THE CULTURAL PROGRAMS OF THE WPA: WITH SPECIAL
EMPHASIS ON THE FEDERAL ART PROJECT

by

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ABSTRACT

The Cultural Programs of the WPA: with Special Emphasis on the Federal Art Project

by

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The number of Americans who did not suffer in some way from the depression of the thirties was small, indeed. This was a period of great travail for the United States and the entire world. However, it was also one of the most interesting and innovative periods in American history. President Franklin D. Roosevelt exhibited forceful and quick reactions to the economic and social problems besetting the nation. Not the least of these measures of mitigation was the Works Projects Administration and the inclusive WPA cultural projects. These projects contained an art program, a writers' program, a theatre program and a music program. The contributions of these programs were varied. A great deal of monetary value was produced by such respected Americans as Jackson Pollock, Mark Rothko, Stuart Davis, Richard Wright and Vardis Fisher. Monetary return did not comprise the major value or design of the programs. The first priority centered on providing useful employment to unemployed and creative citizens. This employment program was unique in that it strived to place the unemployed artist in a position in which he could use his artistic talent. The sculptor was not forced to dig ditches or lay pipe. He was given a job that utilized his true vocation, such as work on Mount Rushmore or sculptures for a children's playground, or even the instruction of sculpturing to an eager class of adults. This was
probably where the real value of the program became patent. The artist was able to regain his self-respect and continue in his work.

The state of Utah presented a useful example of the worth of WPA cultural programs. In a state as small and rural as Utah, a viable and workable program was effected. Therefore, it is reasonable to assume that if the cultural programs were of value to Utah, the significance to the larger states and the rest of the nation cannot easily be dismissed.
Federal public relief in itself was a relatively new phenomenon to appear on the American scene in 1933. Before, there had been some measures taken to assist a virtually helpless populace. The Reconstruction Finance Corporation of Herbert Hoover was probably the most significant relief action to that time. However, due to the drastic state of affairs in the United States in 1931, the RFC gave little direct help to the people, where it was needed. The measure, by design, made Federal loans available to banks, railways and insurance companies. Hoover hoped that the psychological effect of this relief would have a healthy effect upon the economy, and he partially built his campaign around the RFC in 1932.  

Franklin D. Roosevelt offered the nation a hope for something different when he sought the Presidency in the 1932 election. In a Boston campaign address, he insisted that the National Government owed every citizen the right not to starve. He also called for public works, unemployment reserves and new experiments in governmental activity to fight the depression.  

Roosevelt won the election, and his most captivating appeal was the creation of a new hope in America with a new president. Roosevelt did not disappoint most of the people. As the most innovative man to occupy the White House in years, he immediately initiated projects to ameliorate the effects of the depression. 

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2 Ibid., p. 675.
With the counsel of his "Brain Trust," Roosevelt submitted various unique plans to the Congress. The stage was then set for the dynamic series of measures that eventually led to the Works Progress Administration cultural programs.

Initials became the general order of the day for New Deal legislation--the CCC, NRA, CWA, AAA, and among the most important, the WPA or Works Progress Administration. 4 This relief agency, created May 6, 1935, by Executive Order No. 7034 and by authority of the Emergency Relief Appropriations Act of April 8, 1935, 5 had two major goals explicit in its creation: first, to give employment to employable persons in need of work; secondly, to provide useful public projects while aiding the unemployed. In providing jobs to the needy and "small useful projects," the WPA also had a duty to coordinate the activities of the entire "works program." 6 From May, 1935, to the end of the project in June, 1943, it employed over 8,500,000 people at one time or another; or nearly one-fourth of all the families in the United States received direct or indirect support from WPA funds. 7 A total expenditure of over twelve billion dollars accompanied the often ridiculed, often praised Works Progress Administration. 8 Very few areas of the WPA activities received stronger criticism than the various cultural projects under its auspices. The criticism ran the gamut from the fatuous to the legitimate.

At its outset, the Roosevelt administration shifted funds in


7 Ibid., p. iii.

8 Ibid.
a large scale effort to rush food, clothing and shelter to the
many millions of desperately needy Americans. This was done
partially in answer to Mr. Roosevelt's campaign pledge not to
let anyone starve to death. 9

Under the Federal Emergency Relief Act of 1933 (FERA),
Federal grants, not loans, were issued to the state governments,
which then made necessary allocations. However, the need still
existed for further direct action, especially with the winter of
1933-34 approaching, and on November 9, Congress enacted the Civil
Works Administration (CWA) to "provide general buying power."
Four million people obtained work on various projects. 10 This was
all part of Roosevelt's desire to see work done for relief instead
of just handing out the dole. The President put it most succinctly:

The Federal Government must and shall quit this business
of relief...
Work must be found for able-bodied but destitute workers...
We must preserve not only the bodies of the unemployed from
destruction, but also their self-respect, their self-reliance
and courage and determination. 11

The legislation created jobs for the destitute. Unfortunately,
the CWA, while immediately successful, did not offer any long range
plan for work relief. It terminated in four and a half months.
However, the experience of the CWA helped prepare the way for the
WPA.

The WPA

The man picked to head the WPA had impressive qualifications.
Harry Hopkins had been educated at Grinnell College in Iowa, and
from there migrated to New York where he gained a job in Charity
House, a local settlement and relief group, then he headed the
New York Tuberculosis Association, and eventually worked for

9 Works Progress Administration, Inventory (Washington,
1938), p. 4.
10 Ibid.
11 Robert E. Sherwood, Roosevelt and Hopkins (New York:
Franklin D. Roosevelt, then governor of New York. Hopkins became the head of New York's Temporary Emergency Relief Administration (TERA), the first in a long series of Roosevelt's "alphabetical agencies." Hopkins worked so successfully in New York that Roosevelt took Hopkins to Washington, D.C. as part of the New Deal and gave him administrative responsibility for the FERA, CWA and finally the WPA.

Harry Hopkins was a virtuoso in political technique. "'He had the purity of St. Francis of Assisi combined with the sharp shrewdness of a race track tout.'" He also possessed a deep feeling towards his fellow human beings and a dislike of sometimes practical delay. On one occasion when someone informed Hopkins that a specific plan would "work out in the long run," Harry replied that, "People don't eat in the long run--they eat every day." 

Hopkins became the first of a series of WPA head administrators. His term ran from July 1935, until replaced on December 23, 1938 by Colonel F.C. Harrington, who remained in office until September 1940. Howard Hunter, Francis H. Dryden and Major General Philip B. Fleming in turn held positions as Commissioners of Work Projects, the title used from 1939 until June of 1943.

WPA administration consisted of four levels: 1. The Central office in Washington which formulated WPA policies. 2. Regional offices which supervised a number of states. 3. State administrations. 4. District offices which had direct management of project operations. The largest number of administrative employees came in December of 1938 when total personnel reached 35,271.

To assist in administration, a division of applications and information was established to screen all project applications.

14 Ibid.
Frank Walker and his staff sorted, tabulated, studied and rechecked all plans. An advisory committee on allotments, headed by Harold Ickes, sent its recommendations to the President's desk for final approval. 15

WPA employees received their pay from the U.S. Treasury department, although the State district offices ran the operation locally and determined the eligibility of applicants. The only requirements for employment included the need for a job, physical employability, one person per family employed on Federal projects (except CCC and NYA), registration with the U.S. Employment Service, 18 years of age, state residence requirements and relinquishment of Social Security benefits when that became applicable (August 14, 1935). Congressional restrictions prohibited the acceptance of aliens illegally in the United States, or who had not made applications for citizenship prior to the enactment of the WPA, and convicts. 16

Work relief required more funds and maintenance than a dole. Dr. Thomas Parran, United States Surgeon General in 1937, answered criticisms of work programs.

I speak not as an economist but as a doctor when I urge that useful employment be provided for all who are willing and able to work. Whatever the cost, I would urge that from the standpoint of public health in its larger concept--of mental health--economic factors are subordinated to the vital necessity of providing for our destitute citizens an opportunity of a livelihood earned by individual effort. 17

Although the work program doubled the expense of a welfare program, some substantial accomplishment partially accounted for the expenditure of money. Harry Hopkins said:

Let us keep always in mind the underlying purposes of the Works Progress Administration. Our task has been to provide

15 Ibid., p. 7; Sherwood, Roosevelt and Hopkins, p. 69.
16 Final Report, WPA, p. 17. On February 4, 1939, an act was passed allowing no aliens in the program. The minimum age was changed from 16 to 18 years of age in July 1938. No one was allowed to be employed any longer than eighteen consecutive months by the WPA. This did not include administrative personnel. (Prohibition of subversives was also included, 1939).
17 WPA, Inventory, p. 6.
jobs—jobs instead of dole—for those men, women and youths, regardless of religious creed or political belief, whose need of work has been verified.

Thus the actual projects, which have been selected and partly financed by local communities—or made necessary by such disasters as flood, drought, or other emergency—are secondary to physical and mental employment.

In our accounting to our own employers, the citizens of America, it is our duty to list and fairly evaluate every one of these many thousands of WPA projects. The creation and increase of national wealth in terms of material and social construction and improvement have a place in that accounting. And so has the cost.

But over and above all of these considerations there are restored human values in self-reliance, self-respect, renewed faith and hope on the part of millions of people which transcend everything material and provide the practical assurances that the American idea and ideal will persist.

And this should be so stated, for there are no dollar marks or decimals in the value calculations of true human progress.

Millions of people willing to work, had fallen into the "stagnant pool of idleness." They lived at an extremely low subsistence level and while they disintegrated physically and morally, their pride, their faith in the nation and their aptitude for work diminished. Although cheaper in dollars, the dole was more costly in human resources. Therefore, a work relief program became the primary goal of the WPA.

Work relief implied construction, labor or hard physical exertion to most people. Undoubtedly it did in 1933, but a human being who earned his living with an artistic skill could starve just as easily as a ditch digger. Therefore, the program included "white collar," professional and artistic individuals in the relief plans. Not unexpectedly, the more specialized projects met with criticism. White collar and professional persons seemed somewhat acceptable, but government programs for artists, musicians, actors and writers constituted an entirely different matter. After all, art was not really a legitimate vocation in the minds of most people. Even Michelangelo's family had become extremely upset when he decided to pursue a career in such a disgraceful field.

18 Works Progress Administration, Jobs the WPA Way (Washington, 1936), no pages numbered.
19 Ibid.
Throughout history, art has been associated with the more eccentric and odd individuals. Why should they be considered a part of the working force? The answer seems relatively simple; Franklin Roosevelt and Harry Hopkins both regarded artists as Americans, who should not be allowed to perish from hunger. Hopkins replied to criticisms of the Arts Program, "'Hell! They've got to eat just like other people.'"

Art, in its many forms, constituted a vital necessity to society. Artistic achievement has recorded the nature of civilization, and provided numerous forms for evaluating the creations of mankind. Without art, man would be deprived of finding a beauty in nature and in himself that he might never realize otherwise. In its absence, people would fully realize its worth. The preservation of American art and the creation of new art forms became purposes of the cultural mien of the WPA along with the supplying of jobs for the unemployed.

One of the objects of jobs created by the WPA concentrated on keeping workers fit for the ultimate return to private occupations. It seemed logical, therefore, to refrain from using a violinist as a ditch digger or bricklayer where an injury to his hands could end his career. The most logical and practical utilization of individuals came when the WPA established relief work suitable to an individual's original training. This was most fully exemplified under the WPA Arts Program. The individuals continued in the various cultural activities in which they had always worked.

Cultural Programs of the WPA

On August 27, 1935, Franklin D. Roosevelt allocated $25,315,217 for a cultural employment program under the designation, Federal Project Number One. Approval by the Comptroller General in

21 WPA, Inventory, p. 5.
22 Ibid., p. 12.
September of 1935, officially gave impetus to the program. The Cultural Program operated in four major areas: art, music, theater, and writing. Other areas could also be considered part of the cultural program, but these four constituted the most important ones and they developed separate projects of their own, even though they constituted an aggregate of only about two and one half percent of the entire WPA program. Allocations included $11,284,036 for the theatre project, $1,152,662 for the art project, $3,235,704 for the writers project, and $9,641,814 for the music project. A second allocation provided an additional $2,000,000 for art work on "non-Federal" public buildings and institutions. The products of this latter work became the property of sponsoring states and localities, rather than of the Federal Government as in the other programs.

In the cultural projects as in other WPA projects, the employees were divided into different groups in accordance with their degree of skill. The professional classification claimed most of the cultural projects employees. To receive this classification, an individual needed to demonstrate a high degree of professional proficiency. The next qualification included skilled laborers, such as bricklayers, carpenters, and people with equivalent skills. The average wage rate for skilled and professional craftsmen ranged from $55 to $85 a month, although often much less. Other classifications, semi-skilled and unskilled, made up the bulk of the WPA payroll (72% in 1938).

Proper classification and assignment in the cultural projects created inherent problems. It was no simple matter to determine the professional qualifications of actors, musicians, artists and

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25 WPA, Report on the Works Program, p. 33. Subsequent rescissions reduced the amount of funds for each area to: Art, $2,952,663; Music, $7,641,814; Theatre, $6,784,036; Writers, $4,432,504 equally, to a total of $21,811,017.
writers. The WPA attempted to solve this problem by organizing boards or committees, composed of notables in the various fields, who made the preliminary screening on the professional qualifications of workers who claimed music, art, acting or writing as their profession. Later, more complete judgments came from project supervisors. The cultural projects provided opportunity for the exercise of various degrees of ability. A musician unable to qualify for concert work could be employed in teaching music; and an artist who was judged deficient in creative ability might still be fully capable of art instruction or work on the Index of American Design.

Various other problems perplexed the cultural programs. The Actors Union proposed restriction of the Theatre Project employment to its own unemployed members. However, the WPA refused this limitation. Other problems arose when workers felt they might not receive a fair hearing on a labor grievance, or that political pressure might be applied upon them. On March 13, 1936, a WPA notice read: "No employer of the Works Progress Administration is required to make any contribution to a political party." The notice also precluded soliciting for political parties, and charged that anyone caught doing so would be discharged.

In another WPA publication, the Foreman's Handbook, the question was asked:

Q. What should the foreman do if a worker criticizes the government or the President?

A. As a citizen the worker has a right to his opinion, just as he has a right to follow any religious faith or economic philosophy. The conduct or opinions of a worker concern the foreman only when they interfere with the efficiency of the project.

Federal Project Number One was a single nation-wide project with WPA sponsorship. It provided a central administration for music, art, writers and theatre projects, and included the Historical

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Records Survey. The WPA recognized that local communities might not be able or willing to spend public funds on kinds of projects for which there was little precedent in this country. However, it was believed that these projects could demonstrate their social usefulness with Federal support.

