrasts with the formal characteristics of many housing projects constructed during the New Deal, the majority of which were stylistically conservative. Although some reformers hoped the

government's housing programs would extend the planning experiments initiated by European modernists in the 1920s, American architects were selective in drawing from these models. As the architectural historian Richard Pommer has explained, architects combined elements of these European developments with architectural traditions associated with late nineteenth century philanthropic housing, the garden apartment movement, and Beaux-Arts planning.[76] Although the WPA posters depict a number of building types, they downplay this aesthetic diversity. Even housing projects like the Cedar Central apartments, which resembled the greenbelt towns in their modern styling, were reduced to basic formal elements and flat plans of color when illustrated in the WPA posters.

The idealized buildings in these posters actively engaged contemporary trends in modern art and architecture. These structures exemplify the simple and eye-catching forms of modern poster design, which was discussed in chapter one. They also reference the architectural traditions espoused by European modernists in their formal economy and lack of ornamentation. As a WPA poster from Pennsylvania suggests, these movements were linked in the minds of many contemporaries (figure 15). The poster promotes an exhibition at the Federal Art Gallery featuring new "trends in modern art." Defining this for the viewer, the poster includes a number of abstract and geometric forms on a blue plane of color that serves as both ground and sky. Several of these forms – a cone, sphere, and cube - are paired with a small house, a juxtaposition that links modern art and architecture in their shared reliance on geometric forms.

[76] Pommer, "The Architecture of Urban Housing in the United States," 235. See also Robert C. Twombly, *Power and Style: A Critique of Twentieth-Century Architecture in the United States* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1995), 50.

The International Style was one of the most prominent "trends" in modern art and architecture during the period. The International Style originated in Europe with a group of architects that included Walter Gropius, Mies van der Rohe, J. J. P. Oud, and Le Corbusier. Their structures, with a few exceptions, can be associated with characteristics like regularity, a lack of ornamentation, asymmetrical configuration, monochromatic coloring, and an emphasis on volume rather than mass.[77] By the mid-1930s, their work had inspired a number of Americans, who published books, mounted exhibitions, and designed their own buildings in the spirit of the European avant-garde. MoMA's International Style exhibition is often cited as a particularly important moment in the introduction of the style to the American public.[78] Organized by Henry-Russell Hitchcock and MoMA curator Philip Johnson, it featured the work of architects from fifteen countries. The exhibition was in New York City for six weeks, where it was seen by approximately 33,000 people before traveling to eleven other museums throughout the nation.[79] Several of these venues were located in cities where WPA housing posters were produced, including Cleveland and Philadelphia.

Although the initial response to the International Style varied considerably within the architectural community, it sparked what one contemporary called a "healthy disturbing influence."[80] This influence, which increased throughout the 1930s, can be detected in a

---

[77] Henry Russell Hitchcock Jr. and Philip Johnson, *The International Style: Architecture Since 1922* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, Inc., 1932), 13. See also Museum of Modern Art, *Modern Architects*, 13-15; and Twombly, *Power and Style*, 56.

[78] Terence Riley and Stephen Perrella, *The International Style: Exhibition 15 and the Museum of Modern Art* (New York: Rizzoli, 1992), 11. See also Twombly, *Power and Style*, 65.

[79] Riley and Perrella, *The International Style*, 85. See also Lawrence Wodehouse, *The Roots of International Style Architecture* (West Cornwall, CT: Locust Hill Press, 1991), xiii-xvi (footnote 1).

[80] John McAndrew, "Architecture in the United States," *The Bulletin of the Museum of Modern Art* 6, no. ½ (February 1939): 9. See also Riley and Perrella, *The International Style*, 11, 41-2; and Twombly, *Power and Style*, 62, 64. Twombly notes that the International Style was "securing a strong foothold" in the United States by the end of the 1930s thanks, in part, to the MOMA exhibition and the arrival of three German architects (Walter Gropius, Marcel Breuer and Mies van der Rohe) to the United States. These individuals, who left

number of technical and promotional materials produced by housing reformers and government officials. Similarly, the deliberately simplified housing projects depicted in the WPA posters resonate with the International Style exhibition and its publications in a number of ways.

Like the posters, both the International Style exhibition and its accompanying publications promote the planning process by showcasing models, floor plans, and elevation drawings. Moreover, several WPA posters resemble page layouts found in the exhibition's catalog, which uses white space to dramatic effect. An image of Otto Haesler's Rothenburg Housing Development, for instance, is situated in the upper half of a catalog page, with a generous amount of white space and text below (figure 16). Like the housing project in the WPA poster by Velonis, this image shows an aerial view of a model situated on a diagonal (figure 1). Furthermore, both works highlight the landscaped areas surrounding these structures, which include a central courtyard with a circular green space. These representations emphasize the functionality of modern housing by showcasing orderly and geometric structures surrounded by open areas. Their lack of people and dramatic use of white space, however, also accentuate the aesthetic aspects of the developments depicted. Their minimalist presentations encourage viewers to see the structures as works of art.[81]

As critics and historians have noted, the International Style exhibition downplayed the ideological focus of the European movement, foregrounding the aesthetics of the style over its

---

Germany because of the Nazis, were key figures in the promotion of modern architecture in the United States. Likewise, Riley and Perella explain that the International Style curators organized exhibition previews for housing reformers and architects, among others.

[81] The curators also promoted this in their exhibition. See Twombly, *Power and Style*, 66. See also Riley and Perrella, *The International Style*, 77-8, 80.

technical and sociological aspects.[82] Despite this, housing reformers made important contributions to the MoMA exhibition and its accompanying publications. The exhibition included a section on housing that was organized with the assistance of leading housing authorities, including Catherine Bauer, Clarence Stein, Henry Wright, and Lewis Mumford.[83] Likewise, Mumford wrote an essay for the exhibition's catalog *Modern Architects*. This essay, like the catalog as a whole, articulates a relationship between form and function that resonates with the planned developments depicted in the WPA posters.

In his essay, Mumford asserted that a large number of houses built since the industrial revolution were unhealthy, unattractive, and inefficient. He suggested that technological advances, which were creating new needs as well as new possibilities, had necessitated "differently ordered" environments that were healthy, functional, and provided adequate sunlight, fresh air, green spaces, and "outlook." As Mumford argued, functional and well-constructed houses embodied a rhythm and organization that resulted in an aesthetically attractive building. "The aesthetic," he claimed, "arises out of the actual." [84]

In positing a connection between a building's form and function, Mumford's essay complemented statements issued by the exhibition's curators and MoMA Director Alfred Barr. As they explained, International Style architecture exhibits a formal simplification that reflects the regularity and order of its underlying plan.[85] Barr, in his introduction to the exhibition's catalog, contrasted this aesthetic with the "modernistic" character of many contemporary structures. Modernistic structures, he asserted, were laden with applied

---

[82] Hitchcock and Johnson, *The International Style*, 13. See also Riley and Perrella, *The International Style*, 55.
[83] Riley and Perrella, *The International Style*, 21, 60. As the authors note, the exact contributions of each individual are unknown. Catherine Bauer, however, wrote the majority of the text panels for this section of the exhibition.
[84] See Museum of Modern Art, *Modern Architects*, 179-89 (quote on 189).
[85] Hitchcock and Johnson, *The International Style*, 58, 94.

ornament and artificial patterns - superficial surface decoration that disrupted the aesthetic order of the building.[86]

The specific meaning attributed to the regular and ordered structures of the International Style varied among its advocates. A few, like the modern architects associated with Italian Rationalism, worked to situate this new aesthetic within a historical tradition.[87] Most, however, saw the International Style as signaling a break from the past, both functionally and aesthetically.[88] For many of these individuals, the style's geometric and machine-like forms represented efficiency, utility, and progress, making them appropriate for a modern industrial society.[89]

As the WPA poster from Pennsylvania suggests, the minimalist forms of the International Style were linked to contemporary trends in the visual arts (see figure 15). Elaborating on this connection, historian Stephen Eskilson has argued that the International Style exhibition promoted an aesthetic that resonated with Constructivist design.[90] Constructivism originated in Russia after the October Revolution of 1917. Linking art with social and political progress, the Russian Constructivists encouraged the production of utilitarian works aligned with the needs and values of the new Communist order. Their

---

[86] Museum of Modern Art, *Modern Architects*, 13, 15. See also Hitchcock and Johnson, *The International Style*, 37.

[87] Advocates of Italian Rationalism (*Razionalismo*) like Luigi Figini and Gino Pollini, whose work was included in MoMA's *The International Style: Architecture Since 1922*, tied modern architecture to a tradition of innovation that dated to the Italian Renaissance and classical Rome. Likewise, some associated the formal aspects of *Razionalismo* to Mediterranean architectural traditions that prized mathematical order and simple forms. In linking *Razionalismo* to Italy's national heritage, its original proponents hoped to make it an official style of Fascism. For more information on Italian Rationalism see Diane Yvonne Ghirardo, "Italian Architects and Fascist Politics: An Evaluation of the Rationalist's Role in Regime Building," *Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians* 39, no. 2 (May, 1980): 109-27. See also Diane Yvonne Ghirardo, *Building New Communities: New Deal America and Fascist Italy* (NJ: Princeton Univ. Press, 1989).

[88] Hitchcock and Johnson, *The International Style*, 69. See also: Alan Bartram, *Bauhaus, Modernism, and the Illustrated Book* (New Haven: Yale Univ. Press, 2004), 12.

[89] See Radford, *Modern Housing for America*, 72. See also Wodehouse, *The Roots of the International Style*, xiii.

[90] Stephen J. Eskilson, *Graphic Design a New History* (New Haven: Yale Univ. Press, 2007), 270.

efforts inspired an international movement that was promoted by the German Bauhaus, among others. Early proponents of "International Constructivism" downplayed the political roots of the style while adopting its aesthetic language, which was characterized by an economic use of materials, formal order, an emphasis on regularity over symmetry, and an absence of decorative elements, among other things. At the Bauhaus, which endorsed an integration of art, architecture, and design, Constructivism contributed to the school's broader emphasis on functionalism and geometric abstraction.[91]

A number of the architects showcased in MoMA's International Style exhibition, including Walter Gropius and Mies van der Rohe, were affiliated with the Bauhaus before immigrating to America in the 1930s. In exhibiting the work of these artists, MoMA played a significant role in publicizing the economy, precision, and clarity that was associated with both Constructivism and International Style architecture.[92] Their commitment to this aesthetic was enduring and led to exhibitions like the 1938 show *Bauhaus, 1919-1928*, whose catalog was edited by Herbert Bayer, a graphic designer who taught at the school before settling in the United States. As Eskilson has noted, the simplified, geometric, and eye-catching forms endorsed by these individuals and exhibitions had a significant influence on graphic design in the United States.[93]

The WPA posters draw from these precedents in equating planned housing with simple and orderly forms. As contemporaries explained, the increasing emphasis on functionality in planning was encouraging a general streamlining of architectural forms and a

[91] Ibid., 215, 220, 224-5, 232, 236, 270.
[92] Ibid., 234, 270.
[93] Ibid., 270.

move away from non-utilitarian decoration.[94] Foregrounding the role that architects and planners played in this process, journals like *American Architect* and *Architectural Forum* explained that these modern designs were the product of specialized knowledge rather than visual emulation.[95] The streamlined forms, in other words, were a result of the planning process.

The relationship between modern planning and design was reinforced by government agencies like the FHA. A 1941 bulletin produced by the Administration, for instance, explained that "[m]odern design is something more than a new method of exterior treatment – it is fundamentally related to developments in plan and structure of which the exterior treatment is but the final expression."[96] The bulletin contrasted the modern home, with its efficient use of space, materials, and technology, to the faddish and less desirable "modernistic" home that incorporated decorative features unrelated to the function of the building. An emphasis on "efficiency, economy, directness and functionalism" in modern design, it noted, has led to the production of vital and simplified structures well suited to contemporary modes of living.

The WPA posters translated these ideas into visual form by equating "better" housing with simplified structures achieved through the planning process. The symbolic function of this streamlining is particularly apparent in posters like the one by Velonis (figure 1). The modern development in this poster is represented by a streamlined, three-dimensional model, which evokes the planning process. Its bold geometrics and open layout convey a sense of

---

[94] See United States Federal Housing Administration, *Technical Bulletin No. 2: Modern Design,* 5. See also: "Where is Modern Now?" *Architectural Forum* 68 (June 1938): 470.
[95] Hyungmin Pai, *The Portfolio and the Diagram,* 154.
[96] United States Federal Housing Administration, *Technical Bulletin No. 2: Modern Design,* 1-10. See also Winton, "A Man's House is his Art," 381-2.

efficiency and order that contrasts with the dark and chaotic slum, which is represented by a line drawing crossed out with a large, painterly "x." In varying the visual characteristics of each environment, the poster frames the distinction between good and bad housing in both functional and formal terms.

For many, the streamlined and efficient developments depicted in these posters would have symbolized a new and vital urban aesthetic. Drawing from a number of precedents, including the City Beautiful Movement, New Deal reformers and architects suggested that modern planning could lead to a visual restructuring of the urban environment. For these individuals, planned housing offered a welcome alternative to the dense and unsightly slums, which provided little visual pleasure or relief from the disorder and clutter of the city.[97]

Roosevelt addressed this process of revitalization in his second inaugural address, which was referenced in the WPA poster by Leon Carlin (figure 5). In this speech, Roosevelt explained: "I see one-third of a nation ill-housed, ill-clad, ill-nourished. It is not in despair that I paint you that picture. I paint it for you in hope – because the Nation, seeing and understanding the injustice in it, proposes to paint it out…"[98] By suggesting the nation "paint out" the injustice of the slums, Roosevelt encourages a process of urban aestheticization that is visualized in a number of WPA posters, including the poster Wagner designed for the New York Housing Authority, which includes an open white space that symbolizes a whiting or painting out of the slums illustrated on the left side of the poster (figure 9).

For housing officials, the visual reformation of the urban landscape had important social ramifications. New Deal reformers suggested that the beautification of public housing

[97] Radford, *Modern Housing for America*, 9.
[98] Franklin D. Roosevelt, Second Inaugural Address, January 20, 1937. Accessed March 20, 2013, http://historymatters.gmu.edu/d/5105.

could promote a stable social order by enhancing a tenant's quality of life. As Roosevelt's statement suggests, they also associated the aestheticization of urban housing with social justice and equality. Edith Elmer Wood, for instance, lamented that the United States had a "larger acreage of worse looking slums than… any other allegedly civilized country."[99] By suggesting that the United States was falling short of the aesthetic standards for low income housing upheld by "civilized" nations, Wood linked the visual appearance of planned housing to notions of sophistication, social enlightenment, and progress. Moreover, she implies that aesthetics are one measure of a country's social and political integrity. This sentiment was reinforced by a number of housing reformers and architects, including John Gloag, whose article in *Architectural Record* asserted that an architect's work "exposes the quality and fiber of their civilization for the future."[100]

Elaborating on the significance of this relationship, some reformers and government officials linked urban planning and aesthetics with personal growth. Daniel Defenbacher, who worked for the FAP's National Director of Community Art Centers, explained that the "planning of housing, parks, streets, industrial areas, and residential areas embraces the qualities of harmony and aesthetic perception which define art.[101] Community planning," he asserted, "is a result of function and art indivisibly integrated with each other. The functional element is the use which man makes of the community; the art element is the appearance of the community and the effect which this appearance may have on man's development. Here is

[99] Wood, "That One Third of a Nation," 83.
[100] John Gloag, "The Architect as Design Authority," *Architectural Record* 77, no. 1 (January 1935): 32.
[101] Daniel S. Defenbacher was the Assistant to the FAP's National Director of Community Art Centers between 1936 and 1939.

art woven inextricably with man's daily life."[102] According to Defenbacher and others, beauty and functionality were both integral components of a successful planned environment.

The desire to integrate art and life resulted in a number of artworks being installed at planned housing projects throughout the United States, including developments depicted in the WPA posters. The WPA, for instance, created a number of terracotta animals and circular reliefs for New York City's First Houses. Similarly, a relief sculpture by the artist William McVey was installed at Lakeview Terrace in Cleveland. While these works are not depicted in the WPA posters, they paralleled the posters' attempts to aestheticize the urban landscape. Moreover, both stemmed from a similar belief in the power of well-designed objects to bring about a greater social good. As the artist Olin Dows explained in the *Magazine of Art*, the work installed at these housing developments marks "a step in the organization of that complete society which it is our necessity and must be our duty to help create."[103]

Planners, reformers, and public officials linked the creation of planned housing and the aestheticization of the urban landscape to the issue of slum clearance, which occupied a central place in debates concerning federal housing during the 1930s. Several WPA posters allude to this practice in the visual and textual comparisons they make between planned housing and the slums. The blueprint in the WPA poster by Benjamin Sheer, for instance, overlaps the tenement buildings illustrated on the left side of the poster, a configuration that suggests the "better housing" depicted on the blueprint will physically replace the slum

[102] Daniel S. Defenbacher, "Art in Action," in *Art for the Millions: Essays from the 1930s by Artists and Administrators of the WPA Federal Art Project*, edited by Francis O'Connor (Greenwich, Connecticut: New York Graphic Society, LTD, 1973), 226.
[103] Olin Dows, "Art for Housing Tenants," *Magazine of Art* 31, no. 11 (November 1938): 620, 622-3.

dwellings (figure 2). Similarly, the slum scene depicted in the poster by Velonis is crossed out and partially covered by the modern housing development (figure 1).

