

University of Nevada, Reno

**Selling Technocracy: How New Deal visual imagery promoted hydroelectric power
to define a modern Pacific Northwest**

A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in
Geography

by
Katherine J. Heslop

Dr. Paul F. Starrs/Dissertation Advisor

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THE GRADUATE SCHOOL

We recommend that the dissertation
prepared under our supervision by

KATHERINE J. HESLOP

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power to define a modern Pacific Northwest**

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Paul F. Starrs, Ph. D., Advisor

C. Elizabeth Raymond, Ph. D., Committee Member

William D. Rowley, Ph. D., Committee Member

Scott B. Kelley, Ph. D., Committee Member

Peter Goin, M.F.A, Graduate School Representative

David W. Zeh, Ph. D., Dean, Graduate School
May, 2019

Abstract

Franklin Roosevelt's 1932 speech in Portland, Oregon, during his presidential campaign presented an abstract idea for federal electric-power development as a progressive socio-economic response to the hard times of the Great Depression. Regional energy-based and water-controlling landscapes, or valley authorities, built government river-basin infrastructures primarily as big dam systems. As part of New Deal policy (c. 1933-1939), federal agencies attempted to persuade citizens of the Pacific Northwest to accept a new, tangible landscape and culture imbued with technocratic regionalism to define a Columbia Valley Authority (CVA). Films, photographs, posters, songs, pictorial art (Media) created by the Bonneville Power Administration (BPA) and other agencies sought to convey ideological concepts denoting a federal "Promised Land" of socioeconomic utopianism centered on Columbia River Basin development. My research surveyed this New Deal media, selected relevant material, and identified technocratic patterns of communication, symbology, and images deemed instruments for "an acquaintance to the knowledge" of a modern electricity-enhanced society. I identify a *Populist Media Paradigm*, which demonstrates governmental use of the era's realistic genres to conjoin the common individual's experience and emotions with progressive government solutions through New Deal cultural platforms. Even as BPA marketing programs shifted away from notions of valley-authority regionalism in late 1939 to "power-load-building" and defense programs, hydropower images integrated symbology within the fabric of modern Pacific Northwest culture and its emergent energy socioeconomic society. This study found that state-sponsored, public-relations platforms directed their messages at the common citizen, but the enduring challenge was for Americans to accept what a democracy wanted to do for its people.

Dedication

To my family: John, Joanne, and Christopher

and

To my parents: Alex and Gladys

Acknowledgements

The road that led to the completion of this text began with the acquisition of early Bonneville Project public relations and informational material from the Bonneville Power Administration in Portland, Oregon, and the National Archives depository in Seattle, Washington. Over the course of my research, I discovered each pamphlet, photograph and media piece enshrined a unique background. Uncovering the context behind each graphic was important part of this project. I collected material from sources that included the National Archives at College Park, Maryland; the Library of Congress in Washington D. C.; Washington State University Digital Archives in Spokane; and the archives of the Portland *Oregonian*. Field work and visits included Bonneville Dam; Columbia River Gorge; Grand Coulee Dam, Coulee Dam Historical District, and the Franklin D. Roosevelt Lake, the reservoir created by the impoundment of the Columbia River by the Grand Coulee Dam, Washington; and the town of Nespelem on the Colville Indian Reservation, Washington. Observations were noted traveling through the Columbia Basin Project, Washington, of the agribusiness created by the Grand Coulee reclamation project.

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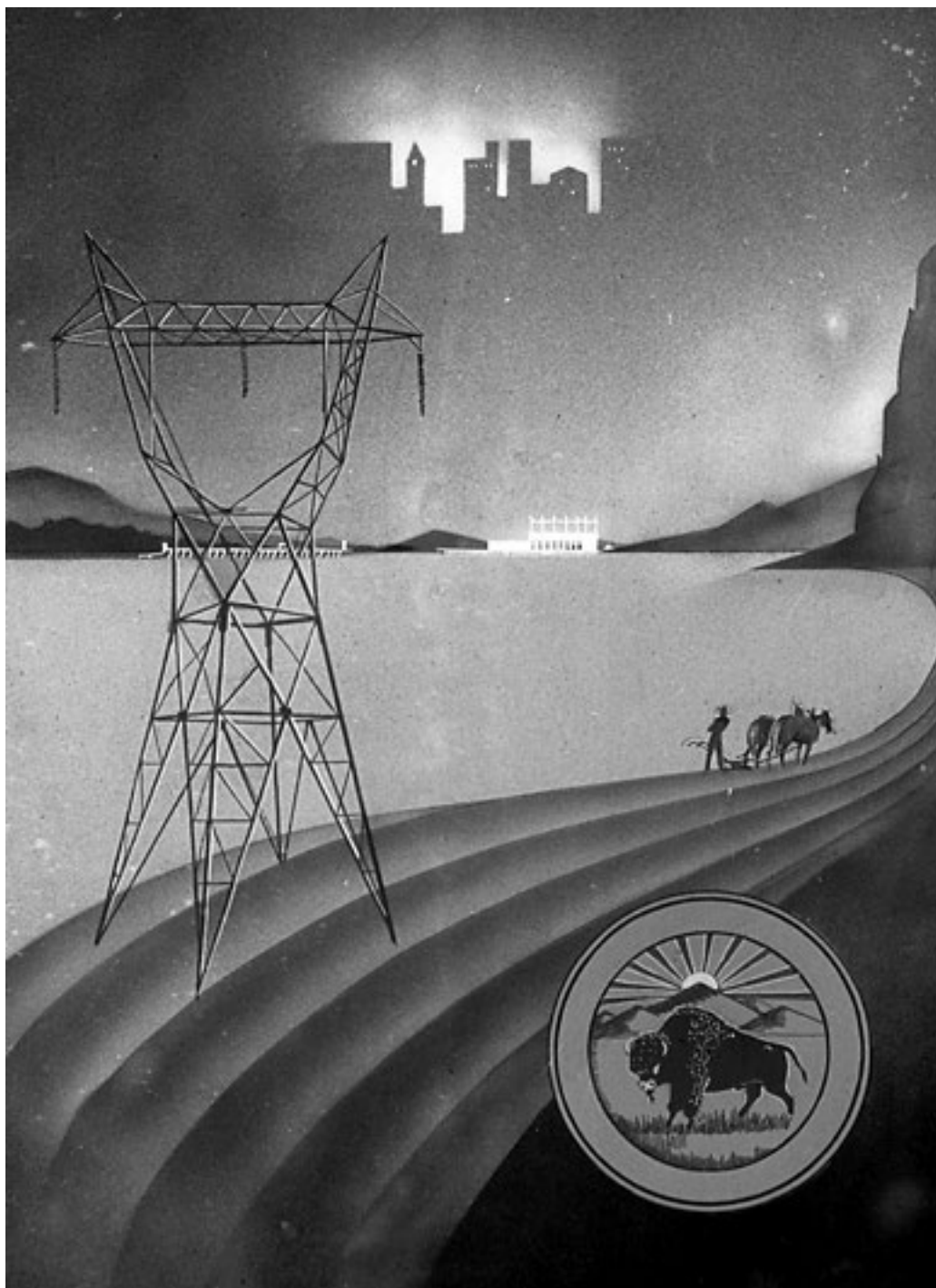


Figure 1-1. “The Promised Land”

Art Prepared for the Annual Report of the Bonneville Administration, 1938.

Date: 1938.

Artist: Unknown.

National Archives, Seattle, Washington. RG 305.2. Box 2. E112721.

Figure 1-1. “The Promised Land” Art Prepared for the Annual Report of the Bonneville Administration, 1938. Humanism defines efforts to achieve new and plausible values. It supports a form of individual liberty consistent with social responsibility in a democracy that seeks rational means to solve human problems. With Nikola Tesla’s reimagining direct current (DC) electric technology, power generation by alternating current (AC) fed electricity to an entire region from a single power source and revolutionized 20th century daily life. As a working principle of a progressive government, New Deal policies advocated collective means as a principal component of social change, one to harness nature for human service and to offer relief from human suffering from the socioeconomic problems of the Great Depression. The projects on the Columbia River in the Pacific Northwest represented one of the New Deal’s principal expenditures in a planning strategy for a “Promised Land.” Regional distribution of inexpensive electricity would allow “men and women and children [to make] an honest livelihood and doing their best successfully to live up to the American standard of living and the American standard of citizenship” representing a vision of equitable sharing of Columbia River natural resources (Roosevelt, Grand Coulee Speech 1934). Power, navigation, irrigation, reclamation and flood control centered on big dams would create “a haven in the wilderness for farmers burned off their plots in the Dust Bowl” (Neuberger, J. D. Ross 1938). Energy-centric regionalism represented what life should be, not the way it was.

Chapter 1: Selling Technocracy — Instilling the Desire for Unlimited Power

Because electrification [can penetrate] everywhere, its social history has almost no limits ...

David E. Nye, 1992

Federal support for and acceptance of Columbia River development was rooted in imaginations, daydreams, and ideas that sparked hope and excitement for the neglected (some would argue forgotten) American household. Dust Bowl migrants, optimistically hoping to regain a place in American society, latched onto the idea of a Promised Land that might await them in the Pacific Northwest, with its utopian image of irrigated land and inexpensive electricity, evoking the modern Jefferson yeoman farmer. The potential of public power would be realized through public works projects, signaling something novel and promising was to come. It was not the dam construction itself that would produce a better world, but power-generating machines that would craft the modern means of an improved life. In fact, river development for technocratic or energy-centric regionalism was a bold concept in its attempt to redefine American individualism into a new collectivism. Through decentralization, small communities would be up-built around power projects connected by transmission power wires in order to safeguard people from future economic boom-bust cycles. Public power transmission at “postage-stamp rates” (a low uniform wholesale rate across the area) would assure regional wide electric use. To this end, federal informational media constructed a careful, populist message to instill ideas of an energy-power culture, planting the seeds for an electricity-based mass society. The government sought support and permission to undertake geographical changes — both

physical and cultural — in the Pacific Northwest for an energy-centric regionalism as a model for national valley-authority schemes. It is this context that dictated the framework for a modern program of federal public relations, artwork, and graphics. This study surveys that media, generated by early Bonneville Power Administration and other federal agencies, used to infuse the idea of a power-centric culture for regional development in the Pacific Northwest.

A “majestic enterprise” on the banks of the Columbia River boasted the potential for being the greatest venue for hydropower to be found anywhere in America. Electricity would reduce the unending punishing tasks of household and rural chores. Lights would brighten the landscape. Industry and commerce would spread throughout the Northwest. Through public works – Bonneville Lock and Dam Project, Columbia Basin Project, Grand Coulee Dam – the average citizen could expect a utopian future based on regional distribution of public-electric power – social desires of modernity were to become economically practical. Although a raw Columbia River was a concept held in some esteem, power generation and efficiency were expected, and perhaps required, as a nod to “Progress.” The progressive policies of the Roosevelt Administration aimed to present electricity as a new way of life, and a technical force for social and economic change, that embody a new social order, involving new technocratic values, as a means of empowerment to its people for a better life.

Geography of the Columbia River Basin

Geography has always had a bearing on history and culture in the Pacific Northwest. It affords the region its scenic beauty and builds the foundation necessary for human

habitation. Early Native American culture flourished amidst regionally organized salmon and seasonal activities in sites of fishing and food gathering. In addition, the region's geographic remoteness moderated early Anglo exploration and settlement. Yet by the mid-19th century, Anglo settlers discovered a natural abundance bestowed upon the Northwest, centered on a river that provided prime waterpower, farmland, and navigable waters, which was capable of transporting surplus products down to the Pacific Ocean and off to the best markets in the world.

The Northwest's physical features are products of powerful geological forces of uplift, fire, ice, and floods, combined with erosion and sedimentation. Uplift during the Cenozoic Era formed the Rocky Mountains. Heat and movement created by pressure between continental plates produced long fissures that oozed lava to build successive layers up to 5,000 feet thick and over 250,000 square miles in extent, establishing the Cascade Mountains. Volcanoes formed within the mountain range during the last few million years, as many extrusions developed only over the last 100,000 years, comparative newcomers. A mere 6,600 years ago, Mount Mazama in Oregon collapsed to impound the waters of Crater Lake. The Cascades continually eroded and rebuilt to construct a physical barrier land-locking several large inland seas. The higher mountain elevations further blocked westerly winds off the Pacific Ocean, capturing moisture that dried up the inland seas, and turned the lands to its east arid.¹

In the Pleistocene Era, ice sheets from the last glacial age advanced and retreated several times across the globe until warming temperatures caused them to melt. Melting

¹ Gus Norwood. Columbia River Power for the People: A History of Policies of the Bonneville Power Administration. Portland: BPA (1981) 1-7.

glaciers brought on floods. In the Pacific Northwest, an ice lobe across Pend Oreille Lake in Idaho and extended to the Bitterroot Range dammed river flow and formed pluvial Lake Missoula, as another ice lobe blocked the Columbia River, diverting water through Grand-Coulee-channeled scablands over Dry Falls. From time to time, and definitely more than once, an ice dam at Lake Missoula failed which released the lake's entire contents — 500 cubic miles of water in two or three days — over the area. The last great flood was thought to have occurred 18,000 to 20,000 years ago, sending water down to the Spokane River Valley, across eastern Washington to the Wallula Water Gap on the Columbia River. Another major channel similarly continued to carve into the Grand Coulee and erode Dry Falls.²

Waters that today make up the Columbia River start their initial descent from Rocky Mountain peaks of the Continental Divide, flowing westward to the Pacific Ocean. Additional free-flowing water comes from the Snake River and other contributors. The high mountain glaciers and annual snowpack of the watershed feed an annual discharge of 198-million acre-feet of water, with the highest volumes spilling west between April and September. The main stem river is 1,249 miles long, originating in Columbia Lake in southeastern British Columbia at 2,656 feet above sea level. Tides of the Pacific Ocean reach 100 miles upstream into the Columbia Gorge.³

The Columbia River watershed unifies and defines the Northwest region around a gravity-propelled aqueous resource. Excepting the coastal streams of Washington and Oregon, the Columbia River drains the entire region. Mountain streams that constitute the

² Ibid.

³ William L. Lang. "Columbia River" in The Oregon Encyclopedia (n.d.), obtained from http://oregonencyclopedia.org/articles/columbia_river/ (18 October 2018)

headwaters of the Columbia River include its major eastern tributaries, the Kootenai, Clark Fork, and Snake Rivers. The well-weathered lava beds of the Central Zone — a 200-mile-wide land belt just east of the Cascades — support extensive agriculture on fertile volcanic soils when well irrigated. The Cascade Mountains as a natural division moderate weather of the humid coastal strip and the dry continental climate to its east. The coastal strip supports a prosperous agricultural industry and forests of fir, hemlock, and cedar. The Willamette and Cowlitz Rivers are major tributaries of the Coastal Zone to the Columbia River. Over half the regional population now resides in the coastal strip areas of metropolitan Seattle and Portland — a pattern of coast-concentrated growth that continues through Oregon, California, and across the international border to Baja California north and south in Mexico.⁴

The first working ocean steamships and riverboats denote the beginning of industrialization along the Columbia River, with the Hudson Bay Company ship, *Beaver*, docked at Fort Vancouver in 1836. Commercial fishing and fish canneries additionally contributed to early industrialization of the Columbia River Basin. In 1927, the desire for improvements in navigation, hydroelectric power, and flood control prompted Congress to authorize the “308 Report,” a survey of potential dam sites on the Columbia River and its minor tributaries. In 1932, the Army Corps of Engineers completed this survey, which laid out a plan for building multipurpose dams along the Columbia River. The need for shovel-ready projects for jobs and economic stimulus during the Great Depression lent credence and urgency to construction of Bonneville Dam near Portland, completed in

⁴ Ibid.

1938, and Grand Coulee Dam near Wenatchee, Washington, completed in 1942. Favorable notions of hydropower peaked during World War II, when these two dams provided needed energy to defense industries – Boeing airplanes, Kaiser ships, aluminum reduction plants – that many credit with aiding an Allied victory. In the post-war era, Northwest industries continued their demand for cheap and plentiful power, to justify the construction of additional dam infrastructure to support a modern, energy-centric economy.⁵

An Overview of the Study: Making the Sale

Franklin Roosevelt held a vision for a New Frontier, which was to remake American society through the fearless application of modern science to the geography of a region. Applying modern technologies to waterways would not only help prevent flooding and erosion, but make river valleys and the natural resources contained within more productive. Dam infrastructure, constructed with diligence, would send inexpensive light and power to kitchens and farms hundreds of miles away. National planning envisioned regional development (a) to relocate people from congested urban areas back to the suburbs and (b) to reforest, reclaim, and resettle abused land. New Deal policies sought a transition from Depression-era dystopic landscapes to a utopian future, through new, far-reaching plans and policies for the “forgotten man,” a term FDR first used in a speech in 1932 to describe the poor who needed help but were neglected and not receiving it. Available land, still capable of producing wealth and abundance, would be utilized to attain the modern American dream of equal opportunity. But the government had to make the sale.

⁵ Ibid.

Chapter Two, *A Methodology for Analysis*, presents a brief historiography of media and image of the era. Early 20th century progressive social reform and value systems required a self-narrative for modernity. Graphic language was to be conceived in a *coordinated experience of public relations* to inspire the public imagination to accept machine-age technology. Common media practices identified and employed by agencies of the Roosevelt Administration targeted human emotions to (a) dramatize socioeconomic problems affecting ordinary Americans, (b) utilize graphics and realism-infused genres of the period, and (c) relate these problems to experiences of the common individual. The Resettlement Administration (RA) took the lead using various media innovations as an intellectual tool to promote and advance RA policies that engaged in humanitarian change and social reform. A discussion is presented on the methodology used for the case study analysis of the pre-World War Bonneville Power Administration media (1937-1941).

Chapter Three, *A Social Process Structures Technology*, surveys the electrical-grid phenomenon that conjoined ideas of futuristic electric technologies to social practices, with transformation of human nature as the “return.” Electricity ushered in a new world that was inventive, groundbreaking, and increasingly inseparable from innovation and modernity. Technical advancements supported single source power generation and electric distribution to foster early regional power schemes, notably Sir Adam Beck’s Ontario Hydro-Electric Commission, the post-World War I Superpower scheme, and Gifford Pinchot’s Giant Power plan. Prominent geographers and conservationists formed a little recognized group in 1923, the Regional Planning Association of America (RPAA), who advocated for rational and scientifically planned communities and landscapes favoring

dispersing industrial masses and balancing agrarian populace. During the 1930s decade, regionalist movements covered the political spectrum — distributists, decentralists, agrarians — espoused ideologies from the advancement of the cause of the worker to restoring traditional agrarian values. Technocratic thought inspired energy-centric river-valley systems, to be known later in New Deal policies as *valley authorities*. U.S. Senator George Norris of Nebraska sponsored the Tennessee Valley Authority (TVA) legislation in Congress for the Roosevelt Administration in 1933, with promises of regional planning to reforest, reclaim and resettle abused national lands, in an effort to bring modernity, and implement needed socio-economic relief in the Tennessee River Valley. The federal Natural Resources Committee considered national plans for regionalization, and among their recommendations were decentralization of the population, facilitated by the availability of cheap hydro or other centralized power source, and resource-based planning. After the TVA, Columbia River Basin was eyed to be the next valley authority development for the Roosevelt Administration.

Chapter Four, *The New Promised Land*, presents the Columbia River Basin as it stirred the imagination of Franklin Roosevelt, who was in awe of the vast volume of water available to support regional planning. Roosevelt first visualized modern development of the Pacific Northwest in 1920 during a train journey across the scablands as a vice-presidential candidate. A dozen years later, FDR, at a 1932 presidential campaign speech in Portland, Oregon, revealed plans to develop the Columbia River Basin for all its values to benefit all Americans. Then-candidate Roosevelt defended public generation of electricity by declaring that, in a democracy, United States resources were the commons

belonging to all citizens. Roosevelt presented a valley authority concept, as an all-inclusive socioeconomic solution centered on energy-centric regionalism. He believed that inexpensive electric power could upbuild small towns and rural areas, and promote a modern agrarian society to offer irrigated settlements to Dust Bowl migrants and the forgotten man. However, there were contending visions between progressive New Dealers and private enterprise and industrialists regarding river power development and national valley-authority planning, and particularly bitter in the Pacific Northwest.

Legislation to establish a Columbia Valley Authority (CVA), failed to pass Congress, resulting in an eleventh-hour compromise bill, The Bonneville Project Act of 1937, five weeks before the dedication of Bonneville Dam. The Bonneville Project Act, signed by President Roosevelt on August 20, 1937, created an interim power marketing agency, The Bonneville Project (later in 1940 renamed the Bonneville Power Administration). This was stop-gap measure, awaiting future legislation to establish a CVA in the Pacific Northwest. James Delmage Ross (J. D. Ross), a Roosevelt emissary and public power advocate, was named the agency's first administrator, and was tasked to implement the mandates of the Bonneville Project Act that encourage the 'widest possible' use of electric energy, for the benefit of the general public, with power preference and priority given to public bodies and cooperatives. Despite all, on September 29, 1937, Franklin Roosevelt dedicated Bonneville Dam, the first public works project of the New Deal completed on the Columbia River.

Chapter Five, *A Populist Media Paradigm*, surveys experimentation using modern media during the Roosevelt Administration under Rexford Tugwell and the Resettlement

Administration. The RA needed an aggressive federal publicity plan of action, to inform the public about government emergency relief for the common man and small farmer. Public relations drew on innovation to explanation, educate, and build conviction amongst the public, seeking support for the RA, its agency, and policies. RA director of still photography, Roy Stryker, instructed his photographers to dramatize the problems of the “lower third,” to engender support for relief, rehabilitation, resettlement, and land-use planning. Pare Lorentz transform the rubrics of the social film documentary to present government propaganda that expressed action and change. Dramatic scripts were to depict the nation’s historical neglect that called for public responsibility, making it apparent to the audience, government solutions would best serve the public interest. Good quality, honest films that used music and narration to build drama and emotion were to be slotted in as shorts before the main feature in movie theaters around the nation. Three important works examined that encompassed the federal power motif are: the films *The River* (1937) and *Power and the Land* (1940) and the radio drama *Ecce Homo!* (1938).

Chapter Six, *The Propaganda of Power*, examines the inventive Federal Theater Project’s Living Newspaper stage production, *Power*, state-sponsored theatre that utilized a cultural means to advance New Deal ideology. *Power* presented forward-thinking ideas regarding government distribution of electricity through schemes such as the Tennessee Valley Authority (TVA), and explored multifaceted aspects of electricity and its power to empower people. Successful implementation of a TVA-like or other proposed valley authorities schemes, depended upon local constituents’ acceptance of technocratic development, not only electric generation and transmission, but also the integration of

engineering, social planning, new agriculture methods, and industrialization. *Power* offered dialogue and discourse, not to dictate electric-power policy, but to generate enthusiasm among its audience for word-of-mouth publicity. A subplot was injected into the drama, to lobby and politicize the *Alabama Power Company v. Harold L. Ickes (1938)*, a pending decision in the Supreme Court, on the constitutionality of a Public Works Administration (PWA) loan program, to grant funds to municipalities to construct public power plants. A local adaptation of *Power* opened in Seattle, in July 1937. As a community organized project, the Seattle production of *Power* was the main attraction of a week-long civic celebration of Seattle's achievements, "Power Week," to declare Seattle as the Northwest's hub-city in a land of power.

Chapter Seven, *Transforming the Abstract*, is the first of three chapters of a case study of the pre-World War II Bonneville Project/BPA public information material. Early on, the Bonneville Project's Information Division wanted to assure people that public power would be available, cost benefits over private utilities would be favorable, and communities could organize into public or municipal utility securing power benefits for all. The challenges ahead for new administrator J. D. Ross and the new agency were not at the dam site, but rather with the people — how to persuade residents of the Pacific Northwest to buy into the Bonneville Project scheme. Administrator Ross and his small staff had to plan, construct and integrate a regional electric-transmission system, develop reclamation and irrigation programs, and improve navigation and flood control for promised jobs and income security — the Promised Land. It was not economically practical to build a

random dam for the sole purpose of power generation without considering other regional provisions.

Ross's other challenge was to counteract private utilities' well organize opposition to federal intrusion into the power generation business. Public relations material had to be generated to spread the concept that public power existed, and private utilities were not the only source for electric power. Unfortunately, Ross's pre-Bonneville Project penchant for public power activities to form public-utility districts, was a distraction from developing of a comprehensive regional plan for the Pacific Northwest needed to fulfill Franklin Roosevelt's campaign promises.

Chapter Eight, "*The Northwest is a Saga of Commerce*," the second of three chapters of the Bonneville Project/BPA pre-World War II public information material case study. After the untimely death of J. D. Ross in March 1939, Illinois Commerce chairman, Dr. Paul J. Raver, was appointed as the second administrator of the Bonneville Project in September 1939. Raver found the Bonneville Project had a sound, and well-advanced Bonneville transmission-construction program but few power-sales contracts. Due to an economic recession in 1937-1938, Columbia River development was labelled as a boondoggle. Under these conditions, Raver shifted policies to emphasize (a) power sales, (b) power-rate savings, and (c) regional planning to accommodate electric power. Raver also did not share Ross's interest in public power districts, taking the position there was plenty of generated power for public- and private- distribution systems in the region's economy. Two other notable changes undertaken by Raver: (a) the Bonneville Project was renamed the Bonneville Power Administration (February 1940), and (b) significantly, Executive

Order 8526 (August 1940) directed the BPA to market Grand Coulee power, allowing contracts to be negotiated for the sale of its power. With the BPA assigned to market Grand Coulee power, the Columbia Basin irrigation project under the control of the Bureau of Reclamation, and river navigation projects assigned to the Army Corps of Engineers, the creation of a Columbia Valley Authority, promised in the early 1930s, had essentially ended.

An extensive power-marketing campaign was set up to meet the new power load program. Preparation of BPA publications was coordinated with a planned announcement of a lower rate schedule for Bonneville power by Administrator Raver. A promotional film, *Hydro (1940)*, was also produced, to provide a wider wholesale means to educate the public on Bonneville power programs and Columbia River development. Inexpensive electricity suggested a modern Northwest economy should be based on industrial ambitions, to allow for primary development of natural resources to launch secondary industries. But inexpensive power was not the only component needed to attract industry. BPA industrial surveys, conducted at the time for prospective business consumers, contained only minimal data on available raw materials, minerals, and finance, and significantly, the viability of the pre-war agency and its regional effectiveness was not known or proven.

Chapter Nine, *Pastures of Plenty*, the third of three chapters of the Bonneville Project/BPA pre-World War II public information material case study. BPA Information Division officer Stephen Kahn was asked to write a full-length follow-up feature fill to the film *Hydro*, as one last gasp of populism, that better spoke to ordinary people of the

benefits of Columbia River development. Known in folk music circles, Woody Guthrie was employed by the BPA for one month, to write songs and ballads for their new Columbia River movie; songs of geography that did not glorify dam projects and powerlines. Guthrie wrote 26 songs in 28 days. Many of his lyrics dramatize the Dust Bowl refugee's plight, Woody called "his people." With lack of government funding, and the United States entering World War II, Kahn's film project and Guthrie's songs were shelved. Power priorities were now focused on defense industries, particularly the Oregon shipyards construction of liberty ships. *Power Builds Ships*, a short BPA documentary, promoted the story of "Columbia River Hydro's Part in the 'Modern Miracle of Ships.'" The Pacific Northwest war industries — made possible by Columbia River hydropower — bolstered a new peacetime industrial economy in the coastal urban areas. The populist message of the Dust Bowl migrant no longer took priority in the post-war region.

Planning for public works was to be celebrated as the highest core of American values vital to the nation's success. Federal media was tasked to convince the American public to believe in the New Deal's technological undertaking, specifically electric innovation, to revitalize American tradition by means of a utopian power culture of the future. As a traditional shining symbol of natural bounty, a modern Pacific Northwest would mean water and woods, wheat lands, pastures and promised electricity, bidding Dust Bowl migrants to a new landscape of plenty. New Deal power public relations, information and propaganda would extend into the cultural realms of image, venues of the Federal Theater Project, documentary film, and music and song to tout Columbia River development as one

of many government undertakings to revolutionize economic life in the Pacific Northwest.



Figure 1-2. “Building for the Future.”

Credit: *Spokesman-Review*, 4 August 1934.

WSU Libraries Digital Collections, State History Box 92. sh92-547.

Figure 1-2. “As we were coming down the river today [to the Grand Coulee Dam construction site], I could not help thinking, as everyone does, of all that water running down unchecked to the sea” (Roosevelt in *Spokesman-Review*, 4 Aug 1934). Columbia River development was rooted in imaginations, daydreams and ideas that held optimism for a mythical Promised Land. This political cartoon reminisced about Franklin Roosevelt’s 1920 vision of the Eastern Washington scablands capable of supporting an engineered agrarian society, a modern frontier, to upbuild traditional small-town and rural Americana through populist-inspired public works and public distribution of electric power.

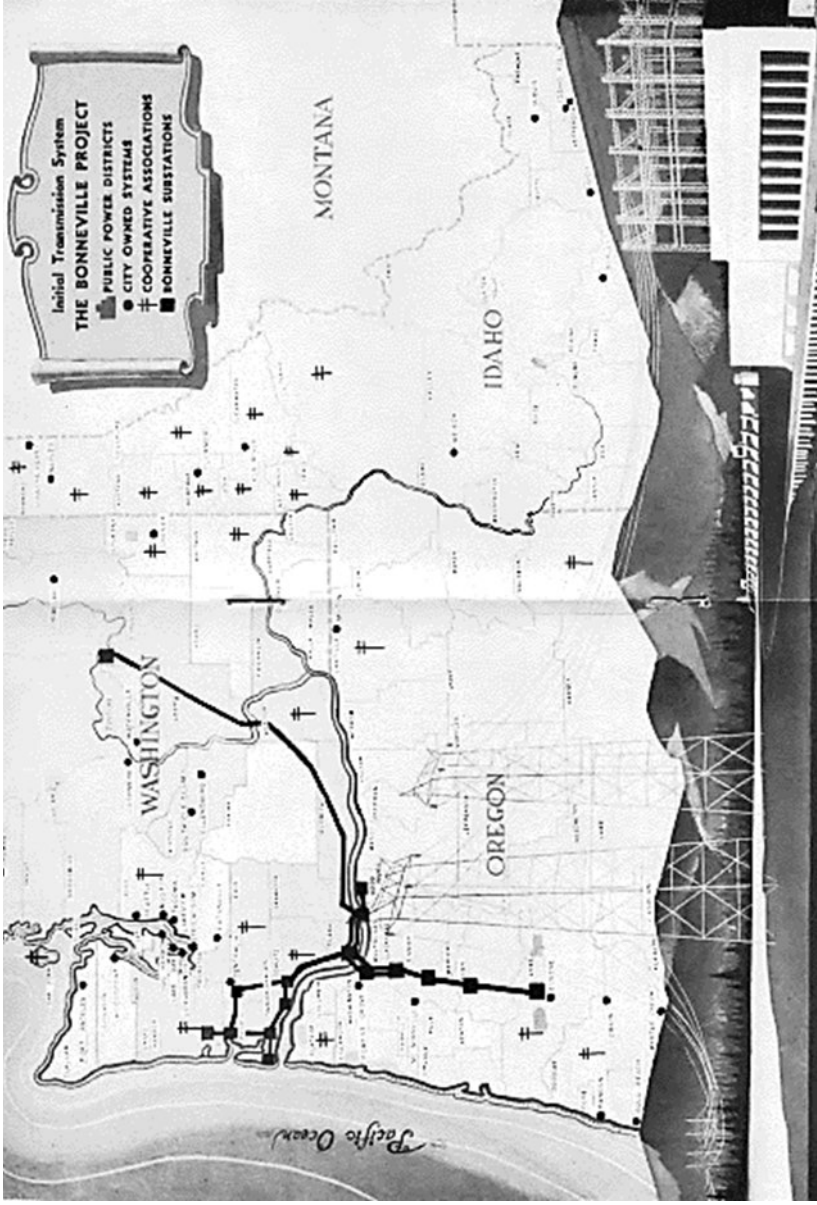


Figure 1-3. Regional Map for Bonneville Project Pamphlet “Bonneville Power – What it costs, How to get it.”

Date: 1939. Artist: Unknown.

Bonneville Power Administration Archives. BPA204 1939.

Figure 1-3. Map for Bonneville Project Transmission System. Bonneville Project administrator J. D. Ross policies were set to include a three-state sub-region to support Franklin Roosevelt’s vision of a Promised Land. Public power and irrigation would open new settlements for the forgotten man and woman to sow their future in the Northwest empire (this Dissertation Ch 7).

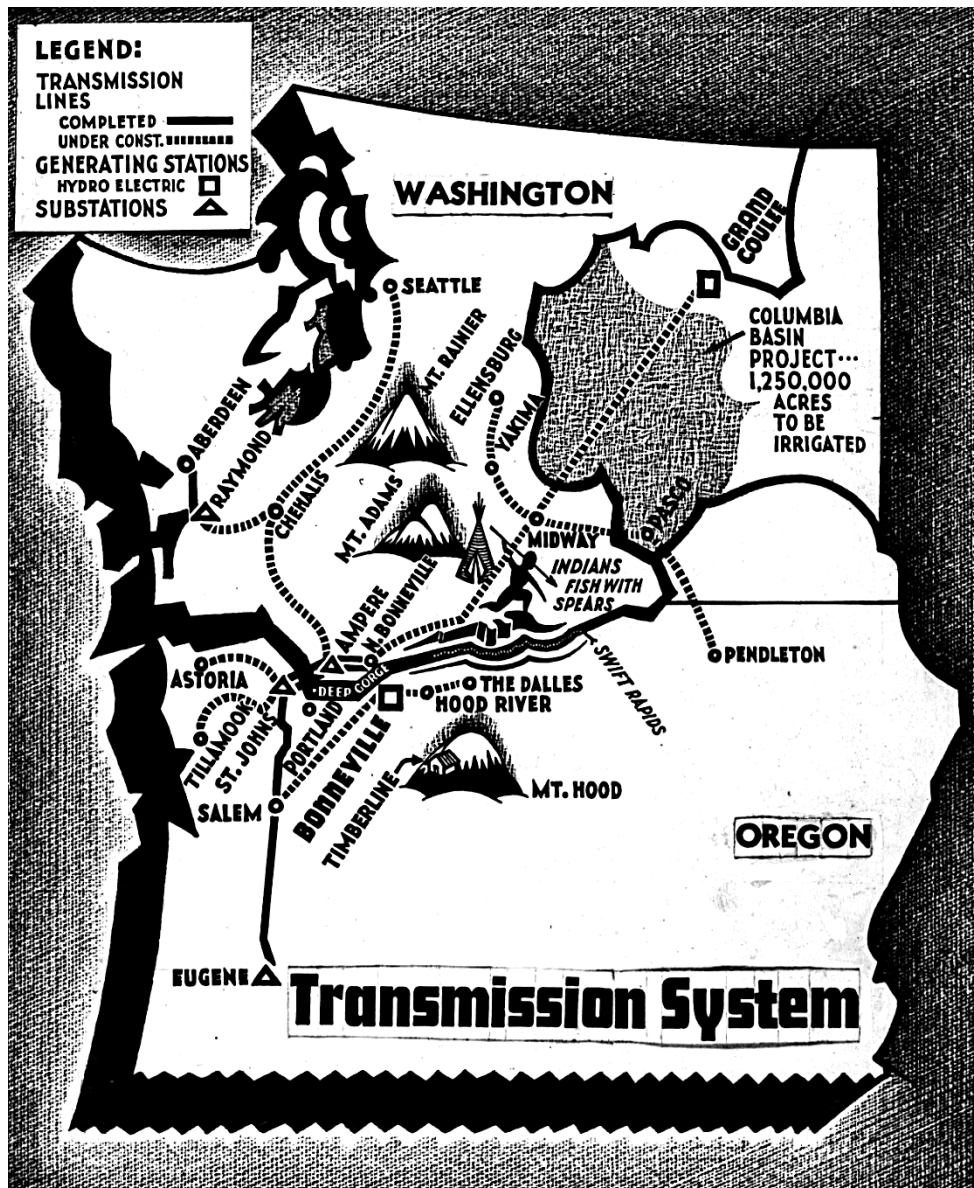


Figure 1-4. BPA Transmission System. (Map).
 Date: 1940.
 Artist: Lloyd Hoff.
 National Archives at Seattle. RG 305.2 E112215.

Figure 1-4. Bonneville Power Administration (BPA) Map of Transmission System, 1940. BPA administrator Dr. Paul Raver and his energy polices gave a new definition to an energy-centric Northwest. Regional planning to accommodate electric power generation and distribution made the Columbia River the central focus of an unofficial two-state Pacific Northwest subregion. The Columbia River Basin is denoted although irrigation water did not flow until 1952 (this Dissertation Ch 8).