Although local sponsors' funds were not required, local cooperation was essential to the success of these projects. For example, music projects required organized support for public performances; art projects demanded public participation and public buildings for decoration; writing projects needed access to state and local records with the cooperation of those officials in charge; and the theatre project would often involve a degree of integration with local schools, parks or recreational programs, either for the use of buildings or to advertise their program. 30

Previous projects in these specialized fields had been pioneered partially by the CWA and FERA programs and the WPA built upon earlier experience to some extent. This was especially true in the music projects where the WPA achieved relatively high professional proficiency. Art projects had also been previously administered, but not on as large a scale as the music project. Writers' programs had existed in only one state, and theatre projects constituted an entirely new phenomenon in the history of work relief. Therefore, more administrative and organizational problems needed solving for the writers and theatre projects than for the other two programs. Like all WPA programs, these cultural activities were designed to give work to unemployed people, retain the skills of the workers and add something new to the American artistic scene. 31

Considerable doubts about the programs reached the Congressional floor. Reports of Communist programs and left-wing propaganda (especially in the theatre projects), coupled with a reluctance to use only Federal funds in sponsoring these programs, led to a special provision in the Emergency Relief Act of 1939. This

30 Final Report, WPA, p. 63.
31 Ibid.
provision forbade the spending of Federal funds for the operation of theatre projects and directed that no funds be spent after August 31, 1939, for the operation of any project solely sponsored by the WPA. "The action of Congress apparently involved no repudiation of the policy of providing suitable employment for workers in the arts." 32

With the closing out of Federal Project Number One, the work of music, art, writers and historical records programs continued in most states under the sponsorship of state agencies.

American art had faced an apathetic populace for years. Artists felt that the general public seldom expressed appreciation in their work. Interest came from a gallery, a museum, a wealthy patron buying culture, or occasionally those rare individuals who truly purchased art for art's sake. Apparently this was an entirely false opinion. The people who failed to appreciate art had seldom, if ever, observed a real oil painting by an accomplished artist. Even fewer had heard acceptable performances of the music of Handel, Brahms or Schubert. According to an eminent national magazine, the WPA cultural programs "brought the American audience and the American artist face to face for the first time in their respective lives. And the result was an astonishment needled with excitement such as neither...had ever felt before." 33 American artists had never guessed such audiences even existed. Prior to this, the artist and his creation had been limited to a relatively small number of buyers. What a professional joy it must have been to find out that millions of people all over the country could appreciate their artistic endeavors in an untrained but authentic way. The proof of public appreciation lies in the dry statistics that seem to be the final judge, to most critics, of a program's usefulness.

The statistics for the "slow" month of June, 1942, read that 25,068 people enrolled in art instruction classes, 174,917 persons became involved in music instruction while another 2,423,217 people

32 Ibid.
listened to 5,974 WPA music project concerts. The short-lived Federal theatre, when in operation, gave over 2,500 performances a month with an average monthly attendance of over 1,000,000 people. Many of the concerts and plays were either free of charge or required a very minimum contribution.

The various cultural projects gave America a new look. Many artistic productions lacked enduring quality, but that was only of secondary importance. Thousands had been given jobs and millions more could profit from the work of these unemployed. Now, towns like Beaufort, South Carolina; Ocala, Florida; Big Stone Gap, Virginia; and Casper, Wyoming could boast of art galleries amply attended by the local citizens.

The Federal Music, Theatre and Writers' Projects

The Federal Music Program provided a perfect example of New Deal innovation and excitement. This project came under the able leadership of Dr. Nikolai Sokoloff, respected leader of the Cleveland Orchestra. The Music Project attracted less critical attention than the more flashy and better known theatre, art and writers projects. This was not due to any professional deficiency on the part of the WPA music personnel, but rather to the fact that the physical accomplishments of the art and writers projects continued to exist in large quantities. The Federal theatre drew a great deal of publicity from its tumultuous ending. However, the music project did not leave behind a significant legacy in material terms, and since the memory of the public tends to be a fickle thing, the Federal Music Project has faded from the memories of most people.

The prime directive of all WPA projects, and no less with the cultural programs, was the desire to give meaningful employment to various persons as well as bolster any attractive side benefits that might accrue.

In its first nine months of operation, the Federal Music Project enrolled 15,000 musicians in the various units of the

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34 Final Report, WPA, p. 133; WPA, Inventory, p. 77.
There were 141 symphony and concert orchestras including: Massachusetts - Boston State Symphony, Commonwealth Symphony (Boston), Springfield Symphony; Connecticut - Hartford Symphony, Bridgeport Symphony; Rhode Island - Rhode Island WPA Symphony (Providence); New York - Syracuse Symphony, Buffalo Symphony, New York City Federal, Brooklyn Symphony; Pennsylvania - Philadelphia Federal, Pittsburg Federal; West Virginia - Huntington Symphony; Michigan - WPA Symphony (Detroit); Illinois - Illinois Symphony (Chicago); Wisconsin - Wisconsin Symphony (Milwaukee); Minnesota - Minnesota WPA Symphony; Utah - Utah State Symphony (Salt Lake City); California - Los Angeles Federal, Northern California WPA Symphony (San Francisco); Oregon - Portland Philharmonic; Oklahoma - Oklahoma City Symphony. A number of these symphonies, including the Utah State Symphony, developed into regular community institutions following the ending of the WPA projects.35

The Federal Music Project was quite discriminatory in their acceptance of qualified musicians for the programs. Only skilled personnel were eligible, and they had to prove themselves before boards of non-relief musicians. Even with stiff qualifications, "thousands of brilliantly trained, seasoned and experienced musicians, were found among the unemployed."36

Many renowned musicians offered their help in forming the project. They realized the tremendous benefit that could accrue to the nation in musical appreciation. Leopold Stokowski, Frederick Stock, Arthur Fiedler, Rudolph Ganz, and Hans Kindler were among those who desired to help.

These distinguished leaders in music agreed with the Government that it would have been a waste of the talents and abilities of all our musicians, the young artists with new conservatory diplomas and the faithful veterans, if an attempt

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36 Sokoloff, Federal Music Project, p. 7; Newsweek, Vol. 6 (September 21, 1935), p. 40. New York musicians of the Federal Music Project had to rehearse at least three times a week under the same standards as a professional symphony, musicians who were absent were docked in pay.
was made to divert their efforts of livelihood to another channel. It would have been unfair to them or to the nation. As with other cultural projects, some musicians came to the music project slowly. They were apprehensive about their work and faintly aware that the project might be of little worth to themselves or the public. However, the morale quickly raised when the musicians learned that musical integrity and artistic standards would be maintained. Those found deficient would be transferred as soon as possible.

Performances of the Federal Music Projects units included:

- Gilbert and Sullivan: Weber's *Abu Hasson*, Offenbach's *Tales of Hoffman* and Verdi's *Aida* and *Rigoletto*.
- Also performed were: *The Merry Wives of Windsor*, *Madame Butterfly*, *Orpheus*, *Hansel and Gretel*, *The Flying Dutchman*, *The Messiah*, *Beatitudes*, *Mozart's Requiem* and *Greig's Sigurd Jorsalfar*.

One of the most fulfilling areas of the music project came from the instruction of that discipline to eager students. The teaching programs of the WPA Music Project were quite well received. Before the establishment of the Federal Music Project, it had been estimated literally millions of American schoolchildren, especially in rural areas, were without any musical instruction in any form. However, the WPA classes helped obviate this problem and also gave employment to hundreds of jobless music teachers. The great music was taught on as simple a level as possible to make it both understandable and interesting. This lack of formalism proved to be very popular.

Fostering American music and giving opportunities to unknown

39 *Ibid.*, pp. 19, 21. Mr. Sokoloff further discussed the salutary effects of the music project, as he stated: "Beyond the immediate benefits in community organization, social music activities enter into many phases of individual life. Its influence is found in the home, cementing family ties and deepening social interests. A more spacious form of self-expression is gained and the cooperative spirit expands in ensemble work. For the musician a new field of opportunity appears. Scores of letters and statements in the press attest these facts." p. 19.
American composers became the most important tasks of the WPA Music Project. Any person who had written a music manuscript could submit it to an audition board of the WPA that endorsed the best compositions for public performances. This type of encouragement produced a wealth of American composition and helped spark creative work in many composers. In the first few months of operation, the project had performed the music of 622 American composers. Opera, especially, experienced the talent of American composers. Otto Meuller's Zorphanne and Mountain Blood by Frank Patterson were heard by WPA audiences. Seth Bingham's Wilderness Stone, a folk cantata, "deeply American in quality," was presented as a musical setting for excerpts from Stephen Vincent Benet's John Brown's Body.

Victor Herbert, John Philip Sousa and George Gershwin were very popular with WPA audiences. Thousands of Americans listened to the music of John A. Carpenter, Frederick Converse, Charles Wakefield Codman, Deems Taylor, Chalmers Clifton, Rodie Britain, John Powell, Aaron Copeland, Jacob Weinberg, Sigmund Romberg, Jerome Kern and Irving Berlin. The Federal Music Project also included a Composer's forum laboratory to "consider every type of music written by competent musicians," in its copying, typing, arranging and librarian sections. A recording section was established to "afford a means by which persons in more remote areas...might share in this music." WPA officials did not mention where they thought these rural people would come by a phonograph or the electricity with which to play them. However, much valuable music, especially in the form of traditional songs of the land were preserved for posterity. The project recorded early Mexican music, Texas Plains music, folk songs of Kentucky, songs of African derivation, liturgical music of California missions and many other valuable music treasures.

40 Ibid., p. 22.
41 Ibid., pp. 14, 15, 23.
The arguments in favor of the WPA Federal Music Project were quite convincing. One area of contention was always monetary. It had been estimated that just preceding the depression, the people of the United States had spent $3,000,000,000 per year on music and related functions. The WPA Music Project spent only $83,477,960 in its entire lifetime, including sponsor's funds. This seems like a meager amount to pay for the returns the project gave the country.

A relatively large amount of material has been written on the WPA Federal Theatre Project. The Federal Theatre Project remained the most controversial of the WPA projects until its demise in 1939. One of Harry Hopkins' old Grinnell College classmates, Mrs. Hallie Flanagan, was chosen to head the Federal Theatre Project of the WPA. She had been Professor of Theatre at Vassar College and also director of Vassar's famous experimental theatre.

The Federal Theatre put on numerous plays and shows to a "new audience, one which had rarely or never seen a play with living actors." Its audiences were estimated in the tens of millions. Plays such as Sinclair Lewis' It Can't Happen Here, Shakespeare's Macbeth (performed as a "black" Macbeth at times), T. S. Eliot's Murder in the Cathedral and Steinbeck's Of Mice or Men, were just a very few of the great plays offered. There were also circuses, marionette shows, musical comedies, satire, and revues and critics.

As with any theatrical venture, there were the failures and also the huge successes. Murder in the Cathedral had been considered a hapless commercial venture, but sold out night after night with the WPA Theatre Project. Of course one cannot forget

44 Two examples of popular accounts of the Federal Theatre are Willson Whitman's Bread and Circuses and Hallie Flanagan's Arena. Mrs. Flanagan's book has an excellent bibliography of periodicals concerning the Federal Theatre.
the tremendous value of the program simply as a means of giving employment to unemployed actors, stagehands, musicians, shop employees and cashiers.

James A. Michener once said of the WPA Federal Theatre Project:

Of all that Colorado has offered me, nothing was more important to my life than this theatre... Somebody estimated the other day that on dramatic works that have been derived from my stories, the Federal Government has collected not less than ten million dollars in taxes, on personal income derived from them another twenty million dollars at least... So for every dollar that the Government "wasted" in 1936, it got back $300 from me alone.


In order to give employment to jobless writers, editors, historians, research workers, art critics, architects, archeologists, map draftsmen and geologists, the WPA inaugurated the Federal Writers' Project and the Historical Records Survey. The program was established to prepare a guidebook of the United States; give regular reports on the progress of the Works Program; put forth an encyclopaedia on Government function and deal with a limited number of special studies.

Henry G. Alsberg, former editorial writer and foreign correspondent for the New York Evening Post headed the Federal Writers' Project. "Slow moving, slow speaking" Alsberg managed to put together an impressive national guidebook before he was replaced in the project. The American Guide series received critical

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46 Letter from J. M. Sullivan, University of Texas, James A. Michener Collection, to Laurence G. Lashbrook, June 20, 1970.
47 WPA, Inventory, p. 78; Flanagan, "Somebody Must Be Wrong," pp. 781-783.
48 Katherine H. Davidson, Preliminary Inventory #57 of the Records of the Federal Writers' Project, WPA 1935-44 (Washington D.C., 1953), p. 1. This government report is located in the National Archives in Washington. However, the Utah State Historical Society also is in possession of a copy.
acclaim and the books found their way to public libraries throughout the country. Top personalities like John Steinbeck, Vardis Fisher, Conrad Aiken and Richard Wright worked side by side with unknowns to produce guides for forty-eight states, thirty book-length city guides and twenty other guides like U. S. One, The Oregon Trail, and an Almanac for New Yorkers. There were also one hundred and fifty volumes of the series Life in America, ranging from the Cavalcade of the American Negro to Baseball in Old Chicago.\textsuperscript{49}

Time magazine claimed that "the first U. S. Guides evoked far more literary enthusiasm than official publications usually raise...Almost every book shows flashes of inspired writing." Lewis Mumford added, "these guidebooks are the finest contribution to American patriotism that has been made in our generation."\textsuperscript{50}

The Historical Records Survey made many important findings including sixty letters of Lincoln, a record of court proceedings against Aaron Burr, a collection of the journals of the Mormon Battalion and a number of lost letters of Secretary of War, Simon Cameron. The eminent American historian, Charles A. Beard, said of the Historical Records Survey: "If you keep up the good work we shall someday have the bedrock materials for a real history of civilization in the United States--and hence a deeper meaning of American life."\textsuperscript{51}

The election of Franklin D. Roosevelt ushered in an exciting period of change and activity, and no part of the New Deal represented this better than the cultural programs of the WPA. Even though they totaled less than three percent of all WPA programs, the cultural projects still made notable achievements and carried


\textsuperscript{50}WPA, Inventory, p. 86.

\textsuperscript{51}Ibid., p. 62.
out their prime directives. Many of their programs became the impetus for present day organizations.

If the accounts written of the horrors of the depression were anywhere near factual, then the WPA programs were neither wasteful nor out of place. Indeed the projects, including the cultural programs, should have been more important to the government in light of the terrible suffering forced upon so many citizens. 52

The cultural programs contributed a substantial return. The monetary value of only one of those programs, the Federal Art Project, will be examined in more detail in the following chapter. But aside from physical considerations, the cultural programs gave the American public a chance to catch their breath, emotionally, during the depression. The value of such factors as laughter, beauty, and fantasy at a time of national economic crisis cannot be measured.

A man who had little taste for artists and writers had given them an opportunity to continue at their professions and to inculcate their skills into the American people. All of this at a time of dire national emergency. No matter what the critics said about the WPA, "the primary job" of saving human beings was quite successful. 53

CHAPTER II

THE WPA FEDERAL ART PROJECT

Organization of the Project

A special program of relief for the American artist produced something quite new in the history of social reform in the United States. It was not until the thirties that any effective attempt was made to aid America's creative and artistic citizens. The depression of 1929 hit hard in the art world and those younger members of the profession with smaller reputations felt the greatest impact. However, as the state of affairs continued to worsen, even some of the most prominent artists were affected. In response to the crisis, some artists' organizations, such as the Society of Arts and Sciences, attempted to give aid to a number of their members. But the limited funds available to private programs could not provide for all those who needed assistance. In December of 1932, a small step was made under public auspices. Ironically, the man behind this program was Harry Hopkins, then the administrator of the New York State Temporary Emergency Relief Agency. The innovative program established a series of art courses to give employment to art teachers.