Reformers and public officials recognized that this "municipal housekeeping enterprise," as it was described by the reformer C. E. A. Winslow, was a practical strategy for selling New Deal housing policies.[104] Many middle and upper class Americans viewed the slums as a threat to the health, security, and morality of the nation.[105] Moreover, local business leaders and property owners saw slum clearance, which reduced urban squalor and helped to minimize the number of rental units in a city, as a way to protect their commercial investments.[106] For these and other reasons, a number of federal housing officials embraced slum clearance, promoting it in their programs and policies. Harold Ickes, Secretary of the Interior and Director of the PWA under Roosevelt, advocated both municipal and federal support of the practice.[107] Similarly, the Wagner-Steagall Act linked the construction of public housing to slum clearance by requiring that one slum unit be eliminated for every unit of new housing built.[108]

Slum clearance, however, was not without its difficulties or critics. While these WPA posters allude to the physical and aesthetic benefits of the practice, they avoid referencing any problems surrounding its implementation. Like other topics addressed in the housing posters,

---

[104] Winslow, "Opportunities and Responsibilities of the Health Officer," 1272.
[105] The housing reformer Edith Elmer Wood, for instance, defined a slum as housing "so inadequate or so deteriorated as to endanger the health, safety, or morals of its inhabitants." Wood, *Slums and Blighted Areas in the United States*, 3.
[106] Radford, *Modern Housing for America*, 104, 191-2.
[107] See Harold L. Ickes, "Address of Public Works Administrator Harold L. Ickes dealing with the Future of National Policy on Slum Clearance and Low-rent Housing. Address Given at the Ceremonies Initiating Construction of the New Housing on PWA's $12,783,000 Williamsburg Slum Clearance Development in New York City. PWA Press Release #1776" (January 3, 1936), 15. See also Radford, *Modern Housing for America*, 102.
[108] Jackson, *Crabgrass Frontier*, 227, 230.

including crime, juvenile delinquency, and disease, the issue has been decontextualized and dehistoricized in an attempt to negotiate controversies surrounding the government's intervention in planned housing and promote the expertise of its planners.

Slum clearance could be both costly and problematic logistically. Financial considerations and legal issues surrounding condemnation, for instance, could be deterrents to the process. Likewise, in New York City, the cost of slum clearance prohibited the practice in all but a few cases when the New York City Housing Authority was able to acquire land cheaply.[109] For these and other reasons, the housing reformers Catherine Bauer, Lewis Mumford, and Robert Kohn argued that slum clearance and urban renewal should be secondary to meeting the immediate need for good shelter. Public housing, they asserted, could be built more economically on undeveloped land outside city centers.[110]

Like these issues surrounding slum clearance, the posters disregard critiques related to the design of new projects in presenting planned housing as an aesthetically pleasing alternative to the slums. During the late 1930s, changes in New Deal housing policy heightened reformers' concerns over the aesthetics of new housing developments. The passing of the Wagner-Steagall Act in 1937 placed a limit of 1,250 dollars per room on the construction cost of new housing projects in cities with more than 500,000 inhabitants.[111] The U.S. Housing Authority explained that this ceiling, which had to cover the cost of slum clearance, would ensure the government produced the greatest number of housing units

[109] See Radford, *Modern Housing for America*, 103, 156-7. Similarly, only twenty-seven of the PWA's fifty-one housing projects were built on slum sites. See Woodyatt, "The Origins and Evolution of the New Deal Public Housing Program," 101.
[110] Radford, *Modern Housing for America*, 101.
[111] Pommer, "The Architecture of Urban Housing in the United States," 237.

possible, thereby helping the most people.[112] Critics, however, claimed the limit ensured a decrease in the quality of new structures compared to projects built under the PWA.

The Queensbridge housing project, which is represented in a WPA poster by Harry Herzog, was one of the developments built after the passing of the Wagner-Steagall Act (figure 17). Like other WPA posters, this work shows an apartment building surrounded by green space and trees. The two children in the poster tower over the structure and its surrounding landscape, suggesting that this is a place where children can grow to be happy and healthy. The poster is a testament to the social benefits of modern planning.

Unlike the structure depicted in the WPA poster, however, the actual Queensbridge housing project consists of Y-shaped buildings arranged in superblocks. Conforming to regulations outlined in the Wagner-Steagall Act, the development cost nearly fifty percent less per room than the nearby Harlem River and Williamsburg projects, both of which were funded by the PWA. The density of the buildings in the Queensbridge project was greater, however, which displeased housing reformers like Lewis Mumford. As Mumford argued, the project was crowded and its buildings excessively standardized, resulting in a development that was "barracks-like and monotonous."[113] Like other reformers, Mumford blamed USHA regulations for creating a framework that encouraged the construction of poor quality buildings that were bleak and alienating. While Herzog may have intended this poster to communicate the benefits of planned housing, for Mumford and others like him, the simplicity of the Queensbridge structure might have symbolized a degradation of housing standards - an economy of production taken too far.

---

[112] Radford, *Modern Housing for America*, 190-92.
[113] Pommer, "The Architecture of Urban Housing in the United States," 256.

In focusing on the physical and social benefits of planned housing, the posters fulfilled a number of purposes. They worked to cultivate new housing tenants. They also promoted the expertise of modern planners, which helped officials justify the government's intervention in a traditionally private sphere of activity. Specifically, these posters tied government expertise to housing reform and the perpetuation of physical and social ideals with a strong suburban bias. Like other posters produced by the WPA, these works suggest that knowledge is a mechanism for balancing the relationship between self and society and promoting both personal and national stability. In doing so, they situate knowledge at the center of social reform.

Conclusion

The WPA posters discussed in this study promote knowledge and social literacy as solutions to some of the New Deal's most pressing concerns, from health and housing to juvenile delinquency. In doing so, these works are consistent with the objectives of officials like Franklin Roosevelt, who sought to instill Americans with "a greater knowledge of and interest in the problems which…strike the whole world." This statement is from an address that Roosevelt delivered at a meeting of the National Education Association in June 1938. The speech, which is worth quoting at length, evokes many of the same attitudes and tensions surrounding art and knowledge that informed the creation of the WPA posters and were addressed in previous chapters. As Roosevelt explained:

> Freedom to learn is the first necessity of guaranteeing that man himself shall be self-reliant enough to be free. Such things did not need as much emphasis a generation ago; but when the clock of civilization can be turned back by burning libraries, by exiling scientists, artists, musicians, writers and teachers, by disbursing universities, and by censoring news and literature and art, an added burden is placed on those countries where the torch of free thought and free learning still burns bright. If the fires of freedom and civil liberties burn low in other lands, they must be made brighter in our own. If in other lands the press and books and literature of all kinds are censored, we must redouble our efforts here to keep them free. If in other lands the eternal truths of the past are threatened by intolerance we must provide a safe place for their perpetuation.[1]

Like many New Dealers, Roosevelt equated knowledge with self-reliance and freedom. Moreover, he argued that the right to learn is a civil liberty that should be protected

---

[1] Franklin D. Roosevelt, "Address Before the National Education Association, New York City," June 30, 1938. Accessed June 1, 2013. John T. Woolley and Gerhard Peters, The American Presidency Project (Santa Barbara, CA), http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=15668.

and encouraged by nations like the United States. As he implied, this democratic ideal, exemplified by art and other forms of free learning and thought, was vital for national progress. Without it, the "clock of civilization" would fail to advance.

The WPA posters worked to fulfill Roosevelt's mission by promoting knowledge and social literacy. Like Roosevelt, the posters suggest that self-reliance and freedom come from the cultivation and application of knowledge, both the viewer's and that of experts. They do this, in part, by visualizing the physical, social, and aesthetic benefits of learning. As the posters suggest, the cultivation of knowledge can enrich individuals both personally and professionally by increasing their imagination, skills, and understanding of the world, all of which encourage self-fulfillment and happiness. Likewise, they imply that the expertise of professionals like doctors and planners can improve a person's health and environment. Knowledge, in essence, helps people respond to and address the changing demands of modern life.

The posters, however, embody diverse and occasionally competing perspectives on the dissemination and application of knowledge. Accommodating the multiple goals of their commissioning agencies, designers redefined knowledge and social literacy, both formally and conceptually, to meet a range of historically specific goals. As a result, the posters engaged multiple discourses - social, economic, political, and artistic. They also legitimized various types of knowledge and ways of knowing: professional, technical, historical, and literary, among others.

Like Roosevelt's speech, the WPA posters link the cultivation and application of knowledge to national goals and ideals. As the posters suggest, education can help define and perpetuate democratic principles like civic responsibility. The cultivation and application of

knowledge can also advance social and economic renewal by encouraging intelligent, creative, and productive citizens, whose actions are consistent with the broader social good. In working to bridge the divide between the individual and the collective, the posters link the welfare of the nation and the preservation of democratic ideals with the involvement of viewers. Government officials considered the public's support of and participation in reform essential for accomplishing their social agendas, unifying the nation, and countering the critiques of detractors.

According to Roosevelt, this learning process also facilitated the perpetuation of certain "eternal truths of the past." The question is, however, who determines what "truths" are worthy of sustaining and whose ends are served? In working to manage the relationship between self and society, the WPA posters reinforced specific norms and behaviors, many of which were informed by longstanding assumptions and prejudices regarding race, gender, and class. Specifically, the WPA posters perpetuated norms and values that were associated with white, middle-class ideals. They also obscured some of the inequities underlying contemporary social problems like health care and housing. In doing so, they reveal longstanding cultural anxieties concerning particular populations.

An analysis of these works, therefore, provides important insights into the government's attempts to negotiate the complex and highly contested social and political terrain of the period. As my project demonstrates, the WPA posters translated the government's complex social goals into legible forms that would capture viewers' attention, mobilizing Americans and instilling them with a sense of purpose and hope. The social norms and ideals envisioned in the posters, however, would have resonated in complex ways

with the diverse viewing public, working both for and against the rhetoric of consensus employed by New Deal agencies.

Although government administrators associated the WPA with the perpetuation of democratic ideals, many of its programs were short-lived. By 1939, the year after Roosevelt's speech, a number of WPA projects had closed and others had been scaled back.[2] These cuts were prompted, in part, by critiques that had been directed at the government's relief programs since the early days of the New Deal, many of which targeted the WPA's cultural programs. Conservative members of Congress accused the FAP of wasting taxpayers' money and producing works that lacked artistic merit. Likewise, they considered the art projects hubs of communist agitation, a conviction that led the House Investigative Committee to begin an inquiry in 1939 examining the political affiliations of FAP workers.[3]

WPA programs were also affected by the war in Europe. After the United States entered World War II, the WPA directed its attention to supporting the war effort. In 1942, the remaining art projects were transferred to the Defense Department and renamed the Graphics Section of the War Services Division. Under the jurisdiction of this division, WPA poster artists went to work making a variety of war-related materials, from training aides and rifle sight charts to political posters.[4]

The scholarship on WWII posters often neglects their links to visuals produced during the interwar period.[5] The decision to treat war posters independently is not surprising considering the significant political and cultural distinctions between the two periods. As

---

[2] DeNoon, *Posters of the WPA*, 30.
[3] Ibid., 26-27. See also Langa, *Radical Art*, 39; and Grieve, *The Federal Art Project*, 2.
[4] DeNoon, *Posters of the WPA*, 31
[5] See, for instance, William L. Bird, Jr. and Harry R. Rubenstein, *Design For Victory: World War II Posters on the American Home Front* (New York: Princeton Architectural Press, 1998).

war-production escalated, for example, the government's conservation efforts shifted from a concern with wildlife and wilderness areas to an emphasis on resources like water and rubber, which were considered crucial to the war effort.[6]

Despite the political and cultural changes that war demanded, the visual materials produced during these two periods share a number of similarities. They exhibit, for instance, many of the same design elements, including simple forms and a dramatic use of white space. Likewise, some of the issues and concerns that informed the WPA's depression-era posters continued to engage government agencies during wartime, shaping the visuals they commissioned. Reading, for example, occupied an important place in the government's social agenda and the posters officials commissioned. As chapter two indicates, the cultivation of knowledge through reading and coursework was seen as an important way of strengthening the nation politically, economically, and socially in both war and peace.

Like their depression-era counterparts, many of the WPA's war-related posters situated knowledge at the center of the government's efforts to balance individual needs and behaviors with national goals. For government officials, the management of knowledge was crucial for ensuring the welfare of the nation in wartime, just as it had throughout the Depression. As the WPA posters suggest, citizens could aid the war effort by increasing their knowledge of home safety, air raid precautions, and other issues. They could also participate by taking courses in subjects like nursing, war training, and ship building. During wartime, however, knowledge could be empowering or disastrous depending on its beneficiary. A WPA poster featuring a Nazi swastika (figure 1), for instance, asks viewers to refrain from

[6] Miles, *Wilderness in National Parks*, 110-1, 115.

telling what they "know" about troop concentrations, departures, and arrivals. As the poster implies, knowledge is power.

Although the promotion of knowledge played an important role in the government's social agenda throughout the duration of the war, the WPA did not. In December 1942, Roosevelt announced that the WPA art projects would be disbanded with the program's termination in mid-1943. Production of the WPA posters, therefore, ended not long after it was taken over by the War Services Division. As Roosevelt explained, this and other WPA programs had earned an "honorable discharge," concluding the important role they played in encouraging reform through the production of visual materials like posters.[7]

[7] Roosevelt quoted in Saab, *For the Millions*, 164; See also DeNoon, *Posters of the WPA*, 31-2.

IMAGES

Introduction

Fig. 1: Fred Rentschler
Ohio FAP, 1938
Repository: Library of Congress Prints and Photographs Division, Washington, DC

Chapter 1: The World Wants New Knowledge and Skills

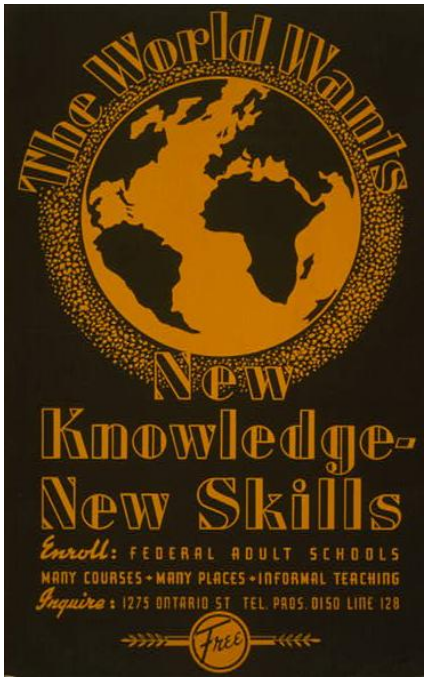


Fig. 1: Sam Braun
Ohio FAP, 1937
Repository: Library of Congress Prints and Photographs Division, Washington, DC

Fig. 2: Poster Exhibition, Federal Art Project Gallery, New York City, December 1, 1938
Repository: Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution

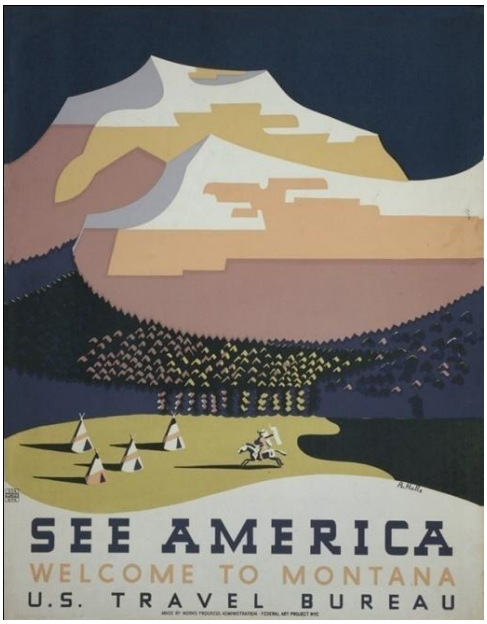


Fig. 3: Richard Halls
New York City FAP, c. 1936 - 1938
Repository: Library of Congress Prints and Photographs Division Washington, DC

Fig. 4: Harry Herzog
New York City FAP, c. 1936 - 1938
Repository: Library of Congress Prints and Photographs Division Washington, DC

Fig. 5: Albert M. Bender
Chicago, Illinois FAP, 1941
Repository: Library of Congress Prints and Photographs Division Washington, DC

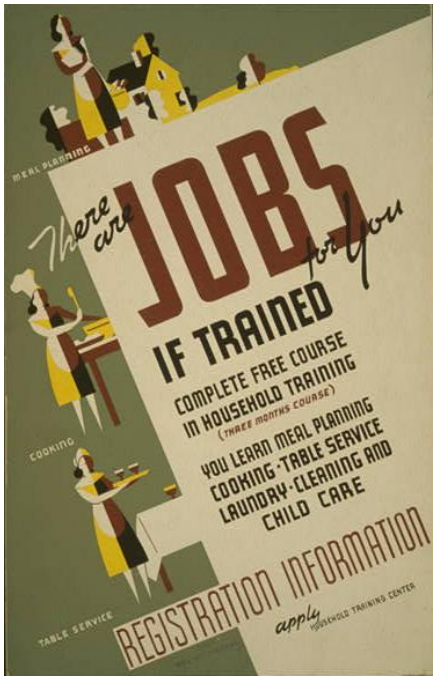


Fig. 6: Artist Unknown
Ohio FAP, c. 1936 - 1940
Repository: Library of Congress Prints and Photographs Division, Washington, DC

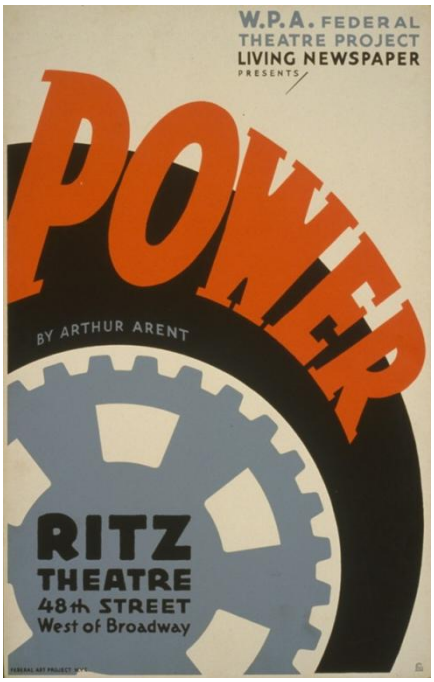


Fig. 7: Artist Unknown
New York City FAP, c. 1936 - 1938
Repository: Library of Congress Prints and Photographs Division Washington, DC

Fig. 8: E. McKnight Kauffer
Power, The Nerve Centre of London's Underground, 1930
Repository: Museum of Modern Art, New York

Fig. 9: Artist Unknown
New York City FAP, c. 1936 - 1937
Repository: Library of Congress Prints and Photographs Division Washington, DC

Fig. 10: Joost Schmidt
Staatliches Bauhaus Ausstellung, 1923
Repository: Museum of Modern Art, New York

