

least known of all the New Deal art agencies. A conservative bureaucracy, the Section kept a low profile to avoid the political controversy associated with the more flamboyant New Deal arts programs and did not attempt to build a wide base of support. "But if the Section did not build a constituency it did leave a rich legacy of work for all Americans" (p. 171). That work included 1,400 murals commissioned for over 1,000 cities and towns in a decade. All this was accomplished by a staff of nineteen, which included two photographers, a carpenter, and secretaries.

Chapter one of *Democratic Vistas* provides background material which places the Section within the context of the New Deal, while chapter two outlines the public procedures, competitions, and pressures from local groups involved in the mural projects. Chapters three through five are devoted to the three major themes portrayed in the murals: historical events, such as town founders and battles; contemporary events, such as local farms, landscapes, and cityscapes; and regionalism, the content associated with New England, the Middle Atlantic states, the South, the West, and the Midwest. Chapter seven contains an excellent discussion of representationalist art as a function of the 1930s. The authors use all the typical categories of the time—Realist, Social Realist, Regionalist, Social Surrealist or Magic Realist, Western, Native American, and Academic—in writing their useful and complete overview of American art as seen in post office murals.

During the 1930s and over the years since many have criticized the Section's program because of its conservatism, but as the authors say: "Whatever the virtues of individual murals or sculptures, its administrators, artists and public helped place art in the context of daily life" (p. 181).

Purdue University Calumet,
Hammond

John C. Carlisle

Black Milwaukee: The Making of an Industrial Proletariat, 1915-1945. By Joe William Trotter, Jr. (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1985. Pp. xvii, 302. Tables, maps, notes, illustrations, appendixes, bibliographical essay, index. \$24.95.)

Most historians of the urban black experience in this century have focused on the formation of ghettos and related aspects of race relations. In *Black Milwaukee*, Joe William Trotter, Jr., seeks to complement the ghetto model by analyzing how Milwaukee's black working class was formed—a process of "proletarianization" that involved "complex interactions of racial and class consciousness and behavior" (p. xi). He also discusses black

responses to oppression and disunity within the black community.

Industrial expansion and black migration from the deep South altered the size and structure of Milwaukee's black community after World War I. Trotter writes that the city's 980 blacks in 1910 contained "an old elite dependent upon white patronage and an emerging new elite based upon black support" (pp. 27-28). Between 1915 and 1932 race discrimination forced blacks into ghettos and into low-paying, unskilled jobs in the iron and steel, meat packing, construction, and tanning industries. While the new factory jobs entailed "a shift upward" (p. xii) in wages and status for former sharecroppers, common laborers, and service workers, industrial capitalism and racism limited how far—and where—black workers could go.

By 1930 the city's 7,500 blacks were divided into a sizeable working class and a small middle class. Some Afro-Americans in the 1920s dreamed of creating a self-sufficient "Black Metropolis," but the Depression turned such dreams to dust. On the eve of World War II, 29.3 percent of Milwaukee's black males were unemployed. Most white workers and their unions, as well as white employers, kept blacks outside factory gates. While middle-class blacks often did aid black workers, united black political efforts usually faltered because of different black class interests. Trotter claims that only the CIO unions, World War II labor shortages, federal fair employment regulations, and "the vigorous socioeconomic and political efforts of blacks on their own behalf" (pp. 147-148) helped to improve conditions. But even so, says Trotter, blacks remained proletarians.

The book has many strengths and some flaws. Unlike some other historians, Trotter devotes much attention to black women workers and deftly analyzes the divisions among blacks. In a final chapter he compares the experiences of Milwaukee's Afro-Americans to those of blacks in other cities.

The book's most serious problem stems from Trotter's proletarian framework. Trotter says that "a more consolidated Afro-American proletariat emerged by 1945" (p. 147), but a distinct black working-class consciousness and culture does not emerge from the book to support his thesis. How did black working-class culture and interests differ from the culture and interests of white classes in those years? Trotter suggests that black institutions played important roles throughout the period, but we do not see black workers in church, in families, and at work. How did religion, family relationships, and work patterns help shape black working-class life? Trotter tells us little about these things. Given Trotter's insistence that Milwaukee's "black industrial working

class was . . . active in its own making" (p. 276), readers might appreciate a fuller array of evidence about the texture of the black working-class presence. Still, there is much to learn from this otherwise interesting book.

*State Historical Society
of Wisconsin, Madison*

Michael A. Gordon

Shaping an American Institution: Robert E. Wood and Sears, Roebuck. By James C. Worthy. (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1984. Pp. xx, 299. Illustrations, tables, note on sources, notes, bibliography, index. \$18.95.)

James C. Worthy, a former vice-president under Robert E. Wood at Sears, and now a professor of management at Northwestern University, has drawn together the management philosophies of General Wood. Worthy suggests that while Wood's successful business strategies spurred Sears into the forefront of retail trade in the 1920s and 1930s and again after World War II, those strategies were not adapted to meet changing conditions after Wood retired in 1954. Admittedly, Worthy's biography (based largely on his personal notes and secondary sources) of a man he admired tends toward puffery. Nonetheless, the reader who recognizes the obvious bias and questions the more sweeping generalizations can gain some important insights into the life of a successful corporate entrepreneur.

Robert Wood held a breadth of knowledge (and an interest in statistics) that led him to recognize in the 1910s that the mail-order catalog market, primarily made up of farmers, was shrinking and that a new market, consisting of urban dwellers, was materializing. Having failed to persuade Montgomery Ward of the wisdom of his ideas, Wood moved to Sears in 1924 and began to fashion a merger of the mail-order business and retail sales. Within his business philosophy, moreover, Wood reversed the usual capitalistic perspective. The company, he believed, should serve the customer first, the employee second, the community third, and lastly, the stockholders. The assumption was clear: if the first three groups were well-served, then the fourth would reap benefits as well. Meanwhile, Wood altered Sears's buying and selling strategies. Instead of negotiating down a list price, Sears buyers worked closely with the suppliers to ascertain the costs of raw materials and of production, and then added a profit. Wood also sought to sell products that the customer desired, not just what was available from the suppliers.

Perhaps the most interesting of Wood's strategies was the way in which he encouraged Sears employees. He built upon a