The Civil Works Administration, CWA, formed in 1933, inaugurated the first national attempt to aid struggling artists and provide them with an opportunity to practice their trade and still

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1 A note of definition should precede this chapter on the Federal Art Project. Often the reader will see the entire WPA cultural programs under the heading Art Projects. However, this paper means to distinguish between theater projects, writers projects, music projects and art projects. The term art project refers to the fine arts of painting, drawing, sculpture, printing and included with these will be art instruction classes.

make a living. This program became a springboard for the Work Progress Administration's Art Project in 1935.

The selection of Mr. Holger Cahill to the position of director of the Federal Art Project was made with careful consideration. It was known by Jacob Baker, who had the most influence in selecting program heads, that there were strong feelings among the different schools of artists. It would probably have been to the liking of the liberally disposed artists like Rockwell Kent and his group to appoint someone with a more radical viewpoint concerning art, but Baker placed political considerations over artistic concerns in this case. One thing the administration did not want was controversy and infighting among program participants. Holger Cahill was a good choice to keep the program from making too many waves. His specialty was folk art, and therefore he did not offer any real problems of vested interests.

Cahill was not an artist in the professional sense, or, indeed an art critic in the technical sense. He was, rather, an art lover, whose preoccupation with art derived, first, from his concept of art as a form of folk expression and, second, from his conviction that American culture could and should express itself as American in the various artistic media. ³

Cahill received his education at Columbia University and the New School for Social Research. Early in his career he wrote and published a number of books and magazine articles. He became "professionally" acquainted with art in 1922 when he served as an advisor in American art to the Newark, New Jersey museum. Significantly, the director of the museum and Cahill's friend, was Joseph Cotton Dana. Dana was trying to democratize American art and bring it more to the attention of the American people. Dana influenced Cahill profoundly as evidenced by his work with the WPA.

Cahill joined the WPA Art Project in the summer of 1935, coming directly from his most recent position as a member of the staff of the American Museum of Modern Art in New York City. ⁴

³Ibid., p. 377.
⁴Ibid., p. 378.
Thus, Cahill's credentials could hardly have been more amenable to the wishes of the WPA. He had a journalistic training that provided him with an extremely useful ability for self-expression as well as a background in art broad enough to keep him from being a didactic member of any artistic group. His administrative experience in museums and his concern for increasing the popular appreciation of art qualified him for the position as Director of the Art Project. His theories concerning the democratization of art were especially applicable for a WPA project, and this qualification placed him in good stead with WPA officials. Holger Cahill, unlike the other original directors of WPA cultural projects, managed to remain in his position throughout the duration of the art program and to hold the respect and admiration of most of his subordinates. George Biddle, a prominent American artist of the times, maintained that "the artists of America can never repay what they owe to...Holger Cahill...God knows what these projects might have been in other hands."

The WPA Art Project, like the other cultural programs, often became the target for political criticism. The greatest period of travail for all the cultural projects occurred in 1939. At this time, Congress passed legislation which placed a large portion of the sponsorship of projects upon local agencies. At least twenty-five percent of the funds were to be secured from sponsors. Another ruling placed a limit of 18 months as the maximum time period anyone could remain on WPA rolls with the exception of supervisory personnel. Obviously, that 18-month ruling tended to disrupt procedures and also deprived the Art Project of the best personnel at all times. The pessimism in many circles and hope in others, that the new legislation would destroy all of the cultural programs proved premature. The states thought enough of the programs to continue them under local sponsorship, and disaster

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5Ibid., pp. 379, 383; Lynn Fausett, artist in Utah's WPA program, Interview, Salt Lake City, Utah, July 7, 1970; Hinckley, Interview.

failed to attend the projects. However, control of the budget passed from the national administrators to those on the state level. The national office continued only in an advisory capacity even though the money from the projects remained federal. It is much to the credit of the WPA program and to the prevailing spirit of that day, that the cultural programs did continue and without much disruption.

That disaster did not ensue was due to a number of causes. In the first place, the status quo ante is never restored; and in this particular case, the four years of operation of the Federal Art Project made the situation in 1939 radically different from what it had been in 1935. Indeed, the fact that art activities continued and in some respects even increased in the period of state control was a tribute to the influence of the Federal Art Project.

Many people felt that the new state WPA Art Projects reflected the desires of the individual states more accurately than the programs planned by a national administration. The continuity of projects was seldom broken and a decided lack of parochialism was evidenced in this transition. Most of the state personnel had been trained under national auspices and indeed they felt that they owed a great debt to the WPA.

On June 30, 1939, there were thirty-six community art centers. During the period of transition from federal to state control, largely because of the 18-months clause that resulted in the loss of trained personnel, thirty art centers were closed. In time, however, most art center supervisors were reinstated, new administrative adjustments were made, and the Art Project began its 1939 winter program with sixty art centers. by June, 1940, twenty-two new centers had been inaugurated.

There was a new viability in the Art Program when it became state dominated, partially due to the fact that the projects were geared more to the abilities and desires of smaller areas, and even more to the amount of community participation. The relationship between the amateur artist, the professional artist and the people developed on a more even level of mutual appreciation.

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7 MacDonald, Federal Relief and the Arts, p. 415.
8 Ibid.
9 Ibid.; Lynn Fausett, Interview.
10 MacDonald, Federal Relief and the Arts, p. 416.
This arrangement seemed to stimulate the process of art.

Activities

The WPA Art Program sponsored teaching of art and gallery showings throughout the country. The need for this program was quite evident.

One of the most arresting and disturbing discoveries made by the Painters Project is the discovery that art teachers in American schools—teachers who were attempting to transmit a knowledge of painting to their pupils—had very frequently never seen an original painting in their lives.

The art teaching program directed classes in ceramics, painting, sculpture, print-making, metal crafts, puppetry, weaving and costume design. Where communities did not have professional facilities for the classes, settlement houses, orphanages, hospitals, community centers and various other places were utilized. A WPA bulletin in 1938 stated: "Civic art centers of this type now constitute a national movement, particularly directed towards regions which have hitherto been underprivileged in the arts."\(^{12}\)

In many cases, community art centers were built or renovated to house the classes and exhibitions of the WPA. Whenever possible, the program located the center near the middle of a city to make it convenient and amenable to local citizens. The overall purpose behind the centers was to convince the public that the program and the building were designed for their use and that the attendants were at their service.\(^ {13}\)

Innovation and freedom of expression were prevalent in the instruction and especially in the children's art classes. Fantasy,


\(^{12}\) Works Progress Administration, Report on the Progress of the WPA Program (Washington, D.C., 1938), p. 79. It might be noted that work in sculpture was directed toward uniting the distinct but related arts of sculpture and architecture. A large part of the work in this medium consisted of friezes, pediments, plaques, panels and decorations designed to harmonize with the architectural plans for public buildings.

\(^{13}\) MacDonald, Federal Relief and the Arts, p. 466.
realism and self-expression were characteristic of the children's creations. Teachers discouraged copying and offered help only when a child requested it.

The object of these classes was not to develop artists, but to provide the child with an aesthetic experience. If, as sometimes happened, a child was discovered to possess unusual aptitude, the project prepared to admit him to more formal classes where he would be taught the traditional disciplines.

In the exhibitions that were shown, the children's sections often drew the biggest crowds and some of their work was excellent. The Museum of Modern Art, in New York City, paid the children's exhibition a great compliment by securing some of their work for its permanent collection. 15

The WPA Federal Art Project wished to stimulate the continued interest in the arts and the art centers. Although artists accepted the ephemeral nature of the program, they hoped that the centers would continue under complete state or sponsor funds after the WPA program ended. This objective was often successful as in the case of the Salt Lake City Art Center, which was officially adopted by the state after the federal government withdrew its support.

The community centers also helped to modify the "metropolitan" emphasis of American art. American painting was unmistakably regional. Southern painters painted in their own style, New Yorkers represented urban influences of the city, a "salty ruggedness" pervaded the New England area and the West had a vigor of the frontiersman. 16 This aspect of "Americanism" in painting will be examined in more detail in another area.

In April of 1936, it was decided by WPA officials that "the public must be made more fully cognizant of the accomplishments of the Federal Art Project." The best way to make as many people

14 Ibid., p. 468.
and divert the minds of the people away from the troubles of the thirties. It was no overstatement to say that the WPA Federal Art Project galleries became "part of the lives of the towns, part of the profound education of the community." Who knows how many promising young artists gained an added impetus or complete inspiration from the Art Project classes, galleries and exhibitions?

There were certain areas of achievement that deserved special mention in relation to the quantity and quality of the end product. One of the brightest and most original aspects of the Federal Art Project concerned the saving and sorting of objects of early Americans. This was the well known Index of American Design Program which involved printing, drawing, photographing, painting and other methods of preserving a past rich in folk art. Holger Cahill's interests and training lay in this direction and he gave important encouragement to the Index.

The purpose and scope of the Index, as finally defined by the Project, emphasized the following points:

The aim of the Index is to compile material for a nation-wide pictorial survey of design in the American decorative, useful and folk arts from their inception to about 1890. It seeks especially--

1. To record material of historical significance which has not heretofore been studied and which, for one reason or another, stands in danger of being lost.

2. To gather a body of traditional material which may form the basis of an organic development of American design.

3. To make usable source records of this material accessible to artists, designers, manufacturers, museums, libraries and art schools.

4. To give employment to painters, graphic artists, photographers and commercial artists who might not otherwise find employment.

The Index of American Design is preparing a series of accurate illustrations depicting the rise and development of American Design. European nations have long recognized the importance of gathering such material. They have prepared collections of plates in color and have published richly illustrated books on their decorative, applied and folk arts,
thus placing the full picture of native arts of design at
the disposal of their scholars, creative workers and manu-
facturers. Familiarity with the roots of their design
tradition has given the work of European designers a rich
individuality. This quality has attracted American manufact-
urers to the European design market with a consequent neglect
of native American talent.

There is no single comprehensive collection of pictorial
data on American design comparable with the great European
classics in the field. With compilation of the Index of
American Design, typical examples of an indigenous American
character will be made available for study. It is hoped
that this material will stimulate the artist, designer, and
manufacturer of articles of everyday use to build upon
American tradition and that it will offer an opportunity for
the student, teacher, research worker, and general public to
come familiar with this important phase of our cultural
pattern.22

The importance of the program was made quite manifest by the
Index’s manual quoted above. The actual work of the Index often
utilized those artists who were not judged capable enough to
qualify for easel or mural work. A lack of originality but a
good command of detail and preciseness, characterized many of the
employees of the Index of American Design. Draftsmen, commercial
artists, and cartoonists often had backgrounds that made them more
inclined to work on the Index instead of elsewhere in the Art
Program.

Examples of Index work included iron work from Maryland and
Louisiana, weaving and wood-carvings of the Southwest, and Shaker
religious work in New England. Furniture, quilts, rugs, coverlets,
household utensils, fabrics, textiles, draperies, glassware, copper,
brass, silver and metal work, ceramics, ornaments of many types,
costumes, items of personal use such as jewelry, and other objects
that due to their unique design or excellent workmanship, had
enriched American life in the years before, became subjects for
the Index. These examples suggested the scope and worthwhile work
of the Index.23

22 MacDonald, Federal Relief and the Arts, p. 446. This
list was originally published in the Index of American Design

23 Ibid., p. 447; See Merle Colby, "Emblems of America,"
American Magazine of Art, Vol. 35 (October, 1942), pp. 204-207,
an excellent survey of the work of the Index of American Design.
A great deal of the subject matter was owned by private collectors or existed as family heirlooms. Undoubtedly, a large amount of tact and amiability was necessary on the part of the Index researchers so as not to offend anyone or hurt their feelings in selecting subjects.

The Index received such prominence throughout the country that even the more accomplished artists were not embarrassed to be placed on its rolls. There was an enormous call from many institutions to exhibit the work of the Index. In 1937, one employee of the Index wrote:

So great a call has come to us for exhibition of Index plates that our supply cannot keep pace with the demand. The importance of the Index...is regularly impressed upon us by requests for Index shows from all over the country.24

A reading of the roll of WPA Art Project artists represents a present day Who's Who in art. Many of the obscure artists of 1935, or those just beginning to paint, worked for the WPA and later became famous in the art field. Ben Shahn, Arshile Gorky, Willem DeKooning, William Baziotes, James Brooks, Stuart Davis, Morris Graves, Philip Guston, Jackson Pollock, Mark Rothko, Mark Tobey and Jack Tworkov all worked on federal projects.25

It was entirely within the rights of critics of the New Deal and especially of the WPA Art Project, to inquire as to the material and tangible results of the program. Many critics could not fathom the overwhelming importance of the Art Project in relation to non-material benefits to the artists and the country. There were various areas of artistic endeavor that were sponsored under the Art Project. Other than mural and easel paintings, there were posters for public welfare. Among these were 30,500 original designs and a total of over 1,600,000 finished posters.26

Another area sponsored by the WPA Art Project was the photo-

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24 Ibid., p. 453.
26 MacDonald, Federal Relief and the Arts, p. 437. This figure covers only up to 1940.
graphy section. This section was most often utilized in connection with the Index of American Design. Some original films were produced including The Making of a Mural and The Making of a Mosaic.27

The Technical Area of the Art Project gave invaluable assistance to artists in research and history on various projects. They also were responsible for executing models, designs and prototypes when needed for specific projects.28

In the printmaking and graphic sections, approximately 11,300 fine print designs were produced.29 It was under this same section that the important carborundum process was perfected. WPA graphic artists worked on the process and succeeded in making it practicable. Carborundum introduced "a rich tonal quality and a luminosity, which derive from the manipulation of inking."30

The Sculptural Program of the Art Project suffered from some problems. Many of the products lacked novelty and failed to integrate with the architectural edifice.31 However, much work of obvious merit was produced including the figures of warriors carved in the store at West Point Military Academy, the statue of Sun Yat-Sen at the San Francisco Public Park, the Muse of Music for the Hollywood Bowl and the Guardian of the Water at the San Diego Civic Center. Five large statues of Civil War generals were done by WPA sculptors at Grant's tomb and the works of Donal Hord, Robert Cronback, Walter Speck, Edris Eckhardt and Ramon Bermudez were quite good. Heinz Warneke produced excellent sculpture for the Harlem River Houses which had been built under a PWA project. Emmanuel Vivano received national acclaim for sculpture done under WPA auspices and Concetta Scaravaglione

27 Ibid., p. 459.
28 Ibid., p. 460.
29 Final Report, WPA, p. 65.
30 MacDonald, Federal Relief and the Arts, p. 436.
received similar praise.32

Some of the children's sculptures received critical laurels including 15-year old Mike Mosco's plaster head of a miner. Another 15-year old, Antony de Paolo, produced an excellent stone buffalo sculpture.33

The Sculptural Program of the WPA gave many unknowns a chance to earn national recognition and to work with some of the masters. One outstanding "discovery of the year" was 28-year old Patrocino Barela from Taos, New Mexico. He was considered a genius at the art of wood-carving and would probably have never been discovered in such a secluded area.34

Innovation was not lacking in the Sculptural Program of the Arts Project. For instance, one unique statue, by Roger Williams Park, called Pioneer, was designed to last for six or eight years "by which time tastes in art may change." It was made of plaster and covered with a thin bronze patina to protect it only for a specific period of time.35 Perhaps that was characteristic of an age of changing values when all that was held sacred had crumbled in the depression of 1929.