Chapter 2: The Art of Reading

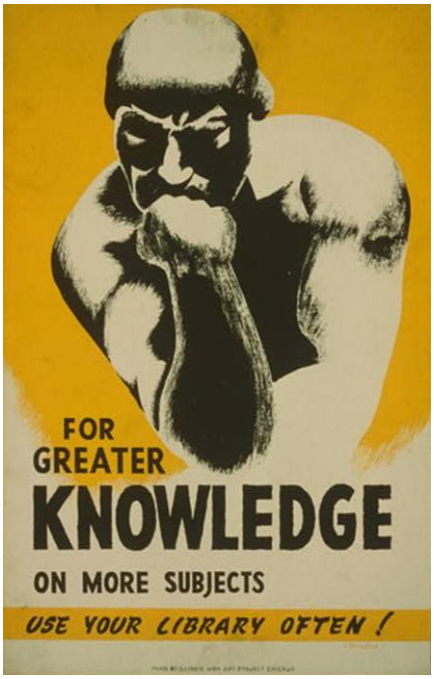


Fig. 1: V. Donaghue
Chicago, Illinois FAP, 1940
Repository: Library of Congress Prints and Photographs Division, Washington, DC

Fig. 2: Auguste Rodin
The Thinker, 1902
Repository: Musée Rodin, Paris

Fig. 3: J. Howard Miller
"We Can Do It!" 1942
Repository: National Museum of American History, Smithsonian Institution

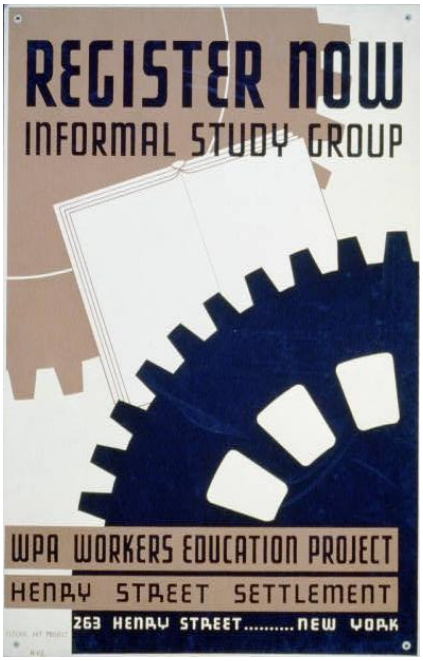


Fig. 4: Artist Unknown
New York City FAP, c. 1936 - 1941
Repository: Library of Congress Prints and Photographs Division, Washington, DC

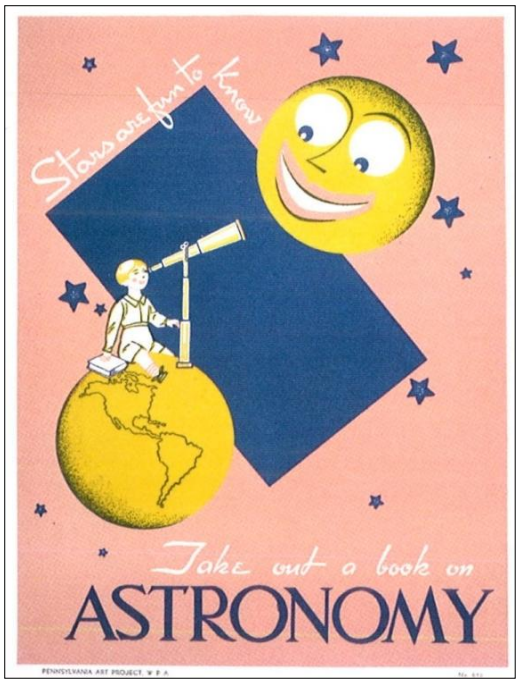


Fig. 5: Artist Unknown
Pennsylvania FAP, c. 1935 - 1943
Repository: Historical Society of Pennsylvania

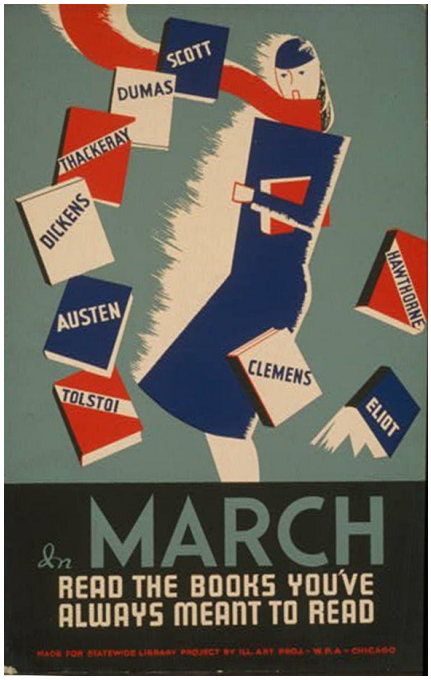


Fig. 6: Artist Unknown
Chicago, Illinois FAP, c. 1936 – 1941
Repository: Library of Congress Prints and Photographs Division, Washington, DC

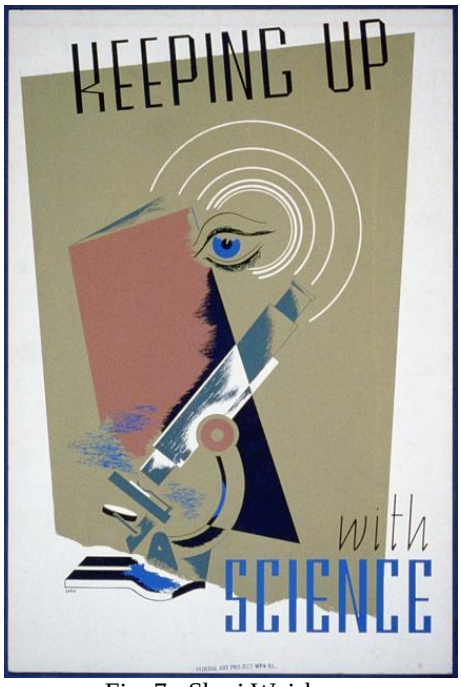


Fig. 7: Shari Weisberg
Chicago, Illinois FAP, c. 1936 - 1939
Repository: Library of Congress Prints and Photographs Division, Washington, D.C

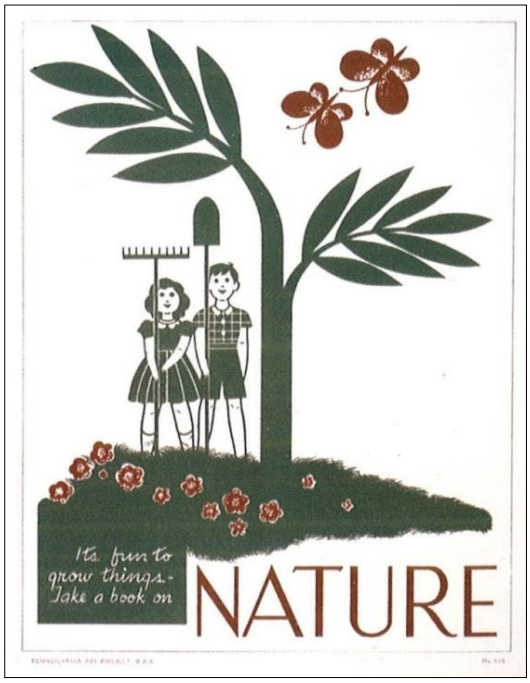


Fig. 8: Artist Unknown
Pennsylvania FAP, 1935 - 1943
Repository: Historical Society of Pennsylvania

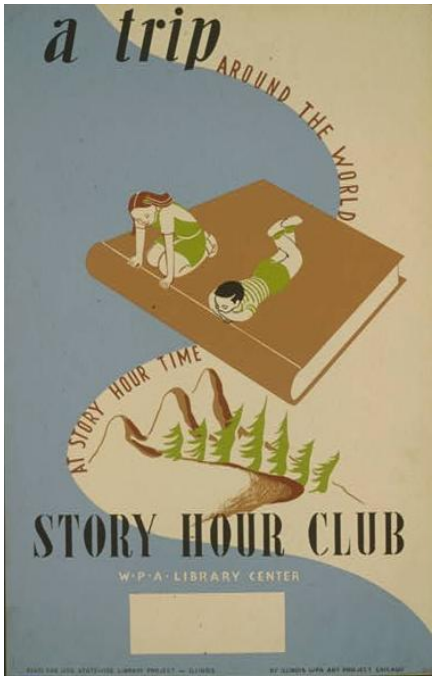


Fig. 9: Shari Weisberg
Chicago, Illinois FAP, c. 1936 - 1940
Repository: Library of Congress Prints and Photographs Division, Washington, DC

Fig. 10: Artist Unknown
Illinois FAP, c. 1936 - 1939
Repository: Library of Congress Prints and Photographs Division, Washington, DC

Fig. 11: Joseph Dusek
Illinois FAP, c. 1941
Repository: Library of Congress Prints and Photographs Division, Washington, DC

Fig. 12: Artist Unknown
New York FAP, c. 1936 - 1937
Repository: Library of Congress Prints and Photographs Division, Washington, DC

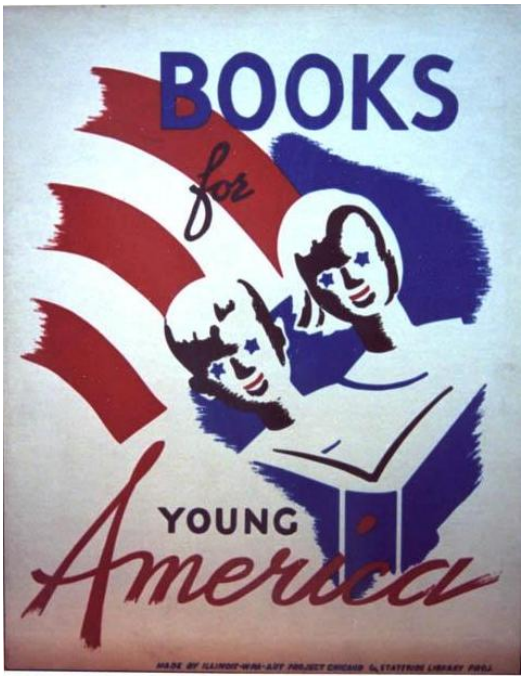


Fig. 13: Artist Unknown
Illinois FAP, c. 1936 - 1941
Repository: Art Institute of Chicago

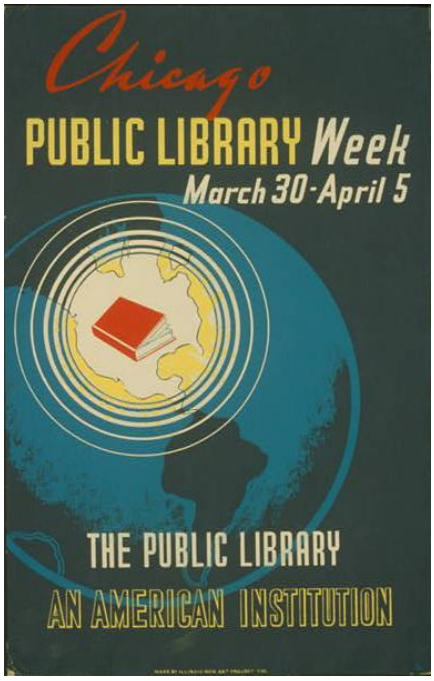


Fig. 14: A.S.
Chicago, Illinois FAP, c. 1936 - 1941
Repository: Library of Congress Prints and Photographs Division, Washington, DC

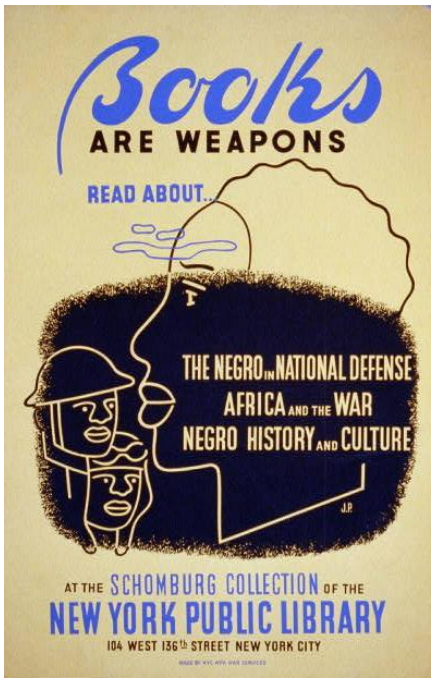


Fig. 15: J.P
NYC WPA War Services, c. 1941 - 1943
Repository: Library of Congress Prints and Photographs Division, Washington, DC

Fig. 16: Artist Unknown
New York FAP, 1935 - 1943
Repository: Ennis Carter

Chapter 3: Posters, Preservation, and Ecological Blindness

Fig. 1: Attributed to John Wagner
New York City FAP, c. 1936 - 1940
Repository: Library of Congress Prints and Photographs Division Washington, DC

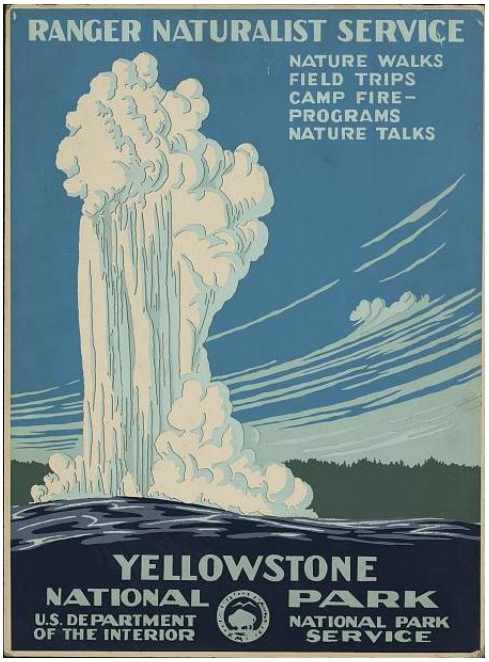
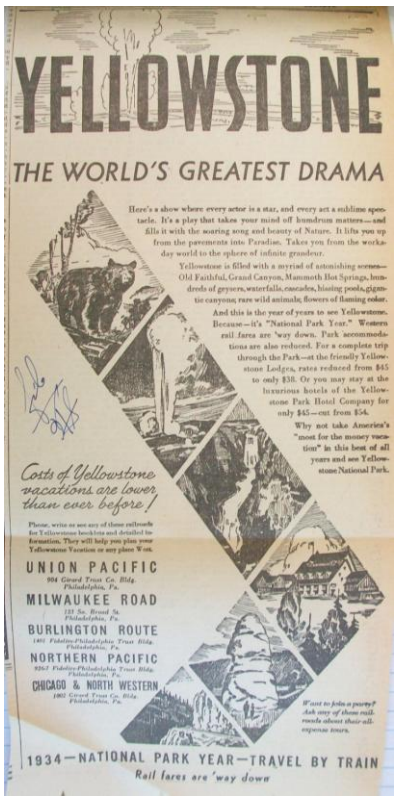


Fig. 2: Artist Unknown
WPA - CCC, c. 1938
Repository: Library of Congress Prints and Photographs Division Washington, DC



Detail of Newspaper Clipping:

Fig. 3: Newspaper Advertisement and Detail, "Yellowstone, The World's Greatest Drama"

Newspaper clipping from: Parks General Publicity and Statistics Publicity, March 16, 1934-April 30, 1934; Box 325, O-501; Second Subseries, Central Classified Files, 1933-1949; Records of the National Park Service, Record Group 79; National Archives at College Park, College Park, MD

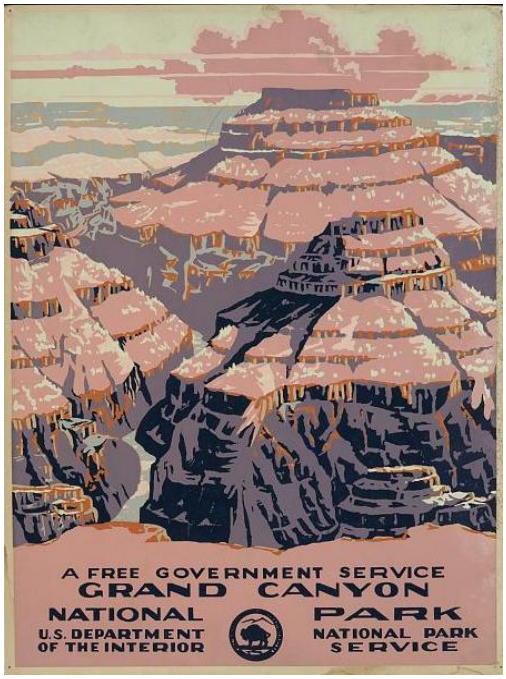


Fig. 4: Artist Unknown
WPA - CCC, c. 1938
Repository: Library of Congress Prints and Photographs Division Washington, DC

Fig. 5: Artist Unknown
Cover of the "Proceedings of [the] Joint Council of National Park Operators and Superintendents held at Grand Canyon National Park, Arizona – May 1-5, 1934."

From: Box 3, O-1.1, General Records; Second Subseries, Central Classified Files, 1933-1949; Records of the National Park Service, Record Group 79; National Archives at College Park, College Park, MD.

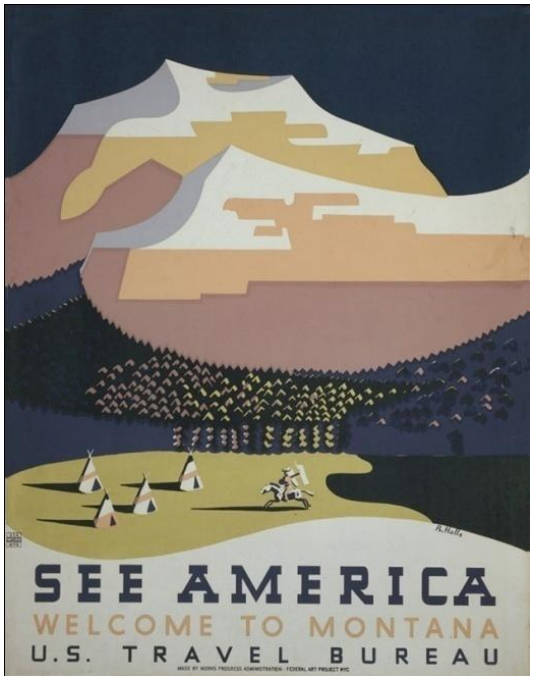


Fig. 6: Richard Halls
New York City FAP, c. 1936 - 1938
Repository: Library of Congress Prints and Photographs Division Washington, DC

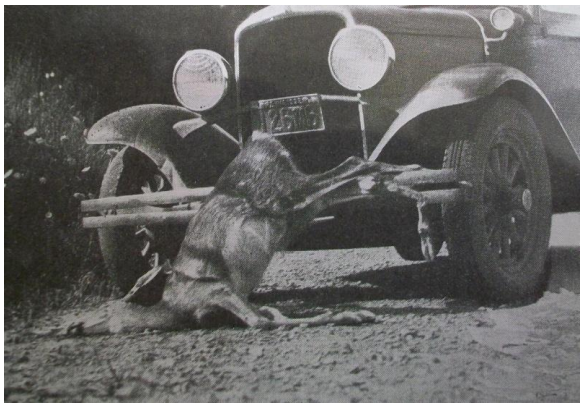


Fig. 7: Photographer Unknown

Photograph from: Leo A. Luttringer, Jr., "Dramas of the Wild," *Pennsylvania Game News* 10, no. 5 (August 1939): 14.