Chapter 2: A Methodology for Analysis

Presentation is fundamentally important, and presentation is a question of art . . .
The function of art has always been to break through the crust of conventionalized
and routine consciousness.

John Dewey, 1927

The Roosevelt administration understood that any undertaking involving social change needed broad popular support. The goal was to legitimize new ideas and create a revised public order in a federal self-narrative that would promote a new social and value system by inspiring the public's imagination through a *coordinated experience* of public relations to acclimate the public to its policies. Everyday life would resonate through a cultural process within a system of symbols, codes, and values as a subtle but powerful vessel of government persuasion. New Deal federalism utilized the era's new media – radio, still photographs, and motion pictures – to employ the language of this new symbology to communicate a common message to ordinary people.

To advance the idea of New Deal regionalism in the Pacific Northwest, media linked development of public power with the establishment of a common ideology: democracy's ability to improve citizens' lives through government-sponsored, energy-centric regionalism. The challenge for the Roosevelt Administration and the Bonneville Power Administration (BPA) was two-fold: (1) to create a graphic language that was consistent with the regional challenges and monumentalism of the Bonneville and Grand Coulee projects and (2) to forge new forms and styles of mass media to express and symbolize the machine-age. The federal government needed to emphasize that public works formed the core of American values and was key to the Pacific Northwest's future

regional success. The Columbia River would be presented as an object of the sublime, able to generate mighty and futuristic forces of electricity, and a great resource for redefining the Pacific Northwest as a machine-age Promised Land and icon of progress. These visual and media interpretations required a research methodology for the critical appraisal of the nature of electrification and both its technical development on the Northwest landscape and role in establishing an energy-centric regionalism scheme as directed by the New Deal government.

Images Present Ideas

Culture or society is reflected in the drawings, pictures, maps, and even built environments that reflect the individual opinions or views of a general populace. Consider the painted portrait – a subject with crafted gaze surrounded by objects of significance in a staged setting – arranged to make a statement constructed in pieces over time. Or consider a political cartoon that satirizes a lawmaker’s reputation beyond the simple deconstruction of a speech. Researchers can interpret these images as a representation of reflected opinions of a culture or society over time. However, photographic images present a different historical challenge. According to Emmett Sullivan, a photographic image captures one historical moment, leaving unanswered the question of what happened in the millisecond before or after that moment and in the spaces outside the constructed frame. Context is not always evident. One must consider the prevalence of a specific visual concurrent with the image’s meaning and emotional context. Judgements about the nature of historical events can be viewed as one

remembers them, but as they are depicted through time.⁶ Defining the documentary genre of the 1930s, William Stott summarizes its two components:

Human documents show man undergoing the perennial and unpreventable in experience, what happens to all men everywhere . . . Social documentary shows men at grips with conditions neither permanent nor necessary, conditions of a certain time and place . . . One might say that a human document deals with natural phenomena and social documentary with man-made.⁷

As people grew increasingly comfortable with electric power, magazines of the period such as *Popular Science*, *Popular Mechanics*, and *Modern Mechanix* featured future innovations and emerging machine-age technology. Beginning in the late 19th century, social and scientific movements in engineering elevated technology and machine rationality as possessing ideal traits to bring to bear in forging a new social order. Spawned from a new generation of formally educated engineers were the so-called technocrats. Among them was Thorstein Veblen, a late 19th- and early 20th-centuries a social economist. He suggested modern engineers embodied efficiency, scientific analysis, and workman-like qualities, and that unlike businessmen, understood the technical logic behind the machine-age and its societal effects. Veblen stated that corporate industries cared about workmanship, efficiency, maximum production, and the common good, whereas businessmen focused on pecuniary gain and maximization of profits, which demonstrated

⁶ Emmett Sullivan. *The Camera Never Lies*, obtained from https://www.coursera.org/api/subtitle-AssetProxy.v1/nlB1azgt...ZNaNbt7UQWiD1Wa0n6E_5BvvpzJK2n92FE&fileExtension=txt (23 March 2017).

⁷ William Stott quoted in Barbara Vilander. *Hoover Dam: The Photographs of Ben Glaha*. Tucson: The University of Arizona (1999) 17.

waste, idle capacity, and coercion. Veblen advocated that control of industry be transferred from businessmen to engineers.⁸

Roosevelt Brains Trust chief, Rexford Tugwell, held that progress and modernity required the reorientation and modernization of working-class values and attainment of ideological harmony between common workers and the technocratic elite.⁹ Tugwell spoke to this economic theory in the 1925 textbook, *American Economic Life: and the Means of Its Improvement*, co-authored by Thomas Munroe and his then-teaching assistant, Roy E. Stryker (who would go on to become a major organizing force in the Farm Security Administration, handling photographers and essayists in the Information Division of the FSA). The textbook claimed that correcting the production-consumption imbalance would produce new ideals of human behavior to establish an “economy of abundance” for all. American Studies scholar, Maren Stange, argued that many progressives in the early 20th century had based their American reform ideology on an effort to adjust all social classes to accept a new economy of abundance or a technocracy¹⁰ that could be

⁸ Ernst R. Berndt. “From Technocracy to Net Energy Analysis: Engineers, Economists and Recurring Energy Theories of Value” (Unpublished). Massachusetts Institute of Technology (1982) 11-13.

⁹ Rexford Tugwell quoted in Maren Stange. “‘The Record Itself’: Farm Security Photography and the Transformation of Rural Life” in *Official Images: New Deal Photograph*.” Washington, D. C.: Smithsonian Press (1987) 2.

¹⁰ Note. Technocracy was recognized formally in 1932-1933 as a progressive socioeconomic movement, culminating at the Columbia University School of Industrial Engineering under department chairman, Walter Rautenstrauch. A Committee on Technocracy at Columbia oversaw an Energy Survey of North America in 1932 in order to “. . . conduct an empirical analysis of production and employment measured in terms of energy expended.” Results indicated that technology, substituting kilowatt hours and machines for man-hours, threw economic mechanisms out of balance. Rapid displacement of workers by technology in many industries eliminated jobs. Technocrats believed this imbalance could never be rectified under a capitalistic system for profit, even at the expense of cutting working hours. But, an “energy theory of value,” utilizing the vast sources of energy released by the principles of science could be the key to a better way of life. Economic sustainability could be found within a resource-based economy rather than the profitability of a monetary-based financial system. This form of economic management could ensure a continued operation of social industrial functions. A portion of the government bureaucracy would be administered by appointed experts to recommend technocratic legislation and functions to government officials that some scholars

achieved through the concept of machines, technology, and mass production.¹¹

Eying a utopian future based on limitless energy resources seemed attractive to Tugwell and an ideal socioeconomic solution for social reform. Although not considered a notable economic theorist in his day, Tugwell is credited with using his textbook to synthesize the philosophy of John Dewey and the ideology of theorists, Frederick Taylor (Taylorism), Thomas Veblen (Veblen theory of conspicuous consumption), and Wharton School economist, Simon Patten (post-scarcity theory).¹² Eight years later, through his then-public appointments (in the Franklin Roosevelt administration) as Undersecretary of Agriculture and head of the Resettlement Administration (RA), Tugwell experimented and integrated these economic and technocratic ideas into New Deal policies.¹³

The “new ideals of human behavior appropriate to an economy of abundance” would rely heavily on social institutions and the mass media to begin a program of “constructive mass education in the ways of better living.”¹⁴ As Tugwell’s teaching assistant at Columbia University, Stryker developed visual coursework for “Contemporary

argue were employed by the New Deal government as a radical socioeconomic response to the Great Depression. See David E. Nye. *Electrifying America: Social Meanings of a New Technology*, Cambridge: MIT Press (1990) 343-344; Berndt, “From Technocracy” 16-17, “Who, What, Why: What can technocrats achieve that politicians can’t?” *BBC News Magazine*, 14 November 2011, obtained from <https://www.bbc.com/news/magazine-15720438> (25-March-2019).

¹¹ Stange, *The Record Itself* 2.

¹² *Note*. Tugwell understood that education at all levels must be a living process that is social and continuous with and responsive to community needs. It was a fundamental means to social progress. Reform called for “socialized intelligence” and a national “intellectual trust” to view the concept of intelligence as instrumental to changes between the individual and his environment. Experience modifies intelligence for its own future ends (i.e., establishes more satisfying means and betterment for the future). Dewey said experience in efforts for change was vital in order to go forward into the unknown. Significant traits of experience can make links to a usable past and an unknown future. See Maren Stange. *Symbols of the Ideal Life: Social Documentary Photography in America, 1890-1950*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press (1987) 100-101.

¹³ *Note*. The formal ideology of a technocracy was popular among many progressives in the early 20th century until 1934 when support collapsed after many of the concepts were absorbed into the New Deal.

¹⁴ Stange, *The Record Itself* 2.

Civilization” based on life and labor in New York, using photographs and other graphics, which revealed a distinctive expertise in utilizing pictorial material. Stange explained that Stryker was influenced by Lewis Hine’s methods of social photography that advocated for educational opportunities with visual literacy. Hine’s post-World War I artistic development of the “positive documentation of the American worker”¹⁵ led him to adapt strategies that situated the worker as the primary subject, creating a motif that drew attention to the intelligence and skill of the American industrial workforce during the Machine Age. Moreover, newspapers and magazines in the modern era set a style that reinforced realistic images with written explanation – a full complement of text and captions necessary to communicate their meaning.

Stryker in *American Economic Life* assembled documentary images to express an emerging progressive-socioeconomic ideology; he captioned and edited over 300 graphic sources to explain Tugwell’s message, which had helped establish early 20th century public symbols associated with modern life. Stryker learned to utilize visual material as primary source evidence, balancing it with written records to explicate the socioeconomic scheme. By utilizing the graphic image as an intellectual instrument, Stryker sought to go beyond progressive reformers’ early social messaging, to assemble and manipulate

¹⁵ *Note.* Post-World War I, Hine’s “Work Portraits” and industrial work demonstrated a positive depiction of the labor’s role in modern American industry. Hine emphasized the dignity of the manual laborer by eliminating the visual noise of the impersonal factory from surrounding background spaces. At the same time, Hine was influenced by Purism – a movement founded by Le Corbusier and French painter, Amédée Ozenfant, emphasizing the purity of geometric form, a variant on Cubism, in his images. See Julia Dolan, *Lewis Hine’s Photographic Interpretation of the Machine-Age* (PhD Dissertation) Chapter 2.

images, conceiving a set of humanitarian iconographic symbols as an agent of change that later would sponsor representations of New Deal government policies.¹⁶

Image Embeds Ideas

During the 1930s, the federal government evinced much interest in the American landscape. Jane Wolff pointed out that New Dealers assumed the role of documenting and transforming the nation's social and physical geography. Federal agencies sponsored the American Guide series, *Films of Merit*, and the Farm Security Administration (FSA), and each of these complex multi-contributor undertakings provided a comprehensive description of the American landscape and its inhabitants in terms of practices, artifacts, and places. The Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC), the Works Progress Administration (WPA), the Resettlement Administration (RA), and the Rural Electrification Administration (REA) have participated in an agenda to reinvent the American landscape. RA director Rexford Tugwell established a publicity department to document rural poverty and government efforts to alleviate it. The WPA, besides engagement in public works infrastructure projects, had the Federal Project Number One program to put artists back to work inspiring the larger population by crafting hopeful views of life amidst the economic turmoil. Therefore, their agenda was twofold: to record what had existed and to project what could be produced as an argument for change. With images of the 1930s American landscape simultaneously distinctive, untidy, heroic, and tragic, the Roosevelt Administration needed to counterbalance appalling images in photography and public

¹⁶ *Note.* In 1935, Stryker joined Tugwell at the Historical Section (Information Division) of the Resettlement Administration ([RA]); becoming later the Farm Security Administration [FSA]), introducing his methodology for using visual evidence to explain socioeconomic arguments and New Deal policies.

imagination of the Great Depression to foster a rhetoric of change. Pare Lorentz directed the RA film, *The Plow that Broke the Plains*, with two prime objectives: “to show audiences a specific and exciting section of the country...[and] to portray events which led up to one of the major catastrophes in American history ... the Great Drought which [was] going into its sixth year.”¹⁷ Tennessee Valley Authority (TVA) planning offered an abundant image for the American future: a federal government proposal to rebuild a lost Eden into a utopia; while a proposed Columbia River development took the vision of a planned Promised Land, an agricultural/industrial empire, with hopes for population redistribution, upbuilding small town America, and large-scale economic planning.¹⁸ Progressive engineering of the era sought to organize and decentralize economic activity within geographical regions whose natural resources would allow self-sufficiency within a highly developed technological system. Hydrology, an important aspect of technocratic theory, relies on a system of rivers and interconnecting canals to provide abundant hydroelectric power, low energy-cost water transportation of commodities, and raise water tables for reclamation and irrigation projects in the country’s more arid or semiarid regions.

To implement change, the New Deal government had to redefine ideas about the present landscape into visions of a forward-looking and progressive landscape, reinventing the Jeffersonian ideal of the Promised Land, where historical geography can coexist with new technology, yet remain a coherent landscape. Establishment of a valley

¹⁷ Richard MacCann. *The People’s Films: A Political History of U.S. Government Motion Pictures*. New York: Hastings House Publishers (1973) 65.

¹⁸ Jane Wolff. “Redefining Landscape” in *The Tennessee Valley Authority: Design and Persuasion*, Chapter 3, edited by Tim Culvahouse. New York: Princeton Architectural Press (2007) 54; Paul C. Pitzer. *Grand Coulee: Harnessing a Dream*. Pullman, WA: Washington State University Press (1994) 267-268.

authority involved examining physical geography to define a region generally centered around a major river and its watershed. The National Resources Committee under the Department of the Interior had prepared a preliminary report in 1935 on “Regional Factors in National Planning and Development” pursuant to a request from Franklin Roosevelt. This report examined the legalities of planning problems that overlapped political boundaries and the related power and limits of the federal government. The federal government already had legal jurisdiction over interstate waterways to improve navigation and institute flood control, and dams were already part of the process. However, the government needed to extend its influence over waterways, with the river becoming the literal and allegorical center of the proposed valley-authority project, not only to be used as a legal mechanism, power generator, and planning tool, but more significantly, as a rhetorical tool to endorse and instill progressive ideology into American society. The river became the federal government’s instrument of social education to advance change.

More crucially, the New Deal government had to project an aura of optimism regarding the efficacy of federal projects, and looked to increase support for forceful intervention by government bureaucracy to shore up a stagnant economy and reinforce the party line. Americans at the time struggled to resolve the tensions created by unknowns that lay between technology and culture. The mid-1930s revealed a pointed stylistic change toward futuristic and streamlined designs in marketing commercial products. *Fortune* and *Life* publishers commissioned artists and photographers to support technology that would order the world, water arid lands, and reinforce a technocratic promise of electricity in every household. A campaign of boosterism was at work to enfold the feats of modernism with long-held devotion to traditional American values of self-reliance, equal

opportunity, and pursuit of the American dream. Just as advertisers who sold ways to create places or artists lamented the loss of one place as they strove to produce new ones, the federal government utilized all manner of media, and most notably visuals, to initiate and fertilize new concepts for a future, better place, fostered in technology e.g., a hydroelectric dam, that could harness nature in a such a way to bring more comforts, conveniences and a higher economic security to the common household.

Power was a metaphor for the New Deal and it went beyond reclamation and harnessing of the nation's natural resources. In "TVA Graphics: A Language of Power," Steven Heller claimed that — whether by image or the built environment to sway the populace — the federal government promised that it had both the ability and power to control their destinies or, in other words, that the power of the government and its programs could empower its citizens. Propagating this image required connecting with a visual language born of the Machine-Age and the technical provisos of the day. Projecting this future vision could not be achieved without employing equally monumental, larger-than-life graphics to meet the dynamic and imposing challenges of environmental control and to instill popular pride and confidence in the overall endeavor.¹⁹

Images of all types performed the vital function of embedding ideas into the popular imagination. Hopeful notions of an idealistic future were expressed by promissory

¹⁹ Steven Heller. "TVA Graphics: A Language of Power" in *The Tennessee Valley Authority: Design and Persuasion* edited by Tim Culvahouse, Chapter 5. New York: Princeton Architectural Press (2007) 106-107.

Note. According to Heller, similar design language was employed during the same period to promote totalitarian regimes in Germany, Italy, and the former Soviet Union to emphasize public works projects with very similar architectural and graphics styles. The iconography, whether modernistic in the Italian mode or neoclassical in the Nazi manner, employed futuristic themes and tropes that can be recognized in many federal government works.

images of Hoover Dam and its role in the outlook of the Southwest. Most of the public were introduced to the Hoover Dam not by witnessing its physical reality, but through verbal and visual representations that instilled the concepts of a modern and futuristic place.²⁰

According to Jean Baudrillard, the concept of America is a “[u]topia made reality of a society which . . . is built on the idea that it is the realization of everything the others have dreamt of – justice, plenty, rule of law, wealth, freedom: it knows this, it believes in it, and in the end, the others have come to believe in it too.”²¹ Communications scholar, Anthony Arrigo, applied Baudrillard’s notions to illustrate imaging of a modern river infrastructure that employs a visual rhetoric²² and the use of “promissory, edited, staged, pseudo-documentary . . . [in] persuasive ways for specific ends.”²³ In the case of the Hoover Dam, preplanned in the 1920s and constructed during 1931-1935, creators of its imagery seemed to engage in deliberate and conscious imaginative practices to shape the emerging river community’s sense of self within the current reality of society. With inspiration taken from Hoover Dam, the largest post-Panama Canal construction in the Western Hemisphere, a visual dialogue of the sublime structure became a distinctive, ideological discourse presented as utopian imagery and arguments. In visual rhetoric, Arrigo claimed that the relationship between image and imagination draws on the concept of

²⁰ See Anthony F. Arrigo. “Imaging the Dam: The Visual Rhetoric of Hoover (Boulder) Dam in Popular and Printed Media, 1920-1975” (PhD Dissertation), University of Minnesota (2010) Chapter 1.

²¹ Jean Baudrillard quoted in Arrigo. *Imaging Hoover Dam: The Making of a Cultural Icon*. Reno, Nevada: University of Nevada Press (2014) 26.

²² *Note*. Visual rhetoric: a theoretical frame for describing how visual images create meaning or construct an argument.

²³ Arrigo, *Imagining the Dam* (Book) 26.

social imaginary. Social imaginary refers to the ways and means that community members imagine their social and cultural surroundings to create a deep commitment to their culture, belief system, values and morals, and what they represent.²⁴ Hoover Dam was depicted as the embodiment of human labor and machine technology against a forbidding Colorado River that played witness to the age-old battle of man against the natural sublime. Arrigo contended also that the Hoover Dam project was viewed as America's divine right of transformation in the nation's progression to greatness, realizing long-held national religious and cultural beliefs, "[y]oked together and displayed in the form of utopian visual and verbal assemblages," that shaped the cultural "imaginary of Hoover Dam" as a place by means of an accumulation of its effect over time.²⁵

Images of Hoover Dam were "created to imagine what might be" and what could eventually become reality. Created visuals in the dam's preplanning stages often expressed the construction of place and notions leading to a hopeful utopian future. Construction of place includes maps that provide a measured and well-recorded knowledge base for building place. In surveys and maps, the cartographer met the engineer and the technocrat, who in turn had to convince policy-makers — and they, the larger public. During Hoover Dam's construction and completion, assembled visuals presented

²⁴ Note. For general discussion on social imaginary, see Arrigo, *Imaging the Dam* (Book) 20-26; Charles Taylor, *Modern Social Imaginaries*, Public Planet Books Series (2003); and "Charles Taylor on Paul Ricoeur," audio lecture obtained on *Social Imaginaries Journal* website (2015) www.socialimaginaries.wordpress.com (3 March 2017).

²⁵ Note. Anthony Arrigo understood American culture as a reciprocal relationship with the natural world, a product of the confluence of religious doctrines, agrarian philosophies, and the use of science and technology to dominate nature. He further deconstructed culture into four elements: (1) as a human endeavor (2) with behavioral patterns shared and learned within a specific community (3) that are transmitted to other groups and (4) involving human symbols and artifacts. See Anthony Arrigo. *Imaging Dam* (Book) Chapter 1.

evidence of efficacy for a government plan that validated promised notions. Some government media was singled out to disseminate fact or information, and to create identities for New Deal promises. They incorporated heroic or iconic qualities to generate symbolic and iconographic representations of ideological concepts to appeal to humanitarian sentiment and American pride, and to manage overall themes for modern social and cultural reforms.²⁶

Media, Message, and the Government

Roosevelt adeptly managed the access and flow of presidential policies by utilizing White House correspondents as “conveyer belts, stenographers, and accurate reporters of spot news.”²⁷ According to Betty Winfield’s *FDR and the News Media*, Roosevelt realized that the daily newspaper was possibly “the only book” people read and that news reels were an early version of televised news: talking newspapers of the screen. The President, touting New Deal strategies, needed not only to find an audience, but obtain public backing for implementing those policies, even when owner-publishers of the era withheld editorial support for many New Deal programs. Mass media was a major political weapon used to boost Roosevelt’s leadership, define current issues, and set a daily news agenda, in furtherance of the most direct communications to the American people.²⁸ The chain of command, so to speak, for gathering and releasing information for public consumption about the Boulder Canyon-Hoover Dam project, for example, began with Roosevelt and his information officer, Steve Early, who in turn looked to Secretary of the Interior,

²⁶ Arrigo, *Imaging the Dam* (Book) 23.

²⁷ Betty H. Winfield. *FDR and the News Media*. Chicago: University of Illinois (1990) 231-232.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 231-238.

Harold Ickes, to gather information from the appropriate department heads. Bureau of Reclamation photographs documenting the project were first conveyed to Washington, D. C. after screening out images that the Bureau did not want publicized before release to the public at large. “We want the world to know what is going on there and for that purpose, nothing is as effective as a good picture,” said Bureau of Reclamation Commissioner, Elwood Mead.²⁹

So thoroughly did the Roosevelt Administration manage the steering of material toward the news media, one correspondent would remark, “[b]y March 1935 . . . reporters . . . seldom wrote their own stories but were mere messenger boys running between the government bureaus and their own offices carrying statements prepared by press agents.”³⁰ According to Richard Dryer MacCann in *The People’s Films*, bearing in mind the conservative adulation of American separation of powers, the Roosevelt Administration had the rare opportunity to use public agencies to expose a political position, as Roosevelt sought to expand a public appetite for New Deal programs. Despite controversy over such adventurism in message control, the Executive Branch employed the tools of mass media to convey and publicize problems needing policy solutions faced by Congress. This notion was exemplified by several federal bureaus. Rexford Tugwell, administrator of the New Deal’s Resettlement Administration (RA)³¹ was perhaps the most keenly aware of the power of communications to implement New Deal programs that were expected to change people’s lives.

²⁹ Commissioner Elwood Mead quoted in Vilander, *Hoover Dam* 18.

³⁰ Winfield, *FDR and the News Media* 37.

³¹ *Note*. Resettlement Administration: April 1935 – December 1936

Tugwell initially believed that “resettlement” had to be explained to the American citizenry – those who needed help and those who paid taxes to support such a program – and to this end created a publicity paradigm beyond what the Roosevelt Administration had previously practiced. To Roy Stryker, who became director of the Historical Division for the RA,³² Tugwell said “We’ve got to tell people about the lower third – how ill-fed, ill-clothed, and ill-housed they are.” In response, Stryker hired photographers such as Walker Evans, John Vachon, and Dorothea Lange to shoot dust storms, Southern tenant farms, and migrants based on “shooting scripts” that would dramatize problems and offer a rationale for relief, rehabilitation, resettlement, and land-use planning. In its short history the RA utilized press releases, public exhibits, broadcast scripts, photography, and film. The RA hired filmmaker Pare Lorentz in June 1935 for inventive and creative processes, shifting some public relations tasks to artists and reporters.³³

The federal government in 1937 created the Bonneville Power Administration (BPA)³⁴ to function as a federal regional-marketing agency for Columbia River hydro-power, a precursor to the proposed Columbia Valley Authority. BPA media was tasked

³² Rexford Tugwell quoted in Richard Dryer MacCann, *The People’s Films: a political history of the U.S. Government motion pictures*. New York: Hastings House (1973) 60.

³³ Note. See MacCann, *The People’s Films* Chapter 5, 87-117.

³⁴ Note. The Bonneville Project Act was signed into law by President Franklin Roosevelt August 20, 1937 creating a provisional power marketing agency, The Bonneville Project, pending federal legislation to establish a Columbia Valley Authority (CVA). By Executive Order, in 1940, the name changed to the Bonneville Power Administration (BPA). Two BPA official historical account were used in this dissertation: Gus Norwood. *Columbia River Power for the People: A History of Policies of the Bonneville Power Administration (1981)*; and Gene Tollefson. *BPA & The Struggle for Power at Cost*. Archival sources: BPA librarian Lillian Davis. *History of the Bonneville Power Administration* (unpublished typescript) (1943). Primary sources were obtained from BPA files at the National Archives Repository, Seattle, Washington, and the BPA Library Archive, Portland, Oregon. Oral history accounts of early BPA Information Division employees Stephen B. Kahn and Elmer Buehler were obtained. A scholarly history of the Bonneville Power Administration was not found.

with marketing electricity, introducing more humanistic views of government to society, demonstrating how a democracy can function for not just one class, but for all the people.³⁵ Roosevelt was enthusiastic about public power and its advocacy in developing entire rivers, river systems, and watersheds.³⁶ These ideals would later translate to make hydropower the key to a future valley-authority regional system. In the Pacific Northwest, the BPA had to develop public-relations material to bring progressive ideas to local life, affirming the promise of public power made possible by the government through energy-centric regionalism.

The BPA tapped into the populist theme of the forgotten man; a theme initially explored by the RA in 1935 as part of an aggressive publicity plan of emergency relief for the common individual. Various images and other assembled media highlighted socioeconomic issues while incorporating a counter-narrative of government-sponsored utopian promises of technology. The RA's goal was to bring economic prosperity and efficiency by means of human dominance over the natural environment. This early government message might have spread through the practice of retail and wholesale politics,³⁷ which presented the rationale for Columbia River development in local and national speeches, political campaigns, news stories, and political activism to establish a place in the American citizen's imagination. In addition to the dam's physical structure, focus was

³⁵ Stephen B. Kahn, Oral History [transcript] conducted by Michael Majdic (1998), University of Oregon Knight Library, UO Media Services.

³⁶ *Note:* Edward Spann denotes as governor of New York in the 1920s and early 1930s, Franklin Roosevelt initially compiled a positive record towards regional planning. Roosevelt in a January 21, 1933 speech in Montgomery, Alabama, said he would devise a plan for the Tennessee Valley, "tying in industry, agriculture and forestry and flood prevention . . . into a unified whole" (In Spann, *Modern America* 152).

³⁷ *Note.* Retail politics: a style of political campaigning focused on local or regional events to target voters on a small-scale or individual basis. Wholesale politics: a style of political campaigning that targets voters on a large-national scale or a mass-marketing basis.

directed at the benefits of constructing the Bonneville and Grand Coulee in order to validate New Deal promises to function for the public good within traditional American values, reflecting the modern Jeffersonian Ideal.

Planned programs of public relations were used to disseminate information and viewpoints through mass media and other outlets. The purpose of a public-relations program was: (1) to interpret and give meaning to actions (2) that are understood within a structure of events, (3) with its general contextual framework undertaken with overall self-interest as the controlling factor. Governments use the news process to influence the power of discussion. Michael Schudson acknowledged that the federal government is one of the practitioners of “managed news,” which has become a permanent condition of modern society.³⁸

The news process is filled with subjective pressures, interjecting personal opinion or corporate viewpoints, as exhibited in press releases from public or information agencies, obscuring objective perspectives that are based on hard facts. Advocates plan and execute communications programs to present information and viewpoints to the public through mass media and a variety of other outlets. In media relations concerning the BPA and public power, journalism and the news process arguably were used to influence activism for administration and government viewpoints and positions. It was not uncommon for the BPA or other government agencies to create events for inclusion in the news agenda, determine the facts or evidence to present to the public, or select the medium and methods used as part of the debate to create relationships that blurred the division

³⁸ Michael Schudson. *Discovering the News*. New York: Basic Books (1978) 166.

between advocacy and news reporting. To support public power, the federal government and other governmental agencies utilized their media resources as a means of distraction from public power opposition, to discourage competitive messages from private utilities in the market place.³⁹

Methodology

When creating a methodology to study a large corporate or government entity, David Nye advocated an inclusive approach that incorporates advertising and public relations as well as research into its history of labor, management, and sales data. Significant entities create and maintain a massive collection of images to promote positive representations, perhaps a metaphor for corporate cultural hegemony: “Corporations edit archives, control access to papers, underwrite favorable works, destroy evidence (more often through neglect than by design), and lay down a barrage of favorable publicity that directs customers and stockholders on how they ought to be understood.”⁴⁰ According to Nye, studying a corporation (or government) demands the recognition not only of patterns in demonstrated cultural phenomena, but also of how those patterns are transmitted by corporate messages and more significantly, who controls them. Through a methodology of image, one can recognize a pattern’s role as symbol maker and ideological force across society. When a corporation or government entity gains substance in support of a given technology (e.g., electrification), Nye advocated studying that organization’s communications as

³⁹ Myron K. Jordon. “The Kilowatt Wars: James D. Ross, public power and public relationships contest for the hearts and minds of Pacific Northwesterners,” (PhD Dissertation), University of Washington (1991) 3-4.

⁴⁰ Nye, *Images Worlds* 3.

the principle instrument that directs and coordinates its development, ideology, and activities.

As for corporate photography, Nye suggested classification based on photographic technique — rather than subject matter — by analyzing and categorizing its formal qualities. Identifying techniques makes it possible to assign meaning and classify all images.⁴¹ Two basic encompassing frameworks are to (1) examine a company's publications to identify where images appear with text and (2) understand the technological use of photography (or image) as a means of communication. Nye's studies permitted him to analyze major corporations (e.g., General Electric) as powerful communicators rather than mere contributors to the larger economic categories of production and consumption. Corporations of the 1930s became far more self-conscious about their images as a key to organizing new patterns of social experience. In fact, artistic photographers emphasized using the camera as a technical instrument that rejects manipulating the subject. In doing so, techniques can become a legitimate part of an image's vocabulary as a means of depiction to thereupon develop a visual code. In contrast, the corporate photographer crafts a message by shaping subject matter to suit preconceived ideas. Corporate photography not only objectified existing social relations and practices but visually codified "progress." In their work, property is emphasized over people, and managerial perspectives are highlighted rather than worker viewpoints. The result facilitated production and distribution of an ideology.⁴²

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, iv-xiii.

⁴² *Ibid.*, iv-viii, 54-56.

To analyze the ideological history of the development of the Columbia River by the New Deal government, as evident in informational and public relations media, data collection and research involved three parts:

(1) Part One: Conduct a background survey of socioeconomic history, historical geography, and cultural development of regional electric-power ideas during post-World War I and the 1930s.

(2) Part Two: Examine relevant federal media regarding the regional electric-power question from 1934 to 1941. In the Pacific Northwest, outside of local public power activism, government informational programs never touted the regional end products of federal Columbia River development until Fall 1937, when the Bonneville Project, a federal power-marketing agency, was established.

(3) Part Three: Conduct a case-study analysis of BPA-informational media from 1937 to 1941.

Data collection consisted of a primary archival-document search from the Bonneville Power Administration Library, the Library of Congress, Washington State University Digital Archives, *The Oregonian* Archives, and the National Archives at College Park and Seattle.⁴³ Initial data collection included individual or groups of photographs, film, posters, pamphlets and brochures, newspaper and magazine articles, letters, scripts, and other relevant documents. From these initial collections, the *most relevant* media material⁴⁴ were selected for the current case study: promotion of an energy-centric New

⁴³ See this dissertation, Chapter 2, Data Collection for BPA Case Study Notes.

⁴⁴ *Note.* Many of the images and media collected, particularly photographs, had minimal, if any, title information (including dates). My initial review of the research media collected for this project and preliminary understanding of BPA history, I marked BPA media material as pre-World War II (1937-1941). For

Deal regionalism in the Pacific Northwest from 1932 to 1941. This material was labeled and organized by date and then divided into the following defined subcategorized periods:

1. Pre-Bonneville Project (1932-1937)
2. The Bonneville Project (1937-1939)
3. The Bonneville Power Administration and the Pre-War Era (1939-1941)

An analysis summary will utilize the following questions as a guide.

1. Assessment of the formal qualities of visuals. What is the predominant formal property in each visual? Does each visual have more than one formal property? Does a dominant property or quality emerge in series to define an overall strategy? Do visual strategies change over time? What predominant themes or motifs surface? Do these themes remain constant over time and across different modes of media?

2. Connotations of visuals to text and textual content. How many relevant visual images are associated with verbal context? What image types are associated with text? How does text influence the visual's meaning and/or does the visual affect textual context? How does text, if it does, advance the intended message?

this study, I eliminated technical images, though important, not relevant for this study. After reviewing primary resource Informational Division material (1937-1941), and BPA librarian Lillian Davis's unofficial BPA history (1943), for this project, I further sorted media material that corresponded with historical research found, and proceeded with the project from there. It is important to note, BPA Informational Division files found in the National Archives Repository in Seattle were not complete. Though the government regularly assesses records and materials to archive or dispose in accordance with the permanent rules and regulation in the Code of Federal Regulations (CFR), anecdotal comments by BPA employee Elmer Buehler in disposing BPA public power materials, Buehler claimed a verbal order in the early 1950s by then-Interior Department Secretary Douglas MacKay – an anti-public power advocate – needs to be considered. See this dissertation Chapter 2, Data Collection for BPA Case Study Notes. Some supplemental pre-BPA media material was collected from the Army Corp of Engineers and local newspapers.

3. Creation and circulation of media. How and by whom was the media produced?

Who was the target audience: a local or retail audience, a wholesale or mass audience, or corporate or in-house audience? By what means was the message circulated?

4. Purpose and goals of the message. What does the evaluation of formal qualities, visual strategies, and textual context, when conjoined with media production and circulation, disclose about the intended motive and purpose of the involved government agency (the image maker)? How does the government (image maker) attempt to capture the intended public's (target audience) interest in the message?

5. Social effects of public-relations media. Overall, what succeeds for the image maker in shaping or exploiting the target audience's perception of a power-centric regionalism in the Pacific Northwest? How does this effort influence or "sell" the federal idea of energy-centric regionalism?

Fundamental to this study is understanding how graphics and visuals were used to advance governmental policies for an energy-centric regionalism during the New Deal in the Pacific Northwest. For instance, how did artwork and artists' renderings equate a better life with a not-yet-built hydropower infrastructure? How were photographs and film employed to illustrate that workers were back on the job partly due to New Deal policies and beneficial new technologies? How was completed river infrastructure to be presented continually as a benefit for the whole of the American people and to what end?

Although federal agencies primarily produced visual media for mass audiences, visual media appeared in regional and local presentations to communicate how democratic government could help the common individual. A survey of New Deal media on regional-power schemes revealed patterns of communication, symbology, and images

deemed instruments of *an acquaintance to knowledge*. From this survey, a *Populist Media Paradigm* was identified: a pattern of populist-style messaging to inform, educate, and guide the citizenry on New Deal policies. The paradigm recognizes media that sought to (a) represent or dramatize socioeconomic problems affecting ordinary Americans through (b) graphics and realism genres of the period, and (c) related these problems to the common individual's experience through (d) selected appeals and emotional manipulation to inspire support of state-sponsored solutions. The paradigm is associated with specific techniques such as compare-and-contrast and before-and-after that are presented in overall landscapes of dystopia, transition, or utopia (Fig. 2-1 to Fig. 2-4). Some form of geographic graphic, usually a reference map, accompanies the media presentation.

In the text, maps are briefly noted as a supplemental evaluative category for promotion of energy-centric regionalism based on their contribution to a social knowledge-building message for the generation and distribution of Columbia River hydropower. Maps, like artworks, are selective about what they represent, and have a place in a larger visual-textual dialogue in establishing a new social order and value system to facilitate cultural change. In the context of the federal government's intervention in Columbia River Basin, one should view maps as ideological tools that both embody and reinforce cultural and social conventions that arise from complex economic, social, and political arrangements. In other words, maps created by government artists display sociohistorical context in relation to regional changes in power and knowledge. As a visual medium to image the future in the Pacific Northwest, maps sought to position proposed modern

concepts, as initially presented by the federal government and later by the BPA, in the context of Pacific Northwest geography.⁴⁵

“Electrifying is both a process and an attribute” a technology that is associated with metaphorical levels of novelty, excitement, and modernity.⁴⁶ Government media labored to craft messages that created the desire for economic, social, and political power. And the Great Depression created the perfect storm, priming the region to accept a new modern way of life with electric power as the commonplace culture of the future. Electricity would be shaped and adapted to ease a passage into modernity for the Pacific Northwest.