One of the largest areas of concentration for the WPA artists came in easel works and murals. A final tally counted some 108,000 paintings and 2,500 murals completed under the program. Many of them became valuable pieces of art. Naturally, some WPA art work lacked distinction and considerable amounts of inferior work had to be destroyed.36 But good art was produced and the many honors bestowed upon the APA attests to that. Artists in the WPA

32 MacDonald, Federal Relief and the Arts, p. 432; "Incalculable Record," (August, 1939), pp. 460-471; Fortune, (May, 1937), p. 171; Time, (September 21, 1936), p. 43; WPA, Inventory, p. 82.

WPA sculptor, Ralph Hume, won a grand prize for his work at the famous Corcoran Gallery.

33 Time, (September 21, 1936), p. 43.

34 Ibid.; MacDonald, Federal Relief and the Arts, p. 432.

35 MacDonald, Federal Relief and the Arts, p. 432.

36 Final Report, WPA, p. 65; MacDonald, Federal Relief and the Arts, p. 425.
received honors in the form of places they were allowed to paint. Tom Loftin Johnson was commissioned to paint a mural for Washington Hall at West Point. Mr. Johnson spent a number of years researching the history of the subject, the texture of the wall, and the lighting and materials best suited for use. Edward Laning painted The Story of the Recorded World on the third floor of the New York Public Library. Dorothy Pucinelli and Helen Forbes did Noah and the Ark for the San Francisco Zoo. Edgar Britton received critical acclaim for his six fresco panels, Epochs in the History of Man, for the Lane Technical High School in Illinois. Subjects depicting evolution and vast expanses of history were popular with WPA mural painters. The Evolution of Civilization, Evolution of Music and Musical Instruments were typical of the work produced. Agricultural, industrial and social themes were of primary concern as WPA artists tried to paint for the people and about the people.

A mural was painted at Samuel Tilden High School in Brooklyn, New York that contained fifty-four panels and included 2400 feet of painting. It was appropriately titled, "Major Influences in Civilization." However, size was not all that distinguished WPA painting. Lester Schwartz was awarded a $2,500 fellowship by the Art Institute of Chicago for his WPA work; Robert W. Godfrey's Portrait of My Wife was purchased by the Metropolitan Museum of New York for its permanent collection; Sidney Laufman won top honors in the 1937 exhibition at the National Academy of Design and James Michael Newell won a gold medal from the Architectural League for a WPA mural. This was the first time this award had been given in five years due to a lack of works deemed worthy of the honor.

37 MacDonald, Federal Relief and the Arts, p. 430.
38 "Incalculable Record," pp. 460-471.
39 MacDonald, Federal Relief and the Arts, p. 428.
40 WPA, Inventory, p. 82.
Paintings and murals were placed in various places all over the country. West Point, Ellis Island, Bellevue Hospital, thousands of high schools, post offices, libraries, airports, universities, and many other public buildings. By 1938, some 15,000 oils and 27,000 water colors had been given to public or semi-public institutions. These included works by the well-knowns such as Gorky's controversial work for the Newark Airport, or Jacob Lawrence's Blind Beggars or Gugliemi's Wedding in South Street. Perhaps even more important was the chance for the unknown painters to make a name for themselves. One reviewer congratulated the WPA art program for fostering "a native show that is astounding and inspiring. And lo, the names of never-before-heard-of young people, from all over the country lead the list." These unknowns included Aaron Bohrod, Raphael Soyer, Mitchell Siporin, Gregorio Prestopino, Rothko and Pollack.

Some circles of critics felt that the mural work consistently fell below acceptable standards, but mural work had special problems. The Ecole des Beaux Arts trained William C. Palmer, who worked on the WPA Art Project, said: "Easel painting is a personal art, done for pleasure; casting a vast panorama on a wall surface calls for all a man's imagination, experience and intelligence." What with windows, doors, light, curving walls, detail lost in ten foot expanses and depth perception, it was easier to understand the individual problems of the muralist.

A mural discovered in New York City in 1965 was valued between $60,000 and $100,000. It had been done by Stuart Davis who was paid the fantastic sum of $24.50 a week for ten weeks in 1939 to paint it. This represented only one of many examples of the

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43 Newsweek, Vol. 6 (December 7, 1935), p. 29.
44 Garraty, American Nation, p. 844.
difficulty of placing purely monetary value on the murals of the WPA, let alone the rest of the work, including the Index of American Design.

Intangible Contributions

What did the Art Projects really produce, what value were they? Were they just an exercise in physical labor with no lasting virtues, or were they something much more? Perhaps no one can explain the human factor of the program as well as the late Holger Cahill.

For the first time in art history a direct and sound relationship has been established between the American public and the artist. Community organizations of all kinds have asked for his work. In the discussions and interchange between the artist and the public concerning murals, easel paintings, prints and sculptures for public buildings, an active relationship has been established. The artist has become aware of every type of community demand for art and has had the prospect of increasingly larger audiences, of greatly extended public interest. American artists have discovered that they have work to do in the world.

The organization of the [WPA Art] Project has proceeded on the principle that it is not the solitary genius but a sound general movement which maintains art as a vital, functioning part of any cultural scheme. Art is not a matter of rare occasional masterpieces: it is not merely decorative, a sort of unrelated accompaniment to life. In a genuine sense it should have use; it should be interwoven with the very stuff and texture of human experience, intensifying that experience, making it more profound, richer, clearer, more coherent. This can be accomplished only if the artist is functioning freely in relation to society, and if society wants what he is able to offer.45

Mr. Cahill's philosophy of art was somewhat different than the general conception of art as simply a medium for masterpieces. This was true of most WPA art officials. Art should connote democracy and people. Edward Bruce also felt that there must be a "democracy" in art. The thirties and their hard times produced a surge for democracy in many aspects of American culture.

All over this great country of ours--and I speak whereof

I know--there is a longing and soul striving for something more and finer and better in life than mere material possessions. There is a desire for beauty, a reaction against the ugliness that surrounds us, a wish to fill one's time with new interests, a hope to find an outlet for creative spirit. Every human being has latent in him the wish to be a writer, or a painter or a musician or a craftsman.

Clearly the WPA Art Program came closer than anything in history to an assimilation between art and the people. Never before were so many able to see and enjoy the act of producing art works. Never before had so much "latent" talent been brought to the surface.

Senator Frank E. Moss, Democrat of Utah, recently reported to one man who worked on the WPA Art Program, that the Federal government has finally realized the tremendous monetary value of so many of the works of art done during the WPA years, and hanging in obscure post offices, schools, libraries and public buildings all over the country.47

The value of man's self-respect has been doubted in some quarters, or scoffed off as too expensive or too much trouble to nurture. However, the WPA found that the price of maintaining self-respect was relatively cheap when compared to the cost of stagnation, especially in the artistic fields. American artists wanted to contribute to the welfare of the country in those days of depression. They vehemently opposed using the stigma of unemployed parasites in reference to an honest working society. The Art Project instilled in them a sense of belonging, of doing their share in a time of need, or genuinely contributing something to their society and their fellow citizens. They were "stimulated to create their best by the knowledge that what they had to give was wanted by their government, and that they were looked upon as an asset rather than a liability to the state." The now famous American artist Ben Shahn worked on the WPA Art Project. In 1964, he looked back upon his time in the program and reported, "


47 Fausett, Interview.
felt in complete harmony with the times. I don't think I've ever felt that way before or since."

It would seem that the value of the program in regard to its raising the morale and self-respect of the artists would be justification enough for its existence. But this was by no means the only area of value to which the program contributed. Concrete figures are often the most impressive arguments to skeptical critics. However, one who has been trained in the fine arts profession might ask if the Federal government's sponsorship of the program (at least in the beginning), might not tend to hamper the artists' creativity or at least infringe upon his integrity. This presented a question that might be negatively answered since the government sponsored the art programs and the artist could be regulated in his production. The buyers do not always set the styles of art, but often follow the popular and dominant trends. Certainly artists could not unani-
mously accept the standards of Impressionism, Romanticism, or Classicism set by someone else. If they did just copy what was popular, they would compromise artistic integrity. For this reason, many revolutionary and innovative artists experienced hard times before their work became fashionable to the buying public. Then the process began all over again, and new artists developed different styles of art. This aspect of innovation and spontane-
ity was one of the basic characteristics of the New Deal and of the WPA Federal Art Project.49 No absolute principles of artistic freedom prevailed on the Project, but by and large the artists painted what they desired within the limitations of their mediums.

There were no national restrictions upon the Art Project, but Harry Hopkins let it be known that he wouldn't stand behind any

48 Bruce, "Art and Democracy," p. 152; Garraty, The American Nation, p. 844. There are a small number of color plates of WPA Art Project work shown in this text.

49 Hinckley, Interview; Fausett, Interview; See also, Leuchtenburg's F.D.R. and the New Deal, Eric Goldman's Rendezvous With Destiny, and Arthur Schlesinger's Age of Roosevelt, Passim to understand something of the innovation and spontaneity of the New Deal.
artist who got into difficulty because of obscenity. The restrictions placed upon artists came from the local administration. The Chicago Art Program placed three restrictions upon its participants. They could paint no nudes, dives, or distribute social propaganda. This handicapped the artist to some extent, but the enforcement of the strictures proved incomplete, and more difficulties arose over interpreting the meaning of social propaganda, dives, or even nudity. The section of fine arts of the Treasury Department did have a reputation for censorship and this was in marked contrast to the WPA.

The WPA Art Project rarely censors its artists. It has fewer bureaucratic facilities than the Section of Fine Arts to do so. Occasionally, therefore, the Project gets very bad pictures—and occasionally the best an artist is capable of. But for the first time in history many thousands of artists are working for the government almost without censorship. I believe this is the most quickening impulse in America today. And I believe it will form a record of the deepest value to the psychologist or art critic of future generations.

Artistic freedom had always been a vague concept at best, and many individuals claimed that their freedom had been curtailed in some way. Obviously, the WPA would have had to put some limits on the work produced by artists accepting public funds if that work proved to be objectionable. Since no restrictions were placed upon them, artists put limitations upon themselves. Perhaps artists have always had some limitation of medium, weather, money, but the WPA artists sensed a "subtle innuendo" that directed their work. This innuendo was not harmful to American art. On the contrary, it created "a market for other than middle-class subjects, and expanded the domain within which the artist might move."

The nature of art under the WPA required a minimum of direction.

53 MacDonald, Federal Relief and the Arts, p. 424.
The artist during his employment on the Federal Art Project enjoyed a freedom of expression that was almost unprecedented in the history of art and utterly refuted the common impression that art and bureaucracy are un congenial.\textsuperscript{54} However, it should be made clear that art and bureaucracy could be uncongenial, it depended on the type of government in power at the time. Hitler's national art provided a good example of government promotion of artistic integrity, but Franklin Roosevelt's spirited administration did offer much freedom to the artist, such as: freedom in his work, freedom from hunger and freedom from a stagnant dependency upon the fickle art buying public.

Besides the usefulness of the WPA Art Program to the artists, there were other areas of worthwhile contributions to the American people. At no period in history have the people been so much in tune with the producers of cultural work. "For the first time... the man in the street began to realize that the artist was a creature of his own flesh and blood."\textsuperscript{55} The new awareness of art favored the artist, but the citizenry of Rock Springs, Price, Daytona Beach, and hundreds of other such towns received cultural enrichment. Areas that had no real conception of art or the feelings of the artist received, at least, a modicum of insight into the problems of someone else. The opportunity to understand other human beings and reach some small degree of rapprochement with them became of incalculable value to individuals and to the nation as a whole.

The Federal Art Project had considerable effect upon the United States in the areas of economic value, social value and in intrinsic aesthetic experience. John Dewey once said, "As long as art is the beauty parlor of civilization, neither art nor civilization is secure."\textsuperscript{56} Art has always represented more than just a

\textsuperscript{54}Ibid.
\textsuperscript{55}Taylor, "Federal Art," p. 185.
\textsuperscript{56}Saturday Review, Vol. 49 (March 12, 1966), p. 245.
facade of beauty for the chosen few who can afford to bathe in its rays. Large numbers of people have experienced the wonder of the arts, if not as creators, then as critical viewers. This sort of breakthrough promised a new day in human experience and understanding. The necessary prerequisite to participate in and enjoy the arts demanded a totally new outlook on the part of the people. Emerson said it succinctly, "The more piano—the less wolf."

Another ramification of democracy in art was the creation of a truly national style of painting. Whether or not this constituted an improvement or degeneration of art, it produced a rediscovery of American culture.

There seemed to be, on the part of the project planners, a common realization that in the United States native art had been too long neglected, and foreign art too long preferred, and that the time had come at least for a national cultural stocktaking.\(^{57}\)

The WPA Federal Art Project was much concerned with democratizing art. Perhaps that was because such a process went hand in hand with employing more people and allowing the largest number to enjoy the fruits of the program. The Art Project allowed art to seep into areas of the country that had heretofore had little to do with any culture save their own most parochial interests. Forty-four years earlier, William Dean Howells had rendered the admonition that, "The arts must become democratic and then we shall have the expression of America in art." Many people felt that art needed to become an integral part of democracy to insure the health of art. However, in doing so it had to resist the tendency of becoming chauvinistic or sycophantic to Washington, D. C. The aim of the Art Project centered on destroying "the false concept of art as a luxury and putting it in its national place as a free and democratic expression of

the life of a society."58

American art had, in some estimates, suffered from the European influences upon it. Many doubted whether a truly American school of painting redolent with American styles had ever existed. John Singleton Copley, Mary Cassatt, James McNeill Whistler and other great artists fled to Europe to achieve notoriety and respect. Even the American patriot Paul Revere remained European in his silversmith tradition. Nearly one hundred years after America had achieved its political independence, James Jackson Jarves, world traveler, art collector and critic, expressed concern over the lack of a national art movement in the United States. He recommended less copying of the Old World, but more looking to it for guidance while depending on the New World for inspiration. However, American painters had done more than look to the Old World for inspiration. Indeed, they had for the most part been completely captivated by European techniques and styles. With the help of the Federal Art Project, there was a swing away from the influences that had dominated American art from 1913 until 1930--French Modernism. American art now differed from it in that it became "democratic, social and anonymous rather than aristocratic, aesthetic and snobbish."59

The establishment of new trends in art were not all attributed to the WPA Program. The circumstance of the Federal Art Project became somewhat coincidental. The direction of America's art movement was already moving in this direction, "Yet no force has as strongly influenced this drift as the government program."60

New England Museum curator, Francis Henry Taylor, in an article for the Atlantic Monthly, made apparent his theory concerning

the new trend in American art and especially its points of difference with European art and artists. He discussed the artists who paint with "enthusiasm for a new Utopia." Taylor clarified the fact that even if the new artist was carried away, it made him no less sincere.