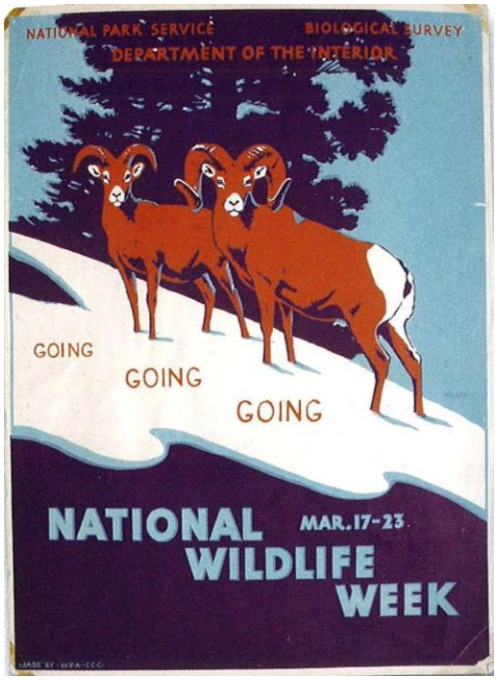


Fig. 8: Walter A. Weber
WPA - CCC, c. 1935 - 1943
Repository/Collector: Doug Leen

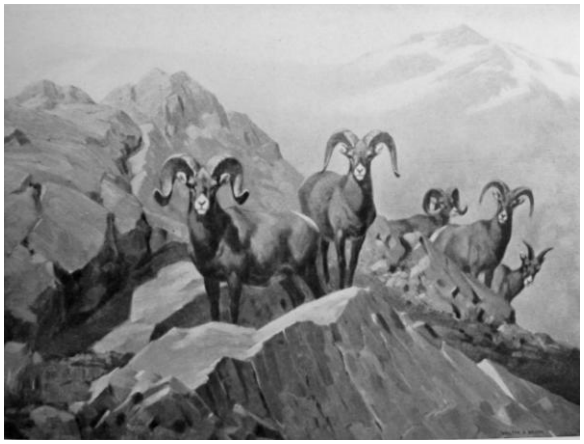


Fig. 9: Walter A. Weber
"The Slow, deadly decline of our mountain sheep population continues."

Image from: United States, Daniel B. Beard, Charles Newton Elliott, and Walter A. Weber, *Fading Trails: The Story of Endangered American Wildlife*, Prepared by a Committee of the United States Department of the Interior: National Park Service, Fish and Wildlife Service (New York: The Macmallan Company, 1942), between pgs 56 and 57.

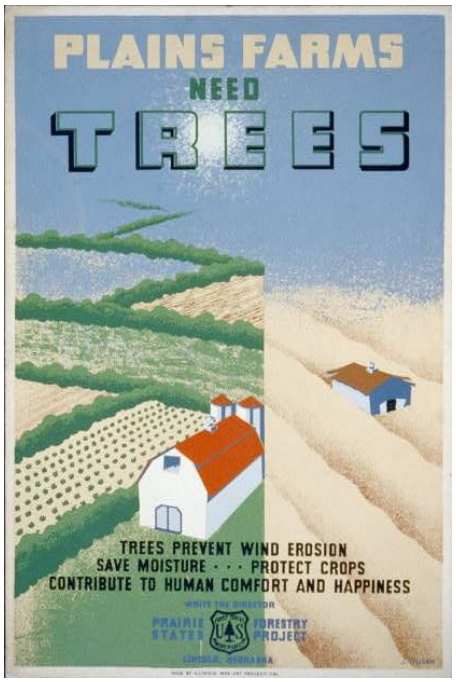


Fig. 10: Joseph Dusek
Chicago, Illinois FAP, c. 1936 - 1940
Repository: Library of Congress Prints and Photographs Division Washington, DC

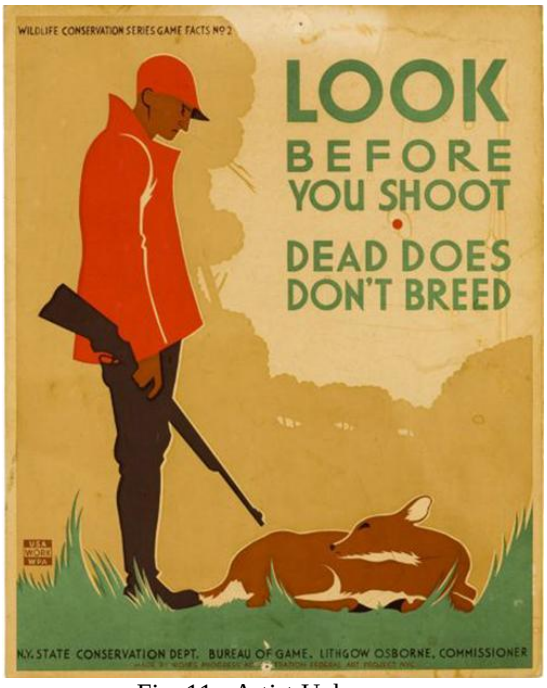


Fig. 11: Artist Unknown
New York City FAP, c. 1935 - 1943
Repository: The Laurence Miller WPA Poster Collection

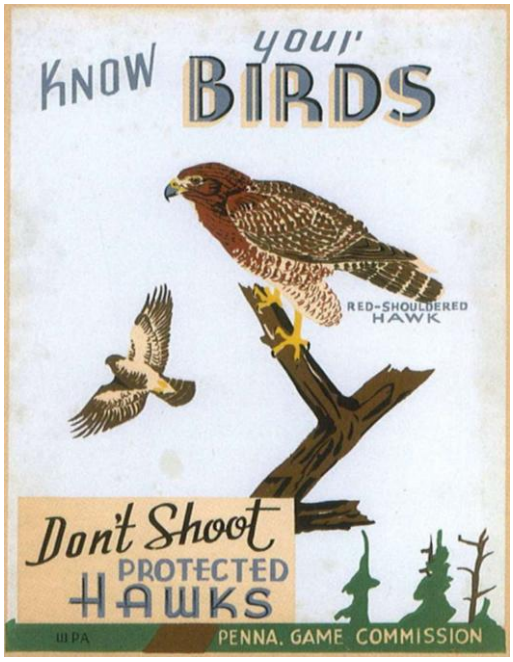


Fig. 12: Artist Unknown
Pennsylvania FAP, c. 1935 - 1943
Repository/Collector: Ennis Carter

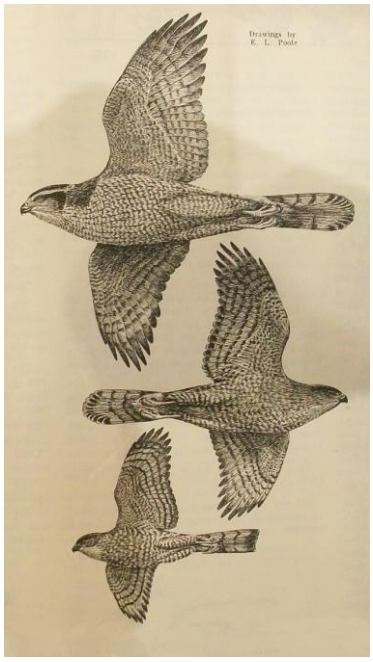


Fig. 13: E. L. Poole Illustration from: Leo A. Luttringer, Jr., "Outlaws of the Air – Or Are They? The Answer to Those Who Say that the Only Good Hawk is a Dead One," *Pennsylvania Game News* 9, no. 4 (July 1938): 11.

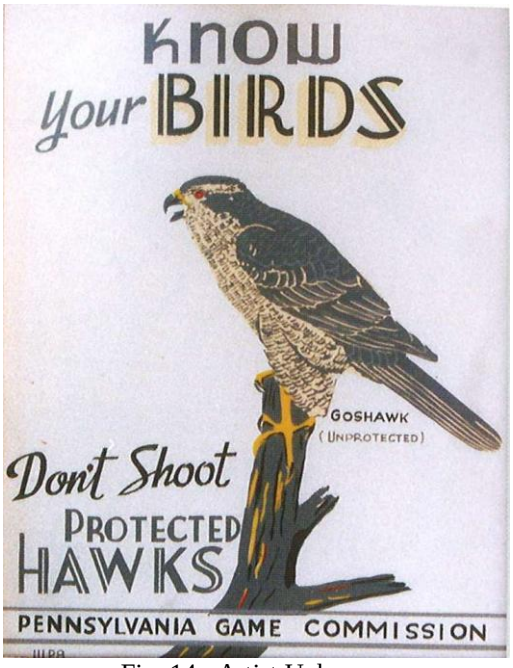


Fig. 14: Artist Unknown
Pennsylvania FAP, c. 1935 - 1943
Repository/Collector: Sid Brion

Fig. 15: John James Audubon, "Goshawk"
Image from: John James Audubon, *The Art of Audubon: The Complete Birds and Mammals* (New York: Times Books, 1979), 25.

Fig. 16: Photographer Unknown
Photograph from: J. Frank Ritter, Jr., "Conservation and Scouting," *Pennsylvania Game News* 11, no. 10 (January 1941): 12.

Fig. 17: "Seeing is Believing" Union Pacific Brochure
From: Parks General Publicity and Statistics Publicity, December 4, 1934-May 31, 1935; Box 325, O-501; Second Subseries, Central Classified Files, 1933-1949; Records of the National Park Service, Record Group 79; National Archives at College Park, College Park, MD

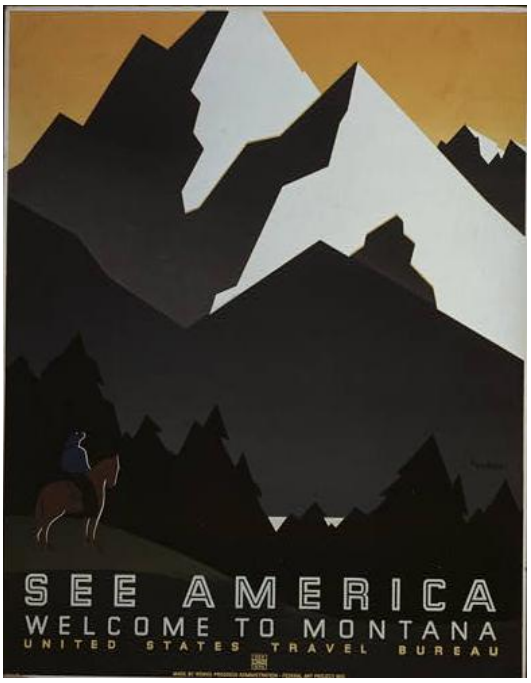


Fig. 18: Martin Weitzman
New York FAP, c. 1936 - 1939
Repository: Library of Congress Prints and Photographs Division Washington, DC

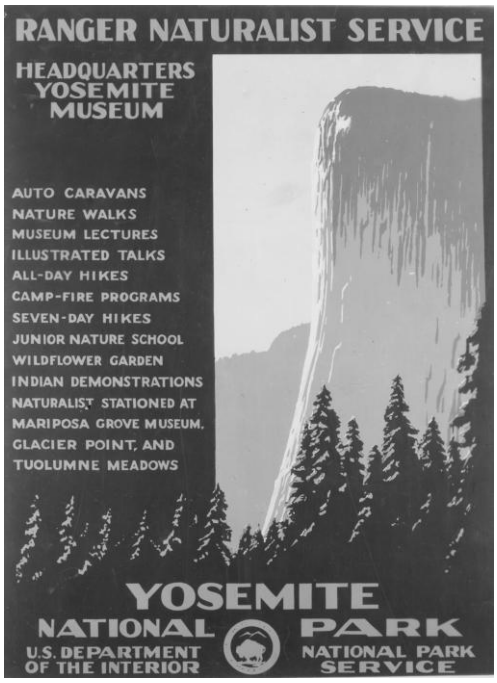


Fig. 19: Schwenk
1940 Photograph of WPA Poster
Poster Artist Unknown. WPA - CCC, c. 1938
(Original Poster No Longer in Existence)
Repository: National Park Service Library, Harpers Ferry, WV

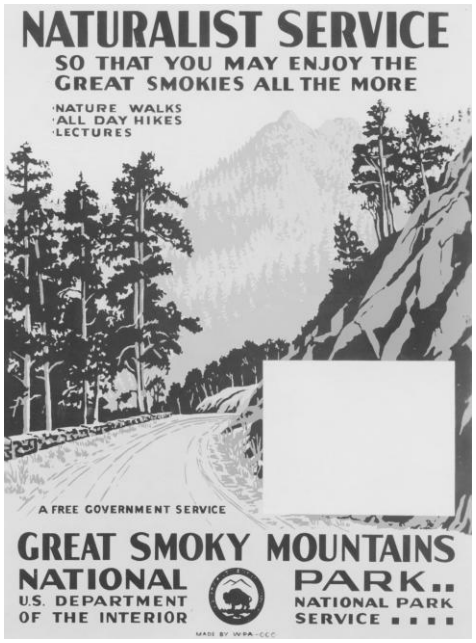


Fig. 20: Schwenk
1940 Photograph of WPA Poster.
Poster Artist Unknown. WPA - CCC, c. 1938
(Original Poster No Longer in Existence)
Repository: National Park Service Library, Harpers Ferry, WV

Chapter 4: Marching on to Health

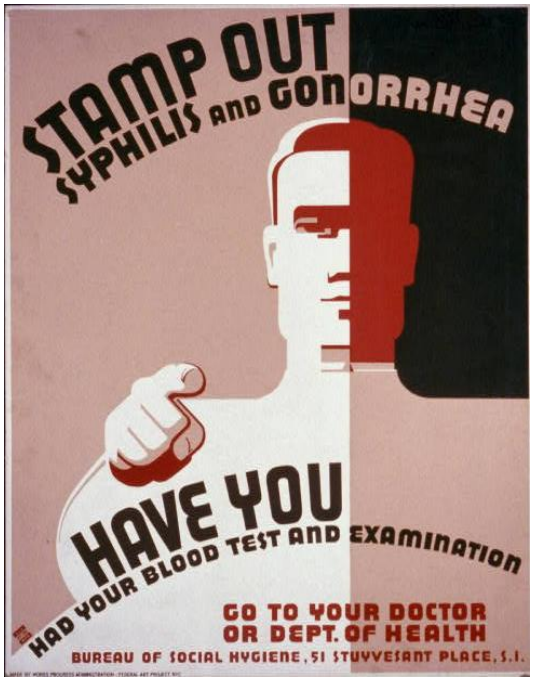


Fig. 1: Artist Unknown
New York City FAP, c. 1936 - 1938
Repository: Library of Congress Prints and Photographs Division Washington, DC

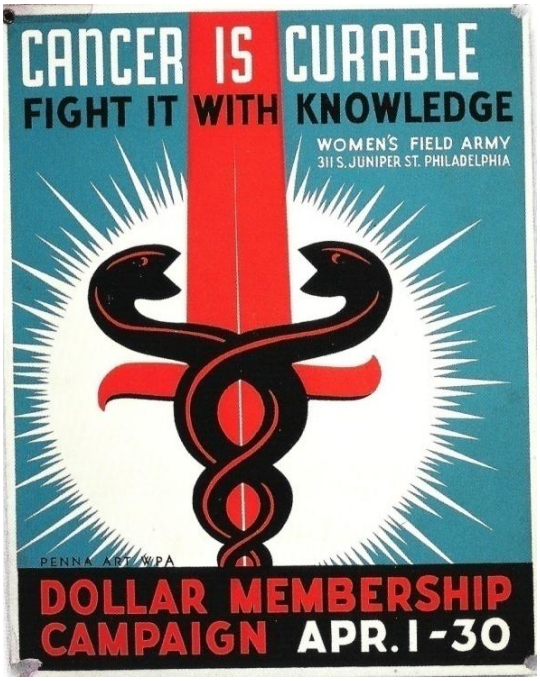


Fig. 2: Artist Unknown
Pennsylvania Art Project, c. 1935 - 1943
Repository: Historical Society of Pennsylvania

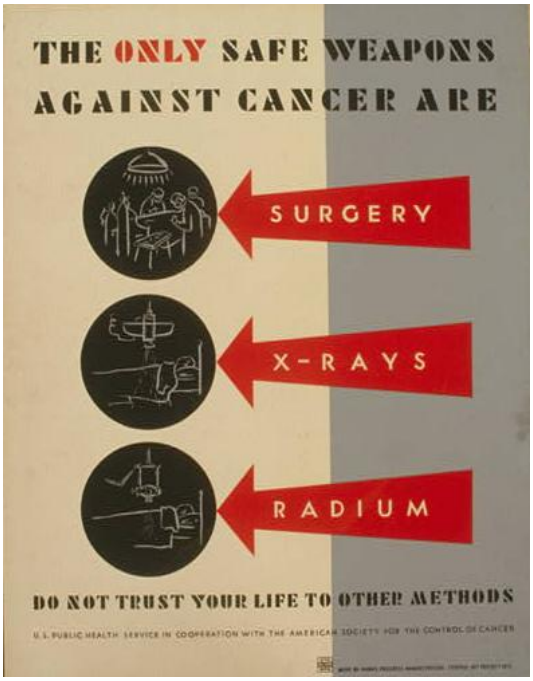


Fig. 3: Anthony Velonis
New York City FAP, c. 1936 - 1938
Repository: Library of Congress Prints and Photographs Division Washington, DC

