



PROJECT MUSE®

---

*The Landscape of Reform: Civic Pragmatism and Environmental Thought in America* (review)

Kevin C. Armitage

American Studies, Volume 48, Number 1, Spring 2007, pp. 160-161 (Review)

Published by Mid-American Studies Association

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1353/ams.0.0148>



➔ *For additional information about this article*

<https://muse.jhu.edu/article/375275>

themes are interwoven with Glaude's critical engagements with the literatures on African American identity, agency, religion, and politics. He traverses these multidisciplinary debates comfortably and lucidly, deploying theory with a light heuristic touch and averting all-too-common tendencies to use it as mere decoration or as an appeal to authority. Glaude's provocative assessment of African American politics will be contested, but it is thoughtful and earnest. His call for wider political vision is morally compelling in light of the continued serious erosion of the life conditions of the black underclass and recent (June 2007) Supreme Court decision that affirmed the trend toward resegregation. His book is worthwhile reading for anyone interested in the condition of Black America and of American democracy. I will assign it to my graduate pragmatism seminar.

University of Kansas

Robert J. Antonio

THE LANDSCAPE OF REFORM: Civic Pragmatism and Environmental Thought in America. By Ben A. Minteer. Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press. 2006.

Traditional scholarship portrays the American conservation movement as split into two warring camps: technocratic elites such as Gifford Pinchot, first chief of the U.S. Forest Service, and romantic aesthetes such as John Muir, founder of the Sierra Club. Not only is this one-dimensional picture a poor, even misleading, reading of Pinchot and Muir, but it is also, as Ben Minteer argues, an oversimplification of "what is in fact a complex and rich moral tradition" (2) of environmental thought and policy reform.

Minteer recovers some of that rich moral tradition by examining a "third way" within the conservation movement: the "politically grounded and civic-spirited" (4) pragmatic conservation of Liberty Hyde Bailey, Lewis Mumford, Benton MacKaye, and Aldo Leopold. Minteer lauds this tradition for its "pluralistic model of environmental thought and action that accommodates both the prudent use *and* the preservation of nature" (4) as well as for its value in fostering "civic regeneration and social improvement" (5). In doing so Minteer aims to encourage environmental thought that is not only concerned with the natural world, but also the "revitalization of democratic citizenship, the conservation of regional culture and identity, and the constitution of the public interest" (189). Minteer succeeds admirably in this goal, having produced a compelling book that should interest scholars in a wide variety of fields.

Minteer begins with an examination of the Cornell University horticulturalist and nature study advocate Liberty Hyde Bailey. Bailey not only developed a philosophical rationale for ethical treatment of nonhuman nature—particularly in his book *The Holy Earth*—but he also was a staunch advocate for the cultural enrichment of rural communities. Bailey put these commitments into practice as Chair of Theodore Roosevelt's Country Life Commission and as the most important theorist of rural nature study. Even Bailey's advocacy of school gardens as a means to teach nature study "entailed a strong civic dimension" (39) because they emphasized a kind of stewardship that benefited both the child and society. Minteer demonstrates the close connections between nature study and the pragmatic, progressive education reforms advocated by John Dewey.

Liberty Hyde Bailey was not the only pragmatist Minteer examines. The regional planners Lewis Mumford and Benton MacKaye were deeply influenced by John Dewey (despite the heated Dewey/Mumford debate in the pages of the *New Republic*) and Josiah Royce, respectively. Mumford, perhaps today best remembered for his scathing critique of power and technology, *The Pentagon of Power*, was also a bioregional thinker active in the Regional Planning Association of America. Like his fellow regional planner MacKaye,

Mumford worked toward “a decentralized, green vision for an aesthetically, politically and ecologically reconstructed urban and rural environment” (104).

This tradition continues today in the form of Natural Systems Agriculture and the ecologically-oriented community planners commonly lumped together as the New Urbanists. This reader wished Minter had more thoroughly explored the intersection of conservation with the cultural pluralism that civic pragmatists also championed. Rather than a defect of Minter’s research, however, that criticism suggests important directions for scholarship that builds from this important and timely book.

Miami University

Kevin C. Armitage

MODERN DANCE, NEGRO DANCE: Race in Motion. By Susan Manning. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press. 2004.

DANCING MANY DRUMS: Excavations in African American Dance. Edited by Thomas F. DeFrantz. Madison: University of Wisconsin Press. 2002.

Literary criticism analyzes written language to understand its social and aesthetic significance while dance criticism reads, interprets, and analyzes the language of the human body in a similar way. Two recent critical volumes, *Modern Dance*, *Negro Dance* by Susan Manning and *Dancing Many Drums* by Tommy DeFrantz intervene in narratives of American studies by introducing dance as a barometer of social history. Even though both volumes cover the dance performance work of twentieth century African American artists, the two authors’ perspectives on the work differ. Manning provides a complex critical reading of social art practices based upon reviews and primary documents, while DeFrantz edits a collection of African American writers and artists who respond to dance aesthetics and practices. Manning is an outside critic, digging through the archive and questioning the social, racial, and gender presumptions behind each dance document. In contrast, De Frantz uses multiple scholars’ voices to describe the social and cultural elements that influence African American dance work.

DeFrantz is interested in definitions: “What is Black dance? What does it have to do with race? How is it different from African American dance?”(4). At the same time, he allows the investigations of his contributors to speak to crossover and disjuncture between and among the artists and their forms. DeFrantz wants to reclaim a history that is not defined by binaries of black and white, one that recognizes African American artistry. In his volume, the individual nuances of performance spring from the page in each perceptive essay.

Even though the editor divides the book into three sections: Theory, Practice, and History, the sections are not distinct; their subjects cross, intersect, and remain in dialogue with one another. In the theory section P. Sterling Stuckey discusses Christianity and the challenge of reading dance hidden within religious contexts. Nadine George comments on the politics of negotiating gender, race, and black-face identities in Vaudeville. Marya McQuirter analyzes the aesthetics of the awkward, and Richard Green demonstrates how Pearl Primus allowed her dancing body to resolve racial dilemmas.

The theory section mutates into a discussion of dance practice. Authors in this section decipher the means and mechanisms of making dances. Their collective writings respond to questions about art production, collaboration, and dissemination. Marcia Heard and Mansa Mussa for example, trace the histories of contemporary African dance through the practices of artists like Chares Moore and Nana Yao Opare Dinizulu. Photographs of bodies in motion provide context for the cultural studies readings. Other essays are more concerned with aesthetics and trends. Sally Banes and John Szwed revisit dance