Data Collection for BPA Case Study Notes

Original digital BPA material (1937-1950) for this case study was obtained as part of my field work from the BPA library files in Portland, Oregon and the National Archives Repository in Seattle, Washington. Approximately 6,000 pieces were initially gathered from files that represented the agency’s work records and published educational and promotional pamphlets to fulfill public-information requests. Two events should be noted that affected collection of the BPA material available for this project.

In 1953, during the Cold War years, BPA-promotional material was allegedly collected from the BPA’s main office and field office for destruction on instructions from Washington, D. C. According to a 1998 oral history from BPA employee Elmer Buehler,

⁴⁵ Katherine Harmon. *The Map as Art: Contemporary Artists Explore Cartography*. New York: Princeton Architectural Series (2009) Introduction, 8-17; Arrigo, *Imaging the Dam* (Book) 117-119.

⁴⁶ David E. Nye. *Electrifying America: Social Meanings of a New Technology*. Massachusetts: MIT Press (1997) x.

verbal orders were believed to have been issued in 1953 by then-Secretary of the Interior, Douglas McKay, for the “incineration” of early BPA promotional materials that included the films *Hydro* (1939) and *The Columbia: America’s Greatest Power Stream* (1949). “It was all verbal like these white house scandals [sic] – nothing in writing – it was just handed down,” said Buehler.⁴⁷ Buehler served as an early administrative employee in public affairs and was later reassigned to custodial duties at the BPA’s Ross complex, where he was given the task to destroy the films and other promotional pamphlets. Having worked in BPA Public Affairs, Buehler had a vested interest in the promotional materials after having printed and distributed pamphlets, organized public viewings of *The River* and BPA film *Hydro*, and driven Woody Guthrie around to familiarize the songwriter with the region for lyrics to be written for the film *The Columbia: America’s Greatest Power Stream*. Buehler reported that instead of carrying out the order to destroy all copies of the BPA films, “I had a projector in my room and I ran them off and when I found a good [film] copy I’d put them aside, [and] I told . . . one of my assistants to put them in my file cabinet.” Buehler took home copies of BPA films (*Hydro* [1939], *The Columbia: America’s Greatest Power Stream* [1949], and *Power Builds Ships* [1942]) and stored Pare Lorentz’s *The River* (1937) in his basement for 18 or 19 years.⁴⁸ BPA

⁴⁷ Elmer Buehler. Oral History [transcript] conducted by Denise Matthews (1998). University of Oregon Knight Library, UO Media Services; Also see Greg Vandy, *26 Songs in 39 Days*, Seattle: Sasquatch Books (2016) Chapter 8.

⁴⁸ Ibid. *Note*. According to BPA Library Researcher, Libby Burke, there was an investigation in the 1980s involving the order to incinerate BPA promotional materials allegedly given by former Oregon governor and then-Interior Secretary, Douglas McKay. No written order to purge the educational/promotional materials, specifically destruction of the films, was ever found. The order was believed to be verbal. Not long after McKay was appointed Interior Secretary, he took a special interest in recalling BPA film prints and printed material as he was opposed to public power and images of “downtrodden” farmers in his home state of Oregon. McKay believed that natural resources should not be under federal jurisdiction. No one in federal government ever followed up on the alleged destruction of materials. Burke believed the promotional

library researcher, Libby Burke, confirmed this story, reporting that approximately twenty years later a graduate student inquired about these films that Buehler had revealed were kept in his basement.⁴⁹

Subsequently in the 1980s, an unknown number of photographs and negatives had been loaned for use in production the BPA's 50th anniversary book, *BPA and the Struggle for Power at a Cost,* " disappeared. Burke reported nothing nefarious was intended. No one at the BPA Library during that time knew how to handle photographs and negatives, which they then did not consider library or archival materials. In the mid-1990s, BPA photographs and negatives held in the library were offered for permanent transfer to the National Archives in Seattle, Washington, which served as the repository for BPA's records and archives. The BPA library was able to borrow back archived graphic material in order to digitize the remaining photographs and negatives.⁵⁰ Not all graphic material contained attached metadata. Almost all graphic material was catalogued by a limited classification system: those coded with "E" ("E" was added on later but is meaningless) followed by five digits or less were from the Engineering Division and those coded with "E" followed by six digits came from another division, most likely the Information Division.⁵¹ No other information was available.

Guided by this media acquisition, other field work involved field trips to the Bonneville and Grand Coulee Dam sites. These visits included walking the Engineers'

materials were recalled and collected from satellite BPA offices in the region to be destroyed. However, files at the BPA were not purged. (Libby Burke. Re: "Our Emails." Message to Katherine Heslop. 17 April 2017. E-mail.)

⁴⁹ Libby Burke. "Introduction by BPA Library Researcher Libby Burke," in *BPA Motion Picture Division: The Kahn Years*. BPA Film Collection, Volume One 1939-1954 (2014).

⁵⁰ Libby Burke. Re: "Our Emails." Message to Katherine Heslop. 17 April 2017. E-mail.

⁵¹ Tina Kay. Re: "Our Emails" Forward. Message to Katherine Heslop. 8 May 2017. E-mail.

and Government Camps at Grand Coulee Dam and the Fish Ladders at Bonneville Dam, and a drive through agricultural areas served by the Columbia Basin Project, the Franklin Delano Roosevelt Lake and Recreation Area, and Nespalem, Washington, on the Colville Indian Reservation, which is the site of an early Rural Electric Administration Electric Cooperative called Nespalem Valley Electric.



Figure 2-1. “Abandon Saw mill” in Pacific Northwest. National Archives, Seattle, Washington. E113083 (1939).

Figure 2-1. Example of a dystopic landscape. Humans, disease and fire deplete Northwest forests faster than it grows. The lumber industry loses its source of raw materials and has to shutter mills.



Figure 2-2. “M.S. Parmeter – N.P. Nespelem Valley REA Co-op. gets electricity after waiting 24 years, Nespelem, Washington.”
National Archives, Seattle, Washington. E113051 (1941).

Figure 2-2. Example of transformative landscape. Electricity served as an agency to the modern world.

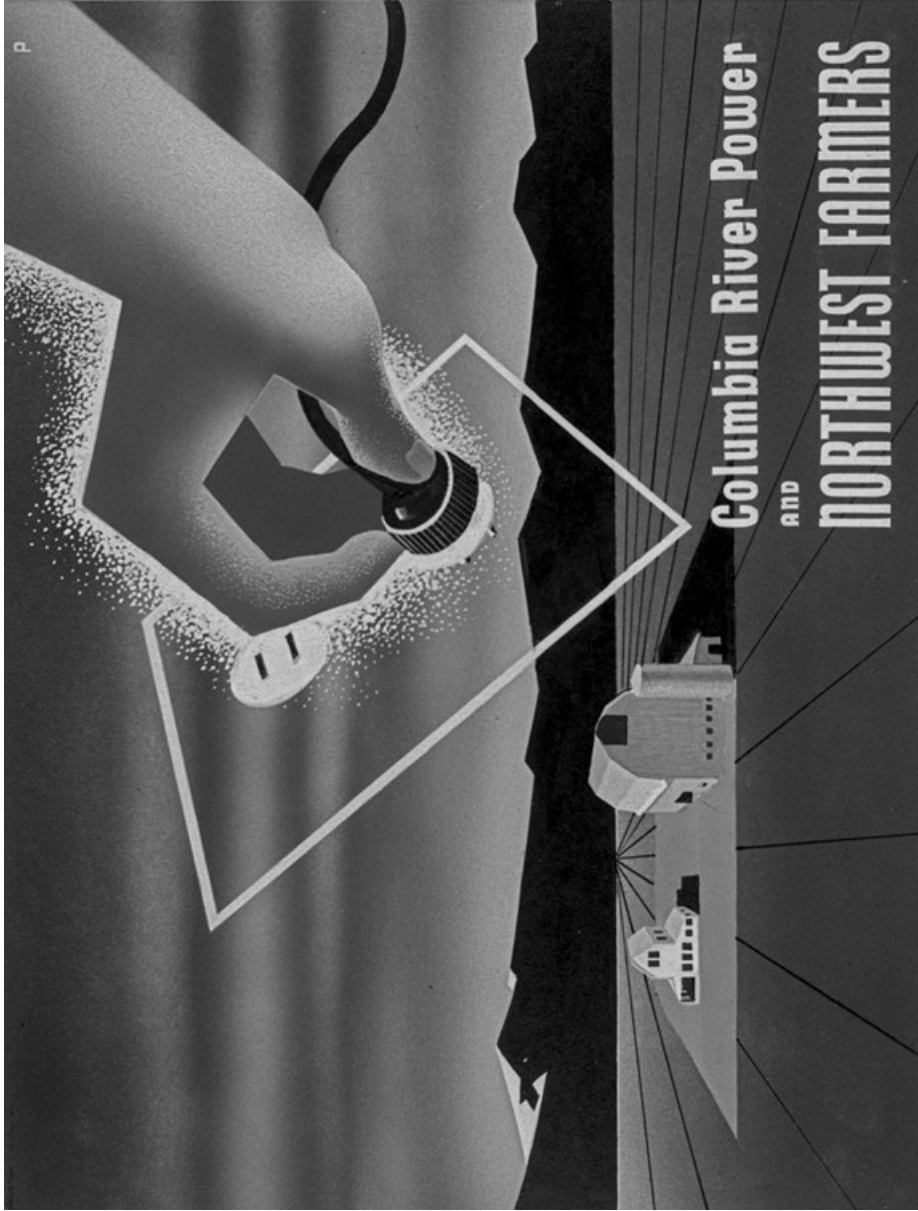


Figure 2-3. “Columbia River Power and Northwest Farmers.”
National Archives, Seattle, Washington. E113863 (1941?)

Figure 2-3. Example of utopic landscape. Power offers a vision of the “Promised Land.”

IS HOUSING A PUBLIC RESPONSIBILITY?

Government Money & Regulation Guarantee...

FREE SCHOOLS
Federal and local governments spend two and a half billion dollars annually for public education.

CHEAP POSTAL SERVICE
The postal system has cost the American taxpayer an average of more than 125 million dollars a year for the last five years.

BETTER SHIPS
"The government today is paying about \$30,000,000 annually for the carrying of mails which would cost, under normal ocean rates, only \$3,000,000. The difference, \$27,000,000 is a subsidy, and nothing but a subsidy."
—President Franklin D. Roosevelt, March 4, 1935.

BETTER TRAINS
State and federal governments have given more than a billion dollars to the railroads, in the form of land grants and other aids. Gifts of land totalled more than 176 million acres, an area larger than the state of Texas.
—Knowledge Institution Report

BETTER HIGHWAYS
The federal government has spent an average of 250 million dollars a year on highways for the last five years.

BETTER AIR LINES
To aid American air lines, the federal government has paid an average of nearly 17 million dollars annually for the last five years.

Is the American Home LESS IMPORTANT?

Figure 2-4. "Poster by Record Section, Suburban Resettlement Administration."

Date: December 1935.

Contributor: Arthur Rothstein.

Library of Congress Prints and Photographs, Washington, D. C.

Digital ID fsa 8b26860//loc.gov/loc.pnp/fsa.8b26860.

Figure 2-4. Example of Compare and Contrast method. The message objective was to record what existed and to project what could be produced as an argument for change.

Chapter 3: A Social Process Structures Technology

No machine is an abstract force moving through history. Rather, every new technology is a social construction and terms of its adoption are culturally determined
David E. Nye, 1992

Americans over time have assigned various meanings to electricity, ranging from grand visions in imaginary tales to metaphors in speech, such as “I guess we got our wires crossed,” “The plan suffered a short-circuit,” or “I need time off to recharge my batteries.” An early attraction to electricity served as a nonfunctional fascination with a phenomenon that provoked awe and wonderment of the sublime, with pioneering engineers such as Edison, Westinghouse, and Tesla. Electrical technology was not associated with a “natural,” new source of light, heat, and power. Nothing inherent in electricity dictated a social use. Henry Adams, a descendent of two U.S. Presidents, included a groundbreaking and singular chapter titled “The Dynamo and the Virgin,” which contrasted the social history of religious France during the Renaissance with the American fascination with electrical power in the 20th century as a sublime force for a technocratic society. He recognized tendrils of thought and cultural change in a developing, outward-looking world.

Electricity became a new force in everyday life that would cultivate a unique and forward-looking culture configured within generated kilowatt hours, wired homes, and novel appliances, synthesizing a modern-day sense of self. Energy generation could not operate in a laissez-faire environment. A physical bond had to be established to nurture a reciprocal relationship with its consumers. Business leaders and public officials maneuvered for control of early electric generation and distribution operations that allowed energy producers to impose their own economic, social, and political values on its

consumers. Electrifying America would come to involve “technology, ceremony, popular enthusiasm, salesmanship, public relations, private interests, and politics.”⁵²

Grappling with the Phenomenon

Historian David Nye wrote that during the late 19th- and early 20th-centuries, the public’s response to electrification encapsulated expectations of utopianism, “offering metaphors to an enlivening ‘juice’ of rejuvenation to the nervous system freeing mankind from toil.”⁵³ More than a business commodity, electrification significantly became conjoined with ideas of social progress and the transformation of human nature. Electric technology ushered in a fresh world so inventive and groundbreaking that it became inseparable from innovation and modernity: a veritable symbol of progress. Intellectuals and thinkers with visionary designs imagined electricity assimilated into society for its betterment. Whereas futuristic concepts were expressed in the era’s popular press and dime novels, antimodernists focused on electrification’s capacity for social control in devices (e.g., electric street lights to deter crime) and found alarming prospects in its potential use as an aid in surveillance. Inventor Thomas Alva Edison, even as he developed the technical details of electric generation and distribution, voiced utopian visions for electricity. Although viewed as outlandish by today’s standards, Edison predicted that electrification of the home would eliminate the distinctions between night and day, speed up women’s

⁵² David E. Nye. *Images Worlds: Corporate Identities at General Electric*. Cambridge: The MIT Press, (1985) 1-5, 21; David E. Nye. *Electrifying America: Social Meanings of a New Technology*. Massachusetts: MIT Press (1997) 391.

⁵³ Nye, *Electrifying America* 182.

psychological development toward intellectual equality with men, and even hinted at his own personal experimentation with electricity in ways to communicate with the dead.⁵⁴

The early modern powerhouse epitomized the control humans gained over the elements. Photographer Lewis Hine imagined power as “huge machines” that worked silently within vast structures, giving an initial impression that the human factor was negligible. In the photo essay, *Cast of Characters* (1928) Hine drew parallels with “power makers” who possessed the character of modern electric innovation – youthful, resourceful, and venturesome – while being struck by a human sense of responsibility and power, and exhibiting control of a force greater than their own (Fig. 3-1)⁵⁵. Modern electric technology in the home developed into a symbol of personal prestige and conspicuous consumption and as “an expression of belief in scientific progress concretized in a new vacuum cleaner or electric refrigerator” that affirmed new roles for women as managers of the home.⁵⁶

Given these futuristic notions, late 19th- and early 20th-centuries electrical corporations and designers tried not only to implement this modern promise but sought to ease the anxieties of its technology by designing new products in familiar, if not similar, styles to its nonelectrical counterparts. For example, electric light fixtures were made to resemble candles or chandeliers; an electric coffee pot would look like a Victorian table service. Electric motors supplanted inefficient steam engines, and electrical displays were

⁵⁴ Ibid., 147; and Paul W. Hirt. *The Wired Northwest: The History of Electric Power, 1870s-1970s*. Lawrence, Kansas: University Press of Kansas (2012) 64-65.

⁵⁵ Lewis Hine. “Cast of Characters in the New Drama of the Power Makers ‘Work Portraits,’ ” in *The Survey*, 1 March 1924, obtained from <http://www.unz.org/Pub/TheSurvey-1924mar01-00595> (2 Feb 2017) 595.

⁵⁶ Nye, *Electrifying America* 280.

popular examples of progressivism in home life as exhibited at world's fairs. Electric household appliances replaced iceboxes, woodstoves, brooms, and coal-heated flatirons. By addressing electricity as a tool for social improvement, electrical corporations and utilities implemented "informational" advertising to express the promise of social advancements through new electrical utilities and products. In the earliest advertisements, the simple light bulb was incorporated within traditional settings, limiting the disjunction between the premodern world and new technology. Through the National Electric Light Association (NELA) and like organizations, business corporations and utilities attempted to communicate their visions of electrification to guide the national power conversation. Morris Cooke, chair of Pennsylvania's Giant Power plan in the mid-1920s, consulted prominent writers in the rational housekeeping movement to share domestic themes of electric modernization through the popular literature of the times.⁵⁷

Early Public Utility Ownership: The Ontario Hydro-Electric Commission

Motivated by the rising importance of electricity in urban and industrial life, the Bellamy Society's "Nationalist Clubs"⁵⁸ of the late 1890s and early 1900s favored public electric utility ownership. Early social reformers argued that electric utilities, as a vital service for the public welfare, required public regulation. Yet prior to World War I, municipal electric ownership frequently was due to insufficient capital or local markets failing to attract private companies to set up an electrical generating service. Still, progressives

⁵⁷ Nye, *Electrifying America* 182-183; Ronald C. Tobey, *Technology as Freedom: The New Deal and Electrical Modernization of the American Home*, Berkeley: University of California Press (1996) 51.

⁵⁸ Note. Inspired by futurist Edward Bellamy's book, *Looking Backwards: 2000-1887*.

experimented with public and municipal utilities to offer lower energy rates as a socioeconomic tool.⁵⁹

Canadian newspaper editors encouraged public power in what historian H. V. Nelles termed a “Populist Revolt” for the people’s control of power utilities.⁶⁰ As early as 1903, a *Toronto World* article in response to meetings held by public utility advocates in Berlin, Ontario argued:

Capitalists get together and create monopolies. The municipal representatives at Berlin [Ontario] yesterday gave the practical effect to the belief that people should get together and create monopolies . . . Corporate oppression has been possible largely because of the diffusion of the strength of the oppressed. The Berlin convention is a sign of an awakening.⁶¹

Opponents of private utilities and public service corporations⁶² pointed to the inefficiency of duplicated utility and infrastructure costs. Different houses on the same block found it unworkable to be offered power service by so many different companies. Insufficient voltage standardization among private utilities could not accommodate unequal and varying customer power demands that required shunting power between locations. Rate structures were not fixed. Moreover, private utilities offered lower rates to its industrial users

⁵⁹ Note. Five significant public or municipal hydropower projects from 1913 to 1930 affected public power policy on a regional and national level: (1) Hetch Hetchy Valley in Yosemite National Park, (2) Muscle Shoals on the Tennessee River, (3) the Skagit River Project in the Pacific Northwest, (4) the St. Lawrence River in New York, and (5) the Boulder Canyon on the Colorado River.

⁶⁰ Hirt, *The Wired Northwest* 52.

⁶¹ *Toronto World* in Hirt, *The Wired Northwest* 52.

⁶² Note. Paul Hirt defines a “public service corporation” as a special business category allowing corporations that possess franchises to provide electric energy in the form of lighting, power, and transportation to municipalities for profit. A public service corporation used public thoroughfares and other public resources. The term “public utility” was later adapted, still denoting a privately owned, for-profit company. A public utility does not necessarily denote a publicly owned utility. See Hirt, *The Wired Northwest* 62.

to maintain a constant and maximum power load to offset the lesser demands of domestic and rural power markets.⁶³

The Canadian Ontario Hydro-Electric Power Commission (a.k.a. the “Hydro” model) developed an early 20th century public utility scheme that sought to harness the power potential of Niagara Falls for widespread, long-distance wire transmission of electrical energy throughout the populous southwestern Province of Ontario, Canada. The provincial government sought to reduce coal imports to render Ontario less dependent upon foreign energy resources. Secretary of the Public Ownership League of America, Carl Thompson, in 1923 hyped the Ontario Hydro-Electric model as “[t]he greatest electric light and power system in the world . . . greatest of all publicly owned systems . . . the greatest of all whether public or private.”⁶⁴ Canadian-born J. D. Ross, father of the hydro-electric public utility movement in the Pacific Northwest and first Administrator of the New Deal Bonneville Project, studied this project.

Chairman Sir Adam Beck of the Hydro-Electric Power Commission in a 1924 *Survey* article, “Ontario’s Experience,” explained that the core theory behind provincial utility control was to engage in (a) practical power development that (b) involved city, town, village, and smaller municipalities, and to (c) construct and operate a vast hydroelectric energy system on a cooperative basis. The Commission itself acted as a trustee and agent for municipalities that exercised both administrative and constructive functions to define policy for its overall development: transmission and distribution of hydro-electrical power under municipal ownership. Electric power was purchased initially by

⁶³ Hirt, *The Wired Northwest* 52-53, 62.

⁶⁴ Carl D. Thompson. “The Ontario Hydro-Electric,” in *Public Ownership*. Chicago: Public Ownership League of America (1923) 5:(3) 3.

the Commission from established generating plants already erected at Niagara Falls. Many municipalities acquired their own power plants by the late 1910s, with the system supporting 380 cooperating municipalities by 1924, boasting in the aggregate of generation plants capable of producing a million horsepower to distribute electric power.⁶⁵

Central to the underlying strength of regional hydropower development was the commercial and industrial potential intrinsic to each region's geography. "Such [geographical] circumstances . . . constituted a solid foundation of great promise upon which the Commission could build in establishing a market for consumption of electrical energy for domestic, commercial and manufacturing requirements," wrote Beck.⁶⁶ The Province was well-watered both in the amount of annual precipitation and its seasonal distribution to provide an ample water supply for agriculture. The physical size of the Great Lakes and their enormous storage capacity allowed for a dependable and uniform water flow for the Niagara and St. Lawrence rivers to sustain the power-generation infrastructure. Natural raw material resources provided regional advantages in timber, mining, fisheries, and game. Canadian hydroelectric power during the early 20th century was extensively used to develop pulp and paper industries and contributed to the success of mining industries in the region.

Social reformers maintained that "cheap power" reorganized this Canadian region culturally, contributing to a pattern of landscape decentralization and correspondingly increased prosperity. Reformer Martha Bensley Bruère in the 1924 article, "Following the

⁶⁵ Sir Adam Beck. "Ontario's Experience" in *The Survey* (1 March 1924) obtained from <http://www.unz.org/Pub/TheSurvey-1924mar01-00584> (2 Feb 2017) 584-590.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 586.

Hydro,” held that power technology implemented upon the Ontario landscape had “checked the human tide toward the great cities and created a land with no visible signs of poverty.”⁶⁷ Bruère wrote about witnessing clean and prosperous urban environments due to reduced burning of coal fuels and noted that residential power rates in Toronto and London were a fraction of the cost of those in American cities. Bruère believed that a major component underlying the success of regional social reform was cheap power because smaller municipalities and communities - towns, hamlets, villages, farms – were equally serviced by hydropower at low rates. This led to industry and other commerce providing community employment opportunities radiating out from the urban centers, and made conveniences of modern domestic life more obtainable, which in turn afforded increased leisure time and new social interactions for the individual. This new regional prosperity reinforced the local economy, permitting more women to enter the labor force, and increased prospects for local citizens to purchase homes and engage in property ownership.⁶⁸

Bruère was most encouraged by what she witnessed in the rural areas that she termed the “Hydro-country.” Electric farming equipment made rural life easier, forming a more appealing case for younger generations to remain home, allow their parents to retire on the farm, and the son to take over cultivating the land. Hydropower made nearby rural villages and hamlets more attractive to others who did not plan to farm, providing work in smaller regional industries and crafts that offered incentives to make a home in the country rather than migrate to the cities. Touting the restoration of country life and

⁶⁷ Martha Bensley Bruère. “Following the Hydro,” in *The Survey* (1 March 1924) obtained from <http://www.unz.org/Pub/TheSurvey-1924mar01-00591> (2 Feb 2017) 594.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*; and Tobey, *Technology as Freedom* 51.

upbuilding small communities to maintain the family unit, Bruère exclaimed, “These small industrial centers [were] becoming an effective dam to keep the flood of population out of the great cities – in the Hydro-country” (Fig. 3-2).⁶⁹

At the time, Beck attributed the success of the Ontario Hydro-Power project to the mutual respect shared between the provincial municipalities and the Hydro Commission, instituting integral policies to eliminate political influences. The Ontario Hydro-Electric model benefited not only the larger cities and towns but tackled the difficult problem of power distribution into rural areas to stimulate the agricultural economy and farming culture by aiming to raise standards of living while continuing to support traditional family life. Electrifying agricultural regions generally was not profitable because the aggregate electrical load in rural districts tended to be minor, and transmission distances were relatively extensive so that construction of infrastructure was costly. The provincial government subsequently passed the Rural Hydro-Electric Distribution Act of 1921 as supporting legislation to aid in solving the financial problems of bringing power to rural districts by providing funds for 50 percent of provincial rural transmission costs.⁷⁰ However, key values that the provincial government recognized in electrifying rural districts pertained to uplifting and preserving the social, cultural, and economic traditions of agricultural districts that not only impacted local farmers, but spurred overall provincial economic growth. In offering to sustain agricultural life in the Province, the provincial government supported healthier regional life and cultural interactions within the whole of its

⁶⁹ Bruère, “Follow the Hydro” 594.

⁷⁰ Beck, “Ontario’s Experience” 590.

constituency. This integration of power distribution with social goals was examined as a model by other public utility advocates and social reformers of the era.

American Superpower Efficiency

In December 1918, E.G. Buckland of the New York, New Haven & Hartford Railroad Co., in turn encouraged by consulting engineer, William Murray of New York City, urged then-Secretary of the Interior Franklin Knight Lane to conduct a survey of energy sources along the Atlantic seaboard from New England to Washington D. C.⁷¹ Prompted by this advice, Secretary Lane in January 1919 asked Congress for an appropriation of \$200,000 to study a comprehensive “superpower” system for the industrial Northeast.⁷² In an explanatory letter, Lane wrote, “The enormous development of war industries had created an almost insatiable demand for power, a demand that was over-reaching the available supply with such rapidity that, had hostilities continued, it is certain that we would be facing an extreme power shortage.”⁷³

Murray, submitting his report to Congress in 1921, recommended that existing public and private utilities in the Northeast be supplemented by new superpower generating plants and high voltage transmission line networks to feed its electrical output into a regional power pool. The regional pool would be tapped at load centers for distribution to area consumers. Holding companies, funded by private investors, would own and manage the new superpower plants and high voltage transmission lines at a substantial savings

⁷¹ George Otis Smith quoted in W.S. Murry et al. *A Superpower System for the Region*, Professional Paper 123, Forward. Washington D. C.: Government Printing Office (1921) 9.

⁷² Ibid.

⁷³ Ibid.

due to the economic efficiencies inherent to this kind of integrated power system.⁷⁴ The proposed Northeast superpower zone held that maximum power requirements were needed for future industrial development, but unlike the Pacific Coast, this region had limited hydroelectric resources. A prime economic feature touted in this superpower zone plan was a conjoining of hydroelectric power resources of the Northeast with available steam-powered electric supplies supplementing new fossil-fuel generating super plants to add up, in the end, to an efficient use of existing resources.

Up to the 1920s, Murray recognized that power production and its distribution had been attained largely by development of standalone public and private utilities. Yet Murray argued that these utilities failed to achieve the most efficient energy generation for an industrial economy largely due to then-current restrictive government policies that inhibited expansion of electric utilities.⁷⁵ In addition, Murray contended that modern power generation needed a new, innovative “broad policy in legislation, regulation, financing, and management . . . [that] may not only remove the existing inhibition, but may give positive encouragement to the expansion of electric utilities,” so that adequate, reliable cheap power can permit national industrial and economic expansion.⁷⁶

⁷⁴ Thomas P. Hughes. *Networks of Power: Electricity in Western Society, 1880-1930*. Baltimore: The John Hopkins University Press (1983) 297.

⁷⁵ Murray et al., *A Superpower* 18.

Note. The Federal Water Power Act of 1920 sought to facilitate economic development of hydroelectricity through a partnership between the government and capitalists in private business organizing the power industry for profit ventures while the government sought to protect the interests of consumers and the public. In this legislation, progressive proponents succeeded in establishing a single federal regulatory agency, the Federal Power Commission, to coordinate policies and procedures as a government bureaucracy, to facilitate planned hydropower development and to expand regulation of utilities. Among its regulatory actions, the Federal Power Act authorized 50-year renewable leases for dam sites, sanctioned fees to cover administrative costs, and collected compensation to the United States for allowing private interests to use public property and resources. See Hirt, *The Wired Northwest* 175-178.

⁷⁶ Murray et al., *A Superpower* 18.

The power market envisioned superpower energy to furnish municipal, private, industrial, and railroad sources. The transmission grid would be shaped by locations of power demand. Managing energy infrastructure was based on efficiency, building electric generating units to the maximum size, reducing capital investment, and setting overall operating costs to a minimum. According to Murray's report, investment of \$1 billion for an integrated system would result in annual savings of more than \$200 million in less than 10 years over the unintegrated power system because of the integrated system would have a higher load factor and other economies intrinsic to a superpower scheme.⁷⁷

Then-Secretary of Commerce Herbert Hoover, revealing his engineering training, applauded this superpower scheme. A member of the Interior Department's Superpower Advisory Committee, Hoover quickly assumed a role in the Committee's leadership, working with Murray to organize and chair the Northeast States Superpower Commission. Hoover argued that the great post-World War I engineering challenge would be conveyance of electric power on a massive scale from central coal and hydroelectric generation facilities, across state lines, and for extended distances. He backed regional power systems as new, modern landscape features to provide inexpensive power for the most efficient use of local natural resources and raw materials. Central power generation meant that the nucleus of an economic region would revolve around energy, furnishing the technocratic lifeblood for regional industry, agriculture, transport, and homemaking, including the exchange of surplus power with other regions, a scheme Hoover favored. Yet, Hoover's visions were complicated by politics, mixing a 1920s American corporatist

⁷⁷ William Murray in Hughes, *Networks of Power* 297.

perspective with 19th century individualism.⁷⁸ The Secretary was onboard with public development for the modernization of the nation's rivers and waterways and approved the federal government's financing of large works such as hydroelectric dams for power schemes. However, Hoover opposed the public power concept, believing that government should stay out of the electric generating business because federal competition would violate the American commitment to economic freedom, private initiative, and individualism for its citizens.⁷⁹

The Insull Scheme

Early on, electricity proved to be a unique manufactured product – mass-produced, transported, distributed, and consumed all at the same instant – that could not be saved. Englishman Samuel Insull understood the challenges of the era's power generation business, pushing for then-existing technical expertise to devise an electric-utility paradigm that would significantly modify the power business structure. In 1907, Insull invested in a small utility in Chicago, trusting that energy production would run more efficiently when operated as a monopoly with more massive and centralized technology to cut production costs and be more proficient.⁸⁰

⁷⁸ Note. Alternative energy advocate Amory Lovins would argue nearly the opposite some fifty years later, favoring decentralized “soft energy paths” in a flurry of articles and books, beginning with the *Foreign Affairs* article, “Energy Strategy: The Road Not Taken?” (1976) 55: (1)63-96.

⁷⁹ William Hard. “Giant Negotiations for Giant Power: An Interview with Herbert Hoover,” in *The Survey* (1 March 1924) obtained from <http://www.unz.org/Pub/TheSurvey-1924mar01-00584> (2 Feb 2017) 577; Sarah T. Phillips. *This Land, This Nation: Conservation, Rural America, and the New Deal*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press (2007) 34; Stuart Chase. “A Vision in Kilowatts,” in *Fortune*, (1933) 7: (4)35, end of article 108.

⁸⁰ Harold Evans et al., “Samuel Insull” in *They Made America: “Newcomers,”* PBS Online/WGBH Website (2004) obtained from http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/theymadeamerica/filmmore/s2_pt.html (3 March 2017).

To profit in the electric-utility business, Insull had to sell his electric product to customers around the clock, generating and distributing electric power to anyone he could. Initially, Insull sought customers who would use electric power at times other than peak hours, as in all-night restaurants or drugstores and ice-firms that made ice at night. He pushed appliances, gave away electric irons, and offered to wire households on easy payment terms to initiate a cycle of growth that lowered the price of electric power. Lionized as an innovative businessman, Insull built an expanding utility empire as a public service corporation, democratizing electricity for profit. His electric power business organization had a profound social, cultural, and political impact on society – on what people did, where they went, and how hard individuals worked. To finance his business expansions, Insull conceived a holding company scheme that sold low-priced bonds and stock to his customers, marketed as a seemingly sound investment in electric and energy use. At one point, his utility empire, valued then at \$3 billion, served four million customers throughout thirty-two states.⁸¹

Insull's corporate shrewdness, however, left mixed results for the nation's power generation and distribution industry. Private commodity-based power systems such as Insull's enterprise had socioeconomic costs to consumers: minimal rural electric service and rate structures that favored investors. As such, private electric interests were motivated to consolidate into larger energy generation distribution systems; electric commerce could expand across local and state boundaries. Unfortunately, with the onset of the Great Depression, Insull's venture ended in economic collapse, with millions of investors who

⁸¹ Evans et al., "Samuel Insull."

put their faith in him, losing their investments, making him a scapegoat for the nation's economic despair.

Giant Power for a Social Revolution

Governor Gifford Pinchot and his power advisor Morris Cooke backed another important post-World War I energy planning scheme, Giant Power, coined to suggest “the realization of far-reaching social objectives through a vaulting engineering technique.”⁸² Giant Power would distribute generated electricity through private, municipal, and power cooperatives operating under individual management. However, contrary to Superpower thought, this plan would be integrated and regulated under state government to serve industrial, domestic, and rural sectors. Pinchot was a progressive, conservationist, and follower of Theodore Roosevelt;⁸³ Cooke was a consulting engineer noted for his liberal social views. Pinchot and Cook's power proposals reflected a populist approach: “[W]e are studying the social needs first.”⁸⁴

Gifford Pinchot in 1922 won the Pennsylvania gubernatorial election. A year later, he established the Giant Power Survey Board, directed by Morris Cooke with advisory board members that included Samuel Gompers and Arthur E. Morgan. The Board subsequently submitted a report to the General Assembly of Pennsylvania, concurrently circulating the Giant Power plan for nationwide publicity. Although a government-run power program, Giant Power's geographic scope was limited to Pennsylvania. Giant

⁸² Gifford Pinchot. “Giant Power” in *The Survey* (1 March 1924) obtained from <http://www.unz.org/Pub/TheSurvey-1924mar01-00584> (2 Feb 2017) 561.

⁸³ *Note.* President Theodore Roosevelt argued that ownership of water power resources should be reserved for the people, implying that water power development was a function of civic authority.

⁸⁴ Pinchot, “Giant Power” 561; Hughes, *Networks of Power* 301.

Power was distinctly different from other superpower plans in fostering a “social revolution” based on inexpensive electricity, which included electrifying rural regions. Modern technology to structure the system involved configuration of giant centralized mine-mouth power plants and long-transmission-wire networks.⁸⁵

The concept of mine-mouth plants originated from Cooke’s government advisory role on energy and transportation problems during World War I. Cook suggested as a conservation measure, the construction of large power plants at mine-mouths sites, to streamline energy generation and delivery efficiency along high voltage lines to load centers for consumer distribution. At the time, Cooke set out to build mine-mouth power plants in eastern Pennsylvania to generate electricity for cross-state power delivery to the city of Philadelphia. His plan included coal by-product ovens to process raw bituminous coal, deriving chemical compounds from the resource before delivering fuel material to the power plant. Sale of these by-products — estimated in 1924 at one billion dollars annually — was supposed to reduce consumer costs of carbo-electricity, with rates on par with hydroelectricity rates in the West.⁸⁶

Pinchot and Cooke sought not only to lower rates for citizens but embarked on a social crusade to electrify rural areas and lower rates for small-town users. To Pinchot, “[o]ne of the most pronounced and untoward effects of the Industrial Revolution with its mechanical power was the massing of population in urban centers.”⁸⁷ He thought that if

⁸⁵ Hughes, *Networks of Power* 301; Nye, *Electrifying America* 297.

⁸⁶ Hughes, *Network of Power* 299, 302; Energy Education. “Mine Mouth” (n.d.) obtained from http://energyeducation.ca/encyclopedia/Mine_mouth (30 Nov 2016); Joseph Stella. “The Coal By-Products Oven,” in *The Survey* (1 March 1924) obtained from <http://www.unz.org/Pub/TheSurvey-1924mar01-00584> (2 Feb 2017) 563.