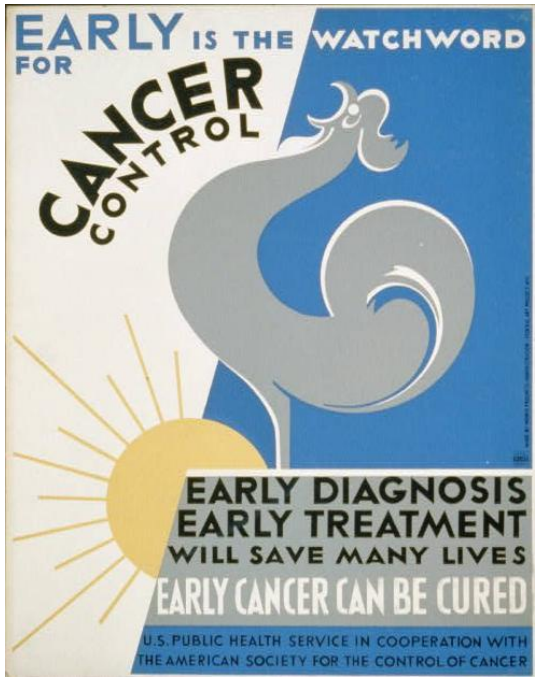


Fig. 4: Artist Unknown
New York City FAP, c. 1936 - 1938
Repository: Library of Congress Prints and Photographs Division Washington, DC

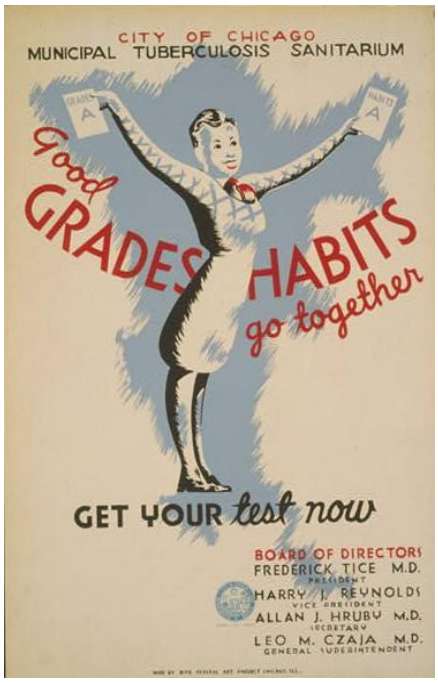


Fig. 5: Artist Unknown
Chicago, Illinois FAP, 1939
Repository: Library of Congress Prints and Photographs Division Washington, DC

Fig. 6: Charles Verschuuren
New York City FAP, c. 1936 - 1939
Repository: Library of Congress Prints and Photographs Division Washington, DC

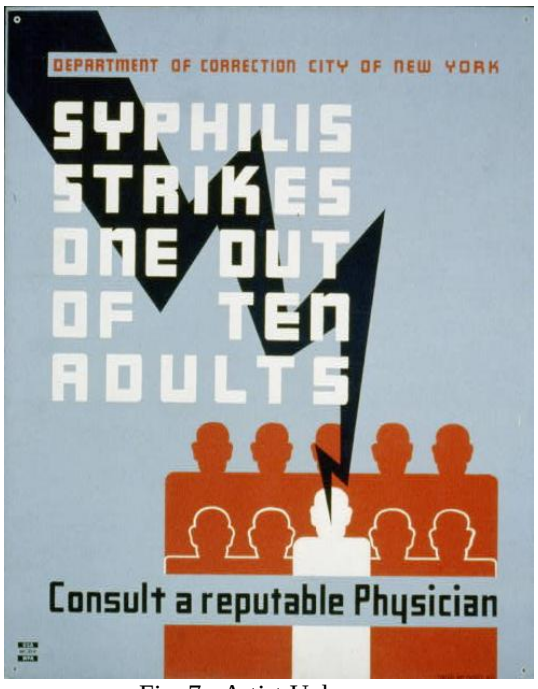


Fig. 7: Artist Unknown
New York City FAP, c. 1936 - 1937
Repository: Library of Congress Prints and Photographs Division Washington, DC

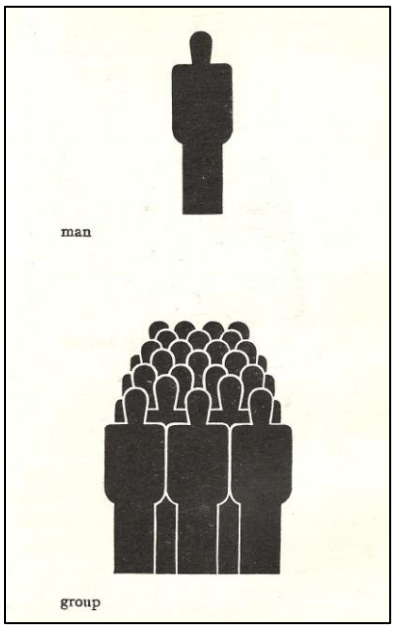


Fig. 8: Image taken from Otto Neurath, *International Picture Language: The First Rules of ISOTYPE* (London: Kegan, Paul, Trench, Trubner & Co., Ltd., 1936), 31.

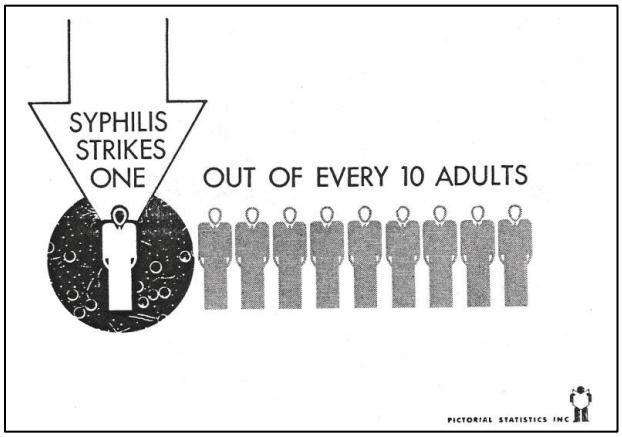


Fig. 9: Image taken from Thomas Parran, M.D., "The Next Great Plague to Go," *Survey Graphic* 25 no. 7 (July 1936): 406.

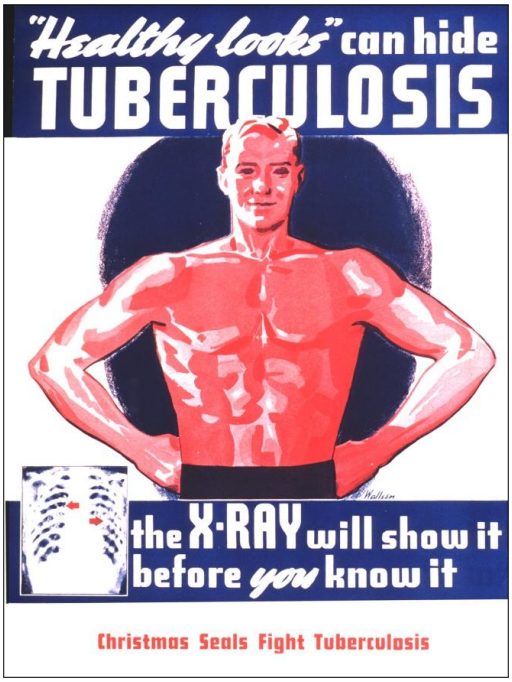


Fig. 11: Artist Unknown
National Tuberculosis Association, c. 1935
Repository: U.S. National Library of Medicine, History of Medicine Division, Prints and Photographs Collection (C00200), Bethesda, MD. © 2003 American Lung Association

Fig. 10: Artist Unknown
Chicago, Illinois FAP, c. 1936 - 1939
Repository: Library of Congress Prints and Photographs Division Washington, DC

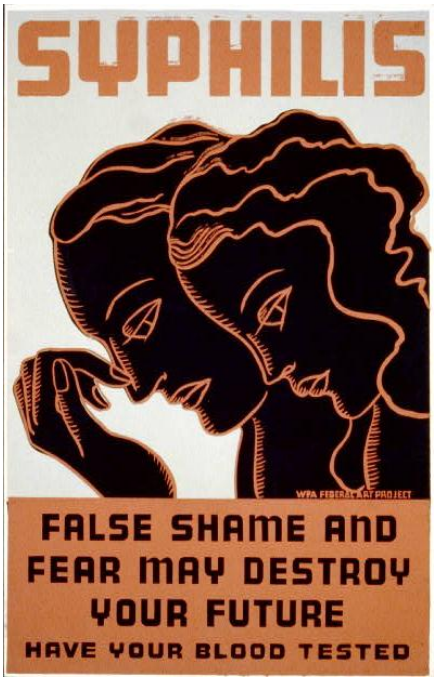


Fig. 12: Erik Hans Krause
Rochester, New York FAP, c. 1936 - 1938
Repository: Library of Congress Prints and Photographs Division Washington, DC

Fig. 13: Artist Unknown
Chicago, Illinois FAP, c. 1936 - 1940
Repository: Library of Congress Prints and Photographs Division Washington, DC

Fig. 14: Artist Unknown
Chicago, Illinois FAP, c. 1936 - 1941
Repository: Library of Congress Prints and Photographs Division Washington, DC

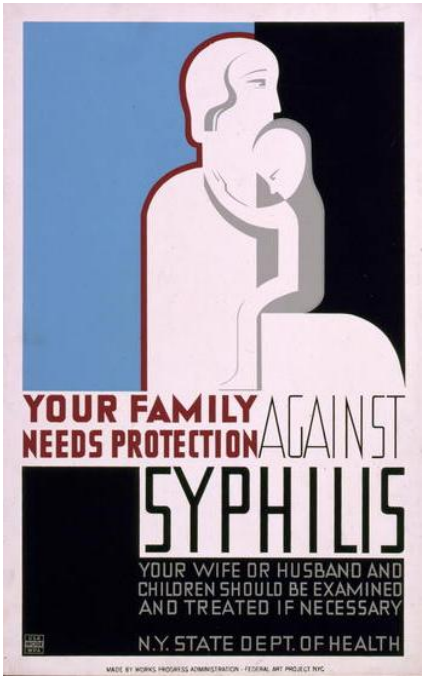


Fig. 15: Charles Verschuuren
New York City FAP, c. 1936 - 1939
Repository: Library of Congress Prints and Photographs Division Washington, DC

Fig. 16: Possibly M. Lewis Jacobs
New York City FAP, c. 1936 - 1940
Repository: Library of Congress Prints and Photographs Division Washington, DC

Fig. 17: Artist Unknown
Chicago, Illinois FAP, c. 1936 - 1939
Repository: Library of Congress Prints and Photographs Division Washington, DC

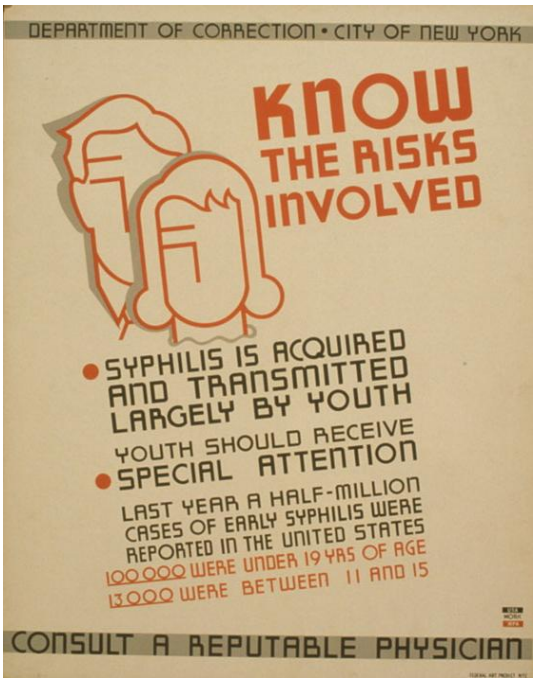


Fig. 18: Artist Unknown
New York City FAP, c. 1936 - 1937
Repository: Library of Congress Prints and Photographs Division Washington, DC

Fig. 19: Artist Unknown
Chicago, Illinois FAP, c. 1936 - 1940
Repository: Library of Congress Prints and Photographs Division Washington, DC

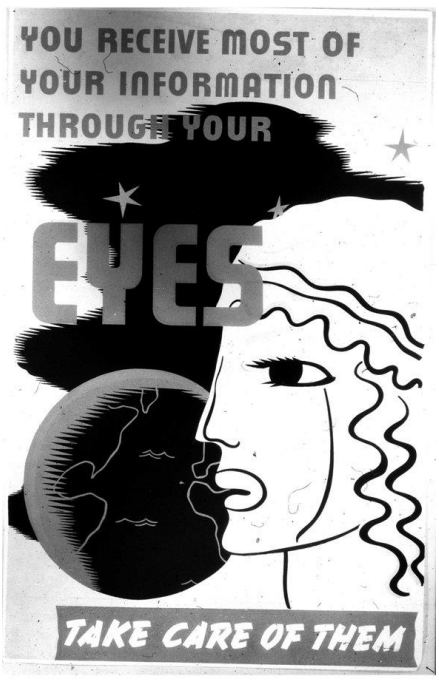


Fig. 20: Erik Hans Kraus
Rochester, New York FAP, c. 1936 - 1938
Repository: Erik Hans Krause Papers, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution

Chapter 5: One Third of a Nation - Ill-Housed

Fig. 1: Anthony Velonis
New York City FAP, c. 1936 - 1938
Repository: Library of Congress Prints and Photographs Division Washington, DC

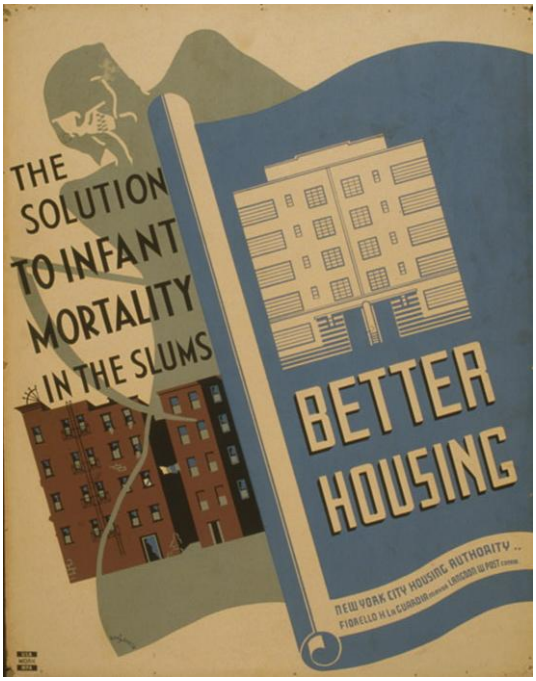


Fig. 2: Benjamin Sheer
New York City FAP, 1936
Repository: Library of Congress Prints and Photographs Division Washington, DC

Fig. 3: Earl Schuler
Ohio FAP, c. 1936 - 1940
Repository: Library of Congress Prints and Photographs Division Washington, DC

Fig. 4: New York City Housing Authority, *First Houses* (1935), 3.

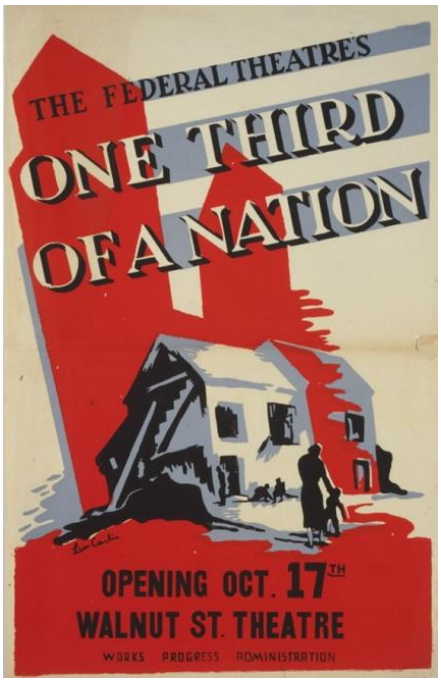


Fig. 5: Leon Carlin
Pennsylvania FAP, c. 1936 - 1939
Repository: Library of Congress Prints and Photographs Division Washington, DC

Fig. 6: Artist Unknown
Ohio FAP, c. 1936 - 1940
Repository: Library of Congress Prints and Photographs Division Washington, DC

Fig. 7: Estelle Levine
New York City FAP, 1936
Repository: Library of Congress Prints and Photographs Division Washington, DC

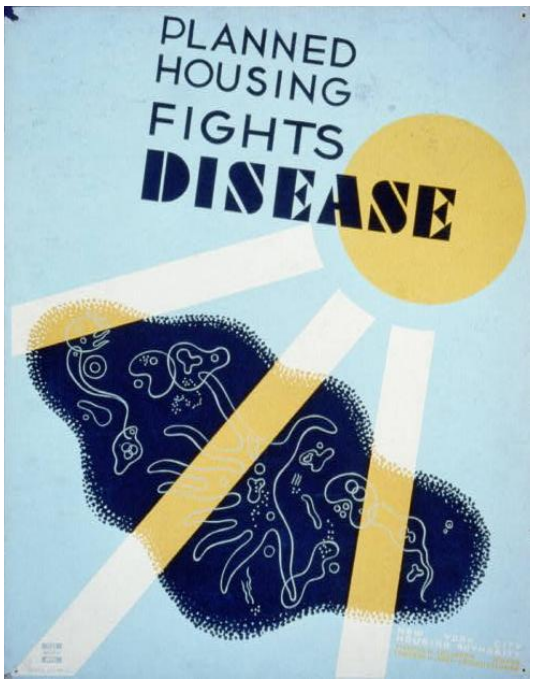


Fig. 8: Artist Unknown
New York City FAP, c. 1936 - 1938
Repository: Library of Congress Prints and Photographs Division Washington, DC

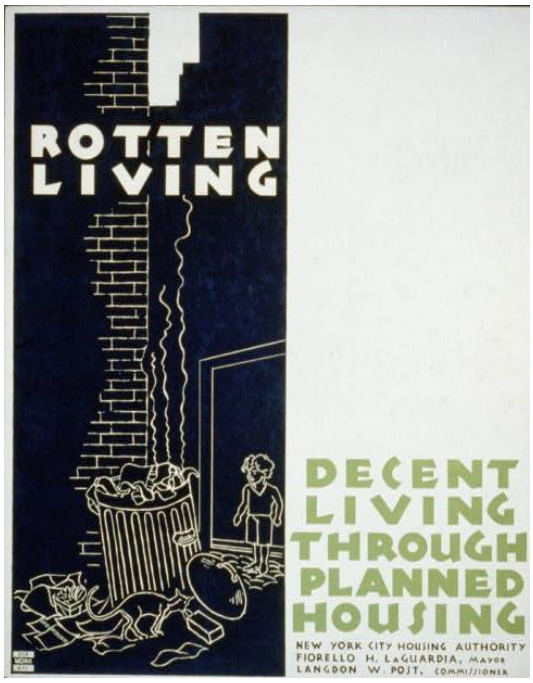


Fig. 9: Attributed to John Wagner
New York City FAP, c. 1936 - 1938
Repository: Library of Congress Prints and Photographs Division Washington, DC

