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*A Nation of Realtors: A Cultural History of the  
Twentieth-Century American Middle-Class* (review)

Janet Rose

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instruction songs that teach European Americans how to dance to black music while Veta Goler discusses blues aesthetics in Diane McIntyre's lifelong collaboration with jazz artists. The anthology concludes with a history section that excavates information about under-documented African American artists: Asadata Dafora, Margot Webb and Harold Norton, Katherine Dunham, and the New York Negro Ballet.

Manning takes a different approach to social activism within dance. Whereas most critical studies of modern dance focus on primarily white choreographers with a nod towards including African American artists, Manning integrates the histories of black and white dance in modern America. Her carefully crafted writing describes continuity and change in the "staging of blackness and whiteness during the period when the term 'Negro Dance' was in common usage" (xxiv).

Her book discusses some of the same African American artists as the De Frantz volume, however the strength of the writing is the way that it illuminates the complexities of race, culture, and artistic production. Because she includes white (and other) artists, she places the work of the African American artists within a wider social and historical context. Manning thematically groups her material around political approaches to content. For example, the first chapter "Danced Spirituals," describes the work of black and white choreographers who were inspired by African American spirituals. It includes close readings of performances by Edna Guy and Helmsley Winfield as well as Ted Shawn and Helen Tamiris. What is unique about Manning's approach to chronicling these dance works is her consideration of text, venue, audience response, and artistic intent. Her reflection on each of these diverse elements allows her to astutely analyze the political implications of the performances.

The chapter "Dancing Left" is particularly interesting in this respect. During the 1930s, both the Worker's Dance League (a consortium of leftist dancers) and the Federal Theatre Project produced dance projects about the underclass. Only the Federal Theatre Project however, supported African American dance productions. Manning notes that "When African American performers linked dances of the Black Atlantic to dances of social protest, Martin [a *New York Times* dance critic] and his peers hardly took notice" (101). She then delves into the complexity of shifting racial landscapes by describing a 1991 reconstruction *How Long Brethren* by African American choreographer Dianne McIntyre. Manning confronts the reader with the irony of having a protest dance by white Jewish choreographer Helen Tamiris' reconstructed 55 years later by a choreographer who would not have been recognized when the dance first created. Through nuanced writings that include multiple critical outlooks, Manning is able to bring politics to dance history.

The two books *Modern Dance, Negro Dance* by Susan Manning and *Dancing Many Drums* by Tommy DeFrantz offer alternative perspectives about African American dance in the twentieth century and make strong contributions to academic understandings about how dance speaks to American societies.

State University of New York at New Paltz

Anita Gonzalez

A NATION OF REALTORS: A Cultural History of the Twentieth-Century American Middle-Class. By Jeffrey M. Hornstein. Durham, NC: Duke University Press. 2005.

Jeffrey Hornstein's *A Nation of Realtors* is an important addition to American culture scholarship, arguing persuasively that the U.S. real estate industry architected a twentieth-century cultural paradigm that equated owning one's "own" home with authentic middle class status. In addition, *A Nation of Realtors* has a spooky relevance today (2007), as

the U.S. mortgage industry scrambles to recover losses from its aggressive, and arguably abusive, financial products targeted at naïve and overly optimistic home “owners,” creating one of the newest American flavors of mainstream financial hardship.

Hornstein’s book turns on the question of what constitutes “middle class” in the United States. He writes: “How did virtually all Americans come to think of themselves as ‘middle class’ in the twentieth century?” (ix). From the promotion of the real estate agent as a serious, stabled professional to the quasi-scientific boosterism that argued for a new science of “realology” by mid-century, the book provides an important study in the intersection of aspirational consumer culture, boot-strapping entrepreneurship, and American history.

Social and economic researchers differ on definitions of U.S. middle class status. One of the main strengths of Hornstein’s book is that it argues powerfully that the term “middle class” defines a state of mind rather than an externally applied demographic or economic fact. The book shows how cultural mythology—here an American belief in self-determined individual achievement and optimism about the promise of equal life chances for all—combine with business interests to produce a sustained and powerful cultural and business premise which is a central theme of U.S. history.

One of the values of Hornstein’s book is his meticulous history of an occupation that he argues marks American cultural identity: the real estate agent. The “realtor,” as Hornstein traces, is a uniquely American invention. Real estate agents were also one of the primary professions open to and marketed toward women. Thus, the story of the central role played by the real estate industry’s promotion of home ownership in defining normative culture, and the armies of women real estate agents who ultimately turned this idea into reality, is both historically important and a good read. Among the book’s other strengths is its textbook example of how business and consumer ambition synergistically weave together a perceived truth, no less real because it is constructed. Hornstein demonstrates how the desire to professionalize one realm of an otherwise lower status sales job—the real estate agent, or realtor—synergistically orchestrates tandem growth in the real estate industry. Developers, leveraged capital in the form of mortgages, and consumer desire are only a few of the synergistic businesses that the real estate market conjoins.

This is an excellent book. It would make a valuable text for course work in cultural, business, consumer, and women’s history. If there is a less successful element in the book, it can be found in the book’s attempt to provide a moral perspective. While Hornstein’s conclusions may be justified, the argument that the real estate industry and its agents fueled the demise of inner cities and urban areas in favor of economically efficient tract and suburban home developments suggests rich territory for a more complex economic and market perspective. Future scholarship on the intersections of human striving and economic interests must contend with Hornstein’s case study of the U.S. real estate industry as one overall direction of property ownership and the resulting life’s chances.

University of Missouri–Kansas City

Janet Rose

**BLACK WRITERS, WHITE PUBLISHERS: Marketplace Politics in Twentieth-Century African American Literature.** By John K. Young. Jackson: University Press of Mississippi. 2006.

Realigning the broad concerns of cultural studies with the revisionary tendencies of American literary history is a necessary project for twenty-first century scholars, mainly because the conditions that obtain in the production and reception of literature have changed radically. John Young argues convincingly that by giving sustained attention to