He [the artist] is able to reason with detachment, since he has felt the urge of hunger and want for a long time, and to establish codes and patterns, not of artistic technique, but of artistic content and subject matter. He has developed an iconography of the American scene based upon social injustice and agrarian revolt. He is pushing the imagination away from the squalor of the cities to the replenishing verdure of our landscape, just as the Hudson River School protested against the Industrial Revolution and the Panic of 1837.

It is this taste for preaching and for saving the world before he saves his own skin that distinguishes the artist of America from the modernist of Europe. The American, to be sure, acknowledges the realities of the present, but sees a hope for the future. He is as young as his art and has discovered a new formula for escape.

One might disagree with Mr. Taylor's maudlin appraisal of American art, but the text of the article clearly distinguished the newness and individualism of American painting.

In commenting further on the new art as it was exemplified by the Art Project, Mr. Taylor stressed that:

Five years ago, [1931] all American painting looked like the picture in the Carnegie International exhibition of the year before. Today, art fashion setters are being given a run for their money. [The work] may lack their [New York art] finish and polish, which are, after all, only the fruits of industry, but it is honest in workmanship and much more honestly conceived.

In democratizing the art scene, the WPA laid a broad foundation. Its purpose was not primarily to find and foster Michelangelo, but to put the artists to work. Its credo might have been that if one creates a cultural background, the art will follow. "It wasn't Michelangelo who created the 15th Century but the 15th Century that created Michelangelo." America's artists had come out of the alleys of "Bohemia" and were mingling with farmers, workers,

62 Ibid., p. 185.
technicians, politicians, teachers and innumerable others. They
were "painting American stuff on the walls of American buildings."
Foreign visitors, as was often the case, seemed to be more aware
of what was happening than the indigenous population. Ford
Maddox Ford may have overstated the case, but he insisted, "Art
in America is being given its chance and there has been nothing
like it since before the Reformation." 63

It would be a gross mistake to overlook the value of the
WPA Art Project in relation to the society as a whole. Not only
did it offer jobs, democracy and security, but it also contributed
to the "standard of American living." Harry Hopkins claimed that:

Health, education, and recreational and cultural services
of our white-collar workers are reducing the costs of crime,
and disease and charity, and that they are raising the whole
standard of American living. 64

This was accomplished not only by giving jobs to people, which
kept them from doing something more drastic to obtain relief, but
in addition, maps, diagrams, charts, lantern slides, models,
dioramas and other aids to visual education were presented to
various tax-supported institutions throughout the country. Posters
were made for public agencies to assist in the campaign for better
citizenship, municipal cleanliness, public health, reduction of
vandalism and crime and other public improvement projects. However,
the amount of work accomplished on the project was of minor impor-
tance when compared to the significance of providing useful work
and social stability.

63 Biddle, "Art Under Federal Patronage," p. 333; Lindeman,
64 Harry L. Hopkins, "Employment in America," Vital
Speeches, Vol. 3 (December 1, 1939), p. 105. Mr. Hopkins reported
this before the Mayors' Conference, Washington, D.C., November 17,
1936.
CHAPTER III
WPA CULTURE IN UTAH

Organization in Utah

The WPA was organized in Utah in the spring and summer of 1935. Like most other states, Utah had experienced federal relief in earlier programs such as the Civil Works Administration and the Federal Emergency Relief Administration. Under both of these programs the state had possessed cultural programs of the type sponsored by the WPA. Under FERA aegis, there were twenty-two artists employed in Utah in 1934. This group produced murals, pottery, posters, water colors, wood blocks and oil paintings. The experience gained in these earlier programs proved to be helpful in organizing and operating the much larger program of the WPA.

The responsibility for Utah's cultural programs rested with the state administrator and beyond that with the regional administrator. Neither the cultural programs nor the WPA programs in general could have lasted long or worked as well without the type of leadership Utah was able to muster.

One of the men responsible for the smooth-running Utah projects was Darrell J. Greenwell. Mr. Greenwell was both State Administrator of the WPA and also Director of the Utah State Department of Public Welfare (SDPW). This alleviated the problem of jealousy between the heads of the two offices since, as Greenwell stated, "I could just turn my hat around and be WPA one minute and state man the next." Greenwell was more than just "state man" or "WPA." He was apparently tireless in his efforts, indomitable in his undertakings and inexhaustible in his understanding of the problems of the time. The research


2Ibid., p. 72.
for this project uncovered many favorable comments on his work, and in Utah during the depression, Darrell Greenwell was one of the most respected and admired men produced by the state. Mr. Greenwell's regular employment had been as editor of the Ogden Standard Examiner, but he was lured away from that position each year by the Western Regional Administrator of the WPA, Robert H. Hinckley.

The WPA Federal Art Project fared well in Utah due to the understanding and intelligent men who administered the program. It certainly had something to do with the fact that Robert H. Hinckley was a cultured and sensitive person himself, who realized the value of employing the artists of the area. Mr. Hinckley became associated with the WPA through his connections with Governor Blood. The Governor called upon Hinckley to organize the county Civilian Conservation Corps. From this position, Mr. Hinckley moved to State Administrator of the Federal Emergency Relief Program. While in these positions, Hinckley came in contact with Harry Hopkins. Hopkins was impressed enough with Hinckley to invite him to Washington, D.C. to assist in the administration of the WPA. However, Hinckley refused to live in Washington, so Hopkins appointed him National Assistant Administrator of the eleven western states and Hawaii and Alaska. 3

Mr. Hinckley's political philosophy was conducive to the WPA program and he believed that "The Republicans were and are in favor of things. We, the Democrats, were in favor of people." This philosophy also prompted him to choose Darrell Greenwell as Utah State Administrator. Greenwell was "a sweet gentle man," "reasonable, not argumentative." Mr. Hinckley recruited him each

3 Hinckley, Interview. Mr. Hinckley related his experiences of trying to resign from his WPA administratorship, after the program was on its feet, to pay more attention to personal affairs. However, a tenacious Harry Hopkins and more tenacious Franklin D. Roosevelt managed to personally convince him of staying with the program. Mr. Hinckley did resign (one would suspect with FDR's approval) in 1938 to become a member of the Civil Aeronautics Administration. In 1940, he would become Harry Hopkins' Assistant Secretary of Commerce. See also, Ogden Standard Examiner, January 1, 1938 and August 6, 1944.
year from his regular editorial position to run the WPA in Utah. 4

On July 1, 1935, "the nature of our assignment was revealed to us. That was to promote and operate useful projects designed to take up to 20,000 men and women off Utah relief rolls and provide them with useful employment." It was this assignment which Darrell Greenwell proceeded to undertake. Actual operation of the WPA in Utah began in September of the same year. 5

Mr. Greenwell realized the problems of administering relief, especially to artists. Looking back, he wrote in 1943:

If the task of promoting construction projects was difficult, it was more so in the non-construction field. For the public was fairly well-educated about public works of the type usually handled by contractors. To educate the public to the desirability of sponsoring service or production projects was a rather trying experience. The public, including sponsors, were suspicious that things were going to be made altogether too pleasant for the poor. That a project should be set up so that unemployed violin players could play the violin seemed pretty crack-potty. Why shouldn't the unemployed violin player or artist be put to work building a sewer? We had to use many arguments, including the very realistic one that violinists or artists couldn't build very good sewers.

We had to take this back in some degree, for a few months later we picked an outstanding mural painter, a man who had been president of the Art Students League in New York, out of one of our sewers and learned that he had been an excellent sewer

4Hinckley, Interview; Elzy J. Bird, Interview, Salt Lake City, Utah, September 1, 1970. See also, Malmgren, "History of WPA in Utah." Mr. Malmgren was able to obtain a personal interview with Darrell Greenwell before he died in 1961. He was quite complimentary of Greenwell and stated that much of the success of the Utah WPA program could be attributed to his policies. p. 117.

5"Final Report of Darrell J. Greenwell, Utah WPA Administrator 1935-1943." This report was submitted to George H. Field, Deputy Commissioner of Work Projects, February 6, 1943, pp. 14-15. In this report, Mr. Greenwell stated that the worst enemies the Utah WPA projects had were the local construction companies. They naturally felt that WPA projects would be competing with them, an allegation that was constantly denied by WPA national and local administrators. (A copy of Mr. Greenwell's unpublished report is available in the Utah State Library and also on order from the National Archives in Washington, D.C.); Alma Vernon Rasmussen, "The Government Workers Relief Program in Utah, 1932-1940," (unpublished Master's thesis, University of Utah, 1942), p. 51.
builder. He had a degree in Civil Engineering. 6

Utah's program of the Federal Art Project was conducted on a much smaller scale than that of the more populous states. However, the Project was certainly not without value even in such a predominantly unsophisticated area as the state of Utah. The accomplishments there should be of interest when compared to the preceding chapter on the national program.

The Utah State Institute of Fine Arts was the chief sponsor of the WPA art, music and writers projects in the state. The Institute was organized in March of 1939 under the title of The Utah Art Institute. Mrs. Alice Merrill Horn was, to a large degree, responsible for its inception. In March of 1937, the official title was changed to the Utah State Institute of Fine Arts. 7

The objects and purposes of the Institute shall be to advance the interests of the fine arts...in all their phases within the State of Utah and to that end to cooperate with and locally sponsor Federal agencies and projects directed to similar undertakings, to develop the influence of art, literature and music in the Adult Education field, thus supplementing the more formal instruction of the Public School system, to associate manufacturers, agriculturalists and industrialists in these endeavors, to utilize broadcasting facilities and the power of the press in disseminating information and, in general to foster, promote, encourage and facilitate, not only a more general and lively study of the fine arts, literature and music, but to take all necessary and useful means to stimulate a more abundant production of an indigenous art, literature and music in this state.

The last sentence discussing "an indigenous art" was quite import-

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8 Laws of Utah, p. 227; See also Utah Educational Review, Vol. 33 (September 15, 1939), p. 39. The Utah State Institute of Fine Arts was well received by local citizens. It was quite innovative and broadcasted a weekly radio program which dramatized various important events in the lives of great artists. The Utah State Institute is still well respected and is presently under the able direction of Mr. Wilburn West.
art when compared with the WPA desire of also fostering real American art.

A governing board was also included in the organization of the Institute. The Governor of the State selected this board with the consent of the State Senate. Included on the board was one artist, one architect, one writer, one musician, one sculptor, one craftsman, one drama representative, one dance representative, and "five business or professional men or women interested in either art, literature or music." 9

Headquarters for the Utah State WPA centered at 59 South State Street in Salt Lake City. From there, Elzy J. Bird directed the Art Project. Mr. Bird had been an artist with the program from its beginning and became State Director of the Art Project in 1936 succeeding the first director, Judy Lund. Bird continued with the WPA until 1942 when he went into the armed forces. His background included study at University of Utah under J. T. Harwood, further study in Los Angeles and finally a stint with Walt Disney Productions. 10

From the beginning of the Project, state cooperation prevailed. This was in some part due to the regime which represented Utah. Frank Jonas, a professor of political science at the University of Utah, described the 1935 Utah government as "the most liberal in the state's history." The state allocated $25,000 for fine arts alone. That coupled with federal funds consisted of "quite a bit then." 11

Mr. Bird illustrated one aspect of the helpfulness of state officials. He picked up Governor Henry H. Blood (1932-1940) "in an old Ford to show him the building...the art project leaders wanted to rent." Not only did the Governor go along with them "all the way" on their choice of a building, but he was "a prince" in his dealings with Mr. Bird and his staff. 12 Other officials in

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10 Bird, Interview.
12 Bird, Interview; See also Morgan, Utah Guide, p. 169. Governor Henry H. Blood was a lifetime patron of the Arts.
the Arts Project included Donald B. Goodall, Director of the Utah State Art Center; Gail Martin, chairman of the Utah State Institute of Fine Arts; and Lynn Fausett who became Assistant State Art Supervisor after Mr. Bird resigned.

Contributions to Utah

The WPA refused to limit its activities to one art center or to employ only a few artists. On the contrary, it tried to reach as many people as possible. This philosophy urged the establishment of several art centers. Centers opened in Provo, Price and Helper became extremely popular with the local citizens, and included traveling exhibitions, local talent, and classes in everything from "crafts to children's classes to sculpture." It is possible that better community relations were, in a large degree, a result of the art classes. Mr. Bird said: "We made many friends through the art classes; we left a good taste in their mouths when we finished."13

The creation of the art centers, according to Mr. Bird, made available "exhibits and the painting of murals for communities that could not otherwise have afforded them." The response to the centers was quite remarkable. The Salt Lake Center averaged a "couple hundred" art students in attendance each day. The Helper Art Center became nationally famous when it set a percentage attendance record for the entire country by having more people attend its opening exhibit than the total population of the town.14

In 1939, when the Helper Center opened, Elzy J. Bird, Gail Martin, and the Mayor of Helper were among the speakers. Mr. Bird described the Helper gallery as "typical of art centers being established in small communities by the National Arts Program of the WPA." The gallery was in the large foyer of the

Civic Center and it comprised an area of 80 by 40 feet. Additional space was made possible by installing large screens upon which to hang paintings. The people of Helper and vicinity would "have the opportunity of seeing the best works of Utah and other western artists." 15

The WPA stimulated art in Utah by providing an opportunity for Utah artists to practice their craft in the state and by encouraging artistic former residents to return. "Creation of the WPA Art Project enabled young and progressive artists to remain in the state." Donald B. Goodall wrote of the WPA project that an "important value was to permit artists the opportunity to continue their work. That men working in the Utah area were able to function consecutively in their development has been significant. These are and were the prize-winning and the leading artists in the Intermountain area." 16

Dale Morgan stated the general view of art in Utah and described the importance of the WPA in keeping talent within the state.

Utah, always conservative, has been slow to accept the more extreme forms of contemporary art. The buying public, those who purchase paintings for home and office, have a strong preference for conventional portraits and realistic landscapes... Artists who remain in the state conform to public standards. 17

The Utah art project gave artists a chance to produce something in the state that conformed more with their thinking than with what the buying public told them to paint. The healthy effect this had on the artist was obvious.

The artists of the United States owed a debt to the WPA Art Project, no less so in Utah. As was the case nationally, the Utah artist was able to continue in his work with the least possible injurious results. The most impressive fact about the Art Project was the amount of freedom granted to the artist.

Whether it was due to Holger Cahill's national administration or Elzy Bird's local administration, artistic integrity was not compromised. The primary prerequisite for an artistic endeavor was always the qualification of the artist to handle the job, politics, personal animosity, or outside pressure notwithstanding.  

Utah's Art Project also included a Unit of the Index of American Design and a one man Photographic Department. Robert Jones was the photographer and his work was described as excellent. He later became the director of all advertising for the Columbia Record Company in New York.