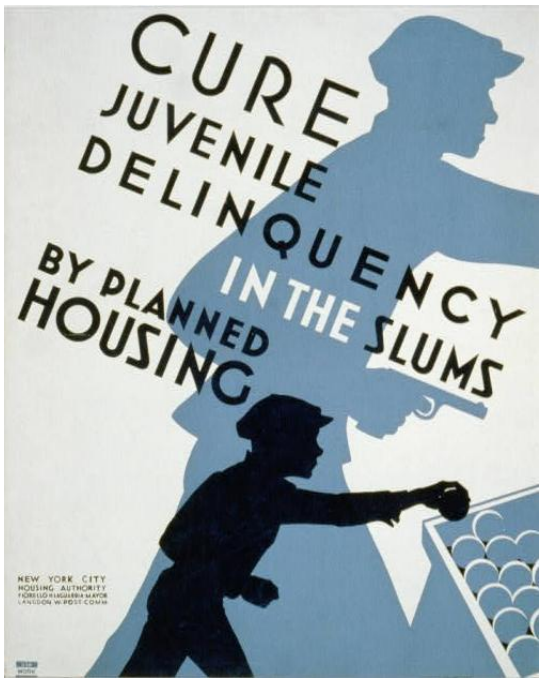


Fig. 10: Artist Unknown
New York City FAP, 1936
Repository: Library of Congress Prints and Photographs Division Washington, DC

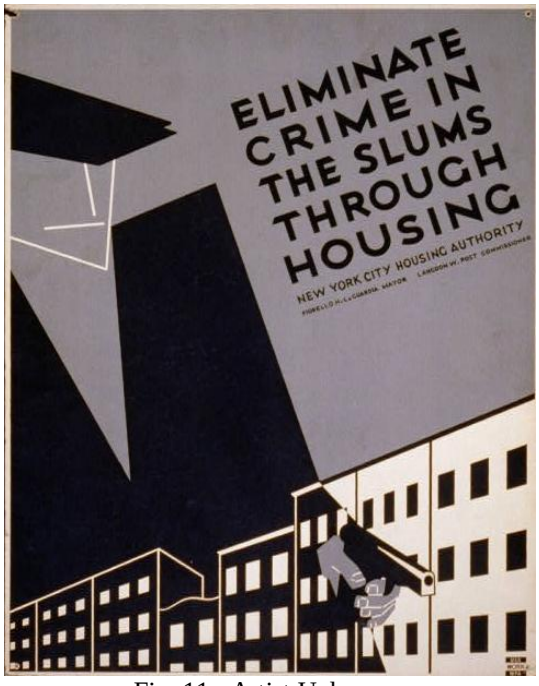


Fig. 11: Artist Unknown
New York City FAP, 1936
Repository: Library of Congress Prints and Photographs Division Washington, DC

Fig. 12: Photograph of Promotional Poster, *Dead End: Cradle of Crime*, 1937
Repository: New York State Archives. Motion Picture Division. License application case files, 1921-1965. A1418-77, Box 550, File 33438.

Fig. 13: Detail of Advertisement for Medusa Portland Cement Company, *Architectural Forum* 89, no. 6 (June 1941): 15.

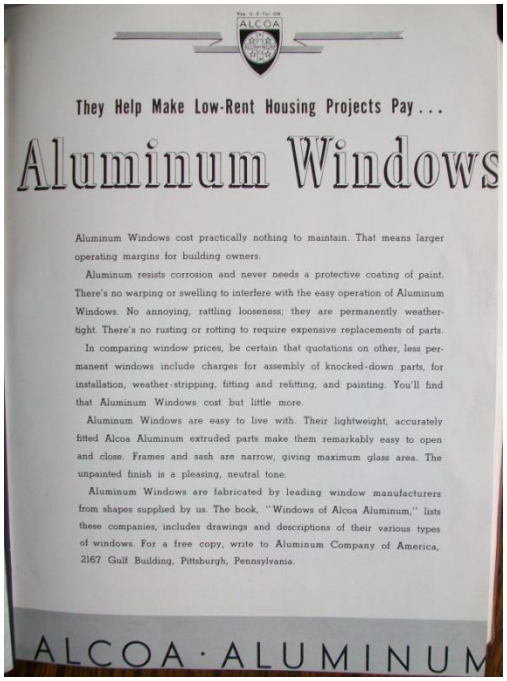


Fig. 14: Advertisement for Alcoa Aluminum Windows, *Architectural Record* (July 1939): 26-7.

Fig. 15: Artist Unknown
Pennsylvania FAP, c. 1936 - 1939
Repository: Library of Congress Prints and Photographs Division Washington, DC

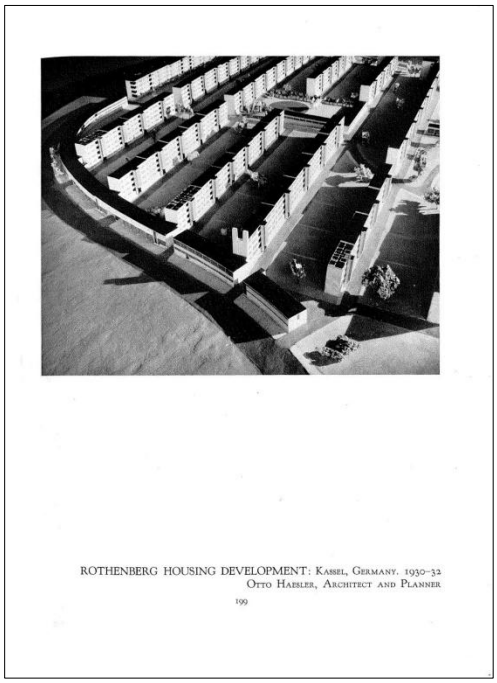


Fig. 16: Rothenberg housing development depicted in: Museum of Modern Art (New York, N.Y.), Alfred Hamilton Barr, Henry Russell Hitchcock, Philip Johnson, and Lewis Mumford. *Modern Architects* (New York: Museum of Modern Art, W.W. Norton & Co, Inc., 1932), 199.

Fig. 17: Harry Herzog
New York City FAP, 1940
Repository: Library of Congress Prints and Photographs Division Washington, DC

Conclusion

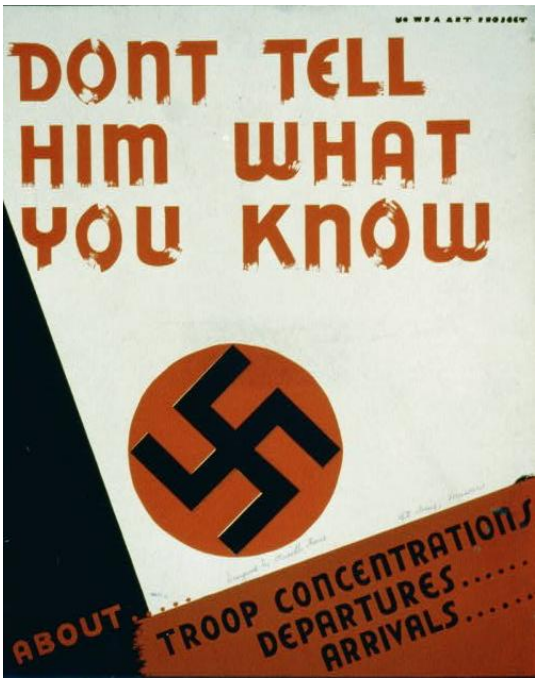


Fig. 1: Russell W. Kraus
Missouri WPA Art Project, c. 1941 – 1943
Repository: Library of Congress Prints and Photographs Division Washington, DC

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Archival Sources

Chicago Historical Society
- William McBride Poster Collection, U.S. Work Projects Administration
- Broadsides: Entertainment, Music, Concerts (Illinois--Chicago)

J.W. Hartman Center for Sales, Advertising, and Marketing History. Duke University Rare Book, Manuscript, and Special Collection Library
- Garrett Orr Papers, ca. 1873-1994
- Howard Scott Papers, ca. 1921-1984
- J. Walter Thompson Company Domestic Advertising Collection
- J. Walter Thompson Company Information Center Records
- J. Walter Thompson Company Newsletters, 1910-2005
- J. Walter Thompson Company Publications, 1887-2005
- J. Walter Thompson Company World War II Advertising Collection
- Outdoor Advertising Association of America
- War Effort Mobilization Campaigns Poster Collection, 1942-1945

National Archives at College Park, College Park, MD
- Records of the National Park Service, Record Group 79
- Records of the Work Projects Administration, Record Group 69

National Park Service Library, Harpers Ferry, WV
- Civilian Conservation Corps Materials in the National Park Service History Collection (RG 4)
- Interpretation in the National Park Service (RG 19)
- National Park Conferences (RG 8)
- National Park Service Administrative Manuals (RG 22)
- National Park Service History (RG 37)
- Series V: Cultural Resources Management Records, 1887-2000 [Prior Name: The NPS Museum Function (RG 14)]
- Washington Memoranda to All, 1935-1940 (RG 56)

Pennsylvania State Archives
- Records of the Game Commission (RG 39)

Smithsonian Institution, Archives of American Art
- Artists for Victory, Inc. Records, 1942-1946
- Joseph Binder Papers, 1933-1967
- Federal Art Program Papers of Franklin D. Roosevelt and Harry L. Hopkins, 1932-1942
- Federal Art Project, Art Education Division Records, 1939-1940
- Federal Art Project, Photographic Division Collection, c. 1920-1965, bulk 1935-1942

- Frank Greco Papers, 1922-1977
- Erik Hans Krause Papers
- Audrey McMahon Papers, 1935-1980
- Pennsylvania Federal Art Project Records, 1940-1942
- Nina Perera Collier Papers, 1934-1950
- Ruth Reeves Papers, 1919-1966
- Louis Siegriest Papers, 1927-1981

Journals – Series

American City. Pitsfield, MA: Buttenheim Publishing Corporation, 1934-1938.

American Journal of Public Health and the Nation's Health. New York: American Public Health Association, 1935-1942.

Architectural Forum. New York: Time Inc., 1935-1942.

Architectural Record. New York: The Records and Guide, 1934-1942.

Avocations. New York: H. L. Lindquist, October 1937-March 1939.

Compass. New York: American Association of Social Workers, 1935-1942.

Magazine of Art. Washington, DC: American Federation of Arts, 1937-1943.

National Parks Bulletin. Washington, DC: National Parks Association, 1933-November 1939.

Nature Magazine. Baltimore, MD: American Nature Association, 1935-1942.

New Yorker. New York: F-R Publishing Corporation, 1936-1943.

Outdoor America. Madison, WI: Izaak Walton League of America, November 1935-1941.

Pennsylvania Game News. Harrisburg: Pennsylvania Game Commission, 1932-1942.

Print. New Haven, CT: W.E. Rudge Inc., 1940-1943.

Recreation. New York: National Recreation Association, 1931-1942.

Shelter. Philadelphia, PA: Shelter, 1930-1932.

Survey Graphic. New York: Survey Associates, Inc., 1935-1942.

Visual Digest. American Optometric Association, June 1937-1942.

Primary Sources

"6,000,000 Found Ill in Day by Survey of National Health." *The New York Times*. January 17, 1938, pgs. 1-2.

Abrams, Charles. "Housing and Politics." *Survey Graphic* 29, no. 2 (February 1940): 91-3.

Altaraz, Isaac M. "Planning for Recreation." *Recreation* 29, no. 1 (April 1935): 27-8, 44-5.

Arent, Arthur. "One Third of a Nation: A Living Newspaper about Housing." In *Federal Theater Plays*. New York: Random House, 1938.

Armstrong, D. B., and John Lentz. "An 'Editorialette:' Health Education in a Free Society." *American Journal of Public Health* 31, no. 12 (December 1941): 1318.

____. "By Way of Evaluation." *American Journal of Public Health* 31, no. 3 (March 1941): 271.

____. "Pictographs – 'Handle with Care.'" *American Journal of Public Health* 31, no. 5 (May 1941): 512.

____. "Publications and Posters." *American Journal of Public Health* 31, no. 7 (July 1941): 736-7.

Ash, Robert Foster. "A Discussion of Some New Thinking Relative to Vision as a Function." *Visual Digest* 5, no. 4 (Spring Issue 1942): 27-31.

Association of Schools of Public Health. "The Need for Intensive Educational Campaigns in Cancer Control." *Public Health Reports* 55, no. 15 (April 12, 1940): 653-5.

Atkinson, Brooks. "Audubon – The Perfect Bird Man." *Pennsylvania Game News* 6, no. 4 (July 1935): 14.

Attwell, E. T. "Recreation for Colored Citizens in the New Democracy." *Recreation* 30, no. 10 (January 1937): 491-4, 515.

Bailey, Alfred M., and Robert J. Niedrach. "A Day with a Nesting Goshawk." *Nature Magazine* 31, no. 1 (January 1938): 38-40.

"Basic Principles of Healthful Housing: Preliminary Report, Committee on the Hygiene of Housing, American Public Health Association." *American Journal of Public Health* 28, no. 3 (March 1938): 351-72.

Beard, Patten. "Our National Scenery in Travel Poster." *Nature Magazine* 26, no. 3 (September 1935): 144-6.

Bertram, Anthony. *The House: A Machine for Living In; A Summary of the Art and Science of Homemaking Considered Functionally*. London: A & C Black, LTD, 1935.

Bessey, Mabel A., and Isabelle P. Coffin. *Active Reading*. New York: D. Appleton-Century Co. Inc. 1941.

Biegeleisen, J. I. *Poster Design*. New York: Greenberg, 1945.

Biegeleisen, J. I., and E. J. Busenbark. *The Silk Screen Printing Process*. New York: McGraw-Hill Book Co, 1938.

Borst, Evelyne. "Too Many Spectators!" *Recreation* 35, no. 11 (February 1942): 682.

Braucher, Howard. "Getting the Spirit of Recreation into the Human Relations of Government." *Recreation* 31, no. 11 (February 1938): 633.

____. "Freedom." *Recreation* 31, no. 8 (November 1937): 457.

____. "Keeping Adventure." *Recreation* 31, no. 10 (January 1938): 585.

____. "Our America." *Recreation* 34, no. 6 (September 1940): 341.

____. "Recreation Workers and the Preservation and Development of Democracy." *Recreation* 30, no. 6 (September 1936): 281.

____. "What is the American Way of Life." *Recreation* 30, no. 12 (March 1937): 569.

Brown, Francis J. "Social Planning through Education." *American Sociological Review* 1, no. 6 (December 1936): 934-42.

Cammerer, Arno B. "Maintenance of the Primeval in National Parks." *Appalachia* 22 (1938-9): 207-13.

Carpenter, Daniel. "Home Recreation." *Recreation* 32, no. 8 (November 1938): 459-61, 482.

Chambers, E.G. "Vision and Psychology." *Visual Digest* 4, no. 3 (December 1940, January and February 1941): 28-33.

"Comparative Architectural Details in the Greenbelt Housing." *American Architect and Architecture* 149 (October 1936): 20-5.

Cook, Luella B. "An Experiment in Observation." *The English Journal* 24, no. 25 (May 1935): 381-7.

Deering, Ivah. "Education Comes Alive." *Recreation* 32, no. 5 (August 1938): 292-4.

DeLemos, John T. *Planning and Producing Posters*. Worcester, Mass: Davis Press, 1943.

Dimock, Hedley S. "How Effective is Our Education for Leisure." *Recreation* 30, no. 9 (December 1936): 427-30.

Dippold, W. M. "Hunting Goshawks." *Pennsylvania Game News* 5, no. 12 (March 1935): 10-1.

Dows, Olin. "Art for Housing Tenants." *Magazine of Art* 31, no. 11 (November 1938): 616-23, 662.

Dublin, Louis I. "No More Tuberculosis by 1960!" *Survey Graphic* 30, no. 1 (January 1941): 30-3, 46.

Dublin, Louis I., and Homer N. Calver. "Health Education for the Millions." *American Journal of Public Health* 28, no. 2 (February 1938): 117-22.

Duffus, R. L. "The Architect in a Modern World." *Architectural Record* 80, no.3 (September 1936): 181-92.

Duke University School of Law. "Low-Cost Housing and Slum Clearance: A Symposium." *Law and Contemporary Problems* 1, no. 2 (March 1934): 135-256.

Durant, Henry. *The Problem of Leisure*. London: G. Routledge & Sons, 1938.

Emerson, Kendall. "The Future of the Program for Tuberculosis Control." *American Journal of Public Health* 25, no. 6 (June 1935): 707-11.

"Federal Agencies in Education-Recreation Field." *Recreation* 34, no. 11 (February 1941): 643-64, 695.

"Federal and State Planning for Recreation." *Recreation* 32, no. 9 (December 1938): 515.

"Feed the Birds." *Pennsylvania Game News* 4, no. 9 (December 1933): 8-10.

Field, Ben. "Sight is an Adventure." *Visual Digest* 1, no. 1 (August 1937): 33-5.

____. "Sight is an Adventure." *Visual Digest* 4, no. 1 (June, July, August 1940): 23- 6

"Fight Tuberculosis with Modern Methods." *American Journal of Public Health* 25, no. 2 (February 1935): 217-8.

Fisher, Dorothy Canfield. "Schooling for Youth in the Light of Adult Education." *Recreation*, 32 no. 5 (August 1938): 266.

Frankfurter, Alfred M. "The Year in Art: A Review of 1937." *ARTnews* (January 1, 1938): 11.

"Freedom in Recreation." *Recreation* 33, no. 10 (January 1940): back cover.

Fultz, Dessa M. "Making the Story Hour 'Go.'" *Recreation* 35, no. 2 (May 1941): 67-70, 126.

Galdston, Iago. "The Psychologic Factors of Health Education." *American Journal of Public Health* 26 no. 2 (February 1936): 171-5.

"Game Commission Exhibit at Farm Show." *Pennsylvania Game News* 11, no. 12 (March 1941): 16-7.

