

Debs opposed the war, how he ran foul of Attorney General A. Mitchell Palmer (the “Fighting Quaker”), and how democrats then fought for his freedom. Debs played his part in the campaign for the release of all political prisoners by running for President from prison. Freeberg chronicles the fight that took place outside the prison walls for Convict 9653’s release, and the roles played in that fight by radicals like Lucy Robins.

Freeberg argues that, thanks to the efforts of his supporters when he was in prison, Debs’s anti-war stand had “unintended consequences.” One of them was the formation of the American Civil Liberties Union (1920). Another was Attorney General Harlan Fiske Stone’s directive, in 1924, that the BI should undertake no more political work. This book is a convincing exposition of a fresh theme in the history of American liberty.

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Susan Currell, *American Culture in the 1920s* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2009, £17.99). Pp. xix + 252. ISBN 978 0 7486 2522 2.

I have never understood exactly why the 1920s are referred to as “roaring.” Susan Currell’s explanation is intriguing: “Without a doubt, the cacophony of sound heard from millions of loudspeakers that had simply not been there just a decade earlier fixed the word ‘roaring’ permanently to ‘the twenties’” (134). This observation concludes her excellent chapter on “Film and Radio,” in which she points out that the arrival of sound on film coincided with the introduction of radio into the home. She connects these innovations with broader developments in commerce, education, politics and art. Indeed, one of the particular strengths of this book is its method of establishing connections across different areas of cultural production, avoiding easy generalizations and offering concrete examples to illustrate larger trends. (This is clearly one of the central purposes of the Twentieth-Century American Culture series, which presents the century decade by decade.)

Comparisons across different media are facilitated by the structure of the book: the chapters are: “The Intellectual Context,” “Fiction, Poetry and Drama,” “Music and Performance,” “Film and Radio,” “Visual Art and Design” and “Consumption and Leisure,” while the Conclusion focusses on the cultural legacy of the 1920s. This well-judged arrangement permits, for instance, an illuminating discussion of the relationship between photography and architecture, which grows out of an account of the New York skyscraper. The comments on the skyscraper, in turn, form part of a thematic focus on the city, which cuts across chapters. Other such themes include race, technological innovation, artistic experimentation and religion. The discussion of race issues and black writing is especially insightful; on the other hand, I found the use of the word “modernism” a little confused, and the survey of the debates over high and low culture rather vague (there is no mention of the rise of middlebrow culture and little attention to the decade’s emphasis on self-improvement). The chapter on music and performance provides an impressive and engaging

account of jazz, though it does not really cover any other topics – there is a cursory reference to Martha Graham, but dance does not receive the emphasis which it deserves. These, however, are minor criticisms: in such a concise volume, it would be impossible to cover everything in detail, and Currell really does pack a lot in, without ever sacrificing clarity.

The book includes a detailed timeline – reading down the column entitled “Criticism” produces an instant potted history of intellectual developments in the 1920s, while the other columns list key events and canonical titles in literature, film, music and so on. Another attractive pedagogical feature of this series is the inclusion of boxed case studies. In Currell’s volume, these are effectively integrated into the main text, and among the well-chosen topics are events such as the Scopes Trial and Lindbergh’s transatlantic flight, key books and films including *Cane*, *Nanook of the North*, *Manhatta* and (rather inevitably) *The Great Gatsby*, and important artists and performers – Bessie Smith, Eugene O’Neill, Clara Bow, Georgja O’Keefe and others. This book would be ideal for use on an interdisciplinary cultural-history course, but it also provides exactly the kind of contextual knowledge required by students focussing purely on literature, or film, or visual art, or music.

In general, the book is lucidly written, although I did notice a few passages which were either hastily composed or carelessly edited. There are occasional small errors (*The Beautiful and the Damned ...*), but in general this is a most reliable and carefully researched book. I shall certainly add it to the reading list for my own course on America in the 1920s; indeed, I think it belongs right at the top of the list.

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Peter Conn, *The American 1930s: A Literary History* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 2009, £15.99/\$27.99). Pp. 280. ISBN 978 0 5217 3431 8.

David Eldridge, *American Culture in the 1930s* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2008, £17.99). Pp. 287. ISBN 9780748622597.

By confining the focus of his literary survey of 1930s America to fiction and non-fiction, Peter Conn risks presenting a frustratingly incomplete portrait – especially ironic given his assertion in the introduction that the majority of scholars take such a reductive view of the 1930s as “to reduce a complex palette to a monotone” (6). Yet considering the inclusion of some comment on the decade’s drama and history painting, and notwithstanding the absence of any real discussion of the era’s rich poetical output, the analysis is impressively broad. Arguing against the common critical assumption that the 1930s may be characterized in cultural terms largely by leftist aesthetics and politics, Conn emphasizes the enormous ideological and imaginative diversity of the United States in the 1930s. However, Conn’s focus is specific, and his literary history is driven by the sustained force of the past on the American imagination. As the debate grew during the 1930s over the meaning of