By far, the majority of the professional work done on the Project came from painters and muralists, although there were some fine sculptors. At a pay rate of $80 a month, WPA artists produced some work which later became quite valuable. For instance, Lynn Fausett's mural in the Price, Utah City Hall took approximately two years to complete. Fausett received $1600 for the entire job. Recently, the Price City officials had the mural appraised and insured for $40,000. 19 Professor H. Reuben Reynolds, of Utah State University, who catalogued and appraised many WPA art works in the state, placed the average value of WPA paintings at about $300 per canvas. 20

It would be a drastic error to place undue emphasis on the pecuniary value of the Utah Federal Art Project. Of much more importance was the opportunity that the Project afforded to Utah's artists and communities. Mr. Fausett, in describing the Price City Hall mural was much more concerned with the fact that the job

18 Bird, Interview; Professor H. Reuben Reynolds, Interview, Utah State University, Logan, Utah, July 31, 1970; Professor Everett Thorpe, Interview, Utah State University, Logan, Utah, July 29, 1970; Fausett, Interview. Mr. Fausett had feelings that the Treasury Department's program of decorating public buildings was not as free from bureaucratic influence as the WPA Art Project.

19 Bird, Interview; Fausett, Interview.

20 Reynolds, Interview; Perkins, Interview. Professor Reynolds unhappily mentioned that a large number of WPA paintings were lost at the Utah State Fair.
finest artists. His watercolor, *Takin Five*, drew critical acclaim at the New York World's Fair of 1939. Mr. Bird's work is detailed and precise and thoroughly entertaining in its subject matter.25

Lynn Faussett's background consists of study in Utah and a 16-year association with the Art Students League in New York. Mr. Faussett was President of the League during the depression years, and it was largely due to his efforts that the League weathered the monetary storms of the period. His work includes murals for the Nebraska Capitol Building, the Irving Trust Building in New York, the Kansas City Union Station and work for the Chicago World's Fair. He also collaborated with Clara Fargo Thomas on the Daily News Building in New York, the Chicago Tribune Building and work for the New York World's Fair. His local work included a mural for the Union Building of the University of Wyoming. This painting contained a number of beloved professors, and when it was unveiled before an audience of 400 people, "'nearly everyone wept.'" This mural attracted national attention. Mr. Bird also did work at the White Pine High School in Ely, Nevada and the already mentioned Price City Hall.26 Mr. Faussett's brother, Dean, who also worked for the WPA project, had studied at Brigham Young University and the Art Students League.27

Gordon Cope was another very talented Utah artist. His WPA portrait of Governor Blood was placed in the Capitol Building. Mr. Cope was a fine artist who specialized in Indians of the Southwest. He painted pictures of several famous Indians and completed a project for Vernal, Utah that consisted of 12 scenes selected by the local citizens that held some special significance to them. While working on the project, Mr. Cope stayed with the Vernal citizens in their homes.28

28 Faussett, Interview; Bird, Interview; Thorpe, Interview; Morgan, *Utah Guide*, p. 169; Malmgren, "WPA in Utah," p. 84.
Some of the other artists on the Project included: Howell Rosenbaum who painted many fine landscapes including several for the state insane asylum. His work has been described as excellent and his artistic abilities as quite promising; Henry Rasmussen, who came the closest to the "modern school" on the Project; Edwin Evans, the chairman of the University of Utah art program and one of the great talents of his day; Everett Thorpe, now professor of art at Utah State University; Carlos Anderson and Ranch Kimball (present manager of the Lagoon Corp.) both contributed many fine sketches; Florence Ware's "delicate work"; Mr. and Mrs. Calvin Fletcher's paintings, and Maud Adams, Paul Smith, William Parkinson, W. H. Shurtliff, Phil Malan and Morris Brooks also contributed to the program. These people performed teaching duties as well as producing their own art. The statewide staff consisted of about sixty to seventy people. Of this, only about twenty actually produced art work. The rest were secretaries, gallery attendants, carpenters, bookkeepers and other auxiliary personnel. 29

The value of the program to Utah and her artists was quite patent. As Donald Goodall wrote:

The values of the program to artists in the Utah area [also] lay in the broadened exposure of Utah artists to new stimuli, due in part to the intake of traveling exhibitions and, for a couple of years, of visiting artists from the East, in particular, from Chicago. 30

WPA art work has remained popular in Utah. One particular mural of Lynn Fausett's was recently placed in the University of Utah Museum of Natural History. 31 In a note at the bottom of the mural, the Museum gratefully acknowledged the good luck of having


30 Goodall, Letter, August 20, 1970.

31 The following account is based on the personal recollections of Mr. and Mrs. Lynn Fausett.
found the mural in the basement of the Denver Museum. The painting and discovery of the mural became an interesting story of the WPA. Mr. Fausett claimed that an old cattleman, who was homesteading a cabin at the top of Barrier Canyon in Southern Utah, knew that Indian petroglyphs were painted throughout the canyon; some were of remarkable quality. The cattleman, a Mr. Tidwell, did not pay particular attention until one day when he found employees from an oil company trying to blast the pictures off the walls. He reportedly pulled his guns on them and ordered them to cease. With that, Mr. Tidwell got in touch with the Peabody Institute and they in turn informed the WPA officials.

In order to prevent the complete destruction of the petroglyphs, from either man or the elements, a team of local WPA Art Project personnel, under the supervision of Mr. Fausett, proceeded to accurately recreate the Indian work on a giant canvas 11 feet by 80 feet. The Index of American Design helped make some preliminary sketches and photographs, but the final work was done by Fausett and the artists in about three months. After completion of the huge project, Mr. Fausett tried to find some institution where he could display it. However, probably due to its size, he was unsuccessful. He never knew what became of it until it was found in the Denver Museum's basement. The curator of the Museum apparently collected as much unwanted WPA art as he could get. Fortunately, the mural was still in good enough condition, and with some touch-up work, was hung in the Museum of Natural History in Salt Lake City. The rediscovery and display of the mural was fortunate, since the Barrier Canyon petroglyphs have become ever more weathered and their location has made them difficult for the average Utah citizen to reach. As with other areas of the WPA cultural projects, the Art Project also aimed at rescuing America's past history from destruction.

Utah possessed other cultural programs during the depression years, most notably mention must be made of the music and writers' programs. As has previously been mentioned, the Utah State Institute of Fine Arts was the sponsor of the Art, Writers' and Music Projects. This coordination of cultural activities helps explain why Utah's programs were successful.
Music and Writers' Projects in Utah

The history of symphonic music in Utah was full of the vicissitudes of the public. The Salt Lake Symphony Orchestra, Utah's first symphonic group was organized in 1892, but lasted only a short time. In 1912, it was revived as the Salt Lake Philharmonic Orchestra. The name was again changed in 1924 and the group completely disbanded in 1925. In 1929, one of the strongholds of serious music in Utah, the Salt Lake Theater was razed. The advent of talking pictures caused the further disbanding of Utah's musical groups, and musicians had to leave the state to find employment. This could have had serious consequences for the state, had not the WPA Music Project given renewed impetus to orchestra music in Utah. As a result of the first Utah WPA orchestra, the state was able to begin and maintain a Symphonic Orchestra, employ musicians in the state, present musical concerts to thousands who had never heard live orchestral music, and teach music to thousands of more receptive school children and adults. At times a small charge was made to attend the musical performances, but it was not unreasonable.

WPA musicians in Utah were criticized in some quarters for working other jobs and still drawing the money from the program. Investigations into the backgrounds and families of these men were sometimes performed to the chagrin of the project leaders. One supervisor stated that if a good musician would work for WPA wages that should be enough proof.

The Writers' Project within the state also contributed some worthwhile work. This group collected, transcribed, collated and recorded journals, diaries, old newspapers, autobiographies and personal interviews dealing with Utah's past. They also produced numerous texts including: The History of Grazing, The History of Ogden and Provo, The Pioneer Mormon City. One of the leaders of

the state project was the celebrated Utah historian and journalist Dale L. Morgan. Mr. Morgan's talent became part of many of the works that were produced, especially in the informative and well written *Utah, A Guide to the State*.

The Writers' Project suffered locally as it did nationally. Politics and personal animosities forced the resignation of Henry Alsberg as head of the national program. Utah had its problems as well. By its very nature, the local WPA Writers' Project had to give work to as many as it could. Some individuals employed were not skilled writers or journalists, several had failed to complete grade school. This led to some resignations when it was thought that the program was sacrificing "creative talent" for job producing. 34 However, one fact must be kept in mind. The primary purpose of the WPA and the WPA cultural projects was to produce employment with which to end the depression and, secondarily, to create as much in the way of aesthetic and cultural value as possible. Therefore, if some seemingly unqualified personnel were on the rolls, the reason was attributable to the employment goal of the WPA.

Problems and criticisms of the WPA cultural projects were not absent in Utah any more than they were on the national scene. Many people thought all WPA employees were "boondogglers" or "shovel leaners." It was difficult, as Mr. Greenwell recalled, to convince people that artists were deserving of relief. 35 WPA workers were lumped into one bunch when criticism was meted out. Sometimes the accusations bordered on the ludicrous, such as correlating an increase in drunken driving and traffic violations directly to the WPA rolls. One WPA spokesman answered that he didn't believe WPA personnel could "afford cars fast enough to exceed the speed limit." 36

Generally the WPA received favorable newspaper coverage, especially since Darrell Greenwell was associated with the

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36 *Ogden Standard Examiner*, January 23, 1938.
Standard Examiner in Ogden. Gail Martin, Chairman of the Utah State Institute of Fine Arts, was often called upon to write articles about the WPA Art Project for the Deseret News. Mr. Bird remembered that the procedure of writing "much of our own publicity for the newspapers" was not uncommon.37

One of the largest problems facing the cultural projects and the WPA generally in Utah, was early antipathy from the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. This was in part due to a declaration from the Church Presidency that, "No man should ask for charity from the government." However, as soon as the L.D.S. Church began its own welfare project in 1936, they realized the problem was far too big for them to handle alone. Church authorities encouraged members to remain on WPA rolls rather than quitting their job and taking church relief.38

Lynn Fausett remarked that the L.D.S. Church was quite remiss in not using art, and especially unemployed artists, to "spread the work of the church."39

However, the church was extremely suspicious of the WPA and of the entire New Deal. It was not completely understood at first that this was not another historical attempt to subvert the power of the church over its members. For instance, the Writers' Project experienced difficulty in obtaining church records and correspondence due to suspicion on the part of various L.D.S. historical groups. After it was ascertained that the WPA had honest intentions, the church lessened its hostility toward the entire WPA cultural projects.40

It seems reasonable to assume that the primary concern of the L.D.S. Church, other than losing strength with its members, was the effect that the dole would have on American life. The

37 Reynolds, Bird and Hinckley, Interviews. Mr. Hinckley noted that the Deseret News usually followed the L.D.S. Church line regarding the WPA.
39 Fausett, Interview.
40 Malmgren, "WPA in Utah," p. 91.
WPA represented the antithesis of self-reliance and rugged-individualism that was honored in many Utah and American homes. The fact that the WPA was able to exist and in many instances quell this belief was further testimony of its successful results.

Problems with the L.D.S. Church were not at all permanent. Relations became quite cordial between the WPA and the Church when both regarded each other as truly trying to help Utah's stricken population. Mr. Robert Hinckley reported that he always tried to keep relations with the Church on a favorable standing. Since the Church was involved in relief work, "I always told J. Reuben Clark [Second Counselor to the President during WPA tenure in Utah] everything I knew about the Program." In any event, Mr. Clark was apparently won over, for in 1940 he had no unfavorable comments concerning the WPA.  

Another later contention of the L.D.S. Church concerned the subject of whether or not Mormons were being discriminated against on the WPA. This represented a complete reverse of their earlier dislike and distrust of the WPA. Mr. Hinckley claimed that this allegation was a "Mormon myth," and that a University of Chicago study found more L.D.S. people on the WPA rolls than anyone else in the state, according to their per capita ration in the population. 

The epithet "communist propaganda" was not as stridently shrieked in Utah as it was on a national scale. However, it was still heard in some corners. There were a number of socialist-type groups in Utah, including the Civic and Relief Workers Protective Union of Utah, Utah Workers Alliance, Relief Workers Protective Union of Salt Lake City, The Socialist Party of Utah and the Bill Haywood Branch, Communist Party of Utah. These groups were more concerned with construction projects than with cultural projects. They were often voicing their disapproval of

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41 Hinckley, Interview; Greenwell, "Final Report," p. 7; Deseret News, October 5, 1940.
42 Hinckley, Interview; See also Emery, "Mormon Security," p. 103. "...in 1935 there were proportionally 25% more Mormons than Gentiles on relief in Salt Lake County."
the WPA for not reaching far enough or for lay-offs.  

In the final analysis, almost any work of art could be construed by the beholder into some kind of "subversive propaganda." This could have been the case when a Utah police officer compiled a "pink list of which probably all Utah artists were on." Criticisms of the Art Project seldom came from the artists themselves, but there were some. A desire to see more money spent and provide a better living for these indigent creators would have been welcomed. The artists realized that even though they were paid very little, at least it kept them eating, paying the rent, clothing their families and above all producing works of art. You couldn't complain too much, "everybody was in the same spot."

Other criticisms from professional artists, when they had any, were academic. One important contention could be the policy of depriving the WPA rolls of some very good artists simply because they made too much money. Thomas Hart Benton, was not refused work, but declined to accept work relief because he considered himself already making enough money. Benton did not want to deprive a more needy artist from receiving WPA aid.

Utah's Federal Art Project seems to have been a success. Even though most people of the state would stare blankly if questioned about WPA art, that did not mean that they did not enjoy it and utilize it. The Roosevelt administration was filled with so many different agencies and initials that even some

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44 Bird, Interview. However, Mr. Bird, Mr. Fausett, Professor Reynolds and Mr. Hinckley all agree that to say Utah had any "communist problem" especially in the Arts Project, would be vastly overstating the case.
45 Bird and Fausett, Interviews.
46 Reynolds, Interview; Thomas Hart Benton, An American in Art (Lawrence: University of Kansas Press, 1969), p. 69. In Utah, at least one excellent artist was kept from the program because of financial solvency. (Reynolds)
Great Basin. Darrell Greenwell noticed the "esprit de corps" and the common goals of the WPA personnel. Certainly, there were some who could not get along or who did their best to shirk work, but they had to be in the minority when a look was taken at the tangible accomplishments of the Project. Classes, exhibitions, art "the average public could understand," and "a great activity" in art all over the state.47

The intangibles must also be remembered. Here was the chance for Utah artists to stay in the area, to develop a more regional, or at least American, style of art. The opportunity was given for all Utah artists to realize some fulfillment of an artist's dream and see their work on exhibition. Lastly, there was a "spirit of commaraderie, a feeling of unity and friendship" among the artists that was stronger than ever before or since the WPA. Perhaps this rapport and the security offered by the WPA were the reasons that a number of very fine Utah artists ceased to paint when the program ended. Robert Hinckley summarized the value of the Utah WPA cultural projects when he said, "It went much farther than relief, it kept the body alive and the soul."48

47 Greenwell, "Final Report," p. 5; Reynolds, Interview; Fausett, Interview.
48 Fausett, Interview; Hinckley, Interview.
CHAPTER IV

NATIONAL CRITICISMS, PROBLEMS AND ACCOLADES

The discussion of any adverse or favorable criticism of the Federal Art Project must necessarily encompass criticism of the entire WPA and often the New Deal itself. People do not neatly separate one portion of an institution from its whole. Therefore, it was often the case that a wholesale denunciation of the WPA in general included the critics views of the Art Project, the New Deal, and Franklin D. Roosevelt.