⁸⁷ Pinchot, “Giant Power” 561.

“mechanical energy can not only be made cheap but distributed broadly, authorities agree in predicting a spreading out of population – a veritable ‘back to the land’ movement.”⁸⁸ Until the 1920s, few regions in the United States had seen an effort to develop power systems in rural areas. Of those, serious efforts were limited to more densely populated country districts or areas contiguous to urban or semi-urban centers — less difficult areas for building an electric transmission infrastructure.⁸⁹ If electricity could be delivered hundreds of miles from where it was produced, then the social stratifications developed during the steam age could be reversed, especially for rural residents. This revolutionary source of power would “put the farmer on an equality with the townsman.”⁹⁰

Private companies such as General Electric and Westinghouse, took an early interest in rural electrification, pushed for its development, and were keen to reach the farm market with labor-saving machinery. Many of their advertisements promoted poultry raising and dairy farms: “[M]ore light – more eggs . . . by using electric light to prolong the day in the hen house.”⁹¹ David Nye argued American farmers faced two disadvantages in the rural power market: 90% of farms could not get power distribution lines strung to their homes, and those that did, often paid twice as much for power wheeled to them off the grid as their urban counterparts.⁹² Private utility companies could achieve greater profits by serving dense urban sectors and increasing appliance sales to that

⁸⁸ Ibid.

⁸⁹ Ibid.

⁹⁰ Pinchot quoted in Phillips, *This Land, This Nation* 27.

⁹¹ Note. In 1924, the National Electric Light Association (NELA) Rural Electric Service Committee report in *Proceedings of the Forty-Seventh Convention* had shown installing two 40-watt bulbs in the henhouse and turning them on a few hours before dawn claimed a poultry farmer could raise his productivity by 50 percent in the winter months, increasing annual profits by \$80. See David Nye *Electrifying America* 296-297.

⁹² Nye, *Electrifying America* 287.

customer base than to market electric products to sparsely populated rural areas. General Electric in *General Electric Digest* concluded that the “ ‘purchasing power of . . . 1.9 million [rural customers] [was] too low to put them in the potential customer market . . . A mile of distribution line can serve 50 to 200 customers in the city; in the country the average is three customers to a mile.’”⁹³ In 1923, National Electric Light Association (NELA) supervised a rural test project: twelve rural lines were constructed to serve 359 families in Pennsylvania. Only two lines made a profit and the overall project lost \$8,000 on an investment of \$94,000.⁹⁴

Advocates for Giant Power trusted in government and expected it would act as an external force to change the trend of private development of the electric light and power industry, not only in the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania, but for the rest of the nation. State authority to oversee and control regional power planning would include complex government regulatory features to safeguard against monopolistic corporate practices and guide the development of the power industry to its full potential to meet social ends. Pinchot and Cooke believed that a state-regulated, unified power system would bring about social restructuring and supply general needs more efficiently, specifically to bring cheap power outside urban areas. Power (electric power, manufacturing power, economic power) need no longer be confined to the city; equity would be the overall outcome of an efficient power system. State-operated power would give Pinchot and Cooke the opportunity through governmental means to educate the public about electricity and regional

⁹³ Ibid., 297.

⁹⁴ Ibid.

power to the point “where [government] can intelligently and fully cooperate with public and private enterprise” to reach stated social objectives.⁹⁵ Proponents agreed that Giant Power represented prospects for nation building while demonstrating how new scientific discoveries and the “art” of power generation might be “applied to effect immeasurably for good the lives of all the people.”⁹⁶ Giant Power, unfortunately, suffered defeat in the 1926 Pennsylvania legislative session at the hands of private utility lobby interests.

Early 20th Century Regionalist Thought

Social reformer John Dewey astutely observed, “The country is a spread of localities, while the nation is something that exists in Washington and other seats of government.”⁹⁷ Intellectual regional movements emerged in domestic locales of pre-1930s America, finding their roots in shared environments, economies, and cultures that matured together without pretension. Whereas American eastern industrial capitalists of the 1920s witnessed the self-styled roaring twenties bring prosperity to many, the decade saw populist social conflict and anxiety in other areas of the country. Industrial cities of the Northeast and upper Midwest suffered from substandard urban living conditions, rural areas were in decline, and some in the lesser populated South and West expressed mixed feelings about industrial expansion into their domains. Regionalism offered an alternative to this national discord in a cultural, social, and historical context.

Sociologist Howard W. Odum argued that regionalist thought pushed 19th

⁹⁵ Pinchot, “Giant Power” 561.

⁹⁶ Ibid., 562; Phillips, *This Land, This Nation* 29-30; Hughes, *Networks of Power* 304.

⁹⁷ Michael C. Steiner. “Regionalism in the Great Depression,” in *Geographical Review* 73: (1983) 432.

century sectionalism toward new, dynamic principles of subnational development. Odum believed that recognition of regional strengths would allow diversity to form in a coordinated whole, with the nation richer for it.⁹⁸

Influenced by geographers and conservationists, individuals such as Clarence Stein, Lewis Mumford, Benton MacKaye, and Henry Wright formed a new, but little recognized group, the Regional Planning Association of America (RPAA) in 1923. The RPAA through its members, promoted an ideology of regionalism in the 1920s and 1930s. It advocated for rational and scientifically planned communities and landscapes that dispersed the industrial masses and balanced the agrarian populace.⁹⁹ RPAA's ideology would enable a shift in economies and society, encouraging decentralization to stimulate economic development in rural areas and gradually ease urban crowding.¹⁰⁰ To the extreme, Lewis Mumford, preached that the fusion of technical power to meet humanistic

⁹⁸ Harvey Kantor. "Implications of Folk, Planning, and Regionalism," in *American Journal of Sociology*, 79: (1973) 286.

Note. Odum's full comment on sectionalism vs. regionalism from the Natural Resources Committee report (1935): "[R]egionalism envisages the nation first, making the total national culture the final arbiter, while sectionalism emphasizes political boundaries and state sovereignty, technical legislation, and local loyalties. Where sectionalism features partisan separateness, regionalism connotes component and constituent parts of the national culture. In the third place, sectionalism may be likened to cultural inbreeding whereas regionalism is line breeding, or regionalism may be considered as cultural specialization within geographical bounds in an age which continuously demands wider contacts and standardized activities: or it may be the way of quality in a quantity world. In the fourth place, sectionalism is an analogous to the old individualism while regionalism features cooperative endeavor. And finally, one of the most critical aspects of sectionalism is that it must ultimately lead to a centralized coercive federalism, which is contrary to the stated ideals of American democracy." See National Resources Committee Report (1935) vii-ix.

⁹⁹ *Note.* The RPAA represented one form of radical reform supporting social management by technicians (technocrats) to provide wise management of social development, through planning thought and government policy. Ideology ranged from reshaping America from available resources to using technology to embody a new social order involving acceptance of new values which would displace "a mean and inferior kind of life with a completely different kind" (Mumford in Spann, *Modern America* 163).

¹⁰⁰ See Edward K. Spann. *Designing Modern America: The Regional Planning Association of America and its Members*. Columbus: Ohio State University Press (1996); Eve Vogel. "The Columbia River's Region: Politics, Place and Environment in the Pacific Northwest, 1933-Present (PhD Dissertation), University of Oregon (2007) 34; Phillips, *This Land, This Nation* 30-33; Kantor, "Implications of Folk" 278.

ends needed extreme change in basic social values, and in 1933, Mumford expressed disappointment in Roosevelt's planning policies calling them "a half-baked revolution which would neither break with the past nor lead us into the future."¹⁰¹

Diverse regionalist thought developed during the decade of the Great Depression. Many of its proponents self-described themselves as "agrarians, distributists, decentralists, back-to-the-land and subsistence-homesteading advocates."¹⁰² Their ideology covered the spectrum, from progressive intellectuals who envisioned regionalism advancing the cause of the worker, centrists supporting New Deal policies as a tool for economic reform, and traditional conservatives seeking restoration of agrarian values. They were searching for underlying fault lines of American culture exposed during the Great Depression and rediscovered a "whole world of marvels on the continent to possess – a world of rivers and scenes, of folklore and regional culture, of a heroic tradition to reclaim and of forgotten heroes to follow."¹⁰³

During the tumultuous Depression years, there was a desire for a stable America, a sense of order, and certainty. Human-centered regionalists considered natural settings in which folk cultures could flourish as a corrective to a top-heavy machine civilization, whereas ecologically oriented regionalists tried to fit civilizations into the capacities of the land.¹⁰⁴ Even by the early 20th century, capitalism had an ingrained reputation for moral bankruptcy, hence the common impulse for some to find the social answer in an agrarian scheme of regionalism. The Southern Agrarians at Vanderbilt University

¹⁰¹ Lewis Mumford in Edward Spann. *Designing Modern America: The Regional Planning Association of America and its Members*. Columbus: Ohio State University Press (1996) 164.

¹⁰² Steiner, "Regionalism in the Great Depression" 430.

¹⁰³ Alfred Kazin quoted in Steiner, "Regionalism in the Great Depression" 431.

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, 432-433.

expressed their own conservative ideas of regionalism, vaunting the traditional values of the southern farmer. The Southern Agrarians supported the virtues of a traditional South against intrusion from Northern government and industry, to protect the holdings of small farmers. The Agrarians primarily feared limits placed on the free marketplace and worried about potential adverse effects of planning on personal liberty.¹⁰⁵

Decentralist intellectuals of the 1930s, led by journalist and agrarian Herbert Agar, worried about reversing the trend of large-scale industrialization and considered urbanization a threat to a society of small propertied landholders. For Agar, decentralization of industry was the only way to preserve the Jeffersonian Ideal of equality and independence as he believed that federal government policies toward big business caused the Great Depression by creating an imbalance between production and consumption. Decentralists supported electricity as a route toward dispersing industry for regional progress: As electricity was easily adapted to small factories, home and farm industries, manufacturing need not remain concentrated near sources of coal for steam power. These ideas were comparable to the social reform underlying the Ontario Hydro Project and the Giant Power scheme in Pennsylvania.¹⁰⁶

Only two decades earlier, feminists hoped electricity would transform a home into a kitchenless apartment.¹⁰⁷ Now agrarian zealots wanted the opposite, hoping Americans would reject the city in favor of rural life. Advocates believed that Americans would return to the countryside, aided by electrification to make decentralization work, and spurn

¹⁰⁵ Note. See Phillips, *This Land, This Nation*, Chapter 2.

¹⁰⁶ Note. See Edward S. Shapiro. "Decentralist Intellectuals and the New Deal," in *The Journal of American History* 58: (1972) 938-957.

¹⁰⁷ Nye, *Electrifying America* 247-248.

giant utility companies as a threat to the local. Both factions expected electricity to create a new society. Unfortunately, 90% of farmers in the early 20th century remained without electricity, were poor, and endured low agricultural prices and debt.¹⁰⁸

In this era, sociologist Howard W. Odum became a leading promoter of regionalism, even expanding his research on “Negro” culture in the southern United States to identify behavioral patterns that were indigenous to certain places. To him, these distinctive habits and patterns of behavior formed unifying themes in the development of specific localities, asserting the social scientist's value in solving the complex social issues of the early 20th century. Assigned to survey the nation and all social facets of the time, Odum fostered the concept of the *folk region* as a major unit, legitimizing his research as an active member of President Herbert Hoover’s Research Commission on Social Trends from 1929 to 1933. Later he began to understand the complexity of national social planning and the struggle to integrate ideas of regional patterns into American society. In 1930, he published *An American Epoch*, which detailed the immense economic and physical resources of the southern United States along with early examples of how a region could transform itself into a strong industrial and urban economy. Odum expressed optimism about the South’s potential significant role in the nation’s progress.¹⁰⁹

¹⁰⁸ Nye, *Electrifying America* 307.

¹⁰⁹ Kantor, “Implications of Folk” 282-283.

Note. Odum’s work directly opposed that of the Southern Agrarians at Vanderbilt University who expressed their own conservative ideas on regionalism that vaunted traditional values of southern agrarianism. The Southern Agrarians supported the virtues of a traditional South against intrusion by the Northern government and industry in order to protect the holdings of small farmers. The Agrarians’ primary fear was limiting the traditions of the free marketplace and worries that planning would work against personal liberty. See Phillips, *This Land, This Nation* Chapter 2.

In 1936, Odum published *Southern Regions of the United States*, which analyzed characteristics of the South, establishing his reputation as a leading national theorist on regionalism. *Southern Regions* inventoried geographic and physical factors that characterized the South, detailing the lifestyles of its people, education, government, and culture in relation to agricultural, industrial, technical, and other economic components. Odum introduced the premise that “forces of state, region, and the nation had to be combined further . . . to form a new ‘motivation and realistic design with adequate stabilizing and permanently reinforced agencies of action.’ ”¹¹⁰ He argued that regionalism was a means of maintaining a balance between the new and the old, the rural and the urban, the agrarian and the industrial, the folkways of the people and the “technicways” formed by scientific advances. And, this would be attainable with adequate social planning that was “based upon the actualities of both cultural development and scientific principles, and upon practical, workable techniques growing out of factual [regional] inventories.”¹¹¹ This ideology in Odum’s work contributed to the growing national push for more enlightened and resource-wise planning schemes, without losing sight of the local “folk” psychology in instituting provincial plans.¹¹²

Odum’s regional philosophy presented several alternatives and proposals for the early 20th century. In *American Regionalism* (1938), Odum and co-author Henry E. Moore claimed decentralization was inherent to reaching a balanced rate of national growth. Cities should not grow at the expense of the hinterland. Thinking regionally

¹¹⁰ Howard Odum quoted in Kantor, “Implications of Folk” 284.

¹¹¹ Ibid.

¹¹² Kantor, “Implications of Folk” 284, 288.

would shift the nation away from concentrating wealth and power in one location toward a totality that promotes “unity, homogeneity, and comprehensiveness.”¹¹³ “Regionalism is the antithesis to false cosmopolitanism,” Odum said, and faith in regionalism would counteract the tendency of cities to monopolize resources and wealth.¹¹⁴ For Odum, regionalism had an organic characteristic where time, space, and people are considered together, with no group isolated from its natural geographic or cultural base, creating a sense of security and opportunity for individuals to achieve their full potential.

Historian Barry Karl explained that the regionalist movement of the early 20th century in a sense offered compromise in its attempt to create public-private national interconnections that equitably distributed the nation’s natural resources and its development to all.¹¹⁵ Such development would include national waterways to generate power as part of the framework for such regional ideas. While the national waterways in the early 20th century declined as transportation routes, a new symbiosis was developing in its place involving technology and nature.

Franklin Roosevelt in the post-World War I period became interested in the government’s role in planned management of public policy. National wartime coordination encouraged early planners who expected the federal government to administer new nationwide programs, much to the displeasure of those who regarded this as a threat to local autonomy. Yet, national calamities associated with disasters such as floods and high-casualty dam failures began to change community attitudes about dams, modern

¹¹³ Ibid., 285.

¹¹⁴ Odum quoted in Kantor, “Implications of Folk” 285.

¹¹⁵ Barry D. Karl. “Constitution and Central Planning: The Third New Deal Revisited” in *The Supreme Court Review* (1988) 169-172.

engineering, and eventually electricity as manmade marvels that manipulated nature for human benefit. State and local governments traditionally were bound by local public jurisdictions; however rivers crossed state lines and complicated politics, edging the federal government into positions of control over the distribution of national resources. Pre-New Deal Americans were hesitant about public ownership of utilities, perhaps due to the still undefined modern public responsibility for managing natural resources and technology within a culture that still professed a belief in, and loyalty to, American individualism and heritage. Even though national planning schemes remained unpopular during the 1920s, transboundary issues and conflicts were developing beyond local and state jurisdictions. As a result, discussions began of concepts such as district-style governance and other ideas for managing the distribution of modern services.¹¹⁶

Muscle Shoals and the “Valley Authority”

There was no post-World War I Congressional consensus on the disposal of two federal nitrate-fixing plants on the Tennessee River at Muscle Shoals, Alabama. These industrial plants used electricity during the Great War to remove nitrogen from the air to make gunpowder and fertilizer.¹¹⁷ In the early 1920s, the Harding and Coolidge Administrations offered the chemical plant and its hydroelectric facilities to private business for purchase, but there was little interest. In 1921 amidst a flourish of publicity, Henry Ford proposed to purchase the site from the government.

¹¹⁶ Ibid., 169-173.

¹¹⁷ Note. According to Hirt, World War I ended before the hydroelectric facility was completed as a power source for the plants. See Hirt, *The Wired Northwest* 174.

Ford sought social modernization of the Tennessee and Mississippi River Valleys through development of electricity for industrial and urban expansion. He envisioned an advanced linear city, running 75 miles along the Tennessee River region. He promised interclass mobility for farmers and rural residents, an industrialized countryside, and modernization for the advancement of personal well-being and revitalized community relationships. The media of the day capitalized on Ford's fame and futuristic imagery, declaring that Ford would make profound changes to this national landscape through electric power as he did with the automobile (Fig. 3-3).¹¹⁸

Under the leadership of Senator George Norris of Nebraska, progressives opposed Henry Ford's Muscle Shoals proposal. Norris sought legislation requiring the federal government to retain the Muscle Shoals facilities because power plants, he believed, should be utilized for the social benefit of its citizenry (or the public good). As a conservationist, Senator Norris sided with fellow progressives such as Gifford Pinchot, for utilitarian yet democratic development of the nation's natural resources. Norris diverged from Pinchot and Cooke in claiming inexpensive public power could not be achieved merely through government regulatory powers. Norris put the matter bluntly, "Every stream in the United States which flow from the mountains through the meadows to the sea has the possibility of producing electricity for cheap power and cheap lighting, so to be carried into homes and business and industry. This natural source was given by an all-wise

¹¹⁸ Tobey, *Technology as Freedom* 48-49; Phillips, *This Land, This Nation* 33-34; "Rush for Muscle Shoals: Ford's Proposed Seventy-five-Mile City Already Attracting Thousands" in *The New York Times*, 12 February 1922. *Note.* Henry Ford in the late 1920s was an ambitious planner of places, acquiring an area twice the size of Delaware in the Brazilian Amazon as an urban building site, something NYU historian Greg Grandin discusses in *Fordlandia: The Rise and Fall of Henry Ford's Forgotten Jungle City*, New York: Metropolitan Books/Macmillan, 2010.

Creator to his people and not to organizations of greed.”¹¹⁹ He trusted that inexpensive public power would bolster rural communities through regional distribution of electricity to attract manufacturing opportunities to uplift the nation’s rural agrarian base.¹²⁰ Norris succeeded in blocking Ford’s proposal to purchase Muscle Shoals from the government.

Muscle Shoals was an emblem of the debate over electric power in the United States prior to the New Deal, with capitalist interests struggling with the public power movement. Most post-World War I progressives and a handful of rural populists agreed with Norris that the energy consumer, government, and publicly-owned utilities shared common interests.¹²¹ Norris espoused electric power in terms of human rights and minimal standards rather than profit and loss, because development of natural resources for the community represented democratic ideals and was a distinctive defense against monopolistic corporate power schemes.¹²² By mid-decade, “For the Public Good” was a motto embraced by progressives who questioned the value and efficacy of government rate regulations alone to secure electric power for the benefit of all Americans. A new stratagem was adopted to advance distribution of inexpensive electricity: backing publicly-owned power utilities.¹²³ Nonetheless, progressives continued to struggle against private for-profit utilities for fair access to electricity at an equitable rate for the remainder of the decade.

¹¹⁹ Norris in Tobey, *Technology as Freedom* 47.

¹²⁰ Note. In 1925, Norris visited the Ontario Hydro Project in Canada and came away persuaded that a large public power system could operate effectively and efficiently in the U.S. See Phillips, *This Land, This Nation* 34.

¹²¹ Note. Progressives were frustrated by conservative progressives, who still stressed individualism and competition, and found it difficult to accept social reform that included government-run power schemes. See Tobey, *Technology as Freedom* 48-49.

¹²² Tobey, *Technology as Freedom* 48-49; Nye, *Electrifying America* 304; Hirt, *The Wired Northwest* 174; Phillips, *This Land, This Nation* 33-34.

¹²³ Tobey, *Technology as Freedom* 45.

Franklin Roosevelt developed a vision for the nation: develop large areas of the country to absorb new settlements. National planning would address the inflow of the rural population to the cities, bursting their boundaries, with a backflow plan to move people to the suburbs and beyond. As New York Governor, Roosevelt would address the State legislature in 1932, with ambitious plans as he was turning 50:

We seem to have established that the distribution of population during these recent years has got out of balance, and that there is an overpopulation of the larger communities . . . An immediate gain can occur if as many people as possible can return closer to the sources of agriculture food supply. This is not a mere “back-to-the-farm” movement. It is based on the fact that the pendulum has swung too far in the direction of the cities and that readjustment must take place to restore the economic and sociological balance.

I am a great believer in the larger aspect of regional planning and in my judgment the time has come for this State to adopt a far-reaching policy of land utilization and of population distribution.¹²⁴

A single year later, he confirmed the sentiment by advocating for establishment of the Tennessee Valley Authority (TVA). Roosevelt said, “It is time to extend planning to a wider field . . . If we are successful here [TVA] we can march on, step by step, in like development of other great natural territorial units,” constituting a potential new framework to establish public domain for future settlement and decentralization.¹²⁵

The TVA, a Congressionally-authorized federal corporation, was established to institute progressive principles in implementing an energy-centric regional planning

¹²⁴ Franklin Roosevelt in Benton MacKaye. “The Tennessee River Project: First Step in a National Plan,” in *The New York Times*, 16 April 1933. ProQuest Historical Newspapers: *The New York Times* 23.

¹²⁵ Ibid.

scheme. Labeled “Democracy on the March,”¹²⁶ the TVA promised to uplift depressed regions through utilitarian conservation — to reforest, to reclaim, to channelize, to resettle the land — by developing Tennessee River Basin resources to boost economic and social opportunity for the people (Fig. 3-4).¹²⁷ Roosevelt and progressive proponents wanted to reorganize the federal government and construct an American society with modern science and technology fearlessly applied to regional geography to make its river valleys more productive, to prevent erosion and floods, and to wheel light and electrical current via power lines to kitchens and farms hundreds of miles away. Whereas the old American sectional frontiers were all about the strong-handed pioneer with an axe and plow who could take up free land and live a life independent of neighbors, the New Frontier promised a modern, industrial society that demanded regionalist thought. It depended on diverse constituents working together for the common good, and prospering through interdependence with their neighbors in public-private partnerships. The New Deal government wanted to establish a new vision for the “common man’s” future, where land could produce an abundance to make real the modern American dream of equal opportunity for its citizens.

¹²⁶ David E. Lilienthal, *TVA: democracy on the march*, Westport: Greenwood Press, (1953).

¹²⁷ Note. Benton MacKaye supported utilization of Muscle Shoals power resources and development of the Tennessee Valley Authority. He touted a new framework of national planning using technology to reforest, reclaim, and resettle the land, to ease migration and to control the distribution of population. The Tennessee Valley was to be the first of five critical upstream source valleys in the Mississippi Basin, which occupies two-fifths of the continental United States and controls downstream reclamation of the fertile lower Mississippi flood plain. But the Tennessee River was part of the Great Appalachian Valley – a major water highway from Chattanooga to Lake Champlain – and a heavily populated corridor with fertile soil and abundant resources. With new supplies of electric power from central generation plants delivered through transmission lines, modern planners believed manufacturing growth would cause a population distribution that would discourage development of metropolitan centers, constituting a new framework for a public domain for future settlement. See Benton MacKaye, “The Tennessee River Project” 23; Edward K. Spann, *Designing Modern America*, Chapter XIV.

Electricity: A Social Process

Technology is not a mere assemblage of machines; it is a social process and an internal interaction that develops and adapts to the innovations and the human culture of the era. Restated by David Nye, “Technology is an extension of human lives: someone makes it, someone owns it, some oppose it, many use it, and all interpret it.”¹²⁸ American electrification and the evolution of its social meaning from 1880 through the 1920s was influenced, if not determined, by differing views of corporate and governmental powers. Publicly-owned and municipal utilities seldom expanded beyond the boundaries of the bodies that owned them. During the pre-World War I period, initial consolidation of manufacturing electrical power equipment by General Electric and Westinghouse, along with technical innovations (e.g., long-range transmission), aided private corporations — rather than government entities — to better develop and manage early regional electrical power distribution.¹²⁹

Regulatory power and ownership of electric utilities through the early decades of the 20th century became part of national energy politics. While the Great War created movement toward electric system integration and resultant markets, the federal government during the post-World War I period retreated from cultivating technology, giving way to traditional private-sector industrial control. Seeking regional harmony for a heterogeneous population, progressives foresaw a society where electricity lifted the standard of living for small towns and farms by dispersing and decentralizing industries away from greedy urban centers. Progressives held that inexpensive electricity rates were the

¹²⁸ Nye, *Electrifying America* ix.

¹²⁹ *Ibid.*, 182.

key to reform, utilizing two basic approaches to lower electric power rates: government regulations and publicly-owned utilities. However the rise of for-profit utility holding companies during the 1920s offset the power of local and state regulatory utility commissions. As holding companies expanded with stockholder investment, they became interstate entities, regularly headquartered outside the locations of most of their electrical generating ventures. This was not entirely without reason, since with a proliferation of hydroelectric (and later, nuclear and coal-plant) power, moving the product often meant crossing state lines and even transnational boundaries. Under these conditions, a regulatory commission in one state could not conduct a financial audit of a utility holding company with a corporate head office in another state. Therefore, state governing bodies and commissions were barred from judging the fairness of local rates — or meddling in their calculation and establishment.¹³⁰

Development of electricity in the American landscape came in three stages. First, electric lighting was introduced to domestic markets to illuminate America's main streets, The Great White Ways. Second, the power business built up and expanded into industry, street traction companies, and underground railways, balancing diminishing evening domestic consumption with heavy daytime demand. Third, home appliances proliferated, beginning in 1910 with fans and heaters and then the post-World War I expansion of large household appliances. This third stage included household purchases of stoves, refrigerators, washing machines, clothes dryers, vacuum cleaners, and comparable items

¹³⁰ Tobey, *Technology as Freedom* 43-45.

that continued until the mid-20th century, when the electric revolution had insinuated its way into every American dwelling.¹³¹

According to Ronald Tobey, despite the enthusiasm for electricity and promised social reforms, during the early 20th century fundamental economic and demographic constraints restricted the mass adoption of household appliances. The decade's capitalist economy caused an unequal distribution of income so that only the upper 20% of households could afford electric appliances.¹³² In fact, the average residential dwelling technically could not support multiple electric appliances — economically or in wiring and infrastructure. Economic limits constrained modernization for most American homes, with debt committed to the automobile. Appliances remained costly as manufacturers and utility companies sought to quench the appetite of the luxury market, rendering the adoption of appliances to social status, and failing to create a true mass market for electric domestic devices. Though Tobey points out, five years into Roosevelt's New Deal policies (1937), credit plans to subsidize consumerism and home owning, helped to bring the white middle class and workers the quality of life progressives defined as modern electric.¹³³

By 1930, private utilities had generated and distributed 95% of the electricity in the United States, whereas utility cooperatives and municipal utilities represented only 5% of production. Ninety percent of the electricity generated by power utilities was

¹³¹ Nye, *Images Worlds* 22, 62-63; Nye, *Electrifying America* 182-183.

¹³² Tobey, *Technology as Freedom* 33.

¹³³ *Ibid.*, 33-34. 177. *Note.* Debt-based consumption became a new symbol of electric power modernization (Tobey, *Technology as Freedom* 126).

distributed to urban areas, whereas only 10% of rural areas were serviced.¹³⁴ The Great Depression and the progressive presidential campaign of Franklin Roosevelt provided agency for interest in regionalism for the transmission of electricity, with planning objectives focused on navigation and electric power projects to achieve modernity and progress in a democratic society (Fig. 3-5a-e).

¹³⁴ “Electricity in the Limelight: Federal Theater Project Takes on the Power Industry” on New Deal Network Website, obtained from <http://newdeal.feri.org/power/essay01.htm> (3 May 2017).

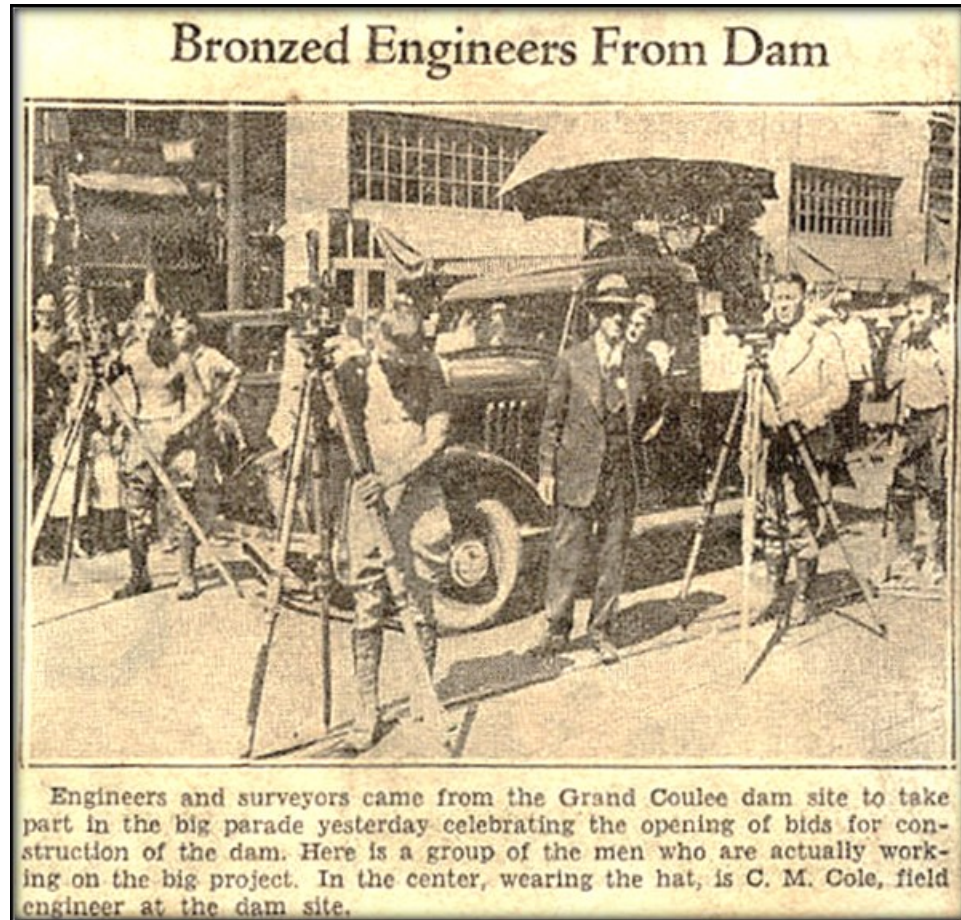


Figure 3-1. “Bronzed Engineers From Dam.”

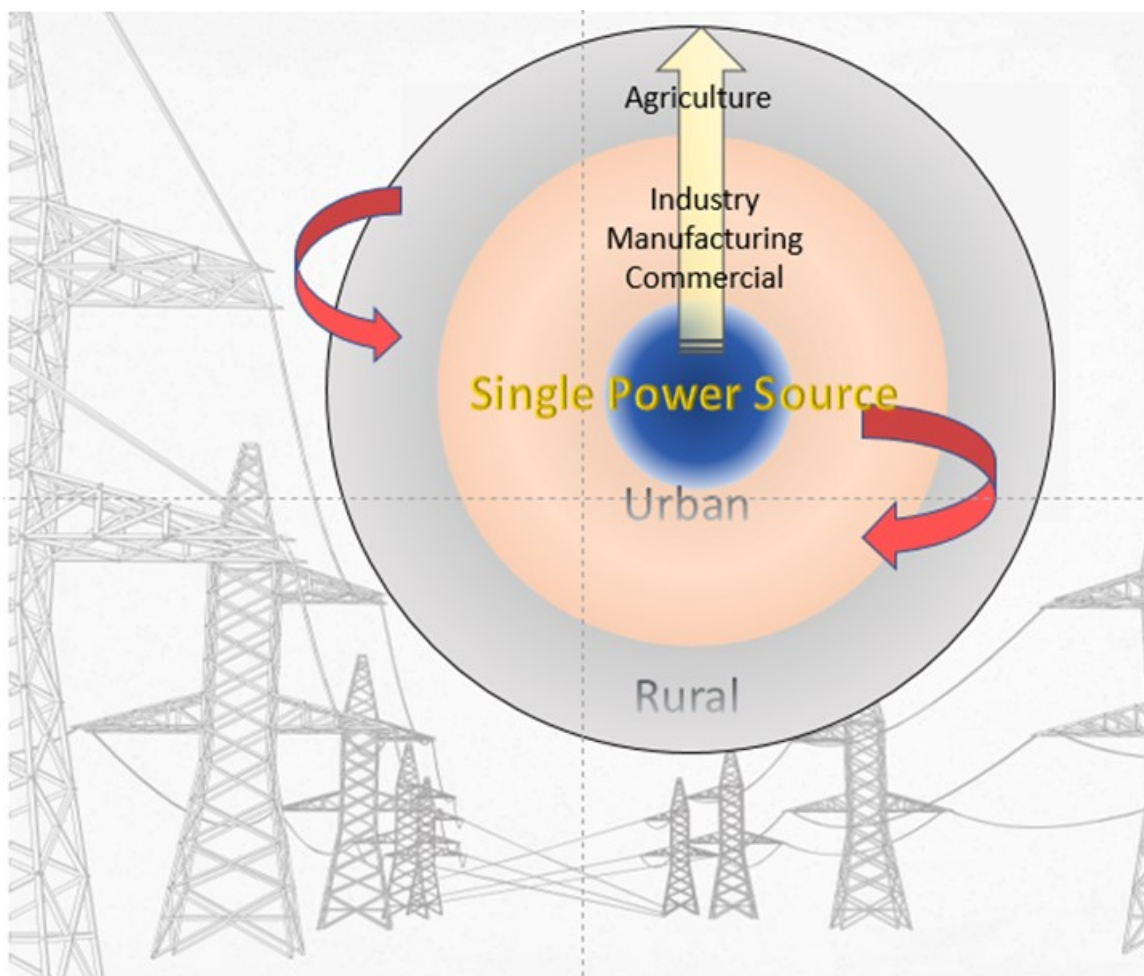
Credit: *Spokesman-Review*, 19 June 1934.

Photographer: unknown.

WSU Libraries Digital Collections. State History Box 92. sh92-285.

Caption Text: Engineers and surveyors came from the Grand Coulee dam site to take part in the big parade yesterday celebrating the opening of bids for construction of the dam. Here is a group of the men who are actually working on the big project. In the center, wearing the hat, is C.M. Coe, field engineer at the dam site.

Figure 3-1. A New Labor Force. The nature of modernizing the landscape created the hero-engineer and idealized ‘manly’ worker image. Healthy, robust males posed with tools of technology. Grand Coulee Day held a symbolic transition from a manual labor economy to technical society. These workers posed as the image of a new labor force – youthful, venturesome and resourceful – who became responsible for the intricacies of technology. The suited man, identified as a field engineer, gazed into the camera confident New Deal initiatives would bring prosperity back to the people.



Kotkoa-Freepik.com
K.Heslop

Figure 3-2. Regional Ontario Hydropower Model.

Figure 3-2. Regional Ontario Hydropower Model. Inexpensive power can reorganize a region culturally in a pattern of decentralization to increase prosperity. A single power generating source, transmission networks, and provincial regulation brought benefits for industry, commerce and employment opportunities radiate from urban areas to rural areas, checking the tide of migration away from the traditional countryside. The key is inexpensive electricity served up at low rates to towns, hamlets, villages and farms to help make rural life more attractive, to upbuild small communities for support to maintain the family unit. This would feed back into an overall loop of healthier regional life and cultural interactions. (See Sir Adam Beck, Ontario's Experience 1928 and Martha Bensley Bruère, Following the Hydro 1928).



