

Rewriting America: New Essays on the Federal Writers' Project. Edited by Sara Rutkowski. (Amherst and Boston: University of Massachusetts Press, 2022. vii + 270 pp. Photographs and index. \$30.95, paper.)

From 1935-1941 the United States Federal Government embarked on an ambitious scheme, both financially and ideologically, to provide work for writers in the context of the Great Depression.

What was envisioned as a short-term plan to produce state guidebooks – essentially tourism promotional material – to bolster internal travel and tourism and boost local economies, turned into something more unexpected. The Federal Writers' Project would revise artists' expectations of their relationship with the federal government, provide a training ground for some of America's most celebrated writers, and fascinate historians for years to come.

Rewriting America is a reminder that the scholarship on the Federal Writers' Project has much to offer. Whilst the most well-known of the outputs of the Federal Writers' Project – the interviews with the formerly enslaved – have received significant attention ever since George P. Rawick published his collections in the 1970s, the Federal Writers' Project itself has received significantly less attention. Historians of slavery have often mined the interviews of the formerly enslaved without any significant awareness of the internal politics and context of the project that created them. Works by Jerrold Hirsch (2004) and Catherine Stewart (2016) have offered vital book-length context and interjections on both the interviews and the state writers' projects as a lens to local understandings of the United States. Rutkowski's volume, however, offers valuable chapter-length introductions to themes and characters often on the periphery of some of the previous scholarship.

The essays in this volume have been separated into sections offering insights into, first, the administration and politics of the project (essays by Taylor, Demasi, Hirsch and Mutnick). Secondly, reflections and new research into regional contexts (Arenson, Rivera, Harris, and Singer), and finally a section on the archival significance of the project (King, Mine, Robinson and Sun, and Rutkowski). Essays in the first section combined offer a fascinating insight into the intersection of identity,

politics and writing in the 1930s with the individuals discussed having all contended with suspicions about either their communist links or sexuality and subsequent fears over national security. The essays on Asian Americans (Robinson and Sun) and Hispano Americans (Rivera) in the project demonstrate that the academic potential of the sources left behind have much to offer aside from the slavery material that has thus far dominated academic analysis.

A common theme throughout each essay are the connections made to the present. The FWP continues to provide a model for how to support artists through financial crises (the recession of 2008 and Covid-19 pandemic two repeated examples), but also how wide-scale projects to engage in American culture and heritage can emphasise shared histories in times of increasing political polarisation. This volume will provide a fascinating point of reference and stimulation for discussion amongst scholars and students alike.

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