Critics of Roosevelt's WPA program did not have to look too far, especially in the beginning days of the project, to find a basis for their dislike. Political pressure and party promotion often appeared in conjunction with a denunciation of the WPA. Sometimes even friends of the WPA saw an inordinate amount of politics bound up with the projects.

The progress of recovery and reform in the field of the arts was obstructed at each point of growth by party politics without and partisanship within. But progress was there—not only the conservation of skills and the exercise of powers that would otherwise have been starved into futility, but a general lift of the consummatory level of the national life in things of the spirit. If the projects have thus far elicited no outstanding master among poets, painters, composers, dramatists, actors, musicians, they have provided the environment which facilitates the appearance and validates the achievements of such masters.

Charges of political pressure were placed upon the WPA every-time Harry Hopkins personally endorsed any candidate for public office. Probably all the WPA employees did not perform to the political dictates of Hopkins. However, the charge of WPA political abuses was heard most often not only in Congress, but also with the public.

The charge of "unjustifiable political activity" was probably


true to some extent. An organization as large as the WPA was bound to have some reprehensible side affects. Harry Hopkins' replied to this type of criticism that:

The only people who don't make mistakes are those who do nothing at all. The WPA is a great national enterprise to get something done. Mistakes may be made, but we can be sure the American people will not make the mistake of doing nothing.

The influence of Congress helped produce the Hatch Act of 1939, which forbade the use of political pressure upon the governmental employees. Roosevelt was not happy with the "hamstringing" Act but signed it anyway. The WPA had already instated that political contributions and solicitations were illegal as early as March of 1936, three years earlier than the Hatch Act.

Given the problems of political pressure in the program, all of the criticism cannot be applied entirely to the WPA itself. After all, Congress gave the agency wide latitude in 1935, and many of the abuses came from outside the WPA, from congressmen and local officials. The charges of inefficiency, laziness, "boondoggling," leaf-raking and general slackness on the part of WPA employees constituted some of the common criticisms. These charges made many WPA officials and employees very angry. The sign USA-WORK PROGRAM-WPA was displayed on WPA projects not because they were ashamed of their efforts, but because they wanted to invite the public to inspect the work and to see if it was satisfactory. In a 1939 appraisal, 85 percent of those

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4 Work Progress Administration, Our Job With the WPA (Washington, 1936), p. 21.
questioned believed that WPA work was quite good and compared favorably to privately financed improvements. 8

There were criticisms regarding the reluctance of WPA people to accept private employment again. J. B. White, mayor of Paradise, Utah, wrote:

I have known a number of men to quit steady work...to get on the relief work, assuming the attitude that it was foolish for them to work 30 days for $50 when they could get the same for 11 or 12 days work.

One of the objectives of the WPA created jobs, as easily seen in the cultural programs, was to keep workers fit for ultimate return to private employment. Harry Hopkins answered criticisms like that of the Cache County letter as follows:

The average earnings of a WPA worker are $50 a month. His hours are limited so that he cannot exceed his allowable earnings.

I ask you, is it reasonable to suppose that an American worker who is the head of a family will reject desirable private employment to remain in such a situation.

The answer, as we have found in investigating thousands of cases is that if there actually was a job—which in many instances there was not—there was something wrong with it—sub-standard wages or the kick-back, or some other unreasonable requirement.

Some people obtained the impression that WPA workers would not take private employment since so many very young and very old stayed with the program. However, private employment was much more difficult for them to obtain than for others in a more favorable age group. One who looked more closely could see that turnover was quite high in the WPA. Termination of employment came from refusal to accept a reasonable job, lack of funds, illness, injury, inability to perform duties, habitual absence, improvement

8Works Progress Administration, Jobs The WPA Way (Washington, 1936), no pages numbered; National Appraisal Committee, U.S. Community Improvement Appraisal, A Report on the Work Program of the WPA (Washington: 1940), p. 13; See also Appendix II of this paper.


10Hopkins, "Employment in America," p. 106; The WPA checked "every allegation of inefficiency and found 'few' that were substantial." WPA, Inventory, p. 10.
in financial status and in 1939, the 18-months ruling regarding length of time a person could continuously remain on WPA rolls.\footnote{Final Report, WPA, pp. 18, 41.}

An employee of the WPA could seldom equal the wages he could earn in private employment. "Generally speaking, emergency public employment has paid the worker less--often much less--than corresponding work in private and public jobs in the same locality..."\footnote{John H. G. Pierson, Full Employment (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1941), p. 38.}

As one author noted, the question of the WPA employees competing with or not taking private jobs, was rather academic since full employment was not a reality until the Second World War.\footnote{Bakke, Citizens Without Work, p. 274.}

When Franklin Roosevelt heard of criticisms of inefficiency or "boondoggling" on the WPA, he took it in stride and quipped:

There is a word going around--boondoggling. It's a pretty good word. If we can boondoggle our way out of the depression, that word is going to be enshrined in the hearts of the American people for years to come.\footnote{Franklin D. Roosevelt, Public Papers of Franklin D. Roosevelt, 1936, 13 Vols. ed. by Samuel I. Rosenman (New York: Random House, 1938), p. 38.}

Another criticism of the WPA, with emphasis on the cultural programs, concerned the suspicion of Communist infiltration into the projects. Communism was fashionable for many people in the thirties, whether or not they were hard-headed Leninists or the more pliable idealistic type. This latter group probably claimed many disillusioned American writers, artists and musicians. If the WPA Art Project operated according to law, it had no right to discriminate against Communists, at least not until 1939. In that year, subversives, including Communists and Nazis, were denied membership on the WPA rolls. The New York WPA project head, Lieutenant Colonel B. B. Somervelle, estimated in June of 1940 that 1000 employees would lose their jobs with the WPA because of the anti-Communist, anti-Nazi purgings. He said that signed affidavits would now be required disclaiming any connection with the parties. Somervelle further stipulated that those qualifying as subversives did not have to be a member of a party, but that a
"Trotskyite or a splinter group" also came under the restricted list. The Colonel may have taken some liberties with the law with this action. \(^{15}\) Numerous cases of dismissal occurred in New York and most often the suspended personnel were reinstated and declared "not guilty." \(^{16}\)

There were some Communist or leftist leaning people in the WPA and in the Art Project. But often critics stressed the problem to banality. One dismissal resulted from a poster which "depicted a micrometer in such a way as to produce the effect of a hammer and sickle." Other examples included a mural that was torn out of San Antonio, Texas' municipal auditorium because it contained a clenched fist, the international symbol of communism, and another mural was removed from Floyd Bennett Municipal Airport in New York. Bennett had been Admiral Byrd's pilot to the North Pole and a picture of him had been presented by the Women's International Aeronautic Association, the Flatbush Chamber of Commerce, and the Floyd Bennett American Legion Post. They were all incensed because the WPA mural in the airport obscured the picture of Bennett and one of the mural's panels depiction of war was "somewhat gruesome." \(^{17}\)

A few days later, the mural was torn down because the creator, August Henkle, had refused to sign an affadavit that he was neither a Communist nor a Nazi. Colonel Somervelle fired Henkle and claimed that there was a portrait of Stalin and of a loyalist pilot in the Spanish Civil War. Somervelle said that Henkle had painted these to spite the WPA when he found he was being dropped from the rolls for failure to sign the disclaimer affadavit. The United American Artists Union, Local 60 of the C.I.O., said the removal of the mural was part of a "smearing campaign of falsehood and innuendo being developed for the purpose of wrecking the Art Project." Henkle, who had earlier run for Congress from Queens on the Communist ticket, denied the charge and sued

\(^{15}\) New York Times, June 30, 1940.  
\(^{16}\) Ibid., April 16, 1941; October 15, 1941.  
\(^{17}\) Burns, Lion and Fox, pp. 417-418; Fausett, Interview; Reynolds, Interview; New York Times, July 3, 1940; Newsweek, Vol. 6 (September 21, 1935), p. 40; New York Times, July 7, 1940.
Somervelle for "defamation of character." He said that the portrait in the painting was much too obscure to be claimed as Joseph Stalin and that it was actually none other than Franc Reichelt, a pioneer parachutist killed in a fall from the Eiffel Tower. The Spanish loyalist pilot was at that time flying at Bennett Field and "well respected by the local personnel." Henkle further declared that Somervelle had tried to raise a "real scare" and that the destruction of the mural was the equivalent of the Nazi book burnings. Somervelle countered with a huge investigation of some 1000 employees in his jurisdiction and said, "Ye shall know them by their fruits." 

In regard to the Somervelle-Henkle battle, Rockwell Kent wrote that Colonel Somervelle was to blame with his "destruction of public property without such due process as the public in protection of its rights is entitled." 

Some debate occurred over the acceptability of propaganda in art. Kent claimed that all "worthwhile" art was propaganda. Jonas Lie, President of the National Academy of Design, insisted that "treason is no less treason because it is pictorial or literary." However, he mitigated the statement somewhat by saying that "if beauty carries across more than propaganda, then propaganda is justifiable." But if it resulted in mere propaganda, "down with it." 

The cry of subversive influences in the WPA cultural programs reached such a peak that in 1939 the Woodrum Congressional Committee succeeded in having the Theatre Project dropped. The other projects were now required to have 25% local sponsorship as well as abide by the 18-month rule. One perceptive study had suggested that if the cultural programs had always had local sponsorship, the critics might not have been so vehement. In any event,
The Woodrum Committee made many ridiculous accusations but generally thought the WPA was honestly run and "investigating committees seldom commend anyone for good work." 23

The pro-WPA forces did their best to keep the pressure off of the cultural programs. Republican Congressman Vito Marcantonio called for an end of the "kidding of the American people. They are beginning to get wise to us. They are sick and tired of this gag about communism. The gag is beginning to wear thin." 24

Representatives John M. Coffee and Emanuel Celler both took a dim view of efforts to destroy the cultural programs. Celler stated in the record:

The Federal Art Project is a wonderful means of interpreting America to Americans in the graphic arts...Life at best is often difficult. Art removes much of life that is dull and drab and unhappy. These art projects have brought much sunshine into the lives of thousands of the poor, impoverished and downtrodden. 25

Communism and alleged subversive propaganda created a storm all out of proportion to its real influence in the Federal Art Project. Words had an uncanny effect on people, and caused them to jump to conclusions. "People are ready to put down anything that is associated with Communism, no matter how good it is." 26

The WPA suggested that its projects include more planning and the disassociation of public work and relief. Other critics opposed practice of segregation by southern WPA projects,

22 Administration Service, 1941), p. 312; See also U.S. Congress, Congressional Record, 76th Congress, 1st session 1939, p. 2178. Representative John M. Coffee of Washington excoriated an act of the Woodrum Committee whereby they confiscated nude photos of the Federal Art Project. Coffee explained that the photos of the Project were common practice and were kept as a record for the artists so that they could select correct subject-types for specific paintings.


24 Vito Marcantonio, I Vote My Conscience; Debates, Speeches and Writings of Vito Marcantonio. ed. by A. T. Rubinstein. (New York: V. Marcantonio Memorial, 1956), p. 117. Marcantonio is described as having unavowed Communist connections. He was also a master politician in the style of La Guardia. Politics of Upheaval, pp. 143-144.

25 Congressional Record, p. 7291.

26 Strong, Interview.
objected to jealousy between sections, accused the program of poor supervision, while some individuals felt programs failed to go far enough.27

The qualifications required by anyone to judge the quality of art has been questioned. However, such judgment has been only to assist the artist in furthering his work. Lincoln Steffens insisted that in the end, each person had to judge art for himself. At any rate, a very loose and inexact discipline of art criticism had evolved.

Some WPA art was bad, some was very good. Most of it was somewhere in between. Critics called them anything from "exercises in mediocrity" to a "great impetus for American art." Harold Ickes, head of the PWA and also Secretary of the Interior, was quite frank about his conception of WPA. But there may have been a taste of sour grapes attached to anything that smacked of the WPA.

I will say that most of these paintings were terrible from my point of view and I left wondering why men who turned out that kind of stuff should be supported as artists.28

Some Iowans did not appreciate WPA art. When a mural for the state fair was destroyed the answer to queries of why was: "It wasn't art. It was WPA...and an insult to Iowa farmers because it showed them as clubfooted, coconut-headed, barrel-necked, and low-browed. Besides plywood is rare and costs a lot today."29

Those in favor of the Federal Art Project were no less numerous than its detractors. The American Magazine of Art believed that the Project deserved public support. The New Republic claimed that the WPA "remade the face of America." Another magazine extolled lack of discrimination in the Project while another


29 Newsweek, Vol. 28 (July 15, 1946), pp. 31-32.
stressed that much had been accomplished that otherwise would have been forgotten. The *New York Times* liked the fact that under the WPA there was no urge to "fabricate uninterrupted sweetness and light." Alfred Barr of the Museum of Modern Art in New York City said that the WPA Art Project "has made possible a great advance in the art of our country." Dr. Irwin Edmon of Columbia University declared that it was "really making art the popular theme of public discussion and reflection." Lawrence Coleman, director of the American Association of Museums, claimed it was "one of the most important things that has happened to American art in a hundred years."  

Some of the work was singled out as especially good, among which was John Brook's Flight mural for LaGuardia Field. It "is one of the most satisfying murals, on so vast a scale, thus far produced by an American artist." Also notable was the completion of the Mount Rushmore sculpture by Gutzon Borglum under WPA sponsorship. These were some of the projects which were considered an "amazing return of good art on its [WPA] investment."  

In a 1936 "Letter to the President," Lewis Mumford, Thomas Beer, Rockwell Kent, Suzanne LaFollette, S. E. Spingarn, Paul Rosenfeld, John Sloan, George Biddle and others expressed their apprehension that something might destroy the Art Project. They claimed that "if the artist is effectively to serve his community, he cannot depend upon the private patron." They declared that the "salvage of the arts" had come about through the WPA. President Roosevelt also spoke of the "essential place which the arts have in a democratic society." Roosevelt felt that the WPA artist best exemplified the democratic art that did not have to rely on private patrons.  

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Francis Taylor was quite perceptive when he described the over-all value of WPA art. He said there was some rubbish produced "but then white wash is still pretty cheap and extraordinarily effective." That some work was bad was the penalty one must pay. "Yet, even if every mural produced by the government in the last two years were to be erased tomorrow, it would be impossible to wipe out the good this program has done for American art." Taylor thought it might be the beginning of a national and natural art. 33

Was this truly the beginning of a national style or American art? Was it a cultural rediscovery or was it a full-scale Renaissance of American art? Matthew Josephson thought it was the beginning of American art.