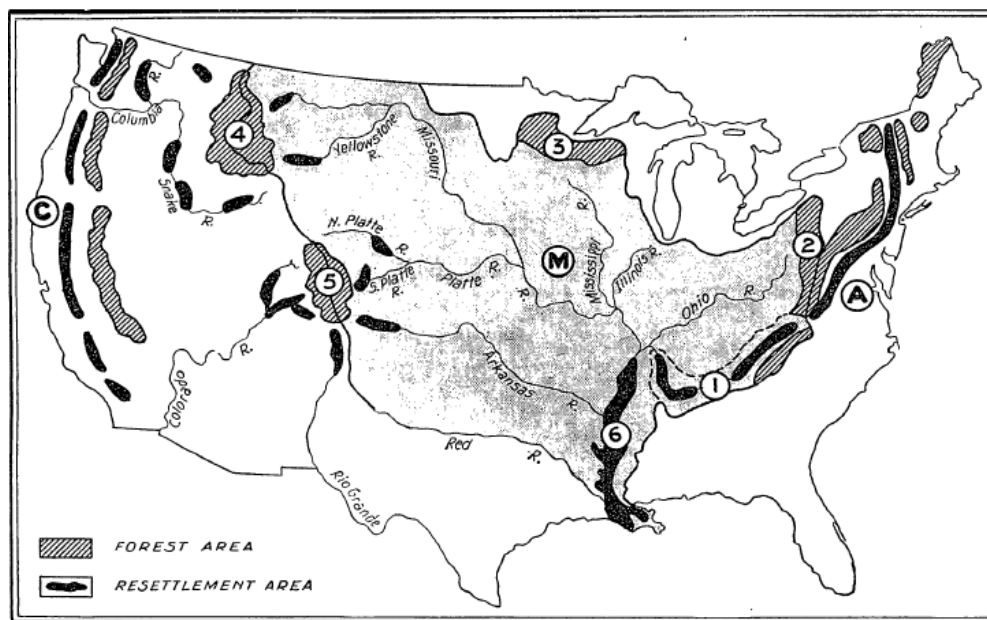
Figure 3-3. Henry Ford at Wilson, near Muscle Shoals, Alabama, 1921.

Date: 1921.

Photographer: Unknown.

Collection of *The Henry Ford*. Gift of Ford Motor Company. 84.1.1660.P.O.456.

Figure 3-3. Henry Ford at Wilson, near Muscle Shoals, Alabama, 1921. Amidst a barrage of publicity, the ambitious Henry Ford proposed to lease the surplus federal nitrate-fixing plants and its hydroelectric facilities near Muscle Shoals, Alabama, to exhibit his vision of private capitalism. Ford sought social modernization for the Tennessee and Mississippi River valleys through the expansion of hydroelectric facilities for industrial and urban development, envisioning a seventy-five-mile advanced linear city along the shores of the Tennessee River. Touting his fame and reputation for futuristic imagery, Ford promised profound changes to this landscape, suggesting interclass mobility for farmers and rural residents, and modernization to advance personal well-being and revitalization of community relationships. Yet Senator George Norris sought federal legislation for the government to retain the Muscle Shoals facilities for the social benefits of its citizenry: for the public good. Progressives advocated government regulations and democratic development of the nation's natural resources to regionally distribute electricity, particularly to the nation's agrarian base. (See this Dissertation Chapter 3, Muscle Shoals and the Valley Authority).



LANES OF NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT.
 (A) Appalachian Valleys. (M) Mississippi Basin. (C) Columbia-Sacramento Valley. (1) Tennessee Valley. (2) Pittsburgh-Allegheny Area. (3) Minnesota-Wisconsin Forest Area. (4) Columbia-Yellowstone Area. (5) Colorado-Platte Area. (6) Lower Mississippi Area.

Figure 3-4. Lanes of National Development. (Map) in “The Tennessee River Project: First Step in a National Plan,” in *The New York Times*, 16 April 1933.

Credit: Benton MacKaye.

New York Times, 16-April-1933. ProQuest Historical Newspapers: *The New York Times* 23.

Caption Text: Lanes of National Development. (A) Appalachian Valleys. (M) Mississippi Basin. (C) Columbia-Sacramento Valley. (1) Tennessee Valley. (2) Pittsburgh-Allegheny Area. (3) Minnesota-Wisconsin Forest Area. (4) Columbia-Yellowstone Area. (6) Colorado-Platte Area.

Figure 3-4. Benton MacKaye in “The Tennessee River Project: First Step in a National Plan” presented a plan as a response to the close of the traditional frontier and end of free lands, to enable American lands to reopen to new settlement through reforestation and reclamation. He expressed the need for improved agriculture in the Tennessee Valley and other river valleys with the ultimate goal of decentralization of the population. This could be done through decentralization of industrial facilities supported by inexpensive hydroelectric power, possibly covering one-fifth of the nation for a new ‘public domain’ for future resettlement. MacKaye said a “decentralized life [means] ... new towns, new roads, new human settings” to conserve not only the nature environment, but the full psychological and cultural habitat needed for full human development” (In Spann, *Modern America* 154). The map reinforced the discourse introducing new cultural settlement patterns that offered an exciting and compelling vision of new economic development for many regions of the nation, to picture a socio-agenda of a new political power.

Figures 3-5a-e. The 1934 National Resources Committee (NRC) Report presented five regional plans to decentralize planning from Washington DC and redirect it back to state commissions. The NRC recommended such areal arrangements as an attempt to make use of sectional loyalty in its planning activities. It should be noted that Plan 1, based upon “Composite Planning Problems” denotes the Pacific Northwest and Columbia Basin as two regions, due to each area possessing dissimilar characteristics. The Columbia Basin Region’s viability as an agricultural area in a semiarid region is based on the watershed, transportation patterns, and the Columbia River. The Pacific Northwest Region, by contrast, shares a moist climate, and the common natural resources of forests, fisheries, waterpower, scenic values, and natural harbors. (NRC 1934, Chapter XV, 167-168)

Figures 3-5a-e. Five recommended National Resources Committee (NRC) planning regions in 1934 report (Maps): (1) Fig. 3-5a: Based upon Composite Planning Problems; (2) Fig. 3-5b: Based upon a Single Function; (3) Fig. 3-5c: Based upon Group-of-States Arrangements; (4) Fig. 3-5d: Based upon Major Metropolitan Influence; (5) Fig. 3-5e: Based upon Administrative Convenience. NRC Report 1934, 158-166

Fig. 3-5a. Based upon Composite Planning Problems.

Credit: NRC 1934 Report, Fig. 20, page 166.

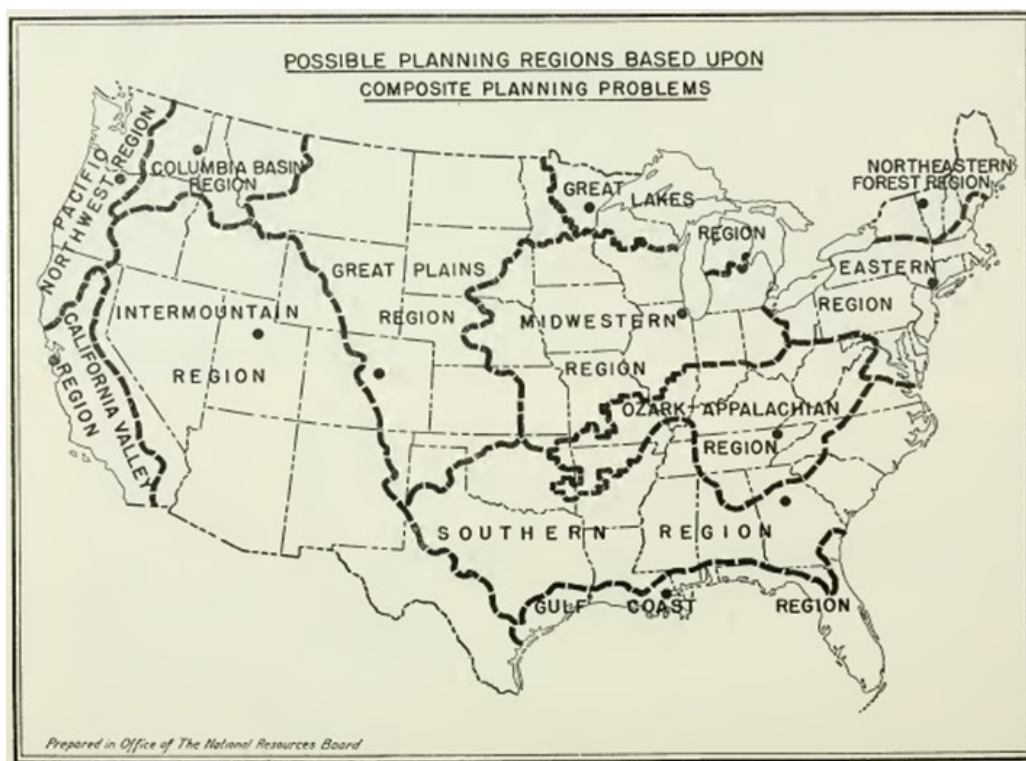


Fig. 3-5b. Based on a Single Function.
Credit: NRC 1934 Report, Fig. 19, page 164.

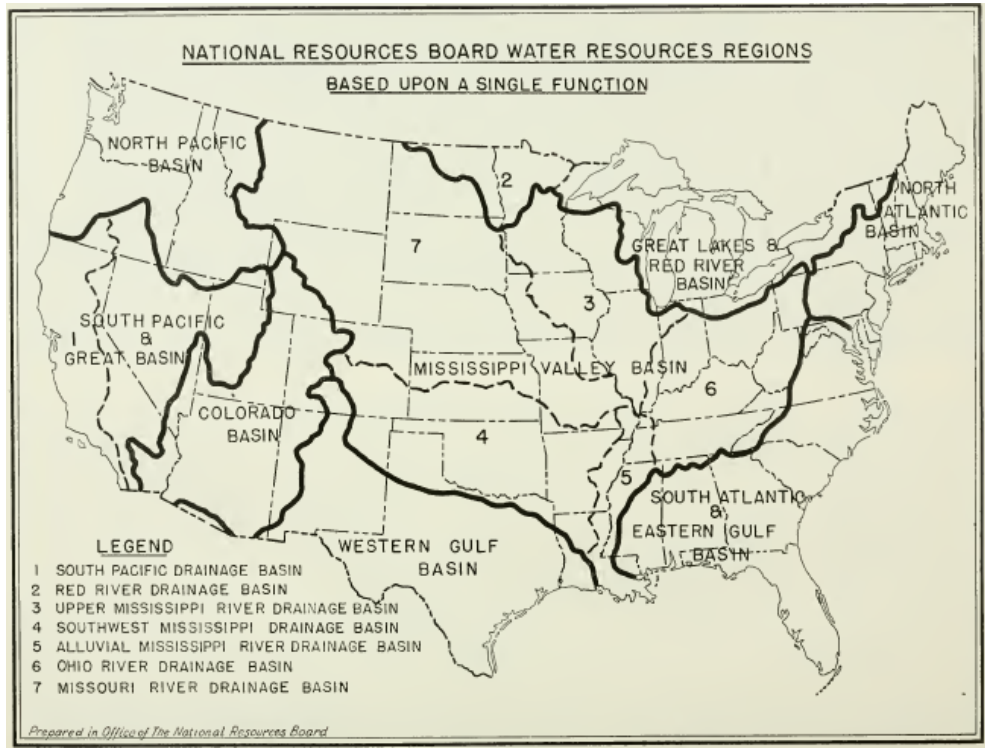


Fig. 3-5c. Group of States Arrangements.
Credit: NRC 1934 Report, Fig. 18, page 162.

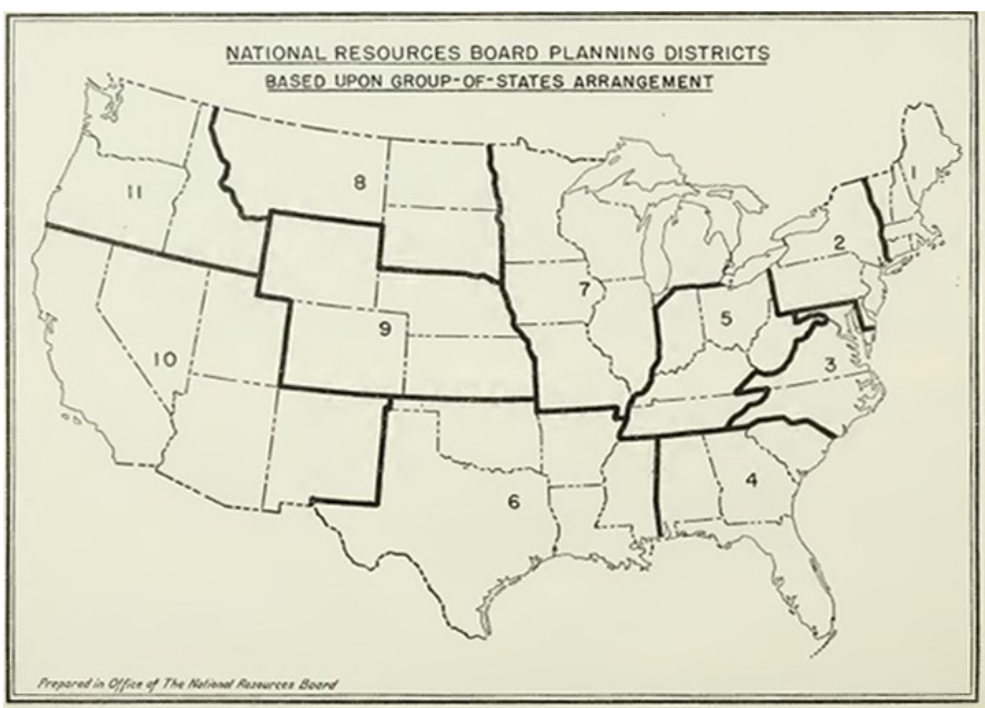


Fig. 3-5d: Major Metropolitan Influence.
Credit: NRC 1934 Report, Fig. 16, page 158.

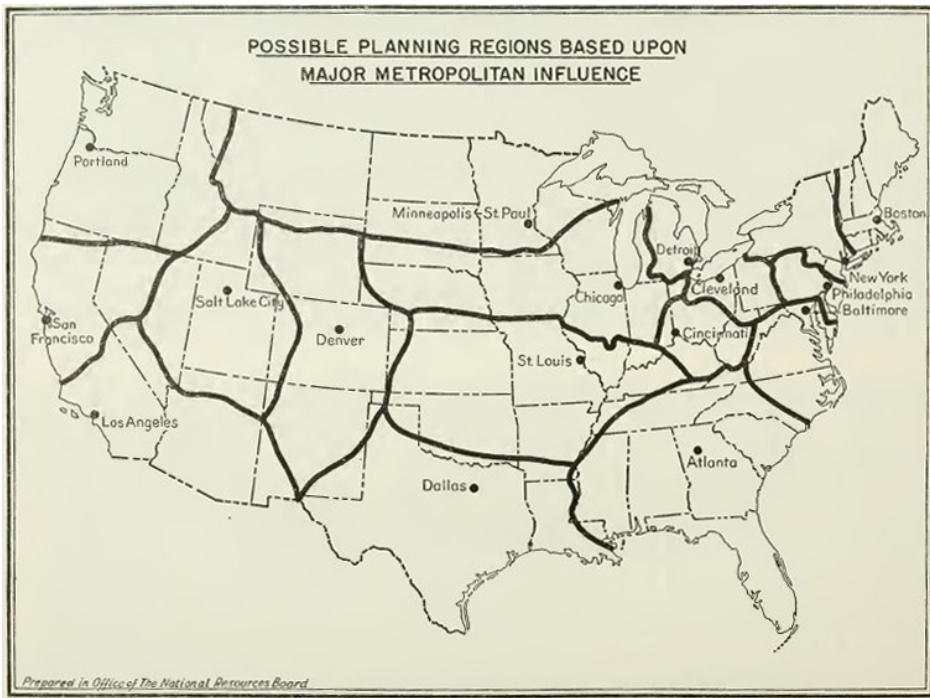
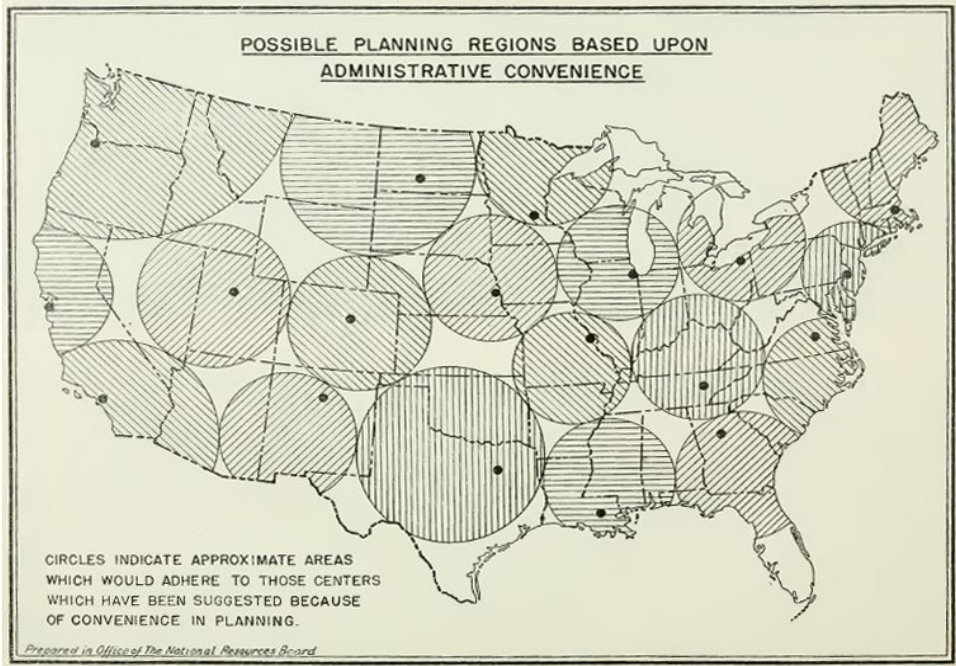


Fig. 3-5e: Administrative Convenience.
Credit: NRC 1934 Report, Fig. 17, page 160.



Chapter 4: The New Deal Promised Land

When you cross the mountain States and that portion of the coast States that lies well back from the ocean, you are impressed by those great stretches of physical territory, just land, territory now practically unused but destined some day [sic] to contain the homes of thousands and hundreds of thousands of citizens like us, a territory to be developed by the nation and for the nation. As we were coming down the river today, I could not help thinking, as everyone does, of all that water running down unchecked to the sea.¹³⁵

Franklin Roosevelt, August 1920

The Columbia River Basin stirred the imagination in 1920 of then-presidential candidate Franklin D. Roosevelt, who was in awe of its vast amounts of water, which suggested the idea for a future Columbia “valley authority.” Valley authorities became known as a New Deal agency for energy-centric regionalism: government integrated within several regional units to contain centralized electric generation and distribution for national planning and socio-technological development. Creation of the Tennessee Valley Authority (TVA) in 1933 inspired over a dozen bills introduced in the 74th U.S. Congress in 1935 to foster other drainage-basin regional developments in the nation. This included the Columbia River Basin (Fig 4-1).¹³⁶

For the first thirty years of the 20th century, the Columbia River and its tributaries could not unite a splintered population in the Northwest region. Labeled as one of America’s last frontiers, the distinct and disparate social and environmental character of the

¹³⁵ Franklin Roosevelt in Richard Neuberger. *Our Promised Land*, New York: The Macmillan Company (1938) 3.

Note. Franklin Roosevelt, traveling to a campaign stop in the Pacific Northwest as the 1920 Democratic party nominee for Vice President of the U.S., scribbled this observation on the back of a dining car menu, somewhat miraculously preserved for posterity.

¹³⁶ National Resources Committee. *Regional Factors in National Planning and Development*, Washington D. C.: United States Government Printing Office (1935) 107.

Columbia River Basin sharply contrasted with romanticized notions of other regionalist movements of the early 20th century in other parts of the country. Geographer Eve Vogel advances an idea that electric power regionalism in the Pacific Northwest originated from local governments' response to New Deal programs that might lead to acquisition of Public Works Administration (PWA) funds for hydropower development of the Columbia River.¹³⁷ Nevertheless, the shape, context, and heart of the Columbia River Basin system and its vast amounts of water were destined to alter.

More Power to You

Conjoined with the history of the Bonneville Power Administration (BPA) is the construction and completion of the Bonneville Dam on the Columbia River in 1937. Various historical and economic factors accounted for the Bonneville Project. Foremost among them was a solution to the unemployment emergency caused by the 1929 financial crisis and Depression. However, the idea of building any dam on the Columbia River was not an impulsive notion of the New Deal, nor was the idea of publicly-owned power utilities foreign to the Pacific Northwest. McMinnville Water and Light, established in 1888, became the first publicly-owned power plant in Oregon. As early as 1908, the Oregon Conservation Commission urged legislation to take “steps to preserve the State’s water power resources, and keep them from going into the hands of a monopoly.”¹³⁸ In 1912, the Commission again addressed the issue, recommending that “[t]he State must pursue a

¹³⁷ Eve Vogel. “The Columbia River’s Region: Politics, Place and Environment in the Pacific Northwest, 1933-Present” (PhD Dissertation), University of Oregon (2007) 37.

¹³⁸ Lillian Davis. *History of the Bonneville Power Administration* (unpublished). Portland, Oregon: BPA (1943) 10.

policy of developing these [water] resources for the benefit of the people or surrender the same to private interests and to be monopolized and exploited for the enrichment of the few at the expense of many.”¹³⁹ Progressive Grangers in the Pacific Northwest strongly favored public development of national resources and public-utility ownership, particularly for electricity and water. The precedent came from its Oregon neighbors. The Oregon State Grange was active in the initiation of publicly-owned utility districts for public water-power development through the passage of the Oregon State Grange Water Power Utility District Law in 1931. In 1936, the Oregon State Grange commenced a campaign for a state power initiative to authorize the issuance of bonds to carry out provisions of that Water Utility District Law. That initiative went down to voter defeat; even so, public power from 1930 to 1940 expanded in Oregon.¹⁴⁰

Washington State welcomed public power with enthusiasm. In fact, half the state received their power from publicly-owned utilities by mid-century.¹⁴¹ In Seattle, public responsibility for electric power dated back to 1890 with the creation of the Department of Lighting and Water Works, later led by J. D. Ross. Ross developed the Skagit River Municipal Hydroelectric Project in 1924 for Seattle City Light. Idaho lagged behind Washington and Oregon in public power development during the same early period, but overall, the Pacific Northwest during the early 20th century implemented power

¹³⁹ Ibid.

¹⁴⁰ Davis, *BPA History* 11; John Caldbeck, “Washington State Grange” (2014) obtained from <http://www.historylink.org/File/10717>; Paul Hirt, *The Wired Northwest*, Lawrence, Kansas: University Press of Kansas (2012) 12-13.

¹⁴¹ Hirt, *Wired Northwest* 13.

regulation and embraced publicly-owned utilities more than most other regions nationwide, and exceeded the national average for rural electrification.¹⁴²

In a major campaign speech in Portland, Oregon in September 1932, Franklin Roosevelt addressed four government power developments: the St. Lawrence River, Muscle Shoals, Boulder Dam, and the Columbia River. He took his message against large power trusts to the people, championing the development of hydroelectric power as a national movement, and expounding on the virtues of public-funded projects and their promised benefits, which he and his agents believed would outweigh any costs. Expansion of domestic consumption of electricity at inexpensive rates was considered a progressive economic transformer, a change with had the ability to produce a benevolent social revolution. Besides power generation, schemes for irrigation and navigation were planned in what *New York Times* journalist Robert Duffus termed at the time, “the majestic enterprise” of the Columbia Basin. To envision irrigation for 4,400,000 acres of land and ocean-going vessels able to travel as far as the Snake River to provide lower freight rates for wheat-growing regions of eastern Washington and other interior areas was nothing short of “magnificent.”¹⁴³ These big government projects would be a source of pride for millions as they represented “victories in a war, not with flesh and blood enemies . . . but with nature in its most majestic and recalcitrant mood.”¹⁴⁴ Duffus reported that the Columbia River and its tributaries could potentially generate 10-million horsepower and what were proposed then as ten dams would generate 3.4-million horsepower. In 1932,

¹⁴² Ibid.

¹⁴³ Robert L. Duffus. “Four Vast Power Projects to Make Economic History,” *New York Times*, 2 October 1932. ProQuest Historical Newspapers: *The New York Times* 23.

¹⁴⁴ Ibid.

dams at the Dalles and the Grand Coulee represented massive electric-power potential. The Dalles was 90 miles upriver from Portland and slated to generate 13-trillion kilowatt hours annually. It was followed by the Grand Coulee above the Snake River in the Great Bend country, which was projected to generate 8-trillion kilowatt hours annually.¹⁴⁵ There was interest in a smaller power-navigation project at Warrendale, a possible early construct, which was located about 40 miles upriver from Portland.¹⁴⁶

Franklin Roosevelt in his 1932 speech declared that, in a democracy, the natural resources of the United States were a *commons* belonging to all its citizens. This was a far-reaching, if not radical concept. The public trust holds the government responsible for managing these resources wisely for the maximum public good. As for the role of progressive government in energy-centric regionalism, Roosevelt set out three principles: (1) government development of natural resources was “for the public good;” (2) common law that sought to protect the public utilities was “vested in legislative action;” and (3) public service commissions were the “proper way for the people themselves to protect their interests.”¹⁴⁷

¹⁴⁵ Ibid.

Note. The Army Corps of Engineers in 1927 were authorized by Congress to survey national river basins, the so-called 308 Reports, to determine the feasibility of developing hydroelectric power in combination with navigation, irrigation, and flood control projects. Published in the early 1930s, the Corps survey originally called for ten dams on the Columbia River – four mainstream dams, six above where the Snake flowed into the Columbia. This included privately funded Rock Island Dam. The Reports constituted a strategy for national resource water planning with federal government financing the navigation improvement portions, leaving an impression that hydropower generation would be constructed under private enterprise. The Great Depression, however, enlarged the federal role of public works and the task of the Army Corps of Engineers in these national river projects. See David Billington, et al., *Big Dams of the New Deal Era: A Confluence of Engineering and Politics*. Norman: University of Oklahoma (2006) Chapter 4.

¹⁴⁶ Duffus, “Four Vast Power Projects” 23.

Note. The original Warrendale dam site was rejected in favor of the Bonneville site at the north end of Bradford Island where the bedrock provided a solid foundation for the dam.

¹⁴⁷ Franklin Roosevelt. “A Campaign Address on Public Utilities and Development of Hydro-Electric Power, Portland, Oregon, September 21, 1932,” speech, obtained from

“This Nation, through its Federal Government, has sovereignty over vast water-power resources in many parts of the United States,” Roosevelt proclaimed:¹⁴⁸

The water power of the state should belong to all the people. The title to this power must rest forever with the people. No commission – not the Legislature itself – has any right to give, for any consideration whatever, a single potential kilowatt in virtual perpetuity to any person or corporation whatever. It is the duty of our representative bodies to see that this power is transferred into usable electrical energy and distributed at the lowest possible cost. It is our power – and no inordinate profits must be allowed to those who act as the people’s agent in bringing this power to their home and workshops.¹⁴⁹

Roosevelt justified the right of the citizenry to own and operate their own power utilities under two conditions: (1) failure of the private sector to deliver satisfactory service at reasonable rates and (2) failure of regulatory authorities to protect the public interest when corporations became too large. In allegorical terms, Roosevelt described the government as having “a ‘birch rod’ in the cupboard to be taken out and used only when the ‘child’ gets beyond the point where a mere scolding does no good.”¹⁵⁰

A utility is in most cases a monopoly, and it is by no means possible . . . for Government to insure at all times . . . that the public . . . get a fair deal – in other words, to insure adequate service and reasonable rates I therefore lay down the following principle: That where community – a city or a county or a district – is not satisfied with the service rendered or the rates charged by the private utility, it has the undeniable basic right, as one of its functions of government, one of its functions of home rule, to set up, after a fair referendum of its voters has been

<http://neweal.feri.org/speeches/1932a.htm>; David Morris. “Defending the Public Good” (2013) in *Institute for Local Self-Reliance*, website, obtained from <https://ilsr.org/defending-public-good-fdrs-portland-speech/>

¹⁴⁸ Roosevelt, 1932 Portland Speech.

¹⁴⁹ Ibid.

¹⁵⁰ Ibid.

taken, its own governmentally owned and operated service [T]he very fact that community can, by vote (of) through the electorate, create a yardstick of its own, will, in most cases, guarantee good service and low rates to its population.¹⁵¹

Regulatory principles spoke to the progressives; anti-power trust rhetoric voiced the most prominent examples of utility mismanagement through private electric holding-company schemes. Public-service commissions were needed to protect the investor as well as the electric customer against financial exploitation:

[T]he Public Service Commission . . . is not a mere arbitrator as between the people and public utilities, . . . but was created . . . first, [to] give adequate service; second, [to] charge reasonable rates. That in performing this function, it must act as agent of the public, upon its own initiative as well as upon petition . . . must be a Tribune of the people . . . getting the facts and doing justice to both the consumers and investors in public utilities This means . . . positive and active protection of the people against private greed!¹⁵²

Roosevelt declared that government — federal, regional, state, local — had to act for all the people and provide the means to bring electric power to all its citizens. With the vast possibilities of power development comprised in the Columbia watershed, Roosevelt claimed that “the next great hydro-power development . . . to be undertaken must be on the Columbia River . . . It means cheap manufacturing production, economy and comfort on the farm and in the household.”¹⁵³ A vision of four great Government power developments in each of the four quarters of the United States “will be forever a national

¹⁵¹ Ibid.

¹⁵² Ibid.

¹⁵³ Ibid.

yardstick to prevent extortion against the public and encourage the wider use of that servant of the people – electric power.”¹⁵⁴

Contending Visions

Different and competing visions harbored for one Pacific Northwest river exposed deep regional rivalries that would hamper regional development. Franklin Roosevelt’s 1932 election victory realized the promise to Washington State’s Senator Clarence Dill to build a federally constructed, low dam and power plant at Grand Coulee. Activity upstream in Washington State distressed the two U.S. Senators from Oregon, Charles McNary and Frederick Steiwer, who were seeking construction of dams on the lower Columbia River. Joined by Oregon’s then-Congressional Representative, Charles Martin, the three men approached Roosevelt about funding a dam project on the lower Columbia that would foster navigation and power generation. The project interested Roosevelt but not Interior Secretary, Harold Ickes. Martin feared that both Ickes and Sen. Dill would kill the Bonneville Project.¹⁵⁵

River development that began with the Bonneville and Grand Coulee dams as federal projects made sense in the midst of the Great Depression. Big dams and public-works projects meant jobs. They meant that the New Deal government would take the lead in fulfilling its 1932 campaign promise for an economic stimulus to the region, an intervention required because private industry, for the most part, was unable or failed to

¹⁵⁴ Ibid.

Note. The Duffus article notes that while substantial progress was made on the Tennessee and Colorado River projects, the St. Lawrence enterprise was still in the blueprint stage, whereas the Columbia River dams were only an engineer’s dream. See Duffus, “Four Vast Power Projects.”

¹⁵⁵ Billington, et al. *Big Dams of the New Deal Era* 165-170.

deliver employment, and local governments were not big enough to fund a plan for area-wide recovery. The Bonneville Project was authorized on September 30, 1933, under auspices of the Army Corps of Engineer (ACE) and funded through the National Industrial Recovery Act. This project became identified with the City of Portland and the State of Oregon, both seeking public-brokered power for economic recovery through regional-industrial expansion. Congressman Martin in October 1933 reinforced this notion, stating on the floor of the House of Representatives, “This power which the Government will develop at Bonneville Dam is not intended to force down rates of the existing power companies. This power is intended for the great chemical and metalurgical [sic] reduction plants whose first consideration is cheap power and an inexhaustible supply.”¹⁵⁶ Excavation at Bonneville began on November 17, 1933; but other than the ACE’s 308 Report, no specific engineering design per se existed for Bonneville. Therefore, the dam’s construction was based on precedent rather than innovation.¹⁵⁷

Construction of the dam at Grand Coulee officially began in November 1933, with excavation at the building site immediately creating jobs. The federal government delayed requesting bids for a low dam design until March 1934. The winning bid was announced in Spokane by Bureau of Reclamation Chief Engineer, Frank Banks, on June 18, 1934, amid the pomp and circumstance of a gala celebration. Then-Secretary of the Interior, Harold Ickes, had made the bid official on July 13, 1934, awarding the project for a low dam to be completed in 4-1/2 years to a consortium led by Silas Mason of New York. The consortium was given the acronym MWAK, for Mason, Walsh Construction of

¹⁵⁶ Richard Neuberger to J. D. Ross. Postal Telegram, 30 July 1937. J. D. Ross Reference Material, Seattle City Light, Seattle Municipal Archives. Collection Number 1200-14, Box 76 (May 2016)

¹⁵⁷ Billington, et al., *Big Dams of the New Deal Era* 155.

Iowa, and Atkinson-Kier Company of San Francisco. MWAK immediately began construction in July of 1934, so that President Roosevelt could witness and boast about economic progress on his return visit to the Northwest and the Grand Coulee dam site in early August 1934 (Fig. 3-2).¹⁵⁸

“Grand Coulee Day” was declared on June 18, 1934. Local excitement brimmed over as construction of the Grand Coulee Dam promised a “new day” for Washington and the Pacific Northwest, even prompting a parade through downtown Spokane. That evening, local and federal dignitaries assembled at a banquet while fireworks lit the sky. As observed in a June 19, 1934 edition *Spokane-Review*:

[R]esidents of Spokane and the Inland Empire who swarmed the downtown streets yesterday afternoon saw a parade seldom equal for color, length, and truthfulness of theme. Symbolic of the huge project, enormous trucks, tractors, steam shovels, and other heavy equipment that will be used in the building the dam vied with pretty floats, colorfully garbed Indians, bathing girls, blaring bands and snappy drill teams. It was a parade worthy of the great event it commemorated.¹⁵⁹

The region celebrated the start of construction, although not the high dam that some partisans hoped for. Besides power generation, the population of eastern Washington, predominately rural, desired the Bureau of Reclamation to develop a Columbia Basin Irrigation Project. Yet, original specifications included only power houses for electricity generation, with no immediate plans for irrigation channels and distribution facilities.¹⁶⁰

¹⁵⁸ Ibid., 174-175.

¹⁵⁹ *Spokesman-Review*, 19 June 1934, in Paul Pitzer, *Grand Coulee*, Pullman, Washington: WSU Press (1994) 100.

¹⁶⁰ Pitzer, *Grand Coulee* 97.

Nevertheless, a young Northwest New Dealer, Richard Neuberger,¹⁶¹ wrote “Harnessing the Mighty Columbia River,” a wholly political essay published in the *New York Times* on July 15, 1934, which backed Roosevelt’s 1932 campaign promise of Columbia Basin power projects. Neuberger reinforced Roosevelt’s populist message and what it meant to the nation as development along the course of the Columbia River unfolded, the first of many undertakings to “revolutionize the economic life of Oregon, Washington and Idaho . . . Now *the dream begins to come true* [my added emphasis]” (Fig. 4-3 to Fig. 4-4).¹⁶²

Newspapers in metropolitan Portland gleefully predicted that the Bonneville Project would foster the mightiest industrial empire in history on the banks of the Columbia.¹⁶³ “Engineers and others have pointed to the possibilities to be realized through this development; the federal government has provided the initial capital for developing the project . . . hence a great dam will span the Columbia [R]iver, harnessing that mighty stream for . . . generating electric power at exceptionally low cost,” one newspaper reported¹⁶⁴

¹⁶¹ Note. Richard Neuberger in 1932 worked on the University of Oregon’s *Oregon Daily Emerald* to endorse Herbert Hoover for president, until his college roommate, Stephen Kahn, persuaded him to become a New Deal reformer. Within the Oregon Commonwealth Federation, Neuberger worked to reform the state’s Democratic Party to embrace the New Deal. His first signed piece for the *New York Times* was in 1934; he served as its Northwest correspondent from 1936-1954.

¹⁶² Richard Neuberger. “Harnessing the Mighty Columbia River,” *New York Times*, 15 July 1934. ProQuest Historical Newspapers: *The New York Times* 25.

¹⁶³ Note. The dream of a modern American empire envisioned regional economies of utopian collectivism that rejected urban life in favor of decentralization — mainly back to the land movements and small town factory manufacturing. This would be made possible by Government engagement in public works — power, flood control, improved navigation, irrigation — a domination of nature as a means to a modern American empire. Further discussion on this subject should include Donald Worster’s *Empire of Rivers* and Karl Wittfogel’s *Oriental Despotism* among the larger body of historic-geographic literature on the discipline.

¹⁶⁴ Lee Bostwick. “Winning in the Northwest-An Estimate of Bonneville Dam Potentialities” of *The Morning Oregonian*, 1 January 1934. LXXII: (22,825) 29.