Gerper, Harold G. "Junior Conservation Education." *Pennsylvania Game News* 11, no. 3 (June 1940): 30.

Gloag, John. "The Architect as Design Authority." *Architectural Record* 77, no.1 (January 1935): 31-2.

Goodrich, Charles H. "The Health Department in the Field of Medicine from the Standpoint of a Private Practitioner." *American Journal of Public Health* 28, no. 8 (August 1938): 923-8.

Gordon, Seth. "Marching Forward." *Pennsylvania Game News* 11, no. 9 (December 1940): 4-7, 26-7.

"Goshawk Bounty." *Pennsylvania Game News* 3, no. 8 (November 1932): 3.

Greenbie, Marjorie Barstow. *The Arts of Leisure*. Camden, NJ: McGraw-Hill Book Company, Inc., 1935.

Greenman, Raymond H. "Incentives and Methods in Health Education - Adult Level the Medical Society View." *American Journal of Public Health* 30, no. 10 (October 1940): 1211-6.

Hallenbeck, Wilbur. "Educating the Adult Community." Review of Educational Research 10, no. 1 Social Background of Education (February 1940): 35-7.

Halsted, Sophia S. "The Nutritionist in a City Public Health Program." *American Journal of Public Health* 28, no. 7 (July 1938): 849-53.

Hemenway, H.S. "Let's All Go to School." *Recreation* 30, no. 11 (February 1937): 539-41, 562.

Henderson, Ethelyn. "Municipal Improvements Visualized by Art Department Pupils of Paterson Schools." *The American City* 49 (November 1934): 50-2.

Hitchcock, Henry Russell, Jr., and Philip Johnson. *The International Style: Architecture since 1922*. New York: W.W. Norton & Company, Inc., 1932.

Holden, Arthur C. "Housing at the Crossroads." *Survey Graphic* 25, no. 2 (February 1936): 100-2, 117-8.

Horner, Henry. "Making Leisure Time Count." *Recreation* 29, no. 9 (December 1935): 441-2, 469.

Houk, Ivan E. "The Handicraft of Weather." *Nature Magazine* 30, no. 6 (December 1937): 345-8.

Ickes, Harold L. Address of Public Works Administrator Harold L. Ickes dealing with the Future of National Policy on Slum Clearance and Low-rent Housing. Address Given at the Ceremonies Initiating Construction of the New Housing on PWA's $12,783,000 Williamsburg Slum Clearance Development in New York City. PWA Press Release #1776. January 3, 1936.

"Improving our Rural Civilization." *Recreation* 33, no.9 (December 1939): 517-9.

"Increasing America's Recreational Facilities." *Recreation* 30, no. 9 (December 1936): 448-50, 467-8.

"John James Audubon." *Pennsylvania Game News* 10, no. 5 (August 1939): 8-9.

Kaempffert, Waldemar. "Facts March On – with Neurath." *Survey Graphic* 28, no. 9 (September 1939): 538-9.

Kaulfers, Walter V. "Outcomes as Objectives." *The French Review* 9, no. 3 (February 1936): 224-30.

Kellner, Sydney. "Federal Art Project Posters Develop New Art Forms." *Signs of the Times* 88 (April 1938): 46-50.

Knox, J. H. Mason, Jr. "Reduction of Maternal and Infant Mortality in Rural Areas." *American Journal of Public Health* 25, no. 1 (January 1935): 68-75.

Lascelles, Tony. "Indians and Game." *Nature Magazine* 31, no. 1 (January 1938): 20-1.

Lasker, Loula D. "Three Years of Public Housing: Where do we go From Here?" *Survey Graphic* 26, no. 2 (February 1937): 78-82, 115-6.

Lasswell, Harold D. "The Function of the Propagandist." *International Journal of Ethics* 38, no. 3 (April 1928): 258-68.

Leopold, Aldo. "Conservation Esthetic." *Pennsylvania Game News* 9, no. 5 (August 1938): 3-5, 31.

____. *Game Management*. New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1933.

Leopold, Aldo, and Charles Walsh Schwartz. *A Sand County Almanac, and Sketches Here and There*. 1949. Reprint, with an introduction by Robert Finch, New York: Oxford University Press, 1987.

Loomis, C. Frances. "Camp Fire Girls Learn to See." *Recreation* 34, no. 4 (July 1940): 233-6, 274.

Loveman, Amy. "Recreational Reading." *Recreation* 30, no. 7 (October 1936): 363-4.

Lumsden, May. "First Families." *Survey Graphic* 25, no. 2 (February 1936): 103-5.

Luttringer, Leo A., Jr. "Dramas of the Wild." *Pennsylvania Game News* 10, no. 5 (August 1939): 12-5.

____. "Education in Conservation." *Pennsylvania Game News* 10, no. 9 (December 1939): 10.

____. "Outlaws of the Air – Or Are They? The Answer to Those Who Say that the Only Good Hawk is a Dead One." *Pennsylvania Game News* 9, no. 4 (July 1938): 10-1.

____. "Pennsylvania Hawks - What They Eat." *Pennsylvania Game News* 6, no. 6 (September 1935): 4-5.

Lynd, Robert S. *Knowledge for What? The Place of Social Science in American Culture*. NY: Grove Press, Inc., 1939.

Macfayden, Dugald. "Slum Clearance as National Defense." *The American City* 49 (March 1934): 48.

Marsden, Carl A. "A WPA Program of Adult Education, Schuylkill County, Pennsylvania." *Journal of Educational Sociology* 10, no. 9 (May 1937): 548-59.

"Mayor La Guardia on 'The New Way of Living.'" *The American City* 51 (October 1936): 5.

McAndrew, John. "Architecture in the United States." *The Bulletin of the Museum of Modern Art* 6, no. ½ (February 1939): 2-12.

McCamy, James L. *Government Publicity, Its Practice in Federal Administration*. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1939.

McNutt, Paul V. "Recreation and the National Morale." *Recreation* 33, no. 10 (January 1940): 543-6, 583.

Mercer, F. A., William Gaunt, Grace Lovat Fraser, Charles Rosner, and Felix Gluck. *Modern Publicity*. London: Studio, Ltd., 1938-40.

Meyer, Mrs. Eugene. "Recreation in Our Present Democracy." *Recreation* 29, no. 9 (December 1935): 437-9, 468-9.

"Misrepresenting a Public Health Situation." *American Journal of Public Health* 26, no. 3 (March 1936): 290.

"Modley Pictorializes the U.S." *Survey Graphic* 26, no. 9 (September 1937): 488-9.

Museum of Modern Art (New York, N.Y.) Alfred Hamilton Barr, Henry Russell Hitchcock, Philip Johnson and Lewis Mumford. *Modern Architects*. New York: Museum of Modern Art, W.W. Norton & Co, Inc., 1932.

Museum of Modern Art (New York, N.Y.), and E. McKnight Kauffer. *Posters by E. McKnight Kauffer*. New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1937.

Nash, Jay B. *Spectatoritis*. New York: A.S. Barnes and Company, 1938.

Neurath, Otto. "Visual Education: A New Language." *Survey Graphic* 26, no. 1 (January 1937): 25-8.

____. "Visual Representation of Architectural Problems." *Architectural Record* 82, no. 1 (July 1937): 56-61.

Neurath, Otto and H. E. Kleinschmidt. *Health Education by Isotype*. New York: American Public Health Association, 1939.

New York City Housing Authority. *First Houses*. New York: New York City Housing Authority, 1935.

"Otto Neurath, Social Showman." *American Journal of Public Health* 27, no. 1 (January 1937): 81.

Parran, Thomas. "No Defense for Any of Us." *Survey Graphic* 27, no. 4 (April 1938): 197-202, 248-52.

____. "Relationship of Maternal and Child Health to the General Health Program." *American Journal of Public Health* 28, no. 3 (March 1938): 256-62.

____. *Shadow on the Land: Syphilis*. New York: Reynal & Hitchcock, 1937.

____. "The Next Great Plague to Go." *Survey Graphic* 25 no. 7 (July 1936): 404-43.

"Pictorial Diagrams." *American Journal of Public Health* 25, no. 1 (January 1935): 94.

Platt, H. Henry. "Science Indoors and Out." *Recreation* 33, no. 1 (April 1939): 9-12, 47.

"Playgrounds for All." *Nature Magazine* 25, no. 5 (May 1935): 242-55.

Poole, Earl L. "A Program of Education through Recreation." *Recreation* 34, no. 4 (July 1940): 247-8, 273.

"Publicity Service Uncertain." *Bulletin of the American Library Association* 30, no. 9 (September 1936): 878.

Purvis, Tom, Frank Alfred Mercer, and William Gaunt. *Poster Progress*. London: The Studio, 1939.

"Regarding Comic Magazines." *Recreation* 35, no. 11 (February 1942): 689.

Relyea, Gladys M. "Some Possibilities in Science for the Leisure Time of Adults." *Recreation* 29, no. 7 (October 1935): 361-3, 374.

Richardson, Louise. "Books and the More Abundant Life." *Recreation* 32, no. 5 (August 1938): 281-3, 314.

Richmond, Leonard. *The Technique of the Poster*. London: Sir I. Pitman & Sons, Ltd, 1933.

Riley, R. H. "The Health Department in the Field of Medicine." *American Journal of Public Health* 28, no. 3 (March 1938): 303-8.

Ritter, J. Frank, Jr. "Conservation and Scouting." *Pennsylvania Game News* 11, no. 10 (January 1941): 12-3, 31.

Rivers, Thomas E. "Recreation and the American Way of Life." *Recreation* 33, no. 3 (June 1939): 121.

Robinson, Bruce B. "The Professional in Recreation and His Responsibility for Personality Development." *Recreation* 32, no. 6 (September 1938): 323-4, 368-9.

Robinson, William G. "Correlation of Public and Private Agencies in the Recreation Field." *Recreation* 28, no. 12 (March 1935): 563-7, 594.

Roche, Josephine. "Medical Care as a Public Health Function." *American Journal of Public Health* 27 no. 12 (December 1937): 1221-6.

Roosevelt, Franklin D. 1 March 1936. Statement on Signing the Soil Conservation and Domestic Allotment Act. Taken from John T. Woolley and Gerhard Peters, The American Presidency Project (Santa Barbara, CA), accessed November 18, 2011, http://www.presidency .ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=15254.

Rossell, Beatrice Sawyer. "Publicity Clinic." *Bulletin of the American Library Association* 32, no. 11 (October 15, 1938): 918-24.

Routzahn, Evart G. "How to Use Pictorial Statistics – By Rudolf Modley." *American Journal of Public Health* 28, no. 6 (June 1938): 785-6.

Sacartoff, Elizabeth. "WPA's First-Class Posters Make First-Class Salesmen." *PM's Weekly* (August 17, 1941): 50.

"Same Slogan but Different Emphasis." *American Journal of Public Health* 26, no. 3 (March 1936): 295.

Sawyer, Edmund J. "Expression in Birds." *Nature Magazine* 34, no. 5 (May 1941): 275-6.

"Science and Recreation." *Recreation* 32, no. 5 (August 1938): 302-4.

Sears, Paul B. "Science and the New Landscape." *Harpers Magazine* iss. 1070 (July 1939): 207-16.

Severns, Hannah. "Gay Tours to Far-away Lands." *Recreation* 30, no. 12 (March 1937): 583-6.

Shepard, Carl F. "The Art of Seeing." *Visual Digest* 2, no. 2 (September, October, November 1938): 20-3.

Shepard, W. P. "Recent Progress in Health Education." *American Journal of Public Health* 27, no. 5 (May 1937): 454-63.

Shoemaker, Myron E. "Education in Conservation." *Pennsylvania Game News* 11, no. 3 (June 1940): 26.

____. "Educator's Place in Conservation." *Pennsylvania Game News* 11, no. 6 (September 1940): 14, 27.

Skeffington, A.M., O.D. "The Eye is a Sense Organ Not a Camera." *Visual Digest* 3, no. 2 (September, October, November 1939): 11-3.

Smith, Elizabeth M. "News Stories, Lists, and Exhibits Aid in Publicity Experiment." *Bulletin of the American Library Association* 28, no. 10, part 1 (October 1934): 795-7.

Sobel, Louis. "Vocational Guidance Through the Organized Club." *Recreation* 29, no. 10 (January 1936): 508-11, 522.

"Social and Economic Costs of Slums." *The American City* 49 (May 1934): 5.

"Social Showman." *Survey Graphic* 25, no. 11 (November 1936): 618-9.

Stern, Alfred K. "Housing: A Ten-Year Program." *Survey Graphic* 25, no. 1 (January 1936): 23-7.

Storey, Charles J. "Painless Adult Education." *Recreation* 32, no. 6 (September 1938): 356, 373.

Stote, Amos. "Jean Carlu: Advertising Artist." *Print* 3, no. 1 (Spring 1942): 25-32.

Taft, Charles P. "Tomorrow's Citizens." *Recreation* 30, no. 7 (October 1936): 334-6, 372.

"The First Chapter of the 'Trail Riders of the Mountains' Organized in Glacier National Park." *National Parks Bulletin* 13, no. 64 (December 1937): 13-4.

"'The Health Officer' for November." *American Journal of Public Health* 26, no. 12 (December 1936): 1228-9.

"The National Cancer Institute." *American Journal of Public Health* 27, no. 12 (December 1937): 1288-9.

"The Value of Birds to Man." *Pennsylvania Game News* 4, no. 12 (March 1934): 10-1, 14.

"They Aim to Please in Delaware." *American Journal of Public Health* 28, no. 6 (June 1938): 777.

Thoma, Marguerite, O.D. "Relation of Visual Disorders to Educational Achievements." *Visual Digest* 3, no. 2 (September, October, November 1939): 4-7.

"Three Important Events." *American Journal of Public Health* 26, no. 10 (October 1936): 1038.

United States, Daniel B. Beard, Charles Newton Elliott, and Walter A. Weber. *Fading Trails: The Story of Endangered American Wildlife*. Prepared by a Committee of the United States Department of the Interior: National Park Service, Fish and Wildlife Service. New York: The Macmallan Company, 1942.

United States Federal Housing Administration. *Technical Bulletin No. 2: Modern Design*. Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1941.

___. *Technical Bulletin No. 4: Principles of Planning Small Houses*. Rev. ed. Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1940.

____. *Technical Bulletin No. 5: Planning Neighborhoods for Small Houses*. Rev. ed. Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1938.

____. *Technical Bulletin No. 7: Planning Profitable Neighborhoods*. Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1938.

United States Housing Authority. *Design of Low-Rent Housing Projects: Planning the Site*. Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1939.

____. *Policy and Procedure Bulletin No. 21: Design of Low Rent Housing Projects, The Structure*. Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office, 8 March 1939.

United States National Park Service, Robert Sterling Yard, and Isabelle F. Story. *The National Parks Portfolio*. Washington, DC: United States Government Printing Office, 1931.

United States Office of War Information. Graphics Division. *How to Make and Reproduce Posters*. New York, NY: The Division, 1943.

Van de Water, Marjorie. "Propaganda: An Insidious Assault Upon the Intelligence, Psychology Warns You How to Recognize It." *The Science News Letter* 34, no. 15 (October 8, 1938): 234-5.

Velonis, Anthony. *Silk Screen Technique*. New York: Creative Crafts Press, 1939.

"Visualizing Possible Rural and Urban Transformations through Proper Planning." *The American City* 49 (October 1934): 56.

Waldman, Henry S. "Recreation and Crime." *Recreation* 32, no. 10 (January 1939): 547-51, 584.

Walton, Mildred. "Professional Reading and its Values." *Recreation* 32, no. 8 (November 1938): 465-6, 484.

Warren, Hazel B. "Publicity and the Budget." *Bulletin of the American Library Association* 27, no. 3 (March 1933): 146-8.

"We are Not Discouraged." *American Journal of Public Health* 25, no. 8 (August 1935): 966.

Wessel, Louis. "Education Versus Recreation." *Recreation* 30, no. 2 (May 1936): 72-3, 94.

"What to do in Health Education." *American Journal of Public Health* 25, no. 7 (July 1935): 868.

"Where is Modern Now." *Architectural Forum* 68 (June 1938): 465-70.

"Why our Wildlife is Worth Saving." *Pennsylvania Game News* 9, no. 1 (April 1938): 15.

"Wildlife Exhibit." *Pennsylvania Game News* 10, no. 12 (March 1940): 16-7.

Williamson, Pauline Brooks. "Visual Education for Schools." *American Journal of Public Health* 28, no. 3 (March 1938): 278-82.

Winslow, C. E. A. "Housing as a Health Problem." *American Journal of Public Health* 27, no. 1 (January 1937): 56-61.

____. "Opportunities and Responsibilities of the Health Officer in Connection with the Federal Housing Acts." *American Journal of Public Health* 28, no. 11 (November 1938): 1269-76.

Wood, Edith Elmer. "Housing - Public and/or Private." *Survey Graphic* 24, no. 1 (January 1935): 5-7.

____. *Slums and Blighted Areas in the United States*. Reprint of 1935 P.W.A Housing Division Bulletin No. 1. Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1938.

____. "That 'One Third of a Nation.'" *Survey Graphic* 29 no. 2 (February 1940): 83-8.

Woodmansee, C. W. "The Main Traveled Highway to the Mind." *Visual Digest* 1, no. 2 (September 1937): 17-9.

Woodward, Hugh M. "Recreation – A Philosophy of Joyful Living." *Recreation* 31, no. 10 (January 1938): 587-90.

Wright, Frank Lloyd. *In the Cause of Architecture: The International Style*. Scottsdale, AZ: Taliesin West, 1953.

"Youth in Conservation." *Pennsylvania Game News* 9, no. 4 (July 1938): 1.

Secondary Sources

Aitchison, Cara, and Helen Pussard. *Leisure, Space and Visual Culture: Practices and Meanings.* Brighton: Leisure Studies Association, 2004.

Andrzejewski, Anna Vemer. *Building Power: Architecture and Surveillance in Victorian America*. Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 2008.

Anker, Peder. "Herbert Bayer's Environmental Design." *Environmental History* 12, no. 2 (April 2007): 254-79.

Armstrong, Helen. *Graphic Design Theory: Readings from the Field*. New York: Princeton Architectural Press, 2009.

Arnold, Joseph L. *The New Deal in the Suburbs: A History of the Greenbelt Town Program, 1935-1954*. Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1971.

Arthur, James, John Davidson, and William Stow. *Social Literacy, Citizenship Education and the National Curriculum*. London: Routledge Falmer, 2000.