A young generation of gifted painters was kept alive through employment by the WPA Federal Art Project, the very men who after World War II brought international fame to the "American School." 34

Members of the WPA Art Project in Utah seem to agree that the United States did not really reach a completely "American art," it was a copy of many things, yet if the WPA or something similar had continued, a "truer American art" if not altogether nationalistic might have been produced. Before the WPA American artists had been trying to paint America as a European artist would paint it. The Federal Art Project helped ameliorate this and at least "caused us to think about American art." "WPA artists came closer to the truthfulness of a Cezanne or a Renoir than Americans ever had before." 35

Whether or not one would subscribe to the theory of a development of completely American art rests with the individual.

34 Matthew Josephson, Infidel in the Temple (New York: A. A. Knopf, 1967), p. 373; Other individuals who consider the WPA Art Project somewhat "a cultural rediscovery" or Renaissance were Grace Overmeyer, William MacDonald, H. R. Reynolds, E. J. Bird, L. Fausett and R. H. Hinckley.
35 Bird, Interview; Fausett, Interview.
Jackson Pollock was quite explicit in his opinion.

Question: Do you think there can be a purely American art? 
Answer: The idea of an isolated American painting, so popular in this country during the thirties, seems absurd to me, just as the idea of creating a purely American mathematics or physics would seem absurd...And in another sense, the problem doesn't exist at all; or, if it did, would solve itself: An American is an American and his painting would naturally be qualified by that fact, whether he wills it or not. 

Mr. Pollock may have been simplifying the question somewhat. An "American art" referred to definite national style that could pervade Americanist paintings. The question of whether or not an artist was American would not necessarily be a deciding factor although the artist born and bred in this country would probably have more of a rapport with its "truth." Was there a new truthfulness in American painting of the thirties? This is the question that Pollock seems to pass over too quickly.

There was something new in art in the thirties. This was a period when artistic styles made their way back across the Atlantic, from Paris to New York. "The expatriate artists and writers who fled abroad in the '20's now returned to America and found fresh esthetic possibilities in the affirmation of native themes." They were looking more for the "subjects of everyday life" and forsaking the "Paris School." Grant Wood came home when he could not find the honesty he was looking for in Europe. Not only was the constant drift of talent from America to Europe halted, but the equally upsetting drift of talent from home communities to the big cities was halted with WPA help. Artists reflected the "vastness and variety of the United States rather than repetitions of the themes from New York and Paris." 

Definitely something was changing in American art. The times were exciting and dynamic. The WPA Federal Art Project

was "attuned in spirit to the tempo and temper and the maturing philosophy of the time."\textsuperscript{38}

\textsuperscript{38} New York Times, August 6, 1939.
CHAPTER V
SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

The New Deal was an era of excitement and innovation. President Roosevelt may or may not have brought the nation out of the depression of the thirties. Perhaps the war really ended the economic problems, but it was Roosevelt and the New Deal which helped bring an end to the spiritual and social depression of the times. Action was taken where it was needed, the FERA, CWA, CCC, PWA, WPA and many others exemplify this dynamic searching for an answer to the difficulties then evident.

"Alphabetical Agencies" by themselves did not mend gaping holes in our social fabric. It also took an especially dedicated breed of men. Men like Harry Hopkins who was the epitome of New Deal innovation. "It was Hopkins who often thought up the programs. At White House dinners, President Roosevelt would say, 'Harry, you've got to come up with a program for this or that.' Hopkins was a great man."¹

It also took competent men in other positions on the WPA administrative staff. Forward looking and intelligent men like Robert H. Hinckley, Darrell Greenwell and Elzy J. Bird were not afraid to step ahead and help produce one of the most interesting and valuable programs sponsored by the WPA, the Federal Art Project. Laurels must also go to the men and women of the Federal Art Project, those who under the stigma of public relief, still managed to produce much of aesthetic and monetary value to the United States.

The WPA officially ceased to exist on June 30, 1943. The war had taken the place of it and other related programs in providing economic stability to the American people. One cannot but be appalled at the price of stability and prosperity. The final tally amounted to $12,974,456,687 spent by the WPA program of which $2,837,713,394 was sponsors' funds. In Utah, $69,037,642

¹Hinckley, Interview.
was expended counting $21,365,974 in sponsors' funds.\(^2\) True, it was a huge amount, but it must be kept in mind that most of the money went back into the economy where it helped make the depression less severe.

Utah was hit quite hard by the depression, especially when L.D.S. Church relief was added to state and federal relief. Utah had 32 percent more workers on WPA projects than in the nation as a whole, 45 percent more in CCC, 50 percent in the NYA, and 60 percent more in the PWA.\(^3\) The state owed much to the efforts of all the people who labored to help it pass the relief programs through those serious times. Utah Congressman Abe Murdock read into the Congressional Record his feelings concerning the value of the WPA program in Utah.

No other public endeavor in history has been subjected to so much maliciously false criticism as the works program of the present administration. Certainly, no other issue of modern times has been discussed with so little understanding, slandered so groundlessly, misrepresented so viciously... Our works program has rebuilt America, has cleaned it up, made it sanitary, beautified it, and made of it a more appropriate place for free people to inhabit...a newer and nobler conception of democratic function [has resulted].

I have, however, carefully studied the public-works program in Utah; I have inspected projects; I have talked with the laborers and supervisors; I have discussed the projects with the local people who sponsored them and will benefit from them...I challenge the critics to point to a single project in the State of Utah which has not been intelligently sponsored, conscientiously undertaken, and efficiently constructed.\(^4\)

Some of the Congressman's speech may have been partisan rhetoric but, no doubt the voters would have had more to say about Mr. Murdock's stand than would partisanship. Indeed, the Utah Appraisal Committee of the WPA concluded that "there can be little question of the general soundness and efficacy of the Federal work relief program...The committee heartily recommends its continuation." The letter was signed by Sumner C. Margetts,

\(^2\) Final Report, WPA, pp. 15, 124, 125.
\(^3\) Emery, "Mormon 'Security','" p. 183.
\(^4\) U. S. Congress, Congressional Record, 76th Congress, 1st Session, 1939, p. 2550-2551.
The final result of the WPA programs was sprawling, confused and misunderstood. Critics chanted their disgust, "but they were often those who tried to get everything they could for their own state at the same time." They cried subversion and socialism and called Roosevelt a friend of the Bolsheviks. However, Communists did not seem to feel that FDR was their friend. On the contrary, Roosevelt might possibly have saved the country from a violent insurrection. "Had it not been for President Roosevelt and men like Harry Hopkins, there would have been communism." Roosevelt emphatically claimed that the "New Deal had saved the country from Communism."  

The question is academic, the country did not become a communist pawn, nor is it known whether or not Roosevelt and his men were responsible for the defeat of communism.  

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6 Hinckley, Interview; Burns, Lion and Fox, p. 280.  
Roosevelt acted in the face of crisis, and as one anti-Roosevelt author claims that same crisis worked perfectly to the benefit of Roosevelt's program. However, that author overlooked that if the times had called for different methods, Roosevelt in his political perspicacity would have utilized them.

In conclusion, had there not been a Franklin D. Roosevelt, or a Harry Hopkins or a Holger Cahill or many others, there might not have been a WPA Federal Art Project. Perhaps the times were just right for such an awakening. Some good always seems to be present even in the dreariest situation. The Art Project will be "valued for generations to come," according to one evaluation. In the future, the citizens of that time may appreciate the accomplishments of the Art Project much more than did its contemporaries.

Study the history of the great artistic movements of the world. These movements have produced about all there is in the world that has stood the test of time. Nations come and go, but those nations which have not produced spiritually in art and literature have left the world no richer.

The WPA Federal Art Project made a valiant contribution in helping the hungry, demoralized and impoverished creators. It also added to the everlasting artistic renown and memorial of the United States.

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10 Bruce, "Art and Democracy," p. 150.
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The Ogden Standard Examinor, January 18, 21, 23, 1938; August 6, 1944.

The New York Times, July 25; November 2, 22, 1937; January 23, May 29, 1938; May 10, July 9, August 6, 7, 1939; June 23, July 3, 7, 9, 10, 12, 14, 27, 1940; April 16, October 15, 1941; September 9, 20, 1942; March 4, 1943; April 30, 1944.
Franklin Delano Roosevelt was more deeply interested in the arts than any other President since Thomas Jefferson. It is doubtful that any head of state since the Renaissance has equalled him as a patron of living art. No one has surpassed him in breadth and generosity of vision, in concern for the freedom of the artist, and the desire to bring the influence of the fine arts into every community and every home.

President Roosevelt's attitude toward the arts was not simply one of the minor graces of a great career. It was an integral part of his being and character, and found expression in everything he did. There was in his approach to day-by-day problems a creative spontaneity which confronted new situations with methods as contemporary as the challenge. And there was too a feeling for tradition. He knew that the present is not made out of the past alone, but he knew also that men are held by the past they carry with them and cling to it for reassurance in unfamiliar surroundings. His strategy always had the traditional foundations that reassured the majority of the people, and an inventiveness that never betrayed him into fighting today's battles with the ideas and weapons of yesterday. This is the way of the artist who respects tradition but knows that it must be created anew in every generation.

The sign of the great leader and the great artist is a transforming power that can turn opposing forces to its own purpose and find advantage in the uncarved block of resisting material. President Roosevelt had the power to meet desperate and seemingly hopeless situations and turn their danger into opportunity, their threatening evil into good. He used this power to overcome personal disaster, and twice he used it greatly to save the nation. When Fascism was preparing to decide the future of the world, and an unprepared America seemed fated to stand aside, his leadership welded the unity and power of the anti-Fascist coalition, prepared America for the inevitable conflict, and out of the wreckage and misery of war created anew the ideal and the possibility of world security and world freedom.

It is one of the blessings of forgetfulness that men do not long carry with them lively images of bygone misfortune. Most of us have forgotten the dismal 'thirties and the economic paralysis that forced twenty million Americans on the relief rolls. There was a time in the 'thirties when it looked as if our economy must be driven through a downward spiral of shattered morale to lower levels of skill and lowered standards of living. In this situation of crisis, which had wrecked the governments of other nations and opened the road for Fascism, President Roosevelt not only kept our economy on an even keel but found an opportunity to achieve great economic, social and cultural gains for the American people. In a time when it looked as if
our civilization had decided that it could not afford itself he established the greatest art program in the nation's history. This was done through the agencies established to deal with the depression. The art projects grew out of the idea that it was essential to maintain the skills of the unemployed. Instead of putting everybody to work digging ditches or raking leaves, construction projects were organized for construction workers, architects and engineers, educational projects for teachers, and art projects for artists. There were, of course, many other types of projects. This program to salvage and enhance a nation's skills was at first greeted with the derisive epithet of "boondoggling," and this at a time when the Fascist governments were maintaining the morale and the skills of their workers through the "made work" of a boom time war economy all too obviously aimed at the democratic nations.

Many opinions have been expressed concerning the value of the government's employment program, and more particularly its art projects. This is not the time to attempt a final evaluation of the WPA Federal Art Project or the Section of Fine Arts, but without venturing too far into controversial territory a number of statements may be made. It is the opinion of many informed critics that these projects raised the art of mural painting in this country to higher levels, gave artists opportunities to acquire new techniques and a wider discipline of craftsmanship through working together in shops and mural studios, created certain invaluable records such as the Index of American Design, and brought into hundreds of communities that had never known it before. These projects represented the greatest program ever undertaken to bring the influence of the fine arts into the daily of the average man. They were absolutely free of censorship. This character of the projects sprang directly from the President's sponsorship. No other head of state has seen so clearly the place of the arts in a democratic society or affirmed so unequivocally the freedom of the artist. During the eight years of the Section of Fine Arts and the WPA projects, not one word or hint of censorship ever came from the White House.* President Roosevelt was convinced, as he himself said, that "the arts cannot thrive except where men are free to be themselves and to be in charge of the discipline of their own energies and ardors...What we call liberty in politics results in freedom in the arts." He wanted to make it possible for American artists to direct their talents and energies toward the whole people because he believed that "in encouraging the creation and enjoyment of beautiful things we are furthering democracy itself." President Roosevelt saw art as a great medium of the continuity and attraction of culture, a spiritual force of gravitation drawing men and nations together.

The life of a great man, like a great work of art, does not yield itself at first observation, nor is it diminished by habit or familiarity. It grows in the perspective of Chinese landscape painting, until it is part of the infinity of earth and sky, imparting to the whole composition its own greatness and nobility. The untimely death of Franklin Delano Roosevelt is an accident of our mortality. His life is now the possession of all men. In
the great perspective of the ages it is a massive peak to which
men may turn and say: I too am part of this.

* George Biddle and Lynn Fausett both disagree with Mr. Cahill
and claim that censorship was used by the Treasury Department.
Richard Hofstadter would also take issue with the statement at
the beginning of the article that FDR was "deeply interested in
the arts." Mr. Cahill may have been understandably overzealous
in his praise of the President, but his article is important
since it represents the feelings of many American artists during
the Roosevelt years.
APPENDIX II

The following are random samplings of various states concerning the question, Have the white-collar projects been worthwhile?
From *U.S. Community Improvement Appraisal*, p. 28.

"In the larger towns and cities the so-called 'white-collar' projects have contributed major improvements in the non-construction fields. The education, health, professional, youth, recreation, research, and arts projects have played an important part in improving the efficiency of community government, fostering recreation and cultural life, extending much needed services, and developing community health and well-being in general.

California

"Practical results arising from the operation of non-construction projects in Florida have become more pronounced and apparent as the various programs have been carried forward. These educational and service projects have required considerable time for the public to become convinced of their good effects."

Florida

"With the exception of Student Aid, most comments on the non-construction projects have been adverse, although the greater part of officials reporting have ignored white-collar projects..."

Indiana

"The white-collar projects come in for a considerable share of the type of criticism just referred to (unfavorable). On the other hand, this type of project is highly praised by a number of persons representing larger communities. These different reactions are easy to explain, since this type of relief is chiefly rendered and best provided in the large centers."

Kentucky

"This committee makes the observation that in its long-term aspect, the public in general does not fully appreciate either the importance of this work (non-construction projects) or the number of relief clients whose capacity is limited to such endeavors..."

Minnesota

HAVE THE NON-CONSTRUCTION (ARTS, ETC.) ACTIVITIES BEEN WORTHWHILE?

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<th>Yes</th>
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<th>Qualified</th>
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<td>95.9</td>
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APPENDIX III

WPA CULTURAL EMPLOYMENT*

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<th>Actors</th>
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* 1935 figures from *Workers On Relief in the United States*, pp. 8, 116.
1936 figures from *Employees on WPA Projects*, pp. 1, 105.
1937 figures from *Assigned Occupations of Persons Employed on WPA Projects*, pp. 10, 64.

CUMULATIVE HOURS AND EARNINGS OF PERSONS EMPLOYED BY THE WPA 1935-1943* (excluding U.S. possessions)

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<td>Total</td>
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<tr>
<td>Utah</td>
<td>81,885,407</td>
<td>$42,337,297</td>
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* The "highest" state was New York with 1,815,322,319 hours and $1,149,424,803. Other high states were: California, Illinois, Massachusetts, Michigan, New Jersey, Ohio, Pennsylvania and Missouri. The "lowest" state was Nevada with 13,744,637 hours and $7,611,227. Other low states included: Wyoming, Delaware, and Vermont. Source, Final Report of the WPA, p. 115.