A special January 1, 1934 edition of a 12-page supplement to the independent Republican *Morning Oregonian* lauded the Bonneville Project and its practical benefits for regional commerce, reinforcing Congressman Martin's vision of electrochemical and metallurgical industries, based on abundant, inexpensive power. Oregon business leaders, bankers, and industrialists anticipated a "superpower" scheme, as an array of "Pittsburghs" on the banks of the Columbia, lured by a bus-bar rate plan,¹⁶⁵ where power costs were based on transmission distance from the generating source. Commercial leaders denoted the locality as "an industrialist's paradise – the great river boiling through its mountain gateway, the downstream sweep to the world beyond, the crenelated wall of big dam, the vast wilderness with such untapped resources stretching away to countless horizons."¹⁶⁶

Roosevelt returned to the Pacific Northwest in August 1934, both to campaign for Democratic candidates, and to reaffirm a populist message directly to the people at the Bonneville Dam and Grand Coulee projects.¹⁶⁷ Revisiting his 1920 Northwest observations Roosevelt envisioned a land of opportunity that could absorb displaced populations victimized by urban overcrowding or overused farm soils. He proclaimed that the Northwest possessed sufficient unlimited natural resources and vast acreage to support a larger populace, in order to distribute "the burdens which fall on [other parts of the country] more heavily than they fall now on the West."¹⁶⁸

¹⁶⁵ *Note.* The power plant bus-bar is the point measured beyond the generator but before the voltage transformation point in the switchyard.

¹⁶⁶ Neuberger, *Our Promised Land* 101.

¹⁶⁷ *Note.* Roosevelt spoke at Booneville Dam's construction site on August 3, 1934, emphasizing power generation and navigation improvements for the river. On the following day, Roosevelt made a speech at the Grand Coulee dam construction site.

¹⁶⁸ Franklin Roosevelt. Remarks at the Site of Grand Coulee Dam, August 4, 1934. Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, The American Presidency Project obtained from <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/node/208545> (3 March 2017).

The President justified the federal government's financial and economic outlay in the Pacific Northwest because power would be made so cheap that it would "become a standard article of use, not merely for agriculture and manufacturing but for every home within the reach of an electric transmission line."¹⁶⁹ Therefore, it was the people's investment. Roosevelt trusted that electric generation would overcome the frontier character of the Northwest's regional economy, and stressed the advantages for "men and women and children who will be making an honest livelihood and doing their best successfully to live up to the American standard of living and the American standard of citizenship."¹⁷⁰ His remarks seemingly bolstered public power advocates, boosted reclamation backers, and encouraged technology prophets (a.k.a. the technocrats) in order to gain support for a self-sufficient, energy-centric region. This would only be possible by joining the Columbia River to a vision of equitable sharing of the region's natural resources. "We are in the process of making the American people 'dam minded.'" Roosevelt proclaimed.¹⁷¹

Media photographs taken at the 1934 Grand Coulee speech exemplified and emphasized Roosevelt's populist message and were used to mediate the experience for those who could not witness the actual event. Constructed images portrayed Roosevelt as a "Man of the People" who could lead the forgotten citizen to the Promised Land. These images illustrated the New Deal government at the forefront of socio-technocratic solutions within a framework of American democracy. Emotions of happiness and exhilaration visible on the faces communicated that everyday life would become better for all. Allusions to future modernity contrasted with small town settings, as well as with local

¹⁶⁹ Ibid.

¹⁷⁰ Ibid.

¹⁷¹ Ibid.

Native Americans and an undeveloped landscape, to take advantage of the time-honored American frontier myth that the government came to civilize the West . The dams would tender modern progress upon a historic landscape in order to retain the traditional values of a patriotic people (Figs. 4-4 to Fig. 4-6).

Pre-BPA public media images (1933–1937) conveyed complex information primarily to citizens. Electricity offered hope for a better economic and social means of living, but technology would pose a challenge to familiar life and accelerate uncertainty. Pre-BPA local newspaper images of the Bonneville Dam served as its reference point for most local citizens. Not only did images chronicle the progress of construction as evidence of government efficacy, they created a symbolism and figurative language to educate people about changing cultural and technical adaptations destined to affect daily life (Fig. 4-7).

Images from this era emphasized the project's sheer size through panoramic framing and swooping aerial perspectives. Photographs taken from afar highlighted the abstract, geometric shapes of modern technology rising out of the riverbed. Geometric patterns symbolized the mathematical engineering of modern life and showed evidence of humans applying science to organize nature through modern, strong, and permanent constructs. Cropping would isolate a construction project, or an aspect of the project, removing or obscuring any potentially distracting surrounding environment. Images of machines at the construction site portrayed a more intimate relationship between machine-age technology and nature. Close-up images of workers, who toiled heroically and dangled on ropes above a construction site, illustrated public works providing employment. Humans gave context for the huge scale of construction. Virtually all project workers

depicted were depersonalized and nameless, defined by job or task alone. Images enhanced by captions and text explained novel landscape features by comparing new objects to common ones. Technology was a new and dynamic frontier, interpreted as synonymous with the pulsing energy of a modern world. The collective message of the images boosted a new and well-crafted technocratic society, anchored within a collective culture, and represented what a democratic government could do for its people (Fig. 4-8 to Fig. 4-13).

Public or Private: Valley Authority or Marketing Agency

By the mid-1930s, completion of the Grand Coulee Dam was still several years in the future. Bonneville Dam as a power arch over the Columbia River was one of the more significant and most expensive New Deal Federal public-works projects to be funded and completed during the Roosevelt Administration's early years.¹⁷² Local congressional representatives fought hard for the Bonneville Project. Yet, as stated in 1945 by an early BPA librarian, Lillian Davis, in her historical account of the BPA, "It is interesting that even though a considerable amount of money was invested in the building of Bonneville Dam, there was apparently no organized thought as to what to be done with the obvious end products of the dam once it was finished."¹⁷³ Although the dam was approved in September 1933, Congress waited until Bonneville was nearly completed in 1937 before

¹⁷² Neuberger, *Our Promised Land* 94.

Note. Neuberger in *Our Promised Land* estimates the original cost of Bonneville Dam as \$75M with approximately \$11M in PWA funds authorized for a transmission network for the Northwest. See *Our Promised Land* page 115. William Willingham in "Bonneville Dam" from The Oregon Encyclopedia states the original cost of Bonneville Dam was \$83 million. See https://oregonencyclopedia.org/articles/bonneville_dam/.

¹⁷³ Davis, *BPA History* 11-12.

seriously considering how to market the dam's substantial amounts of hydroelectric power. Somewhat belatedly, on January 18, 1937, Roosevelt appointed a committee on National Power Policy to generate recommendations for the Bonneville Project.¹⁷⁴

To retire Bonneville's debt, copious amounts of electricity had to be sold to stave off opponents eager to disparage the project as an example of decadent spending and foolish planning. Without delay, the Bonneville Project had to generate hydropower and convey it over a network of transmission lines, to electrify homes and farms and deliver power to factories. In order to extend the government's program for more dams on the Columbia River and in the Tennessee Valley, and to counter power trusts and criticisms from private utilities, the federal government was compelled to validate Roosevelt's 1932 promise of great public power works. Regional warfare ensued in the Northwest over how best to utilize what was anticipated to be copious amounts of Columbia River energy. Business was on one side, farmers on the other; conflicts were sharp and bitter, with a firm and determined divide between urbanism and agrarianism. City newspapers of the region, such as the *Morning Oregonian*, urged establishment of industrial empire and dismissed "the ill-considered [sic] talk of electricity for sheepherders and cowboys deep in the Western hills!"¹⁷⁵ On the other hand, thousands of farmers in the eastern region of the Northwest still pumped water by hand, read by kerosene lamps, and cooked on wood stoves. Rural residents claimed the power of the Columbia River system as their heritage and clung to the populist message of Roosevelt and the New Deal. "To hell with the

¹⁷⁴ Ibid.

¹⁷⁵ Neuberger, *Our Promised Land* 95.

factories until we get our share!” farmers proclaimed. “That river belongs to us, not Wall Street.”¹⁷⁶

In December 1935, Roy F. Bessey, Executive Officer of the Pacific Northwest Regional Planning Commission (PNWRPC) and Regional Officer to the National Resources Committee, presented its first local proposal to establish a comprehensive regional plan for the Columbia River Basin. Charles Eliot, head of the PWA’s National Planning Board, asked Democrat Marshall N. Dana, who was associate editor of Portland’s *Oregon Journal* newspaper and a longtime advocate for Columbia River Basin development, to produce a TVA-style regional plan for the Columbia Basin for the federal government. Dana, who had been appointed in 1933 as Regional Advisor to the Federal Emergency Administration of Public Works, organized a planning board with himself as Chairman, NRC Regional Officer Roy Bessy as his assistant, and representatives selected within the four-state Pacific Northwest region of Oregon, Washington, Idaho and western Montana. The Commission was officially formed in January 1934. With little direction, Dana welcomed the ideas of leading local citizens to help prioritize individual projects suitable for a comprehensible regional plan that could obtain PWA funding approval.¹⁷⁷

Under local Reed College Professor and commission member, Charles McKinley, the 1935 PNWRPC report rejected a TVA-style regional approach in favor of a federal power-marketing agency. The commission was opposed to a regional corporation with

¹⁷⁶ Ibid., 102.

¹⁷⁷ Note. The PNWRPC was formed in January 1934. Marshall N. Dana was the 1932 Oregon Senatorial Democratic candidate, appointed by Franklin Roosevelt as Regional Advisor of the Public Works Program on July 27, 1933, with regional headquarters in Portland, Oregon. In 1933, Dana was considered along with J. D. Ross of Seattle City Light to fill vacancies on the Federal Power Commission. See Eve Vogel. “Defining on Pacific Northwest among Many Possibilities: The Political Construction of a Region and Its River during the New Deal” in *The Western Historical Quarterly*. 42(Spring 2011) 34-36.

the scope of a valley authority because several federal agencies, such as the U.S. Forest Service and Bureau of Reclamation, had long and notable records operating in the Pacific Northwest. In addition, newly established New Deal agencies such as the Soil Erosion Service, Resettlement Administration, and Rural Electrification Administration, already offered organizations to handle problems of maladjustment. In McKinley's analysis, the Columbia River was itself a "unifying bond" — a major transportation artery, irrigation source, and promising energy source — that defined a coherent Pacific Northwest sub-regional area of Washington, Oregon, Idaho, and western Montana. Accordingly, the PNWRPC report recommended that the Columbia River Basin be served by a public corporation with the single purpose of operating "the electric power functions of the Bonneville project, of Grand Coulee . . . and of other public works generating hydroelectric energy when the latter are built by the Federal Government."¹⁷⁸ The role of this public power corporation would include planning, design, construction, maintenance, and operation of hydroelectric power. According to the PNWRPC report, the acute problem facing the Pacific Northwest was the exhaustion of timber and mining resources, which existed outside the province of any single federal authority. Therefore, the Commission concluded that the best interests of the region, and specifically the Columbia River, would be served by citizens of the Pacific Northwest and not by a central government.¹⁷⁹

Nevertheless, the first Columbia Valley Authority legislation to market power from the two Columbia River projects was introduced in January 1935. Idaho Senator James Pope, a Democrat who supported public power in the Northwest, introduced a

¹⁷⁸ National Resources Committee. *Regional Planning Part I-Pacific Northwest*. Washington D. C.: US Government Printing Office (1936) xv.

¹⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, Forward.

TVA-style measure that was dismissed by the Army Corps of Engineers and Bureau of Reclamation, who favored their own alternatives. Washington Senator, Knute Hill, proposed a measure to put the Bureau of Reclamation in charge of Columbia River development and power marketing and to transfer Bonneville Dam and power marketing from the Army Corps to the Bureau of Reclamation.¹⁸⁰ In July 1935 Oregon Senators McNary and Steiwer introduced proposals that limited power from the Bonneville Dam to heavy industry and private utilities, and omitted any federal transmission grid. McNary and Steiwer wanted the Army Corps to operate Bonneville Dam, build the main trunk lines, and market power with the Federal Power Commission to set rates.¹⁸¹ In March 1936, U.S. Senators, Homer Bone and Lewis Schwellenbach of Washington, introduced legislation to permit the Federal Power Commission to market Bonneville power, a measure more favorable to public power advocates.¹⁸²

The McNary-Steiwer legislation was opposed by public power interests; supported by the Army Corps of Engineers; favored by Charles Martin, former congressman and newly elected Governor, and the Portland Chamber of Commerce; and surprisingly, supported by Roosevelt, at least until the Bone-Schwellenbach legislation was introduced in 1936.¹⁸³ The Army Corps held publicly-owned power utilities in contempt. As Neuberger noted in *Our Promised Land*, “The public ownership people and the army engineers have long been at polite but distant odds. Senator Norris once observed the army

¹⁸⁰ Gus Norwood. *Columbia River Power for the People: A History of the Policies of the Bonneville Power Administration*. Portland: BPA (1981) 57-59.

¹⁸¹ *Ibid.*, 56.

¹⁸² Norwood, *Columbia River Power* 59; Gene Tollefson. *BPA and the Struggle for Power at a Cost*. Portland: BPA (1987) 127.

¹⁸³ Norwood, *Columbia River Power* 55-56.

corps [sic] was composed of skilled technicians who can build wonderful dams but do not understand the social usefulness of their own products . . . [disdainful of] trunk lines to homesteaders and an electric stove in every home!”¹⁸⁴

In the interim, New Deal legislation in 1935 for federal power policies officially paved the way for “big dams” as public-works projects and for energy-centric regional schemes. Congress passed the Public Utility Holding Company Act, the Federal Power Act, and the Rivers and Harbors Act that authorized Bonneville and Grand Coulee dams and other dams across the nation. That same year, 1935, Roosevelt issued an executive order for the Rural Electrification Administration (REA) to bring electricity to areas of the country not yet served by utilities.¹⁸⁵ These power policies were expected to (a) restrain holding company influence over public utilities, (b) provide affordable electricity for everyone, (c) coordinate by region electric transmission grids based on the 1920s Superpower/Giant Power models, (d) emphasize public service over corporate profit for public service corporations, and (e) enable government agencies to direct the public power industry toward these goals. Significantly, the REA set forth a new ideology in which all Americans were entitled to electric service regardless of economic status or location. However, this new ideology would be driven by social policies solely of interest to government agencies or nonprofit utilities. Therefore, the New Deal government

¹⁸⁴ Neuberger, *Our Promised Land* 115.

Note. Neuberger noted that “[T]he army corps of engineers [sic] are said to have been disdainful of *The River* ... Pare Lorentz created as a social and economic document,” *Our Promised Land* 115.

¹⁸⁵ *Note.* Senator George Norris, representatives from the American Farm Bureau, and the Grange wanted a nonprofit government program that would electrify six million farms within the next ten years. This New REA legislation was signed into law in May 1936. The law authorized new REA loans to finance power lines and power plants for rural areas lacking electric service. In addition, the law offered loans for home and farm wiring and electric appliances. The goal was to create a decentralized system of grass root cooperatives, democratically run at the local level.

designated the Securities and Exchange Commission (SEC) and the Federal Power Commission to implement these policies.¹⁸⁶

Local Political Chaos

Former Republican turned Democrat, Major General Charles Martin, was elected to Oregon's Third Congressional District in 1930 and reelected in 1932 on the coattails of Franklin Roosevelt. Sporting the nickname "Old Iron Pants," he would boast about his Congressional legacy and how he had persuaded Roosevelt to fund the Bonneville Dam in 1933. Martin campaigned as a supporter of the New Deal and advocate of public power. In 1934, Oregonians expected then-governor-elect Martin to implement the relief policies of the Roosevelt Administration. Instead, Martin governed as an anti-New Dealer and, in an about-face, expressed disdain for "coddled communists" and relief and welfare policies. Sympathetic to big business, Martin backed the prospect of granting control of Bonneville Power to private utilities and the Army Corps. Old Iron Pants rebuffed the REA, denigrated Dust Bowl refugees as "alien paupers," and expressed a "Hell! Let them work" attitude toward recipients of government relief. Martin advised Grange activists at the capitol in Salem to "get back to [their] fields where the birdies sing."¹⁸⁷ On several occasions, Martin roused vigilantism against union strikers, famously remarking "The Italians wouldn't submit; they organized their Blackshirts. The Germans would not

¹⁸⁶ See Hirt in *The Wired Northwest* 245-248, Chapter 9.

¹⁸⁷ Charles Martin in Jill Herzig. *The Oregon Commonwealth Federation: The Rise and Decline of a Reform Organization* (thesis) University of Oregon (1963) 3-4.

submit, so they had their Brownshirts and Hitler. I don't believe Americans will submit."¹⁸⁸ Martin was convinced he was under assault by an organized conspiracy composed of the unemployed, organized labor, and New Dealers, prompting him to assign Oregon State Police to spy on his political opponents and infiltrate opposition movements. The 1936 election was a critical pivot point in national public power policies and valley-authority regionalism, particularly in the Pacific Northwest. Despite Roosevelt's reelection in 1936, his New Deal programs were not being carried out in Oregon largely due to the governorship of Charles Martin and his allies.

Days after Franklin Roosevelt won reelection in 1936, articles of incorporation were filed in Salem for the Oregon Commonwealth Federation (OCF), dedicated to "the education of farmers, industrial workers . . . relative to their economic, social and political interest." To this end, the OCF lobbied the state government to implement New Deal policies in Oregon. Immediately after Monroe Sweetland became the OCF's executive secretary, Governor Martin labelled the OCF as a "gang . . . of young Jew[s] . . . Communists, C.I.O.'s and crackpots."¹⁸⁹ The OCF's initial conference in April 1937 embraced an alliance of statewide progressives to support resolutions for "public ownership of all natural resources, utilities, banks and monopolies."¹⁹⁰ The Commonwealth's platform promoted pensions for the aged and unemployed, civil rights, consumer protections, collective bargaining, free medical care for the poor, and high corporate taxes. Many

¹⁸⁸ Herzig, Oregon Commonwealth 3-4; Gary Murrell. "Charles Martin (1863-1946)" from The Oregon Encyclopedia (n.d.) obtained from https://oregonencyclopedia.org/articles/martin_charles_1863_1946/#.WfgLrFtSyM8 (22 October 2017).

¹⁸⁹ William G. Robbins. "Oregon Commonwealth Federation," from The Oregon Encyclopedia (n.d.) obtained from http://www.oregonencyclopedia.org/articles/oregon_commonwealth_federation/#.V6fB91RHanM (7 August 2016).

¹⁹⁰ Ibid.

OCF members hailed from the Oregon Grange, the Oregon Farmer's Union, and the American Federation of Labor. The bimonthly *Oregon Commonwealth Federation News* published articles devoted to promoting public hydroelectric power, an issue that was vital to rural Oregon but opposed by Governor Martin. The OCF supported federal regional planning initiatives, considering the TVA a model for the Columbia River.¹⁹¹

Local conflict and regional disparity did not go unnoticed. The 1936 *NRC Report: Regional Planning Part 1 – Pacific Northwest (1936)* stated that for geographical analysis and planning purposes, “Oregon and Washington, western Montana and all of Idaho except the southeast counties made up a unit . . . [and] might well constitute the Pacific Northwest. [However,] the analysis indicates that as divisions between sections of this great territory manifest themselves in political behavior, those divisions pursue a different pattern than a geographical analysis might anticipate.”¹⁹² Noted regional rivalries and factions were an “exaggeration of the normal and useful rivalry between local communities and areas for population, wealth, and prestige,” which functioned contrary to the success of federal regional planning.¹⁹³ A longstanding feature of life in the United States involved weighing political and economic interests, cast at various scales, and the Pacific Northwest in the 1930s was a hothouse for combative sentiment.

¹⁹¹ *Note.* The OCF seemed to be a response to the Depression as it drew from groups hardest hit. It encompassed various loyalties and shared problems that combined radical theories with practical governance. Grange and farmers union in the populist tradition opposed Wall Street capitalism and private monopolies. Progressives found support in the OCF for a clean and democratic government. Its members were comprised of various shades of Marxists, Socialist Party members, liberal Congregationalists, the NAACP, a few technocrats, and Townsendites, but labor was its strength in activism. With the popularity of Roosevelt and enthusiasm for public power, the OFC offered a “half-way house” for those transitioning from Republican to Democrat. For further discussion, see Jill Herzig, *The Oregon Commonwealth Federation* (thesis).

¹⁹² National Resources Committee, 1936, *Planning Part 1* xii.

¹⁹³ *Ibid.*

Increased tensions and local jealousies would thwart “reaching out toward a sound regional community of interest.”¹⁹⁴ The NRC Report continued:

If regional power is to succeed, local tensions must be kept within the bounds of the common good of the region . . . the Federal Government has a peculiar opportunity to increase the balance in favor of regional homogeneity . . . regional planning and development. The policy it adopts toward the use of the great works on the Columbia River may further the regional movement . . . or it may accelerate the tendencies [of tensions]. If Bonneville power is distributed in such a manner as to concentrate its benefits in the Portland area, and if Grand Coulee energy is sold on terms of peculiar advantage to the people of the Spokane area, regionalism will proceed under a severe handicap and an uncooperative localism will spring up. A wise Federal policy will insist, therefore, that the benefits of regional investment shall spread as widely as is economically possible throughout the region.¹⁹⁵

Although the NRC agreed with the PNWRPC regional plan to establish a federal power corporation to generate and market Columbia River hydropower, the NRC report reinforced Roosevelt’s public power vision to distribute electric energy generated through federal public-works projects in order to “achieve the maximum regional and national benefit by making available this energy to the greatest number of people at the lowest rates consistent with the solvency of these works.”¹⁹⁶ To do so required adoption of a rate policy for the equal distribution of wholesale energy over large areas to contribute to federal goals of industrial decentralization and stabilization of existing communities, thereby

¹⁹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁹⁵ Ibid., xii-xiii.

¹⁹⁶ Ibid., xvii.

operating federally-built projects as regional and national assets as opposed to the “peculiar property of the towns or cities that happen to have grown up near them.”¹⁹⁷

The NRC considered it unwise to establish power rates graded by a series of distance zones, with the cheapest rates at or near generating sites, believing they would discourage construction of new industrial towns around Bonneville and hamper decentralization and regional goodwill. For the same reasons, the NRC backed sufficient federal representation on the PNWRPC advisory board to convey overall national planning and development interests. This recommendation indicated concerns that, without such representation, any thought of Northwest regionalism, even that delineated by power transmission technology, might lead to sectionalism. Implementing the PNWRPC recommendations perhaps had less to do with conceptual ideas of regionalism than with their compatibility to existing political geographies, economic ambitions, and desired Columbia River development.¹⁹⁸

Dana Marshall in 1934 wrote, “The Columbia River is a miracle of power streams, the divider of mountain ranges . . . the reclamer and energizer of an empire. Population follow power. Develop power and other growth will come.”¹⁹⁹ Marshall’s inflated dreams of a utopian Pacific Northwest clashed with the pragmatism of electric power. With the election of Roosevelt, Pacific Northwest voters decided the future character of the Columbia River in ratifying the generation of hydroelectric power from

¹⁹⁷ Ibid., xviii.

¹⁹⁸ National Resources Committee, 1936, *Planning Part I* xvii-xiv; Vogel, *Defining on Pacific Northwest* 36.

¹⁹⁹ Dana Marshall quoted in William Lang. “Failed Federalism: The Columbia Valley Authority and Regionalism” in *The Great Northwest: The search for the regional identity*, edited William G. Robbins. Corvallis: Oregon State University Press (2001) 67.

federal dams. Electrification from its source and transmission to its distribution points required a form of regionalization. Yet the broad, political dystopia of the Pacific Northwest in the pre-BPA era failed to produce a unifying message or symbology of regionalism.

Superpower industrialization sought to attract high energy manufacturing to the region by providing distance-based bus-bar rates concentrated around a river-generating source. Franklin Roosevelt's initial vision for a national power policy presented the four regional hydropower projects as national cornerstones to provide a utility rate "yardstick," the basis for a potential national-rate schedule.

Inexpensive electricity was envisioned as a gift from nature to lighten humanity's burdens and unlock the door to a higher standard of modern living. The "people" would own their utilities and extend distribution lines to distant customers, effectively bringing about social reform through decentralization that moved populations and industries away from crowded urban centers. However, the farm bloc lobbied to protect the region's scenic grandeur and beauty of the hinterlands from unsightly factories and sprawling industrial centers. In *Our Promised Land*, Neuberger described conservation as a challenge and point of resistance to the industrialists. Agreeing with his rural constituents, Oregon State Senator, Byron G. Carney, said, "This country looks pretty good right now. It isn't going to look that way any longer if a lot of factories are turned loose along the river to use all the power, cut down all the trees, and dig up all the minerals."²⁰⁰

²⁰⁰ Byron G. Carney quoted in Neuberger, *Our Promised Land* 105.

The New Deal Influence of “Jaydee”

For J. D. Ross, as an advocate for publicly-owned electric utilities, access to electricity was a civic right attainable with “postage-stamp” electric rates, meaning that customers paid the same price whether an outlet was within one mile or 100 miles from the generating source. Recognized as the architect of City Light, Seattle’s municipal electric utility, the mostly self-taught electrical engineer adopted a post-World-War-I progressive energy rationale by backing measures to regulate electric rates and protect against the so-called profiteering of private utilities. Named Superintendent of City Light in 1911, Ross envisioned hydroelectric developments in the Northwest, as with City Light’s Skagit River project, as tools to attract heavy industries.²⁰¹ According to Ross, hydroelectric infrastructure was a “city builder.” It was crucial for the creation of industrial jobs in Seattle that would put the city on par with the metropolises of New York and Chicago.²⁰²

Born in Chatham, Ontario in 1872, Ross graduated from Chatham Collegiate Institute in 1891. After an unsuccessful quest for gold in the Yukon in 1898, Ross fortuitously settled in Seattle in 1902. He designed and oversaw construction of a new municipal power plant on the Cedar River in Cedar Falls, Washington. Neuberger characterized Ross as a bit naïve and unsophisticated, sometimes so vague and indefinite that he failed to seek advice on important issues.²⁰³ Ross was a trustee of the Public Ownership League

²⁰¹ Alan J. Stein. “Ross, James Delmage (J. D.) (1872-1939)” on History Link.org obtained from <http://www.historylink.org/File/2557> Posted 22 July 2002 (15 September 2017).

²⁰² Myron K. Jordon. “The Kilowatt Wars: James D. Ross, public power and public relationships contest for the hearts and minds of Pacific Northwesterners” (PhD Dissertation), University of Washington (1991) 127.

²⁰³ See Richard L. Neuberger. “J. D. Ross – Northwest Dynamo” in *Survey Graphic*, 27(Dec 1938) 586-590.

of America and a colleague of its Secretary, Carl D. Thompson. Ross supported the work of Director Judson King of the National Government League on Power, Natural Resources and Forestry, and consulted with his old friend, Senator George Norris, who had once proposed Ross as one of three commissioners to operate the power undertaking on the Tennessee River.²⁰⁴ Progressivism, in the 1920s, found a deep well of advocacy among national and local electricity technocrats in support of Pacific Northwest public power initiatives, setting up public-utility information committees on early paradigms advised by the National Electric Light Association.²⁰⁵

Ross thought of himself as a technical pioneer who developed latent power in the Northwest region; as such, he expressed an eagerness to emulate the Hydro-Electric Power Commission on the Ontario model of Sir Adam Beck, who aspired to extend hydroelectric power schemes beyond Seattle to encompass the entire Pacific Coast.²⁰⁶ Ross cited several advantages of public power utilities, which would (a) lower rates to

²⁰⁴ Correspondence from J. D. Ross to Homer T. Bone, 8 May 1928, obtained from J. D. Ross Papers, University of Washington Libraries, Special Collections, Box 22 (October 2015); Correspondence from J. D. Ross to Judson King, 5 December 1931, obtained from J. D. Ross Papers, University of Washington Libraries, Special Collections, Box 21 (October 2015). Correspondence from J. D. Ross to Ralph Clyde, 2 May 1930, obtained from J. D. Ross Papers, University of Washington Libraries, Special Collections, Box 21 (October 2015). Richard Neuberger. "Prophet of a New 'Promised Land of Power,'" *New York Times*, 14 November 1937. ProQuest Historical Newspaper: *The New York Times* 154.

Note. In a speech to the Washington Public Ownership League, 17 September 1935, Ross was introduced as a Trustee, Public Ownership League of America.

²⁰⁵ Jordon, *Kilowatt Wars* 127-128; J. D. Ross "Practicability of Public Ownership," debate material sent to Carl Thompson, 20 August 1936, obtained from J. D. Ross Papers, University of Washington Libraries, Special Collections, Box 22 (October 2015).

Note. General Electric hired Bruce Barton in 1922 to develop a unified advertising campaign for its products. Barton coordinated a public relations effort through NELA and women's clubs, schools, local governments, and home economists, concentrating not only on individual products, but large themes. Barton's campaigns included "Make Your House a Home," which emphasized complete wiring for the home; "The Home of a Hundred Comforts," which suggested the ease and luxury that electricity could bring; "Building an Electrical Consciousness" and "Any Women," a series showing how electrification saved housewives time and energy. See Nye, *Electrifying America* 268.

²⁰⁶ Neuberger, *Our Promised Land* 116.

eliminate private utilities from the electric market and create public authority over natural resources upon which power generation depended; (b) purify politics by removing private-utility lobbyists and their governmental influence; and (c) eliminate private-utility public-relations campaigns and their purported propaganda, leaving only public power committees to disseminate “fair-minded” power information throughout the region.

A successful and popular municipal-energy administrator, Ross was abruptly discharged from his duties in March 1931 by Seattle’s then-Mayor Frank Edwards. It was the night before a ballot measure was voted on, that would give City Light control over its own construction projects. Edwards was allied with an eastern holding company, Stone and Webster, which controlled the private utility, Puget Sound Power and Light. Edwards reportedly responded to a dare made during a late-night political meeting to test his authority over Ross’s clout at City Light and his popularity among Seattle’s residents. The move backfired. Voters overwhelming passed the utility-ballot measure by an 8 to 1 margin, reaffirming faith in Ross as administrator of City Light’s programs. The next day, City Light proponents formed the Municipal Utilities Protection League to circulate petitions to recall Mayor Edwards. Led by Marion Zioncheck, a former student leader at the University of Washington, the group gathered 200,000 signatures, substantially more than the 25,000 required to trigger a recall ballot. On July 14, 1931, the City Council appointed Robert Harlin to succeed Edwards as mayor; Harlin immediately reinstated Ross to his position as superintendent of Seattle City Light.²⁰⁷

²⁰⁷ David Wilma. “Voters recall Mayor Frank Edwards from office for firing City Light Superintendent J. D. Ross on July 13, 1931” on *HistoryLink.org*. obtained from <http://www.historylink.org/File/3548> Posted 9 September 2001 (26 October 2017).

In the meantime, Ross's advocacy for cheap power rates and widespread distribution of publicly-owned hydroelectricity prompted then-Governor Franklin Roosevelt of New York to telephone Ross from across the continent and invite him to consult with the newly formed Power Authority of New York on the St. Lawrence Waterway Project – a new concept in American public affairs.²⁰⁸ Roosevelt and Ross became associates and friends, meeting socially several times to discuss public power issues relevant to the 1932 Presidential campaign. Upon Roosevelt's 1932 election victory, Ross was appointed chief engineer of the PWA power board and later to the SEC in 1935. In early 1937, Ross was Roosevelt's choice for sole administrator of the government's power program at Bonneville. Neuberger's *Our Promised Land* described how the President showed Ross a draft of the Bonneville bill from the Committee on National Power Policy, which would eventually become the Bonneville Project Act. Ross commented, "All the responsibility [for the project] is placed in one man. He can't pass the buck to anyone else." Roosevelt replied, "And you are that man."²⁰⁹

²⁰⁸ Note. The Power Authority would be administered by trustees for the state's interest in the St. Lawrence Project, selling bonds to private investors in an open market to finance the enterprise. The goal for this arrangement is to lower the cost of electricity to the small consumer within a wide use policy.

²⁰⁹ Neuberger, "Promised Land of Power" (NYT) 154; Neuberger, *Our Promised Land* 107-108. See Philip Fungiello, *Toward a National Power Policy*, Chapter 8, Footnote 5, noting a letter Ross to Bob Beck, 27 April 1937, and Gus Norwood, *Columbia River Power* 111. The April 27 confidential letter alluded to Ross's 1-1/2 hour meeting with Roosevelt, where, according to Norwood, Ross expected to become Bonneville Administrator and began to consider recruiting staff for a quick start on constructing the strategic transmission interconnection between the Bonneville and Grand Coulee dams, the symbolic "jugal vein" of the regional power scheme. A Ross-Roosevelt meeting was scheduled in Washington D. C., April 5, 1937. (See "Franklin D. Roosevelt, Day by Day," 5 April 1937.) A letter from Richard Neuberger to J. D. Ross, 1 October 1937, Neuberger's reply to "think over the Bonneville setup . . . then write you my conclusions" might mean consider setting up an informational division before a public announcement of the Ross appointment obtained from Seattle City Light Superintendent James D. Ross Reference Material, Collection Number 1200-14, Box 76 (May 2016).

Increasing support for public power districts in Oregon and Washington provided advantageous political conditions for passage of the Bonneville Project Act, signed into law on August 20, 1937.²¹⁰ Major provisions of the Act were to (a) encourage the widest possible use of electric energy; (b) operate for the benefit of the general public, particularly for domestic and rural customers; (c) preserve preference and priority for public bodies and cooperatives; (d) provide uniform rates throughout the prescribed transmission areas; and (e) set wholesale rates based on actual cost as determined by specific guidelines.²¹¹ The legislation endorsed the PNWRPC regional viewpoint, which was to instruct the federal government to construct the necessary core-transmission infrastructure and institute the creation of a separate agency to market power — an important policy threshold for the region — in order to provide a conduit for Columbia River Power benefits to flow to the people. A civilian administrator for the Bonneville Project was temporarily in charge under the Interior Department, while the Army Corps of Engineers was responsible for power generation at the dam. Roosevelt stopped short of endorsing permanent legislation for control of power policy along the TVA model for the Pacific Northwest.²¹²

Five weeks after signing the Act, Roosevelt visited the Pacific Northwest to dedicate the Bonneville Dam as part of his West Coast trip to inspect several federal projects, including Fort Peck, Owyhee, and Grand Coulee dams and Timberline Lodge at Mt.

²¹⁰ Norwood, Columbia River Power 62.

²¹¹ *Note.* Surplus power generated at the navigation development at Bonneville was made available to be sold by the project administrator. See footnote 392.

²¹² For a more detailed discussion on the Bonneville Project Act, see Philip Fungiello, *Toward a National Power Policy*.

Hood, Oregon. The presidential party was accompanied by the national media – twenty-one newspapermen, two broadcast networks, eight “picture men,” and two telegraph representatives.²¹³ Bonneville Dam became the backdrop of a major address to the nation, whose citizens experienced a “feeling of satisfaction in witnessing the completion of another great national project,” according to the President.²¹⁴ Roosevelt recalled how in 1932, “I visited Oregon . . . and took the occasion in Portland to express views which have since through the action of the Congress, become a recorded part of American national policy.”²¹⁵

The speech held little interest for or appeal to Roosevelt’s host, Governor Charles Martin, or to the Portland Chamber of Commerce, and private utility companies, all of whom favored selling power in the immediate vicinity of the dam for new industrial development. Nor did Governor Martin or his allies appreciate placards along the route to Bonneville that read, “We want Ross,” defending and lauding his role as the administrator of the Bonneville Project.²¹⁶ Roosevelt’s speech was a repudiation of Martin and his allies. Under these circumstances, Ross’s detractors made a last ditch effort to prevent the appointment of a practitioner of “municipal socialism” as the Bonneville Project’s first Administrator. They favored an administrator more sympathetic to Portland, Oregon and

²¹³ Press Release for Presidential Trip, 22 September - 6 October 1937 obtained from www.fdrlibrary.marist.edu/daybyday/resource/september-1937-9/ (24 November 2017)

²¹⁴ Franklin Roosevelt. Speech at Bonneville Dam, Oregon, 28 September 1937. Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, The American Presidency Project obtained from <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/node/208788> (24 November 2017).

²¹⁵ Ibid.

²¹⁶ Norwood, *Columbia River Power* 66.

Note. The People’s Power League organized the “We Want Ross” placards under the guise of “Plain People of Oregon Reception Committee.” See Jill Herzig, *The Oregon Commonwealth Federation* (thesis) 40.

their industrialization campaign, but Secretary Ickes officially appointed J. D. Ross as the first administrator of the BPA on October 10, 1937.²¹⁷

Roosevelt spoke of a need for more study of national water issues, stating that the country's "line of thinking" must include both great regions and narrowly-defined localities. Effective land-use planning and development principles practiced in the semi-arid region of the Great Plains could have prevented the soil erosion disaster that led to the abandonment of thousands of farms and the migration of thousands of families to Washington, Oregon, and California. Roosevelt chided those who "talk glibly of the right of the individual to do anything he wants with any of his property . . . that it is not the concern of the Federal or state or local government to interfere" as a misinterpretation of the idea of "the liberty of the individual."²¹⁸ To address local regional conflicts, Roosevelt argued for a Pacific Northwest region in one unit for the present and the future. As for the development of electric power in the Columbia watershed, its widest use must prevail to encourage upbuilding of the nation's smaller communities. Roosevelt introduced his legislative plan for a ground-up community, with county and state sub-regionalism within seven or eight Larger natural geographic areas.²¹⁹ "Truly, in the construction of this [Bonneville] dam we have had our eyes on the future of the Nation. Its cost will be returned to the people of the United States many times over in the improvement of navigation and transportation, the cheapening of electric power, and the distribution of this power to hundreds of small communities within a great radius."²²⁰

²¹⁷ Norwood, *Columbia River Power* 66.

