

century. Noll's essay effectively complements Ringenberg's work, but he also tends toward a lack of balance when discussing twentieth century developments, especially after 1925, in so-called Christian higher education. Noll writes with a verve and clarity that makes for stimulating reading; it is unfortunate that there is no recognition of his contribution on the title page of this book.

In summary, Ringenberg-Noll have been only partially successful in what they have attempted. Their analytical-interpretive efforts work reasonably well until they move into more recent materials. To this reader their eventual switch from historical analysis to apologetic for the evangelical college is jarring and ill-considered, and it leaves one with a bit of a sour taste and uneasy feelings at the end.

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Excellence & Equity: The National Endowment for the Humanities. By Stephen Miller. (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1984. Pp. 192. Notes, index. \$17.00.)

Stephen Miller's *Excellence & Equity: The National Endowment for the Humanities* is one of a very few book-length studies of the founding, work, and structure of NEH. It arrived in bookstores and on library shelves in 1984 just before the work of the endowment was to be subjected to the intense scrutiny occasioned by Congressional hearings aimed at reauthorizing the legislation that created the agency.

These hearings are taking place in 1985 and, as usual, have brought on a season of concern about the future of the federal role in support of the humanities in the United States. The coincidence of the onset of these hearings with the search for a new chairman for the Endowment and the annual review of federal budget allocations has brought NEH under close observation. Miller could not have predicted the search for a new chairman, nor could he have known of the battle looming over budget expenditures for "middle class" programs. There can be little doubt, however, that the author of *Excellence & Equity* intended to have his say when reauthorization of the Endowment's enabling legislation was considered.

On balance, Miller's work is informative and helpful. He does his readers a significant service by pointing out and describing in detail important facts about NEH and its work. He makes the clear and convincing argument that anyone who wants to understand NEH must first understand the politics that gave birth to the Endowment and have influenced its work since the begin-

ning. Those who want to talk about NEH "in vacuo," apart from the political facts of life in Washington over the last twenty years, are either naive or seeking intentionally to mislead their listeners. NEH is not a private foundation; it is a creature of the mixture of political interest, public need, impassioned persuasion, and interest-group pressure. Miller does a good job of demonstrating that such has been the case under both Republican and Democratic administrations. His weakest analysis of the history of politics at the Endowment relates to the period of William Bennett's chairmanship. This is not just an oversight in the book, but a significant inadequacy.

One of Miller's other important themes is a discussion of the sources, nature, and effects of the conflicts in understanding of mission that have plagued (or blessed?) NEH since its founding. Miller does a good job of describing the central debate over whether NEH should concentrate most of its resources on scholarship and the academy or major public projects, but he is obviously biased in favor of an Endowment focused on support for pure scholarship. The problem with his analysis is that his advocacy of such an Endowment reveals a bias unsupported by substantive argument and detailed persuasion. Miller seeks to apply rigorous standards of judgment to the public programs funded by NEH but hardly ever comments on the value, effectiveness, or suitability of NEH funding for more scholarly pursuits. His analysis thus rests on an implicit double standard.

In the midst of the current debate about the federal budget deficit, Miller's book reminds readers that NEH funding accounts for only a very small amount of the resources devoted to the humanities in the United States. This resource should be used to the best possible advantage or it should not be used at all. Humanists should welcome the tests of need and excellence as determining factors in decisions concerning the future of federal funding for the humanities. Miller rightly argues the need for such standards.

The weakest part of Miller's book is his concluding chapter. His "Conclusions and Recommendations" are for the most part a list of unsupported and highly personal prejudices with which the reader may gladly agree or disagree. These recommendations lack real substance and in some cases are unduly vague by virtue of loose language and lack of definition. Miller and his readers would have been better served by a concluding chapter that suggested remaining questions about the Endowment rather than one that ends so weakly.

The biggest fallacy of the book is Miller's insistence that excellence and equity cannot be combined in the grant work of

NEH. He closes his study with such a claim. By doing so, he betrays his own prejudice and weakens the perceptive and balanced insight which enrich the better chapters of his study.

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Bluegrass Breakdown: The Making of the Old Southern Sound.

By Robert Cantwell. (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1984. Pp. xiii, 309. Notes, selected bibliography, index. \$19.95.)

To those who love it, bluegrass music symbolizes and embodies all the past glories of country music set in a dynamic, contemporary, yet traditional music style. Members of the subculture of fans and musicians surrounding the music pride themselves on their involvement with bluegrass. They collect records, attend shows, play and sing the music, and track down its handed-down history until they become emotionally tied to the music. For fans caught in its grip, bluegrass is more than a style of music; it is a kind of fever that affects the mind. *Bluegrass Breakdown: The Making of the Old Southern Sound* is the first work about bluegrass that communicates the passion of the genre. The book's author, Robert Cantwell, weaves together interviews with the founder of bluegrass, Bill Monroe, along with bluegrass history, the musicology of bluegrass, and interpretations of the meaning of the music in a way that imbues those things with both scholarly significance and the emotional response of the true believer.

Cantwell's most significant contribution is his treatment of the singular synthesis of African- and American-derived musical traits that combine to form bluegrass. His analysis of the rhythmic organization of bluegrass music is filled with fine detail, the result of hours of listening many times to records in order to catch all of the nuances. The discussion of bluegrass rhythm, as compared to that of other country music and jazz is valuable, yet sometimes technical, requiring the rudimentary ability to decipher musical notation. Challenging reading it may be to some, but it is worth the effort. Combining acute description of the function of the instruments in a bluegrass band with painstaking notation of bluegrass rhythms, the book fleshes out the often heard, but seldom adequately explained dictum that bluegrass is country music influenced by the blues. Cantwell also shows how the rhythmic interest of bluegrass is a major part of the music's meaning, artistic achievement, and appeal.