Avery, Elizabeth Bloom. "New Deal Photography and the Campaign for Public Housing." Ph.D. Diss., University of Chicago, 2002.

Barrow, Mark V., Jr. "Science, Sentiment, and the Specter of Extinction: Reconsidering Birds of Prey during America's Interwar Years." *Environmental History* 7, no. 1 (January 2002): 69-98.

Bartram, Alan. *Bauhaus, Modernism and the Illustrated Book*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2004.

Bates, Barbara. *Bargaining for Life: A Social History of Tuberculosis, 1876-1938*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1992.

Bollmann, Stefan, and Karen Joy Fowler. *Reading Women*. London: Merrell, 2006.

Boyer, Christine M. *Dreaming the Rational City: The Myth of American City Planning*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1986.

Braddock, Alan C., and Christoph Irmscher. *A Keener Perception: Ecocritical Studies in American Art History*. Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2009.

Brandt, Allan M. *No Magic Bullet: A Social History of Venereal Disease in the United States Since 1880*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1985.

Brown, Kathryn. *Women Readers in French Painting, 1870-1890: A Space for the Imagination*. Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2012.

Burke, Peter. *A Social History of Knowledge II: From the Encyclopédie to Wikipedia*. Cambridge: Polity, 2011.

Calhoon, Claudia Marie. "Tuberculosis, Race, and the Delivery of Health Care in Harlem, 1922-1939." *Radical History Review* iss. 80 (Spring 2001): 101-19.

Cart, Theodore W. "'New Deal' for Wildlife: A Perspective on Federal Conservation Policy, 1933-1940." *The Pacific Northwest Quarterly* 63, no. 3 (July 1972): 113-20.

Carter, Ennis, Christopher DeNoon, and Alexander M. Peltz. *Posters for the People: The Art of the WPA*. Philadelphia, PA: Quirk Books, 2008.

Cartwright, Lisa. *Screening the Body: Tracing Medicine's Visual Culture*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1995.

Christensen, Carol A. *The American Garden City and the New Towns Movement*. 2nd ed. Ann Arbor, MI: UMI Research Press, 1986.

Contreras, Belisario R. *Tradition and Innovation in New Deal Art*. Lewisburg: Bucknell University Press; London: Association University Presses, 1983.

Cooney, Terry A. *Balancing Acts: American Thought and Culture in the 1930's*. New York: Twayne Publishers, 1995.

Crawley, Charles R. "From Charts to Glyphs: Rudolf Modley's Contribution to Visual Communication." *Technical Communication* 41, iss. 1 (February 1994): 20.

Crothall, Geoffrey. "Images of Regeneration: Film Propaganda and the British Slum Clearance Campaign, 1933-1938." *Historical Journal of Film, Radio, and Television* 19, iss. 3 (August 1999): 339-59.

Currell, Susan. *The March of Spare Time: The Problem and Promise of Leisure in the Great Depression*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2005.

Currell, Susan, and Christina Cogdell. *Popular Eugenics: National Efficiency and American Mass Culture in the 1930s*. Athens: Ohio University Press, 2006.

Cushing, Lincoln, and Timothy W. Drescher. *Agitate! Educate! Organize!: American Labor Posters*. Ithaca: ILR Press/Cornell University Press, 2009.

DeNoon, Christopher. "Art for the Public, Posters of the WPA." *Aidea: sekai no Dezain-shi (Idea: International Advertising Art*) 35, no. 204 (September 1987): 46-7.

___. *Posters of the WPA*. Los Angeles: Wheatley Press, 1987.

___. "WPA Posters." *Communication Arts* 28 no. 2 (May/June 1986): 60-9.

Dijkstra, Bram. *American Expressionism: Art and Social Change 1920-50*. New York: Harry N. Abrams, Inc. in association with the Columbus Museum of Art, 2003.

Drucker, Johanna, and Emily McVarish. *Graphic Design History: A Critical Guide*. Upper Saddle River, NJ: Pearson Prentice Hall, 2009.

Duffy, John. *The Sanitarians: A History of American Public Health*. Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1990.

Dunaway, Finis. *Natural Visions: The Power of Images in American Environmental Reform*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005.

Elias, John L., and Sharan B. Merriam. *Philosophical Foundations of Adult Education*. Huntington, NY: R. E. Krieger Pub. Co., 1980.

Engel, Jonathan. *Doctors and Reformers: Discussion and Debate over Health Policy, 1925-1950*. Social Problems and Social Issues. Columbia, SC: University of South Carolina Press, 2002.

Eskilson, Stephen J. *Graphic Design: A New History*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2007.

Falk, I. S. "Louis I. Dublin: November 1, 1882-March 7, 1969." *American Journal of Public Health* 59, no. 7 (July 1969): 1083-5.

Flader, Susan L. "A Biographical Study of Aldo Leopold: Thinking Like a Mountain." *Forest History* 17, no. 1 (April 1973): 14-28.

Foner, Eric, and Lisa McGirr. *American History Now*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2011.

Fox, Stephen. *The Mirror Makers: A History of American Advertising and Its Creators.* NY: William Morrow, 1984.

Friedman, Andrea. *Prurient Interests: Gender, Democracy, and Obscenity in New York City, 1909-1945*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2000.

Friedman, Jeannie. "WPA Poster Project: When Government Sponsors Art." *Print* (July/August 1978): 68-73.

Gardner, Kirsten. *Early Detection: Women, Cancer, and Awareness Campaigns in the Twentieth-Century United States*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2006.

Ghirardo, Diane Yvonne. *Building New Communities: New Deal America and Fascist Italy*. NJ: Princeton University Press, 1989.

____. "Italian Architects and Fascist Politics: An Evaluation of the Rationalist's Role in Regime Building." *Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians* 39, no. 2 (May, 1980): 109-27.

Gilman, Sander L. *Disease and Representation: Images of Illness from Madness to AIDS*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1988.

Gottlieb, Carla. "Three New Themes in Twentieth Century Art." *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 21, no. 2 (Winter 1962): 177-87.

Grieve, Victoria. *The Federal Art Project and the Creation of Middlebrow Culture*. Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2009.

Grover, Kathryn, ed. *Fitness in American Culture: Images of Health, Sport, and the Body, 1830-1940*. Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1989.

Halpern, Sue. "New Deal City." *Mother Jones* (May/June 2002): 30-2.

Hamilton, Mary. *Literacy and the Politics of Representation*. New York: Routledge, 2012.

Hansen, Bert. *Picturing Medical Progress from Pasteur to Polio: A History of Mass Media Images and Popular Attitudes in America*. New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2009.

Harris, Jonathan. *Federal Art and National Culture: The Politics of Identity in New Deal America*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 1995.

Heller, Steven, and Georgette Ballance. *Graphic Design History*. New York: Allworth Press, 2001.

Hemingway, Andrew. *Artists on the Left: American Artists and the Communist Movement, 1926-1956*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2002.

____. "Cultural Democracy by Default: The Politics of the New Deal Arts Programmes." *Oxford Art Journal* 30 no. 2 (2007): 269-87.

Hench, John B. *Books As Weapons: Propaganda, Publishing, and the Battle for Global Markets in the Era of World War II*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2010.

Hills, Patricia. *Social Concern and Urban Realism: American Painting of the 1930s*. Boston Mass.: Boston University Art Gallery, 1983.

Inmann, Christiane. *Forbidden Fruit: A History of Women and Books in Art*. Munich: Prestel, 2009.

Ito, Mimei. "Seeing Animals, Speaking of Nature: Visual Culture and the Question of the Animal." *Theory Culture and Society* 25, no. 4 (2008): 119-37.

Jackson, Kenneth T. *Crabgrass Frontier: The Suburbanization of the United States*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1985.

Karier, Clarence J. *The Individual, Society, and Education: A History of American Educational Ideas*. Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1986.

Kett, Joseph F. *The Pursuit of Knowledge Under Difficulties: From Self-Improvement to Adult Education in America, 1750-1990*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1994.

Kinsey, Joni Louise. *Thomas Moran and the Surveying of the American West*. Washington, DC: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1992.

Kooijman, Jaap. "Soon or Later on: Franklin D. Roosevelt and National Health Insurance, 1933-1945." *Presidential Studies Quarterly* 29, no. 2 (June 1999): 336-50.

Kotelchuck, Milton. "Safe Mothers, Healthy Babies: Reproductive Health in the Twentieth Century." In *Silent Victories: The History and Practice of Public Health in Twentieth-Century America*, edited by John W. Ward and Christian Warren, 105-34. New York: Oxford University Press, 2007.

Kozol, Wendy. "Madonnas of the Fields: Photography, Gender, and 1930s Farm Relief." *Genders* 2, no. 2 (1988): 1-23.

Kunzman, Robert, and David Tyack. "Educational Forums of the 1930s: An Experiment in Adult Civic Education." *American Journal of Education* 111, no. 3 (May 2005): 320-40.

Langa, Helen. *Radical Art: Printmaking and the Left in 1930s New York*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004.

Leff, Leonard J., and Jerold L. Simmons. *The Dame in the Kimono: Hollywood, Censorship and the Production Code*. 2nd ed. Lexington: The University Press of Kentucky, 2001.

Leonard, Robert J. "'Seeing is Believing': Otto Neurath, Graphic Art, and the Social Order." *History of Political Economy* 31(1999 Supplement): 452-78.

Leuchtenburg, William E. *The FDR Years: On Roosevelt and His Legacy*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1995.

Littau, Karin. *Theories of Reading: Books, Bodies and Bibliomania*. MA: Polity Press, 2006.

Luken, Paul C., and Suzanne Vaughan. "Standardizing Childrearing through Housing." *Social Problems* 53, no. 3 (August 2006): 299-331.

MacGillivray, Laurie, and Margaret Sauceda Curwen. "Tagging as a Social Literacy Practice." *Journal of Adolescent and Adult Literacy* 50, no. 5 (February 2007): 354-69.

Maher, Neil M. *Nature's New Deal: The Civilian Conservation Corps and the Roots of the American Environmental Movement*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008.

Marchand, Roland. *Advertising the American Dream: Making Way for Modernity, 1920-1940*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985.

Marling, Karal Ann. *Wall-to-Wall America: A Cultural History of Post-Office Murals in the Great Depression*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1982.

McElvaine, Robert S. "Art for Our Sake: The Democratic Vision of the WPA Posters." *The Washington Monthly* 20, no. 4 (May 1988): 55-7.

McGrath, Robert L. *Art and the American Conservation Movement*. Boston: U.S. Dept. of the Interior, National Park Service, Northeast Museum Services Center, 2001.

McKinzie, Richard D. *The New Deal for Artists*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1973.

Meine, Curt. *Aldo Leopold: His Life and Work*. Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press, 1988.

Melosh, Barbara. *Engendering Culture: Manhood and Womanhood in New Deal Public Art and Theatre*. Washington: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1991.

Meyer, Stephen Grant. *As Long as They Don't Move Next Door: Segregation and Racial Conflict in American Neighborhoods*. Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 2000.

Miles, John C. *Wilderness in National Parks: Playground or Preserve*. Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2009.

Minganti, Franco. "1939: Flying Eyes. Flight, Metropolis, and Icons of Popular Imagination." *Storia Nordamericana* 7, iss. 1 (1990): 93-103.

Morshed, Adnan. "The Aesthetics of Ascension in Norman Bel Geddes's Futurama." *Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians* 63, no. 1 (March 2004): 74-99.

Nash, Roderick. *Wilderness and the American Mind*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1967.

National Collection of Fine Arts (U.S.). *National Parks and the American Landscape*. Washington: Published for the National Collection of Fine Arts by the Smithsonian Institution Press, 1972.

National Library of Medicine (U.S.), and National Academy of Sciences (U.S.). *An Iconography of Contagion: An Exhibition of 20th-Century Health Posters from the Collection of the National Library of Medicine*. Washington, D.C.: National Academy of Science, National Academies, 2008.

O'Connor, Francis V. *Art for the Millions: Essays from the 1930s by Artists and Administrators of the WPA Federal Art Project*. Greenwich, Connecticut: New York Graphic Society, LTD, 1973.

___. *The New Deal Art Projects An Anthology of Memoirs.* Washington, DC: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1972.

Pai, Hyungmin. *The Portfolio and the Diagram: Architecture, Discourse, and Modernity in America*. Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 2002.

Park, Marlene, and Gerald E. Markowitz. *Democratic Vistas: Post Offices and Public Art in the New Deal*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1984.

Parsons, K. C. "Clarence Stein and the Greenbelt Towns Settling for Less." *Journal of the American Planning Association* 56, no. 2 (1990): 161-83.

Pells, Richard H. *Radical Visions and American Dreams: Culture and Social Thought in the Depression Years.* New York: Harper and Row, 1973.

Perry, Lewis. *Intellectual Life in America: A History*. New York: F. Watts, 1984.

Plunz, Richard. *A History of Housing in New York City*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1993.

Poirier, Suzanne. *Chicago's War on Syphilis, 1937-40: The Times, the Trib, and the Clap Doctor. With an Epilogue on Issues and Attitudes in the Time of AIDS*. Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1995.

Pommer, Richard. "The Architecture of Urban Housing in the United States during the Early 1930s." *Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians* 37, no. 4 (December 1978): 235-64.

Radford, Gail. *Modern Housing for America: Policy Struggles in the New Deal Era*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996.

Radway, Janice A. *A Feeling for Books: The Book-of-the-Month Club, Literary Taste, and Middle-Class Desire*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1997.

Remington, R. Roger, and Lisa Bodenstedt. *American Modernism: Graphic Design 1920 to 1960*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003.

Riley, Terence, and Stephen Perrella. *The International Style: Exhibition 15 and the Museum of Modern Art*. New York: Rizzoli, 1992.

Rothman, Sheila M. *Living in the Shadow of Death: Tuberculosis and the Social Experience of Illness in American History*. Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1995.

Rubin, Joan Shelley. "Information, Please!": Culture and Expertise in the Inerwar Period. *American Quarterly* 35, no. 5 (Winter 1983): 499-517.

Runte, Alfred, and Harold K. Steen. *Public Lands, Public Heritage: The National Forest Idea*. Niwot, Colorado: Roberts Rinehart Publishers in Cooperation with The Buffalo Bill Historical Center, 1991.

Ruth, David E. *Inventing the Public Enemy: The Gangster in American Culture, 1918-1934*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996.

Rydell, Robert W. *World of Fairs: The Century-of-Progress Expositions*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993.

Saab, Joan A. *For the Millions: American Art and Culture between the Wars*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2004.

Schivelbusch, Wolfgang. *Three New Deals: Reflections on Roosevelt's America, Mussolini's Italy, and Hitler's Germany, 1933-1939*. New York: Henry Holt and Co., 2006.

Schrepfer, Susan R. *Nature's Altars: Mountains, Gender, and American Environmentalism*. Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2005.

Shanken, Andrew M. "The Uncharted Kahn: The Visuality of Planning and Promotion in the 1930s and 1940s." *The Art Bulletin* 88, no. 2 (June 2006): 310-27.

Silver, Alain and James Ursini, eds. *Film Noir Reader*. New York: Limelight Editions, 1996.

Silver, Kenneth E. *Chaos & Classicism: Art in France, Italy, and Germany, 1918-1936*. New York: Guggenheim Museum, 2010.

Smiley, David. "Making the Modified Modern." *Perspecta* 32, Resurfacing Modernism (2001): 38-54.

Starr, Paul. *The Social Transformation of American Medicine*. New York: Basic Books, 1982.

Steele, Richard W. *Propaganda in an Open Society: The Roosevelt Administration and the Media, 1933-1941*. Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1985.

Stewart, Garrett. *The Look of Reading: Book, Painting, Text*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006.

Stoeckle, John D., and George Abbott White. *Plain Pictures of Plain Doctoring: Vernacular Expression in New Deal Medicine and Photography*. MIT Press Series on the Humanistic and Social Dimensions of Medicine. Cambridge, Mass: MIT Press, 1985.

Stole, Inger L. *Advertising on Trial: Consumer Activism and Corporate Public Relations in the 1930s*. History of Communication. Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2006.

Stubblefield, Harold W., and Patrick Keane. *Adult Education in the American Experience: From the Colonial Period to the Present*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Publishers, 1994.

Sutter, Paul. *Driven Wild: How the Fight against Automobiles Launched the Modern Wilderness Movement*. Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2002.

Szalay, Michael. *New Deal Modernism: American Literature and the Invention of the Welfare State*. Post-Contemporary Interventions. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2000.

Tobey, Ronald C. *Technology as Freedom: The New Deal and the Electrical Modernization of the American Home*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996.

Tomes, Nancy. *The Gospel of Germs: Men, Women, and the Microbe in American Life*. Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1998.

Toon, Elizabeth. *Managing the Conduct of the Individual Life: Public Health Education and American Public Health, 1910 to 1940*. Ph.D. Diss., University of Pennsylvania, 1998.

Twombly, Robert C. *Power and Style: A Critique of Twentieth-Century Architecture in the United States*. New York: Hill and Wang, 1995.

Vossoughian, Nader, and D'Laine Camp. *Otto Neurath: The Language of the Global Polis*. Rotterdam: NAi Publishers, 2008.

Wagner, Ann Prentice. *1934: A New Deal for Artists*. Washington, DC: Smithsonian American Art Museum, 2009.

"Walter A. Weber, 72, Dies; Geographic Wildlife Artist." *The Washington Post*. 13 Jan 1979. Section C6.

Winton, Alexandra Griffith. "'A Man's House is his Art': The Walker Art Center's Idea House Project and the Marketing of Domestic Design, 1941-1947." *Journal of Design History* 17, no. 4 (2004): 377-96.

Wodehouse, Lawrence. *The Roots of International Style Architecture*. West Cornwall, CT: Locust Hill Press, 1991.

Woodyatt, Lyle John. "The Origins and Evolution of the New Deal Public Housing Program." Ph.D. Diss., Washington University, 1968.

Woolner, David B., and Henry L. Henderson, eds. *FDR and the Environment*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005.

Wright, Gwendolyn. *Building the Dream: A Social History of Housing in America*. New York: Pantheon Books, 1981.

WycKoff, William, and Lary M. Dilsaver. "Promotional Imagery of Glacier National Park." *The Geographical Review* 87, no. 1 (January 1997): 1-26.

Wye, Christopher G. "The New Deal and the Negro Community: Toward a Broader Conceptualization." *The Journal of American History* 59, no. 3 (December 1972): 621-39.