Note. Ross continued to serve at Seattle City Light as superintendent from 1931 to his death.

²¹⁸ Roosevelt, Speech at Bonneville Dam, Oregon, 28 September 1937.

²¹⁹ *Ibid.*

²²⁰ *Ibid.*

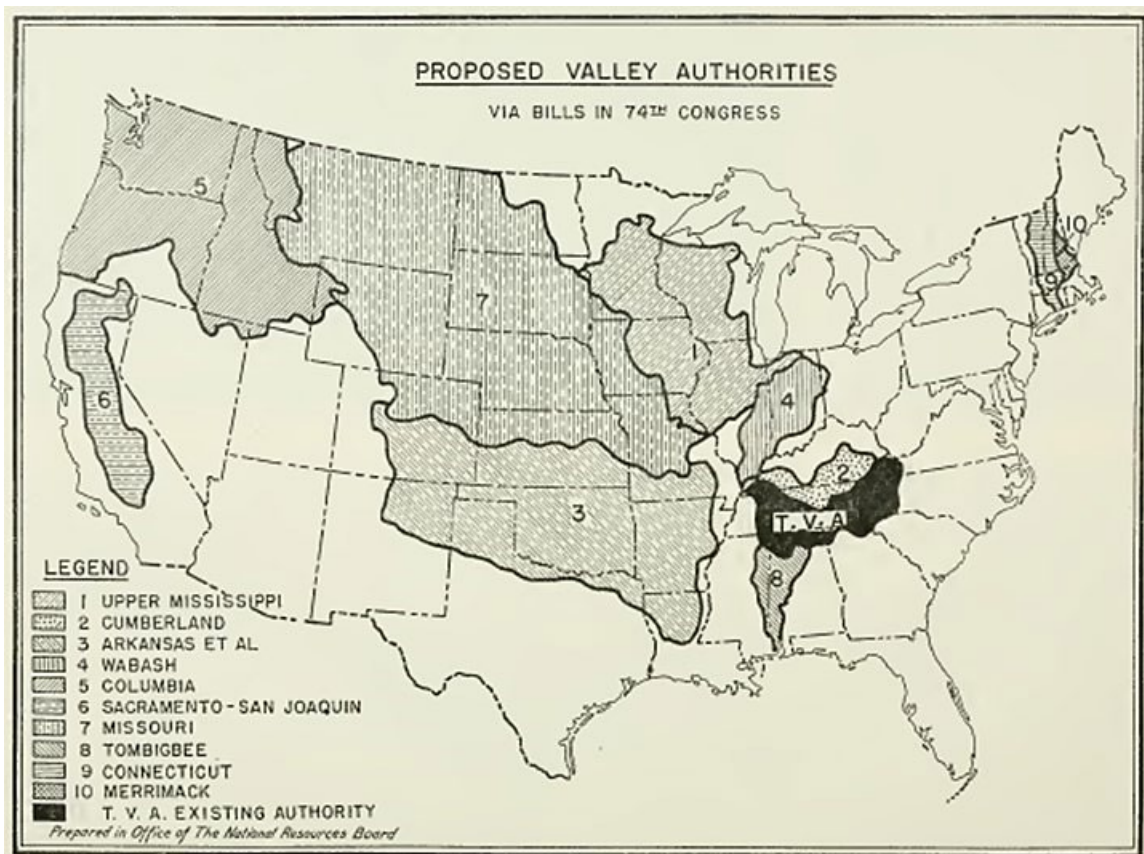


Figure 4-1. Proposed Valley Authorities.

Credit: NRC 1935 Report, Figure 12, page 106.

Figure 4-1. Regional planning appealed to the progressive imagination. The United States covers such a vast territory that the Natural Resources Committee (NRC) suggested valley authorities were needed to develop greater self-sufficiency to outgrow frontier sectionalism. A single-crop or one-resource area was not the ideal. There were many large regions in the United States that suffered from unplanned use of water and land, and from the failure to develop potential resources to their fullest capacity. The NRC said balance and self-sufficiency would result from diversified agriculture and sound industrial development to sustain a culture of regionalism made possible by federal government energy-centric programs. Eight bills for valley authorities were introduced in the Seventy-Fourth Congress in 1935, as well as another proposal that would add the Tombigbee and Bear Creek basins to the TVA. All proposed legislation specified the purposes of the authorities as controlling flood waters, improving navigation, and developing hydroelectric power.



Figure 4-2. “Grand Coulee Day.”

Date: 18 June 1934.

Photographer: Unknown.

Courtesy of Barry K. Jones, *Spokesman-Review* Archives.

Caption Text: Fred K. Jones at the podium, President of the Spokane Chamber of Commerce in 1933 and 1934, presided over the opening of bids for the construction of the Grand Coulee Dam on Riverside Avenue in front of the Chamber of Commerce Building on June 18, 1934.

Figure 4-2. Grand Coulee Day. Monday, June 18, 1934 was declared ‘Grand Coulee Day,’ the day dam construction bids were unsealed. At 10:00 am, in front of the Spokane Chamber of Commerce Building, with full radio coverage, the winning bid was announced. On stage were Governor Clarence Martin of Washington State, elders from the Coleville Tribe, Spokane Chamber of Commerce President Fred. K. Jones, and Elwood Mead, Frank Banks and other of Bureau of Reclamation officials. The dam’s construction contract was awarded to Silas Mason Company, Atkinson-Kier Company, and Walsh Construction Company (MWAK Company). Forty Inland Empire towns that would benefit from the dam were invited to participate in a populist celebration of hometown Americana (Pitzer, *Grand Coulee* 101; *Spokane-Chronicle*, 5 May 1934).

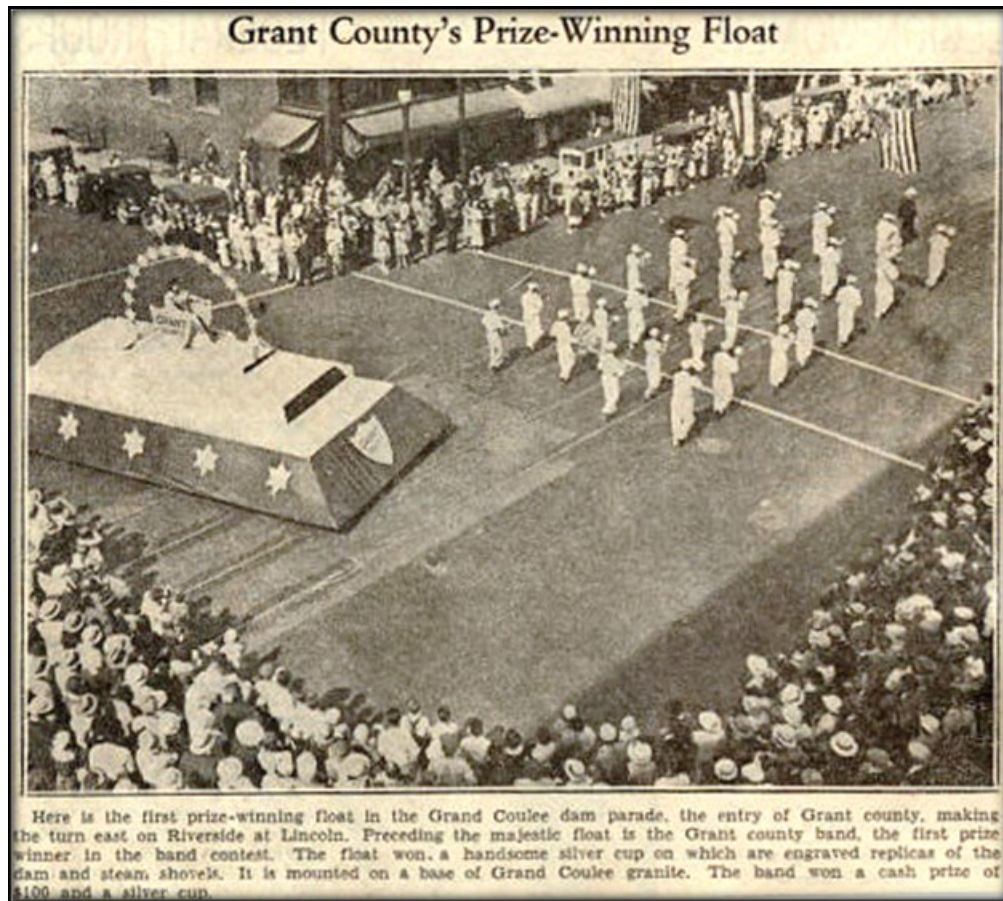


Figure 4-3. “Grant County’s Prize-Winning Float.”

Credit: *Spokesman-Review*, 19 June 1934.

Photographer: Unknown.

WSU Libraries Digital Collections, State History Box 9, sh92-286.

Caption Text: Here is the first prize-winning float in the Grand Coulee dam parade, the entry of the Grant county, making the turn east on Riverside at Lincoln. Preceding the majestic float is the Grant county band, the first prize winner in the band contest. The float won a handsome silver cup on which are engraved replicas of the dam and steam shovel. It is mounted on a base of Coulee granite. The band won a cash prize of \$100 and a silver cup.

Figure 4-3. “Every effort is being made ... to build a parade as a symbol of the vast project that will give to the Pacific northwest [sic] one of the greatest hydroelectric plants in the world” (*Spokesman-Review*, 19 June 1934). This celebration supported the virtues of small-town life. As local folk art, the parade expressed long-held values of hard work, self-reliance, and community. Labor and building trades likewise formed other marching units. This hometown symbology displayed an Americana ethos which seemingly for the time being, eased the anxieties and tensions of the depressed times and welcome societal reform.



Figure 4-4. “President Roosevelt Inspects Bonneville Dam Site.”

Credit: *Coeur d’Alene Press*, 3 August 1934.

WSU Libraries Digital Collections. Northwest History Box 20. nwh21-232.

Caption Text: Bronzed and “fit” after a month’s vacation cruising Pacific and Atlantic waters. President Franklin Delano Roosevelt makes his first inspection of federal projects in the Pacific northwest [sic] where the government is putting the mighty Columbia river to work. The president at Bonneville, Ore., 40 miles above Portland, looks over plans of the mighty development with Secy. Of War George Dern, left, and Gov. Julius Meier, right.

Figure 4-4. Inspecting Progress at Bonneville: President Roosevelt publicized the progress of Bonneville Dam. This newspaper photograph suggested to the nation that the New Deal government was addressing its socio-economic problems. The composition was framed with the President in the center, surrounded by the Secretary of War and the Oregon Governor, posed in discussion with plans of the Bonneville development, a key public works project for the future landscape of the Pacific Northwest. It documented fulfillment of Roosevelt’s 1932 campaign promises. It was also a testimonial to his good health, as the lead observation in the text caption demonstrates.



Figure 4-5. President Franklin D. Roosevelt speaking at the dedication of the Grand Coulee Dam before a massive crowd of 20,000, Washington, August 4, 1934. #E2733.

Photographer: M.D. Boland, Tacoma, Washington.

Date Taken: 4 August 1934.

University of Washington Libraries, Special Collections, Negative Number UW35578.

Figure 4-5. “People are going to understand some of the implications of building dams in the higher stretches of all rivers all over the country” (Franklin Roosevelt, August 4, 1934). The President was taking his message directly to the people, as the man of the people. This panoramic image emphasizes the masses of enthusiastic citizens surrounding President Roosevelt at the Grand Coulee construction site. On that hot day, people “used handkerchiefs or shirt sleeves to wipe away the sweat, found whatever they could drink, and cheered the President” (Pitzer 1994, 101). He was the embodiment of a government leading its citizens to a Promised Land, developing resources for the people, the public good, a symbol of American democracy: “It is going to mean from the Snake down to the sea level, adding 50 percent to potential power they have today ... We are going to see, I believe, with our own eyes, electricity and power made so cheap that they will become a standard article of use, not merely for the agriculture and manufacturing but for every home within the reach of an electric transmission line” (Franklin Roosevelt, August 4, 1934).



Figure 4-5a. President Franklin D. Roosevelt speaking at the dedication of the Grand Coulee Dam before a massive crowd of 20,000, Washington, August 4, 1934. #E2733
 Photographer: M.D. Boland, Tacoma, Washington.
 Date Taken: 4 August 1934.
 University of Washington Libraries, Special Collections. Negative Number UW35578.

Figure 4-5a. The President appears against a background containing distinct symbology associated with a past era – two teepees and undeveloped scrub-desert landscape – the “Last Frontier” as referred to by Roosevelt. The image not only captures the experience, but due to Grand Coulee’s remote location, acts to mediate the experience for those who could not witness the day’s reality. “[T]his country is going to be filled with homes ... a great many families from other States of the Union ... who will be making an honest livelihood and doing their best successfully to live up to the American standard of living and the American standard of citizenship” (Franklin Roosevelt, August 4, 1934). Captured in the moment was faith in a future: hope, opportunity, self-sufficiency, and belief in government.



Figure 4-6. Bureau of Reclamation Press Release. 1934 Press Photo President Franklin D. Roosevelt Visited Grand Coulee Dam Site.

Photographer: Unknown.

Date Taken: 4 August 1934.

Bureau of Reclamation, US Department of Interior, Grand Coulee Project Office. 1934 ARCH 0015.

Caption Text: President Franklin D. Roosevelt visited the Grand Coulee Dam construction site. Quote from his speech – “I leave here today with the feeling that work is well undertaken, that We are going to ahead with a useful project, and we are going to see it through for the benefit of our country.”

Figure 4-6. Subject matter is shaped to reinforce ideas. The Bureau of Reclamation produced this composite to support the New Deal narrative of government-backed programs to build a Promised Land. Franklin Roosevelt’s portrait was cropped to frame a striking pose of a leader, confidently in charge, against a stars and stripes background, and surrounded by optimistic citizens. Roosevelt’s populist message, was implied by this image to resonate with the forgotten man and woman, to reinforce what a democracy can do to secure for its people a better life.

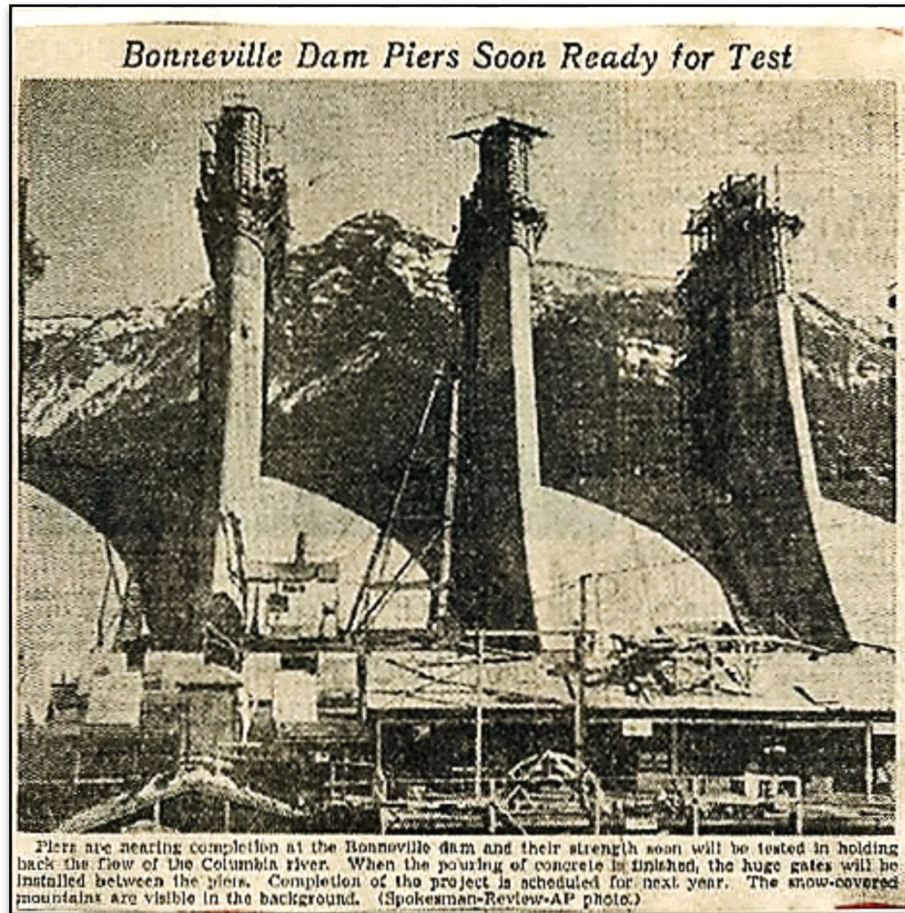


Figure 4-7. “Bonneville Dam Piers Soon Ready for Test.”

Date: 15 March 1937.

Photographer: Unknown. *Spokesman-Review-AP* photo.

WSU Libraries Digital Collections. NW History Box 20. nwh20-230.

Caption Text: Piers are nearing completion at the Bonneville dam and their strength soon will be tested in holding back the flow of the Columbia river. When the pouring of concrete is finished, the huge gates will be installed between the piers. Completion of the project is scheduled for next year. The snow-covered mountains are visible in the background.

Figure 4-7. Technology and Nature. Favorable newspaper photographs with text captions reinforced the government’s message. The marvel of technology juxtaposed to nature’s majesty exemplified government resource development for the common good. The foreground construction buildings indicate scale, while the middle ground held the piers of the dam where gates would be installed to hold back and control the river water, sourced from the background snow-covered mountains. The piers guide one’s eye to mountains and the curves give a sense of forceful movement and power between technology and nature.

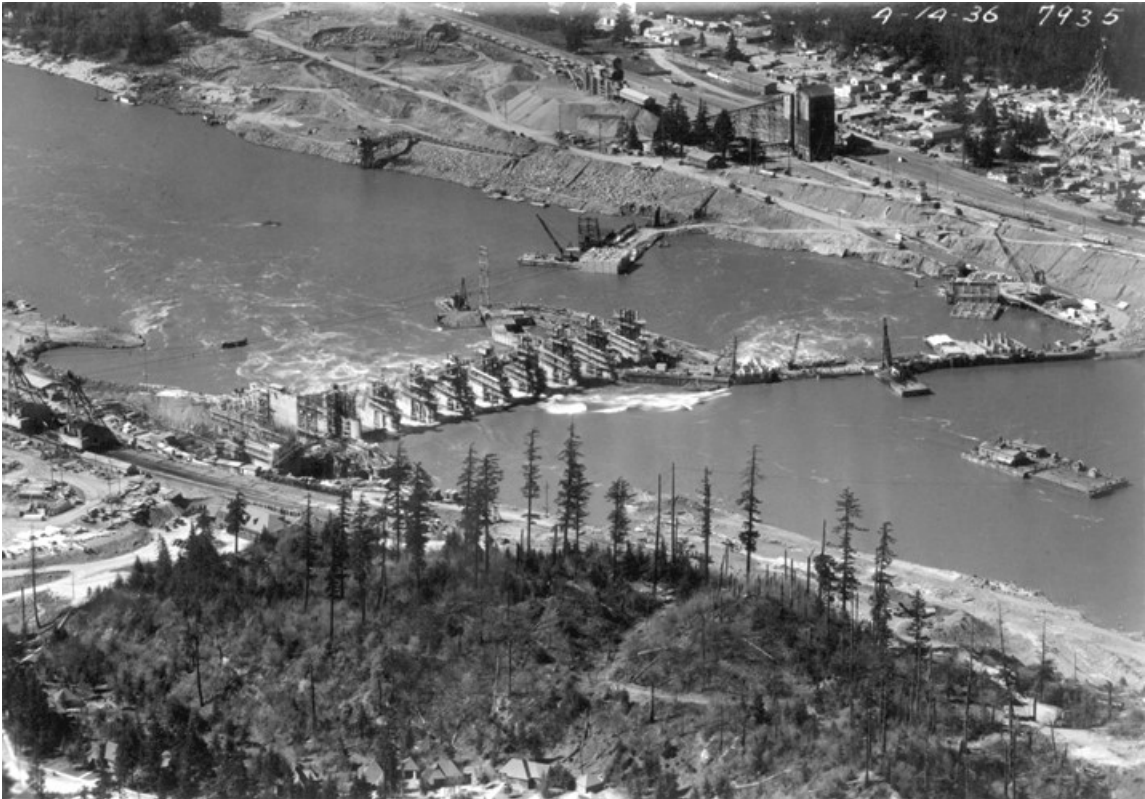


Figure 4-8. Aerial View of Construction, Bonneville Project, 1936.

Date: 14 April 1936.

Photographer: Unknown.

Bonneville Power Administration Archives, Army Corp of Engineers ACE935.

Figure 4-8. Aerial View of Construction, 1936. Photographs taken from afar reduced the dam structure to abstract geometric figures of modern technology rising out of the river. This image conveys the experience of dam construction. Panoramic or aerial perspectives captured the enormity of the project. This composition communicates the interaction of energy and dynamism present in the Columbia River with the dam construction project.



Figure 4-9. “Crane Dredging at Bonneville Construction Site, 1935?”

Photographer: Unknown.

Bonneville Power Administration Archives, Gift of Hoff Family. 2011 Gift.Hoff-015

Figure 4-9. Crane Dredging at Bonneville Construction Site, 1935?

An intermediate viewpoint of the Bonneville construction site that features a dredging crane, a machine-age symbol, set within nature. The scale of the huge machine demonstrates the superiority of technology that makes the human factor appear less significant. Images of machines moving earth and rock picture a messy landscape of change, but also provide evidence of democracy on the march for the betterment of its citizens.



Figure 4-10. Construction at Bonneville.

Date: 26 December 1935.

Photographer: Unknown.

Bonneville Power Administration Archive, Army Corps Engineers. ACE7298.

Figure 4-10. Futurism. The sweeping view documents the rapid change rising out of the riverbed. The image was framed to crop overall geometric patterns and textures in a visual language of modern engineering, defining a utopian industrial landscape. Government efficacy was exemplified in work and labor, resultant of public works projects. Humans vied with the forces of nature to find new ways of work and life within a collaboration between nature and machine.



Figure 4-11. Construction of ‘fish ladders’ at Bonneville Dam on the Columbia River, 9 July 1937.

Date: 9 July 1937.

Photographer: Unknown.

Bonneville Power Administration Archive, Gift of the Hoff Family. 2011 Gift.Hoff-074.

Figure 4-11. Construction of ‘Fish Ladders.’ Provisions for fish passage were planned for Bonneville Dam. Initial propaganda held fisheries could coexist alongside energy generation, transportation and reclamation development. Both were eventually built. This image accentuates the abstract efficiency of technology. The diagonal and curved lines are dynamic emblems of modernity. While engineers found it technically possible to lift adult salmon past the dams, the smolts’ downstream passage over or through the dam structure still was impeded.

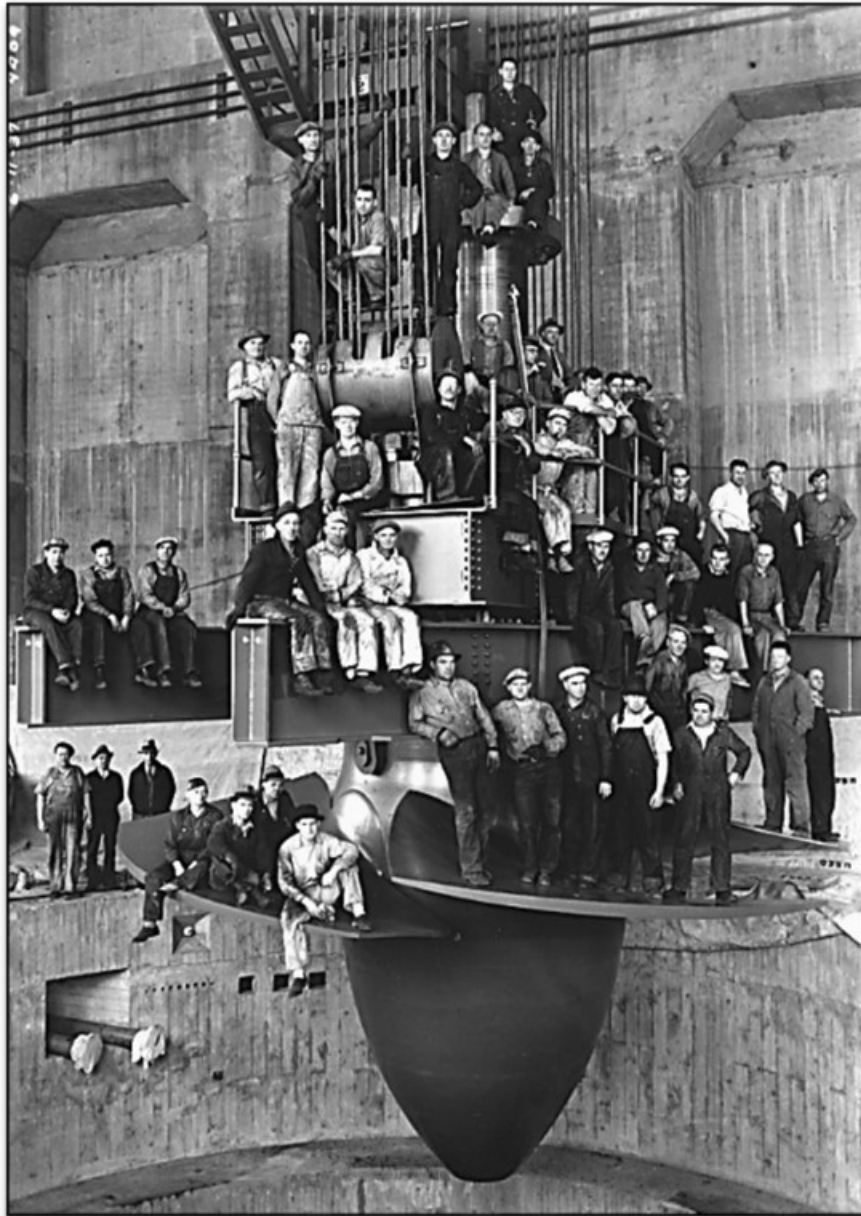


Figure 4-12. Bonneville workers' posed on turbine blade, 11 June 1937.

Date: 11 June 1937.

Photographer: Unknown.

Bonneville Power Administration, Army Corps Engineers. ACE9409.

Figure 4-12. Bonneville workers' posed on turbine blade. This photograph had a two-fold purpose: to provide context for the huge scale construction and evidence that public works provide employment.



Figure 4-13. Construction of the Dam (study for the mural, Department of the Interior, Washington, D. C.) November 1938.

Date: November 1938.

Artist: William Gropper.

Smithsonian American Art Museum. Transfer from the U.S. Department of the Interior, National Park Service Object Number 1965.18.11A-C.

Figure 4-13. William Gropper demonstrates the dignity, courage and strength of the American labor force working for a common goal – economic recovery through the power and effectiveness of President Roosevelt’s policies in electricity and reclamation. The mural supports the myth of faith in a Promised Land and its wonderful possibilities. Based on the artist’s visits to Grand Coulee Dam on the Columbia River and the Davis Dam on the Colorado River, the center panel illustrates engineers interpreting blueprints to direct machinery to harness nature. The left panel shows men dangling heroically, lending movement and vitality to a positive future, while the right panel shows laborers using their individual skills to work in harmony to contribute to the larger, collective construction project. Color chosen in Depression era murals represented an idiom, a characteristic mode of expression to seek connections and relationships to past landscapes, people and traditions with the future (See Lynne Baer, “William Gropper’s ‘Construction of the Dam’”).

Chapter 5: “A Populist Media Paradigm”

Planning for the use and control of water is planning for most of the basic functions of the life of the Nation. We cannot plan for water unless we also consider the relevant problems of the land. We cannot plan for water and the land unless we plan for the whole people. It is of little use to control rivers unless we also consider the conditions which make for the security and freedom of human life The need for planning arises out of the needs and desires of the people. Under the proven system of democracy no plan can be imposed upon the people. Government may inform, educate, and guide. It may mobilize resources for the common task. It cannot dictate. What must be sought is effective means for carrying out a common purpose, not only in the interest of the living generation but for the protection and enhancement of the lives of all the generations to come.²²¹

Mississippi Valley Committee
October 1, 1934

Roosevelt’s 1932 election created a climate for experimentation in American politics: administrative actions to effect change and informational processes to broaden the scope and success of such change. Government-sponsored rhetoric was a constant balancing and counterbalancing act recording what existed and projecting forward what progress could be made. It was at once a two-edged problem that proved both vital and aggravating. Wrong methods used to communicate new policy, may instead muddle the wanted message to the public. Yet, if the wanted message was driven too hard, the public, especially critics, may feel propaganda is overtaking the message, not being mindful of the primacy of the policy for the action taken. The traditionalist may say that the government has no business leading public relations campaigns on government policies. But the apostle of social change may answer, “a broad concept of public relations is part of the American way of life — that every means of persuasion should be placed at the service of the

²²¹ Morris Cooke, et al. *Report of the Mississippi Valley Committee of the Public Works Administration* (1934) ii.

elected leaders of the people.”²²² Such was the dilemma for the Roosevelt Administration’s social programs.

The Resettlement Administration (RA), was created by executive order on April 30, 1935, as a relief agency, to tackle the problems of the small farmer. As head of the RA, Rexford Tugwell needed an aggressive federal publicity plan of action for emergency relief to the common person. Tugwell described this person as “destitute, ignorant, and luckless,” who farmed on marginal land, was saddled with debt, but who wanted to become a part of the framework of a functional economy.²²³ Emergency relief meant that many American citizens would be subjected to relocation — directed where to live, how to live, when to move — radical solutions to socioeconomic problems that required planning. Such potential disruption, required explanation to common people, who thought in more traditional terms. For that reason, Director of Still Photography Roy Stryker instructed his photographers to dramatize the problems of “the lower third,” ordinary and poor Americans, to engender support for relief, rehabilitation, resettlement, and land-use planning. Although the RA’s Information Chief, John Franklin Carter, opted for the usual press releases, he also authorized exhibits for public display and scripts for radio broadcasts, with an emphasis on quality. The photographic section and other media’s documentation of the Dust Bowl effectively demonstrated the need for RA programs. However, Tugwell and Carter agreed that the motion picture medium should present a more graphic depiction of the violence of a Dust Storm.²²⁴ Therefore, they decided to make good

²²² Richard MacCann. *The People’s Films*. New York: Hastings House (1973) 5.

²²³ MacCann, *The People’s Films* 59.

²²⁴ Robert Snyder. *Pare Lorentz: The Documentary Film*. Norman: University of Oklahoma (1968) 24.

quality, honest films that used music and narration to build drama and emotion. The finished products would be shown in movie theatres around the nation, slotted as shorts before the main feature to serve as an important messaging tool for the New Deal government.²²⁵

In an initial letter to Comptroller General John McCarl on August 12, 1935, Tugwell requested funds to produce a motion picture with sound to carry out objectives of the Emergency Relief Appropriations Act of 1935. An appropriation was made for *The Plow That Broke the Plains*. The primary objective was “to help the Resettlement Administration and its employees visualize and understand better the problems confronting them, and to aid them in the prevention of the results of soil erosion and related problems . . . [that was] the most effective, quick, and inexpensive means of explaining some of these problems.”²²⁶ If the American people could be made to understand the Great Plains tragedy, this drama “would build conviction and conviction would support policy.”²²⁷ *The Plow That Broke the Plains* launched a short but meaningful period of documentary filmmaking by the United States Government.

Film was perhaps the most distinct means of publicity that any organization of the era could employ. Sound film, a cultural focus on “Hollywood stars,” the radio’s popularity, and the depression’s economic downturn transformed the public’s taste for entertainment. In the 1930s, Pare Lorentz’s filmmaking for the RA catered to that taste. His films had a notable impact due to Lorentz’s ability to dramatize problems described in “the dry

²²⁵ Pare Lorentz video interview by Alan Fern 17 March 1976; MacCann, *The People’s Films* 59-61.

²²⁶ In Snyder, *The Documentary Film*, Letter to Rexford Tugwell from Comptroller General McCarl, 19 August 1935, 202.

²²⁷ MacCann, *The People’s Films* 71.

words of a government report” in a visual presentation that drew upon emotions to educate the public about problems of national significance. According to Lorentz, “The movie was created, tried, and developed in America. Supported by the dumb and the quick, rich and poor, it is the most powerful medium for news, opinion, and art in the world.”²²⁸

The RA’s early ideas about the governmental impact on wholesale informational practices and techniques of the New Deal fit into a pattern, a *Populist Media Paradigm*. This two-fold model identified the government’s efforts to (1) represent or dramatize socioeconomic problems affecting ordinary Americans by utilizing graphics and realist genres of the period, and (2) relate these problems to the common individual’s experience through selected appeals and manipulation of emotions. Utilizing maps to connect to place was part of this structure. The RA sought to weaponize new media to advance a populist agenda centered on humanitarian grounds as an agency for change. The RA was convinced that ideas could be communicated, opinions changed, and new ways shown to benefit humankind, creating a stage to introduce governmental solutions and resolutions to its audience.²²⁹ The Administration needed “to sell” its policies. Akin to the “usable past” concept, the method employed the audience’s knowledge and experience of an existing place to create a foundation for the construction of a new and better place for the future. Unfamiliar legislation had to be explained. Popular enthusiasm needed to be

²²⁸ MacCann, *The People’s Films* 72; Biography of Pare Lorentz (n.d.) obtained from <http://www.parelorentzcenter.org/biography/> (15 October 2016).

²²⁹ *Note*. Influenced by Social Realism, a school that espoused art as a weapon to communicate ideas, change thinking and freed the imagination to benefit humankind. See David Shapiro: *Art as a Weapon*. New York: Fredrick Ungar Publishing Co. (1973) 18.

inspired. And so the New Deal government had to institute a modern publicity campaign to carry out its designated policies (Fig. 5-1a,b to Fig. 5-6).

Three federal films relevant to this paradigm pertain to the regional-power question in this chapter: *The River* (1937), a film initiated by the RA but completed by the Farm Security Administration; *Ecce Homo!* (1938), a radio broadcast drama by Pare Lorentz (a preliminary script for the film version was never completed); and *Power and the Land* (1940), a film sponsored by the REA under the supervision of the US Film Service. These are early examples of government information about the regional-power planning programs and how they countered private-utility propaganda. A review of available media allows for assessment of the relationship between populist messages of persuasion and regional planning goals.

Pare Lorentz's *The River* (1937)

As the story goes, the idea for *The River* came to Lorentz after his attention was drawn to a map of North America on a wall in Rexford Tugwell's office. Lorentz stared at the map and exclaimed, "Rex, here is the great picture that ought to be made . . . you ought to take a drop of water and follow it from here," referencing the northern beginnings of the Missouri River, "all the way down to the Gulf."²³⁰ Lorentz then walked out of Tugwell's office on his supposed last day with the RA. Tugwell called him back to say the idea was great and that somehow the film would be made.²³¹ The incident took place in June 1936

²³⁰ Pare Lorentz quoted in MacCann, *The People's Films* 71.

²³¹ MacCann, *The People's Films* 71.

after Lorentz had completed *The Plow That Broke the Plains*.²³² On July 4, 1936, Lorentz received confirmation that President Roosevelt authorized \$50,000 budget for a new film.²³³

Lorentz had read the *Report of the Mississippi Valley Committee of the Public Works Administration*, chaired by public power advocate and utilitarian conservationist, Morris L. Cooke, to prepare a movie script under the working title, *Highway to the Sea*.²³⁴ Lorentz's initial idea was "to take an engineer's boat, put a couple of pick-up trucks on it, and start at Minneapolis and go clear to the Gulf."²³⁵ However, after traveling to the Mississippi region, Lorentz realized the impracticability of such a plan and altered his proposal to tell the story through the river's tributaries. He came to understand that control of large rivers required management of the smaller rivers and tributaries that feed the main stem. To understand the region's historical culture, Lorentz consulted Mark Twain's *Life on the River* and Lyle Saxon's *Father Mississippi*.²³⁶

The *Mississippi Valley Report* stated that people cannot reach the highest standard of well-being without the wisest use of the land and water. "We cannot plan for water unless we consider problems of the land. We cannot plan for water and the land unless we

²³² Note. *The Plow That Broke the Plains* premiered at the White House in early March 1936. Its public premiere was at the Mayflower Hotel, Washington D. C. on 10 May 1936.

