There are two omissions in this work that are never explained. One is the lack of a chapter or chapters to describe the Depression and New Deal in the northwestern and northeastern parts of the state, or on Pittsburgh, and the other is the lack of attention given to ethnic groups (other than blacks). These omissions seriously detract from an otherwise fine study of Pennsylvania in the thirties.

If you are impressed with statistics, tables, and long lists of accomplishments and failures this is not the book for you. However, if you are interested in a good narrative describing the human, political, and economic consequences of the Great Depression then this book is a must. What statistical information there is is integrated into the text without being burdensome. Students of social history will benefit in reading the book for its information and skillful use of oral history and local primary sources.

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Steve Nelson: American Radical is the autobiography of an American communist. Based on a tape-recorded oral narrative, the book is actually a joint effort by Steve Nelson and two former history graduate students at the University of Pittsburgh, Jim Barrett and Rob Ruck. Nelson originally told Barrett and Ruck his life story and answered their questions during extended interviews; later these tape-recorded memories were transcribed and edited. Barrett and Ruck deserve credit for this excellent work, yet they correctly remind readers in their introduction that the book is essentially Nelson's creation.

Nelson's story makes fine reading mostly because it is told with both humor and candor. Its appeal also comes from the amazing range of experiences which Nelson recounts. Born Stjepan Mesaros in Croatia, Nelson came to America in 1920 at the age of seventeen. He began learning carpentry, while moving from Philadelphia to Pittsburgh (where he met his lifelong companion and future wife, Margaret Yeager) to Detroit. He joined the Communist party in the mid-1920s. Nelson became an organizer for the party at the beginning of the Depression and worked among the unemployed in Chicago and
southern Illinois, as well as with eastern Pennsylvania anthracite coal miners. He moved in international communist circles, too — first as a student at the Lenin School in Moscow from 1931 to 1933 (during which time he also carried messages from Comintern headquarters in Moscow to Germany and China), then in 1937-1938 as an antifascist soldier fighting with the Loyalists in the Spanish Civil War.

Nelson remembers the early 1940s as the happiest time of his life. Assigned to the West Coast as a party organizer, he later served as the elected chairman of the San Francisco branch. Both his children were born in these years, and he and his wife bought a home in Oakland. The Communist party reached the peak of its influence in the United States during World War II, allowing Nelson to do his work more easily than ever before. Though he would have liked to remain in the San Francisco area, he was elected to the party's national board in 1945 and moved his family east to New York City.

In 1948, he moved to Pittsburgh to take over the job of district organizer in Western Pennsylvania. During the following ten years, Nelson experienced the sharp decline of the Communist party, a debacle that altered his own life profoundly. Brought to trial twice on sedition charges, incarcerated at the Blawnox workhouse for a year, shunned by many of the people who formerly welcomed him to their homes and organizations, Nelson began to question the outlook and practices of the party. After the revelation of Stalin's crimes in 1956, Nelson began trying to revamp the American Communist party on more democratic and less Soviet-oriented lines. He and other like-minded party members failed in this effort, and Nelson severed his ties to the party in 1957.

Unlike other writings by former Communist party members, *Steve Nelson* is neither a confession nor a recantation. On the contrary, what makes this a significant addition to the interpretations of American communism is Nelson's willingness to examine forthrightly his own involvement with radical politics without indulging in recriminations or self-pity. Two other facets of the book deserve praise. The first is Nelson's view of himself as a more or less ordinary man with the usual complement of personal strengths and weaknesses. This self-portrayal invites us to view American communism not as the aberrant creation of fanatics but rather as a movement of working people like Nelson himself, carried on in their own interests and the interests of other American workers. Another admirable quality in the book springs from Nelson's position within the Communist party. For the most part, he was a local and district leader, dealing day and night
with a great variety of people and organizations, and not only with a small group of communist leaders. From Nelson’s vantage, we better understand what party membership meant for hundreds of men and women, few of whose stories have been told until now: why young immigrant workers were drawn to radicalism in the 1920s; why rank-and-file party members who were committed to a vision of freer, more democratic institutions supported repressive Soviet policies in the 1930s and 1940s, despite their own doubts; and why their break with the party in the 1950s was for many of them such a traumatic experience.

The best part of Steve Nelson is Steve Nelson himself, and the fact that the book is based on oral history only enhances the qualities of the story which reflect his temperament and personality. Unlike other recently published autobiographies that began as oral narratives, however, the authors provide little explanation of the process by which Nelson’s spoken words became the written words of the book. Barrett and Ruck say only: “It is his remembering and rethinking that shape this book. The two of us simply helped put it down in words” (xviii). This is inadequate guidance for readers who are interested in the interplay between memory and history, but it is a gap that hardly detracts from the story Steve Nelson tells.

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Peter Gottlieb

The American Quest for the City of God. By LELAND D. BALDWIN.
(Macon, Georgia: Mercer University Press, 1981. Pp. ix, 368. Foreword, prologue, index. $18.95.)

Dr. Leland D. Baldwin, who died early in 1981, was the author of seventeen published volumes on American history, whose scope extended from the history of a city (Pittsburgh) to a two-volume survey of United States history. At the end of his life Baldwin summarized his reflections on this nation’s past in The American Quest for the City of God, a volume filled with such riches of information and interpretation that a brief review does not do it justice.

The basic thesis of Baldwin’s final work is that the key movements of American history have been secular expressions of the City of God: the American Mission; the New Freedom; the New Deal; the New Frontier; the Great Society; Manifest Destiny; making the