²³³ Robert Snyder. "The River" from Library of Congress website (2015) obtained from <https://www.loc.gov/programs/static/national-film-preservation-board/documents/river2.pdf> (15 October 2016)

²³⁴ In MacCann, *The People's Films* 72.

²³⁵ Kathleen Hogan. *The River* from "The 1930's Project of American Studies" website, University of Virginia (n.d.) from <http://xroads.virginia.edu/~1930s/film/lorentz/river.html> (12 October 2016).

²³⁶ Pare Lorentz. *The River* (Book). New York: Stackpole Sons (1938) vii.

Note. The book jacket of *The River* states that the movie was based on Lorentz's book, "Rich Land, Poor Land." From research, Roosevelt Brains Trust member, economist Stuart Chase, wrote *Rich Land Poor Land: A Study of Waste in the Natural Resource of America* (1936). Found no other information on the Lorentz book.

plan for the whole people.”²³⁷ Lorentz took note of the theme “. . . poor land makes poor people. Poor people make poor land.”²³⁸ The Committee held that, figuratively, there is no ideal river. The Great Valley’s water use and water control problems involved the overlap between the physical nature of river and its contributing streams with the various human claims upon the river and adjacent land. “Power, flood control, low-water control, navigation, irrigation, a wide-spread development of rural electrification, and an extensive national reserve against unemployment, appear inextricably bound up in the possibilities of the undeveloped waters of the Mississippi Valley.”²³⁹ The report made the case for a comprehensive power plan to be the coordinating factor for river regional development: Power generation would be the overarching agency of action and responsible strategem of response to the depressed socioeconomic environment. Control of floods, improvement of navigation, provision of power, and prevention of erosion were integral to the agriculture and irrigation, industry and commerce, water storage, forestry, and recreation. In the populist message, an overall government plan would focus not only on ordinary human welfare, but “preservation of the physical foundations [on] which our civilization rests.”²⁴⁰

In the PWA report, erosion and its causes captured the attention of Lorentz, who was a West Virginian with some knowledge of flooding. As a government documentary initiated by the RA, the script’s final sequences were to conclude with the federal TVA project. But after Lorentz and his camera crew experienced the Ohio River Valley winter

²³⁷ *Mississippi Valley Report*, Preface ii.

²³⁸ Pare Lorentz, *The River* (Film).

²³⁹ *Mississippi Valley Report*, Book II 45. See further discussion in the *Mississippi Valley Report*, Book II 45-53.

²⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 53.

floods of 1937, a reasonable assumption is that Lorentz chose to focus on erosion for his river survey. This footage was the most striking material in the film, with standing to capture the public's attention for problems of the Mississippi River Valley and support the iconography of the forgotten man. Perhaps reflecting ideas from the school of social realism, Lorentz portrayed an American life that was not attractive, exposing the lives and humiliation suffered by poor, ordinary people. The PWA's message took on a moral theme — poor land makes poor people — to stir emotions for the call to social action. Footage of government projects aiding the disadvantaged educated its audience about the TVA and the wisdom of accepting federal intervention in the Great Valley.

The River's shooting script employed “compare and contrast” patterns. In fact, a *compare and contrast* and *before and after* structural pattern was commonly used in New Deal media. In the beginning, Lorentz utilized the form and shape of the clouds and the heavens and undisturbed headwaters framed to instill peaceful emotions, “[f]rom as far West as Idaho, [d]own from the glacier peaks of the Rockies,”²⁴¹ to initialize a “muster list” of places, intricacies, and pieces of a river system. Inscribing aesthetic environmental complexities within a sensitive regional Southern history, gave viewers a common understanding of culture and allegiance to this place, a beloved but damaged land. From symbolic acknowledgment of General Robert E. Lee to images marking the misuse of the Mississippi River Valley, the film's story played to evoke a personal sense of place. Images were framed to compare undisturbed natural conditions to ground cover stripped by “forest destruction, tillage, or overgrazing of livestock.”²⁴² Lorentz used repetition as a

²⁴¹ Lorentz, *The River* (Film).

²⁴² *Mississippi Valley Report*, Book II 62; In MacCann, *The People's Films* 71-73.

tool of narration and image and as another form of comparison to emphasize place and sentiments instilled in place over time. Erosion symbolized nature's repayment for land abuse by humans and would be molded into the villain of the story. Witnessed from wide aerial shots to close-ups of individual flood victims, the wrath of Mother Nature was depicted in image after image of ravaging floods, with an aftermath beyond any individual's means of control.

The River was shaped by the fervor of a national social crisis. It transformed the rubrics of the social documentary, utilizing complex image, music, and narrative prose to deliver a complicated message in seemingly simple terms that allowed Lorentz to experiment with new techniques of government propaganda. He connected "actions with change:" (a) to present clear-cut problems, (action); (b) solutions that serve the public interest, (change that involves action); and (c) New Deal policies that were about change. The script's narrative documented historical neglect (rather than an administrative appeal), that needed national attention, touching the audience's emotion, to prompt citizens to accept civic responsibility. *The River's* script-style of celebrated poetry, photography, and message made it difficult for critics to attack the film, and portrayed a pattern of truths rather than fact, e.g., the problems of the great Mississippi River Valley system were not solely due to the overcultivation of cotton.

Filming began in October 1936 and took place in fourteen states, primarily Alabama, Mississippi, and Tennessee. Initial footage included the plight of sharecroppers, erosion, and its destructive effects on the land as well as TVA dams, both completed and under construction. But the most dramatic and emotional footage was shot during upper tributary flooding on the Ohio River and its aftermath in early 1937 from Memphis,

Tennessee to Cairo, Illinois. Lorentz waited until *The River* was cut and edited to 2,900 feet before writing the narrative; he wanted the visual story to serve as a functional text to accompany Vigil Thomson's score. The utilitarian prose imparted a rhythm far better than a more conventional narrative style to explain the pictorial story of the Mississippi River, and the prose could stand alone as a permanent record of the motion picture.²⁴³

On its face, *The River* reported an ongoing crisis of land and water in the lower Mississippi River Valley. But Lorentz lent more impact to this report through a signature dramatic style to document geographic, economic, and humanistic forces of a continuing land and water crisis of the Mississippi River Valley systems. His camera lens functioned as an architectural tool to bear witness to changes in the land and to frame the specific space, time, and form of personal emotions and values. As a critique of capitalism, *The River* was directed toward a mass audience who bore the brunt of capitalism's negative effects, as a representative visualization of the then-current American social order. *The River's* final flood sequences in the Ohio River Valley raised audience awareness of the neglect and roused public opinion to urge action to meet a national need. The storyline built up into a crescendo and a cliffhanger that left a gut-wrenching question for the audience, "How can I help?"²⁴⁴

²⁴³ Snyder, *The Documentary Film* 56-58; Lorentz, *The River* (Book) vii.

²⁴⁴ Note. Pare Lorentz said Roosevelt viewed *The River* sometime in September 1937 and said his comment was, "That's a grand movie. What can I do to help?" In Eleanor Roosevelt's "My Day" Column written September 14, 1937, Mrs. Roosevelt wrote about an unnamed film as a thrilling movie "brought up by the Resettlement Administration showing what happened to the Mississippi River and its tributaries and why they give us so much trouble at times. I wish every one [sic] who still questions the need of reforestation and soil conservation, could see this movie. We understand so little what our forefathers' lack of knowledge has done to us. Year after year we pay the toll financially and in human lives for what they did. We deal with the question of necessity on the emergency basis when the floods occur, but we must look far into the future and must control the cause of floods and thereby return much of our land to the condition where it can support people with a reasonably good standard of living." (FDR Library, Pare Lorentz Center)

The epilogue of *The River*, short, disjointed, cold, and distant from the rest of the film, maintained the New Deal publicity line that only the government had the “power” to put the valley “back together” through schemes of regional planning. With practical assertiveness, the narrative lay claim to an all-embracing power possessed by the New Deal government: “In 1933 we started down the Tennessee River, when Congress created the Tennessee Valley Authority . . . to develop navigation, flood control, agriculture, and industry in the valley First came the dams.” In a rhetorical progression of achievements, the narrative continued as the TVA built “giant barriers . . . that [would] transform the old Tennessee into a link of fresh water pools locked and dammed, regulated and controlled, down six hundred and fifty miles to Paducah.”²⁴⁵ The bold New Deal answer was to promise empowerment to the people, delivered within a populist plan for a system-wide, river infrastructure projected to be so massive that only the federal government could undertake it. This narrative, amplified by huge images of modern concrete structures and music to match its monumentalism, seemed to elevate dams as synonymous with the efficacy and legitimacy of government projects. As the epic concluded:

Where there’s water for flood control and
water for navigation, there’s water for power –

Power for the farmers of the Valley.

Power for the villages and the cities and
factories of the Valley.

[n.d.] obtained from <http://www.fdrlibrary.marist.edu/daybyday/resource/september-1937-8/> [18 October 2016]).

²⁴⁵ Lorentz, *The River* (Film).

West Virginia, North Carolina, Tennessee
Mississippi, Georgia and Alabama.

Power to give a New Tennessee Valley to a
new generation.

Power enough to make the river work!²⁴⁶

As multiple metaphors emerged, holding various meanings for power, electric power was linked to newly-defined humanitarian responsibilities assumed by the government for the security and decent life of all its citizens, which private utilities were unable or unwilling to take on. Electricity became more than literal power, but assumed a cultural power, as well, as Lorentz's film posed the question: Should a democracy use its *power* to help people obtain what they cannot do themselves?

In early 1937, federal legislation was being crafted to introduce regional conservation, development of natural resources, and power authorities. *The Conservation Authorities Act of 1937* was introduced in the U.S. Senate by George Norris of Nebraska on June 1, 1937. Referred to the Agriculture and Forestry Committees, *The Conservation Authorities Act's* purpose and policy was as follows:

[T]o develop, integrate, and coordinate plans, projects, and activities for or incidental to the promotion of navigation, the control and prevention of floods, the safeguarding of navigable waters, and the reclamation of public lands, in order to aid and protect commerce among the several states, to strengthen the national defense, to conserve water, soil, mineral, and forest resources of the Nation, to

²⁴⁶ Ibid.

stabilize employment, and otherwise to protect commerce among states, provide for the national defense, and promote the general welfare of the United States.²⁴⁷

In addition, this legislation called for and defined “Regional Power Authorities.” Subject to the Act’s provisions, the President would be entitled to “authorize and direct . . . to create and establish by executive order, [to] cooperate [with] Regional Power Authorities for the purpose of controlling, operating, maintaining, and improving facilities capable of producing hydro-electric power . . . constructed, under construction, or hereafter constructed by or on behalf of the United States.”²⁴⁸ The Act called for the establishment of a Columbia Valley Authority within six months of its passage. Roosevelt purportedly wanted to screen *The River* during a special session of Congress to support this legislation.²⁴⁹ It remains unknown whether the film was shown to Congress. The *Conservation Authorities Act* was tabled at the end of the Seventy-Fifth Congressional session for future action, failing to get out of Congressional committees (Fig. 5-7).

Ecce Homo: Behold the Man! (1938)

Ecce Homo! was a curious project that followed *The River*. Lorentz presented a radio script to Director William Robson of *The Columbia Workshop*, an avant-garde broadcasting platform for the *Columbia Broadcast System* (CBS). The Workshop experimented

²⁴⁷ George Norris. *The Conservation Authorities Act of 1937* (Draft), from The Secretary File (PSF), Conservation File, Box 127, obtained from <http://www.fdrlibrary.marist.edu/resources/images/psf/psf000504.pdf> (18 October 2016).

²⁴⁸ Ibid.

²⁴⁹ Pare Lorentz. *FDR's Moviemakers*. Reno: University of Nevada Press (1992) 151.

Note. Lorentz’s scripts reflected New Deal messaging with each film developed independently by Lorentz. Robert Snyder said that Lorentz submitted his films to his sponsors only after they were finished and would never change a line or a scene. See Snyder, *The Documentary Film* 198.

with new broadcast techniques to present the work of new writers and artists of the era. At the time, Lorentz was exploring various themes for a proposed United States government film that sought to dramatize a deeper understanding of the era's complex problems concerning unemployment.²⁵⁰ Originally, Lorentz received an offer from William Lewis, vice-president of programming for CBS, to conceive a script for the radio broadcast "Sunday Magazine" to consist of a sound and language picture of the United States. Lorentz recommended devoting the broadcast to the TVA, but Lewis replied that there would never be a show about the TVA on CBS. Lorentz was then offered a one-off program on the CBS Workshop to try out his ideas.²⁵¹

Ecce Homo: Behold the Man! was based on Lorentz's unpublished novel, which traced the pilgrimage of a jobless family from the Deep South to Detroit and finally to the Far West.²⁵² Lorentz claimed that with "gigantic industrial equipment and the magnificent amount of arable land in our country," it was absurd to have 11-15 million unemployed men and women.²⁵³ To advance this social principle, Lorentz conceived the drama's protagonist — an unemployed, faceless Industrial Worker Number 7790 — as a vehicle of evolution to redefine technology. Instead of a negative force with a socioeconomic grip over humans, future technology was depicted as a positive vision that works for the "relief" of the little man. Lorentz was referencing the Grand Coulee Dam project and his advocacy for federal regional development based on the TVA scheme, "building the biggest piece of machinery in the world," to solve problems generated from mass

²⁵⁰ Lorentz, *Moviemakers* 80.

²⁵¹ Snyder, *The Documentary Film* 96.

²⁵² MacCann, *The People's Films* 96; Snyder, *The Documentary Film* 96-97.

²⁵³ Lorentz, *Moviemakers* 80.

unemployment.²⁵⁴ None of the CBS officials read the radio script until the day of the broadcast. William Lewis wanted to cancel the program due to its controversial subject matter, but Lorentz convinced him to let the broadcast continue.²⁵⁵

The script was a factual drama based on “official field reports and case histories based on reports by government field men.”²⁵⁶ As with *The River*, Lorentz used utilitarian prose, sounds in descriptive patterns, and tools of commonality to attract his audience. Behind the chugging, discordant, and syncopated sound effects, Lorentz labeled the socioeconomic context of industrial America as a litany of machine products, employing his signature “muster list” to reinforce his point:

Boston: boots and shoes, fish and wool.
Streamers and dies, silk and paper, sewing machines and
motorcycles.

Waterbury – Bridgeport.
Airplanes and ammunition, brass fittings and cotton
Shirts, submarines and watches.²⁵⁷

Able-bodied workers were subjected to the power, utility, and efficiency of machines and their products, to such an extent that their daily routine mimicked a synchronized manufacturing line: Men woke up at dawn, emerged from row houses toward lines of parked, mass-produced autos, and then jostled in traffic before merging into factory parking lots,

²⁵⁴ Ibid., 103-104.

²⁵⁵ Snyder, *The Documentary Film* 97.

²⁵⁶ In *Ecce Homo!* Radio Broadcast, Introduction, Columbia Workshop 091 *Ecce Homo!* 21 May 1938.

²⁵⁷ Lorentz, *Moviemakers* 84.

where they walked together to take their position on the assembly “straight line.”²⁵⁸ Yet, no matter how efficient the human worker, the job was subject to demand for the product. Too much product might slow a machine assembly line, but it would subject able-bodied human workers to layoffs and unemployment. This was the portrait Lorentz painted of the forgotten man.

The “gut” sequence, as Lorentz put it, was Worker No. 7790 crossing paths with three unemployed migrant men like himself – a Texan, an Alabaman, and a New Englander – at a Kansas filling station, a crossroads of America. Each migrant character, identifiable by distinct regional prose and music and sound, delivered his soliloquy on his own difficulties and reasons for leaving his home. Poignantly, each man was headed to where the other migrant had just left. The intricacies in each man’s story combined to symbolize all unemployed Americans to the public. Each worker was able. But modernity and technology disrupted ordinary people’s understanding of how to make a respectable living. Lorentz’s script presented perceived problems, in animated, imaginative, even over-the-top ways to gain public support for government policies. Lorentz so amplified a problem, that it seemingly overwhelmed the common individual. The natural conclusion was that only democratic government could solve it. This came to be a common theme in New Deal media.

Although the short concluding sequence was a bit disconnected from the drama’s rhythm, Lorentz provided the solution. He had protagonist Worker No. 7790 speak to the

²⁵⁸ *Note.* The “industrial symphony” theme was more evident in the production stills and film description completed for the movie version of *Ecce Homo!* However, in the radio broadcast, this theme was portrayed in a robotic-like sequence that made the human worker an auxiliary factor in the “straight-line” mechanical assembly process. See Snyder, *The Documentary Film* 99-102.

“little man.” Here, Worker No. 7790 touted Roosevelt’s solution, derived from his 1920 vision to make the Pacific Northwest the nation’s symbolic Promised Land:

7790: I’m heading West where they’re moving mountains . . .

7790: They had to let the dynamiters down the side of the canyon on ropes at Boulder Dam.

They blew up the mountain and made a lake and a desert and built the highest dam in the world.

The New Englander: But you can’t eat dams.

They’re changing the course of one of the biggest rivers in the country at Grand Coulee.

Alabaman: Yeah, but they can’t figure out how to feed 11 million of us.

7790: They hit quick quicksand up there so they stuck brine pipes in there and froze her, and then dug it out.

Texan: The big boys have the machines. There’s nothing but relief for the little man.

7790: There’s men and machines and there’s room. There’ll be water enough for thousands of farms up there.

New Englander: Yep, but the big boys have the money.

7790: There’s room enough for 30 million people.

Why, man, they’re building the biggest piece of machinery in the world.

Alabaman: But what’ll they do when they finish?

7790: They can build plenty more!

They can make the desert green!

Maybe they'll build a green city.
 Maybe they'll start in the East and build her all over again.
 Maybe there'll be farms for the little man!
 They can move mountains and they can shove rivers around!
 There's men and machines and there's sun and land and room
 for a man to turn around in.
 And there's a job to be done!

This dialogue built to a patriotic crescendo, signaling a large chorus and orchestra in a rendition of *The Battle Hymn of the Republic!* Glory! Glory! Hallelujah!²⁵⁹

The radio broadcast of *Ecce Homo!* aired on May 21, 1938, its only confirmed broadcast in the United States. Lorentz mentioned its airing on a local broadcast in San Francisco in mid-August 1938, when he was on his way to Portland, Oregon.²⁶⁰ Although *Ecce Homo!* received favorable comments from listeners, the Ford Motor Company cancelled any form of advertising with CBS. The *British Broadcast Corporation* as part of its "Experimental Hour" series retitled the drama, *Job to Be Done*, and aired it on August 14, 1938. Later, Lorentz recalled hearing *Ecce Homo!* on the *Canadian Broadcast Corporation* radio at the Grand Coulee Dam in August 1938 (Fig. 5-8).²⁶¹

Pare Lorentz was invited to meet President Franklin Roosevelt at the White House on July 13, 1938 for an off-the-record briefing on the movie version outline for *Ecce Homo!* Before the briefing, Roosevelt wanted Lorentz to produce 30 three- to five-minute films about pending public-works projects. Lorentz argued that "[w]e would be a flash on

²⁵⁹ Lorentz, *Moviemakers* 100-104.

²⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 117.

²⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 79, 117; "Panorama of American Industry" *Radio Times*, 12 August 1938, 60: (776) 6.

the screen against at least four hours of double-feature Hollywood movies,” leaving little impact on audiences.²⁶² As an alternative, Lorentz suggested, “If we put all the basic problems of public works into one powerful message, audiences would understand the philosophy underlying the government policy.”²⁶³ Roosevelt then examined the proposed outline for the feature film version of *Ecce Homo!* and was most enthusiastic about its endorsement for regional valley-authority development.

In the film version of *Ecce Homo!* Lorentz planned to merge the stories of the four unemployed workers in the radio script version into one main character, Worker No. 7790. Lorentz recalled telling the President about his proposal:

[H]e [Worker 7790] worked his way west . . . was going to be a man competent to repair tractors, to run “cats,” to get a job wherever anybody could get a job, but ending up at the gigantic construction project, Grand Coulee. That was the promise for migrants arriving in the Northwest We had footage of them [migrants] coming up following a rumor that there would be irrigated land, and they worked their way picking apples until their jalopies fell apart. Mostly unskilled workers.²⁶⁴

The Roosevelt Administration wanted the Columbia River Basin to symbolize a vanguard of hope for 10 million unemployed people, to bring full circle his envisioned “promised land.”²⁶⁵ Although the United States Film Service was still one month away from being funded as part of the National Emergency Council, the President approved Lorentz’s film

²⁶² Lorentz, *Moviemakers* 81.

²⁶³ *Ibid.*

²⁶⁴ Snyder, *The Documentary Film* 99-100.

²⁶⁵ Richard Neuberger, “Dams in the Movies,” in *The Sunday Oregonian*, 12 February 1939, 2. *Note.* Neuberger reported that production stills of the Columbia River taken by Floyd Crosby from Vancouver, Washington, to the Grand Coulee Dam in late summer and autumn 1938 were said “to be the most graphic and artistic ever made of the rushing waterway.” Besides filming in the Columbia River Basin, Lorentz and Floyd Crosby filmed at TVA projects, Fontana Dam, Fort Loudon, and the industrial Midwest.

project. Over the next few weeks, Lorentz arranged to visit Grand Coulee Dam and meet the administrator, J. D. Ross, who President Roosevelt had put in charge of the Bonneville Project and Columbia River development. In August 1938, Lorentz surveyed the Columbia River at Bonneville and at the Grand Coulee Dam, making a still photographic study with his cameraman, Floyd Crosby, in preparation for filming the river basin in the Fall 1938.²⁶⁶ After *Ecce Homo!* was put on hold in the Spring 1939 for insufficient funding by the US Film Service, Lorentz was asked to work on his next film project, *The Fight for Life*. Of interest, Lorentz was looking for folk singers as part of the American regional musical score for the movie *Ecce Homo!* Actor Will Geer had introduced Lorentz to Woody Guthrie in Hollywood in mid-1939. As a result, Woody Guthrie made a 5-second cameo in *The Fight for Life*. As Lorentz related in his memoirs, he had Guthrie sit with an extra on the stairs of a slum set at Columbia Pictures. Guthrie was “to make believe” he was playing the guitar as two other guitarists played the movie theme, “The Sick Rose Bush”²⁶⁷

²⁶⁶ Note. Letters from Stephen Kahn to J. D. Ross, 11 August and 15 August 1938, obtained from Seattle City Light, James D. Ross Reference Material, Collection Number 1200-14, Box 70 (May 2016). The letters infer that Stephen Kahn had contact with Pare Lorentz and the film crew, and that Ross met with Lorentz to discuss Columbia River development. The United States Film Service had just been created on 13 August 1938.

²⁶⁷ Lorentz, *Moviemakers* 163.

Note. The Guthrie scene might have taken place in Hollywood just prior to 3 September 1939, after shooting of *Fight for Life* finished. (Snyder, *The Documentary Film* 109). Whether the Guthrie cameo was a “screen test” for a future film is unknown. In an oral interview, BPA’s Stephen Kahn, responsible for hiring Woody Guthrie for *The Columbia: America’s Greatest Power Stream*, recalled he met with Pare Lorentz and a few other people active in documentary filmmaking in winter 1940 in Los Angeles, New York, and Washington D. C. Other evidence suggests Kahn’s business trip took place in January or February 1941. Kahn does not recall if Lorentz or Alan Lomax had mentioned Guthrie to him. See Dissertation Chapter 9, “Pastures of Plenty.”

The President remained enthusiastic about *Ecce Homo!* At a 1939 New Year's Eve showing of *The Fight for Life* at the White House, Roosevelt told Lorentz that he wanted to show congressional leaders a rough cut of *Ecce Homo!* by May 1, 1940, when another bill for a Columbia Valley Authority would be submitted. A Columbia River Gorge sequence was put together, along with the westward journey of Worker No. 7790 to show how far the movie had progressed and to establish the film's mood.²⁶⁸ Roosevelt never saw this rough cut. Even though two-thirds of the script had been completed, the federally-sponsored film *Ecce Homo!* was never completed due to insufficient funding and the approaching war. In 1941, Lorentz attempted an independent effort to finish *Ecce Homo!* at RKO Studios in Hollywood under the title, "Name, Age, and Occupation." In 1942, RKO's reorganization finally ended Lorentz's efforts to finish that version of the film.²⁶⁹ During World War II, the Office of War Information used government-sponsored industrial footage and *Ecce Homo!* footage of the Columbia River Gorge and construction of the Grand Coulee.²⁷⁰

The Power and the Land (1940)

President Roosevelt's directive to the National Emergency Council for the United States Film Service was issued on August 13, 1938:

It has been found advantageous for [federal] agencies to produce motion pictures, sometimes with sound accompaniment, illustrating the physical and human problems confronting our country and the methods adopted by the Government for

²⁶⁸ Snyder, *The Documentary Film* 101; Lorentz, *Moviemaker* 151.

²⁶⁹ MacCann, *The People's Films* 96; Thomas F Bradyhollywood. "Precedential Action in Hollywood: Pare Lorentz Takes Legal Steps Against a Studio – Other," *New York Times*, 1 Nov 1942. ProQuest Historical Newspapers: *The New York Times* X3.

²⁷⁰ Snyder, *The Documentary Film* 102.

their solution. Such pictures have a double purpose. For the people as a whole they make understandable the basic causes of the present conditions. For the government employees in the relief and programs, there is provided, not only an invaluable aid that results from this understanding by the general public, but clarification of the purposes of the relief statues which they are engaged in administering . . .

Two such motion pictures have been produced by the Farm Security Administration – *The Plow That Broke the Plains* and *The River* . . . several departments and agencies have produced and are producing shorter film dealing with various aspects of their programs. I desire that the future distribution and the exhibition of these films be coordinated by the National Emergency Council in order that they may be most effectively and economically serve the purpose for which they have produced.²⁷¹

Among the first government projects to be filmed under the U.S. Film Service scheme was *Power and the Land*, sponsored by the REA under REA Director, Harry Slattery. This REA film was publicized as a companion film to *The River* and *The Plow That Broke the Plains*.²⁷²

For this film, the original endeavor was “an imaginatively produced, emotionally affecting film portrayal” of REA programs expected to deliver a supply of cheap and abundant energy to the farm.²⁷³ REA researcher Charles Walker wrote the script for *Power and the Land*, based on Lorentz’s outline and influences from the 1922 silent film *From Dusk to Dawn*. The script described in parallel two days on a farm, comparing one

²⁷¹ Note. In Snyder, *The Documentary Film 204-05*. Letter from President Franklin Roosevelt to Lowell Mellett, director, National Emergency Council, 13 August 1938.

²⁷² David E. Nye. *Electrifying America: Social Meanings of a New Technology*, Massachusetts: MIT Press (1997) 329.

²⁷³ Snyder, *The Documentary Film* 121.

with electricity and one without.²⁷⁴ With this script, Dutch filmmaker Joris Ivens worked on the film concept with Lorentz staff writer, Ed Locke, and screen writer, Stephen Vincent Benet.²⁷⁵ The dilemma faced by the farmer — technically, physically, and psychologically — was how to utilize electricity in ways that would greatly improve his standard of living.²⁷⁶ The REA wanted to demonstrate the value of electricity to the farmer, such as how electrical products could improve health and ease chores for both for the farmer and his wife, increase income by better care for the family’s livestock, and dispel physical and cultural isolation on the farm through electric lighting and radio entertainment.

The shooting script required a real and appealing family who lived on a “typical” farm without electrical equipment. This motion picture reenactment would use non-actors. Joris Ivens therefore had to find methods for authenticity to make the government message believable. Culturally, a family farm was the oldest cooperative experience that revolved around land resources, a “taking something from the earth to give back to the earth.”²⁷⁷ After surveying all suggested REA sites, the Parkinson family’s dairy farm in rural Belmont County, Ohio, was found suitable. The Parkinson’s smallholding was a legacy family farm. The Parkinsons reported, as did many other ordinary farmers, that their “land . . . got tired.”²⁷⁸ Consequently, they rehabilitated their livelihood by acquiring

²⁷⁴ Ibid., 123.

Note. Placed under the Department of Agriculture in 1939, the agency sought a historical and sensitive record of the farmstead to support the need for rural electrification and rural cooperatives.

²⁷⁵ Joris Ivens. *Camera and I*. New York: International Publishers (1969) 197.

²⁷⁶ In Snyder, *The Documentary Film* 121. *Note.* Taken from an undated memo.

²⁷⁷ *Power and the Land* (Film) 1940.

²⁷⁸ Ibid.

cattle to transition to dairy farming. The setting was a pleasant rural farm among rolling hills, with wide shots showing a “big sky” and open space, a model of the Jeffersonian Ideal. The farm already had some electric power, so measures were taken to shoot around electrical equipment.²⁷⁹ As the script called for modern electrification, additional electrical lighting, other devices, and appliances were installed at the farm.²⁸⁰

Working on a farm without electricity was arduous. Traditional farm chores figuratively illustrated the old ways – fetching water by hand, lighting the stove fire, hand-washing clothes – but gave way in the film to the new symbology of social improvement through modern electricity, including barn lights, running water, and cooling milk in the barn. Electrical household items eased the farm wife’s burden, with an electric stove, washing machine and iron, refrigeration and clean ice, running and heated water. The leisure time created by these improvements allowed the family time to enjoy new culture and information through the radio. The family began to count on the kilowatt hours that “don’t get tired” for help in their daily routine. Mother and daughter wore modern dresses and hairstyles; father and sons were happier, more energetic, and well-fed.

“One man can’t fix it alone” transitioned the film towards a mixture of allegory and metaphor on how electric power can empower the farmer. “It is easier when communities co-operate,” the film suggested, urging neighbors work together to secure their own electricity, hinting at the idea of local collectivism.²⁸¹ Utility access for rural areas was a challenge because private companies could not profit from powerlines in sparsely

²⁷⁹ Joris Ivens in MacCann, *The People’s Films* 103.

²⁸⁰ Snyder, *The Documentary Film* 124.

²⁸¹ In *Power and the Land* (Film) 1940.

populated areas. The film's message to farmers was that "[n]eighbors would own their own lines . . . talk it over . . . the country way . . . a slow decision by people" in the democratic way.²⁸² Joris Ivens observed that the real dilemma and story of rural electrification was "the conflict with private utilities who refuse to put up lines to farmers, but who [fought] any attempt of cooperating farmers to put up their own."²⁸³

Rural electrification played a key role in Roosevelt's technocratic regional planning, supporting regional decentralization, to uplift and preserve the social, cultural, and economic traditions in the countryside. However, REA Director Harry Slattery had a broader vision of the social implications of farm electric cooperatives. Camaraderie was the key to electrify rural America. "You and me – neighbors work together to cut corn . . . When we get together . . . [it's] hard to stop . . . [we] get together to get the things we want."²⁸⁴ Slattery wanted to support the communal premise that electricity would cultivate a modern rural culture – unattainable in a laissez-faire environment – in which a reciprocal bond among its people would conjoin technology with social progress. A balance was sought so that cities would not grow at the expense of the countryside. Not only would electricity develop a better life on the farm, it would stimulate local democracy to strengthen rural and small town life and enable rural America to make a tangible connection with the rest of the nation.²⁸⁵ Agriculture was the last prominent

²⁸² Ibid.

²⁸³ Nye, *Electrifying America* 328.

²⁸⁴ *Power and the Land* (Film) 1940.

²⁸⁵ Ivens, *Camera and I* 195.

economic sector in the nation to be electrified. *Power and the Land* appealed to traditional American values, as state-sponsored salesmanship sought to generate popular enthusiasm among farmers for the progressive regional-power argument.

Political Debate Used Culture

As a federal employee, Pare Lorentz strove to find ways for the New Deal government to speak directly to constituents en masse. He developed a media model for the Roosevelt Administration to confront socioeconomic problems of the depression, explain the government's solutions, and create favorable attitudes toward new policies among the widest national audience possible. Under this model, Lorentz took on the challenge to produce quality motion pictures to be shown on commercial movie screens. Movies were an affordable cultural activity in the Depression era and a good medium for the New Deal government to inform, educate, and guide its citizens, in effect creating a populist form of communication. *The River* juxtaposed gripping flood footage against a single, powerful federal agency offering solutions, the TVA. *Ecce Homo!* grappled with technology as a leading cause of national unemployment, yet suggested that hegemonic federal management of technology in the Grand Coulee project could build a Promised Land — irrigated lands and new industry — to provide relief for the little man. In *Power and the Land*, the audience witnessed a long day of arduous farm chores, vividly demonstrating the need to electrify the farm through community-based solutions promoted by the REA program. Lorentz deployed an iconography of social realism in shaping his portrait of the forgotten

man.²⁸⁶ The characters in Lorentz's scripts represented the collective experiences of ordinary people during the Depression. They were the American people. Faceless Worker No. 7790 epitomized the unidentified and unemployed individual, the forgotten man, who worked his way from town to town for any type of nonspecific work. Families in *The River*, whether migrants due to poor soils and erosion or made homeless by raging floods, symbolized the experiences of all the homeless regardless of cause. *The River* showed vividly that American life was not all pretty, as exemplified by the poverty and vagabond existence of people who yearned for integration into American society. This motif was a jab to the capitalist system juxtaposed with the possibility of salutary change offered by a democratic government. The solutions presented by the films formed a narrative of progressive programs offering prosperity and modernity to the nation. The films seized upon romantic qualities of the past before moving forward in a guided "social revolution" embedded in New Deal policies. This carefully constrained social revolution preserved social order by promising that the government could deliver a better future founded on an idealistic vision of technology and technical qualities being applied to everyday life. The narrative was presented through three distinct landscapes — dystopic, transition, and utopic — seemingly through depersonalized examples. However, in *Power and the Land*, Ivens used an approved shooting script to personalize a typical American rural family.

²⁸⁶ Note. The iconography of the "forgotten man" was a common theme in Depression culture. The 1936 classic comedy, *My Man Godfrey*, as an example, plays upon Depression societal motifs of the down-and-out, exemplifying the "forgotten man," living in the city dump, under the Brooklyn Bridge in contrast to the spoiled lifestyles of elite during the 1930s. *Godfrey* demonstrated employment was the difference between "a derelict and a man," hobos who possessed more pride, common sense and dignity than the driftless Park Avenue well-to-do.

According to critics of President Roosevelt and his New Deal policies, and in the view of some movie reviewers, the Administration was disseminating propaganda through motion pictures and other government media as a ploy to hoodwink the public into supporting specific legislation. In a broad sense, Lorentz's films can be considered propaganda because government sponsorship of media did seek to gain support for a specific policy. The traditional American business mindset equated democracy with private property ownership; whereas an ordered, government-sponsored landscape, such as the TVA in *The River*, was conflated with dictatorship, fascism, and communism in the minds — and complaints — of skeptics.

The federal government needed to try and convert Northwestern residents to achieve its goals with a pragmatic education on regional public power and its great importance to the American people. Roosevelt's vision for a Columbia Valley Authority needed to secure more support among a divided Northwestern population. As noted by BPA librarian, Lillian Davis, before 1937 little organized effort was made to promote the "end products" of the Bonneville Dam, possibly the result of other legislative priorities of the New Deal administration and local differences concerning public versus private power distribution and marketing. Seattle's regional "Power Week" in July 1937 featured the Federal Theatre Project's presentation, *Power*, a Living Newspaper on public power and the TVA (see this Dissertation Chapter 6, "The Propaganda of *Power*"). *The River*, although viewed by the Roosevelts at the White House just before the Bonneville Dam dedication in September 1937, was not released to the public until February 1938. During President Roosevelt's 1932 campaign in Portland, Oregon, he had presented an abstract idea for development of government power as a progressive economic transformer of the

nation's economy. Now, with the dam a reality, the new challenge for American citizens was to embrace the democratic government's plans for its people using this power.



WHO WILL LIVE IN GREENBELT TOWNS?

SUBSTANTIAL CITIZENS

POTOMAC

LEFT TURN

TOWNSHIP OF SUBURBAN RESSETTLEMENTS BEARING PROJECTS WILL BE TYPICAL AMERICAN TOWNSHIP WITH LIMITED INCOME. LOOK TO ESTABLISH 1935, FROM THE YEAR OF THE COLLECTIVE WORK BEARING 1935, A YEAR.

ID <https://www.loc.gov/resource/fsa.8e03265/> ID <https://www.loc.gov/resource/fsa.8b26865/>

Figure 5-1a,b. Montage: Substantial citizens. Suburban Resettlement Administration poster.

Date: 1935.

Contributor: Arthur Rothstein, photographer.

Farm Security Administration, Office of War Information Photograph Collection (Library of Congress), fsa.8e03265, fsa.8b26865.

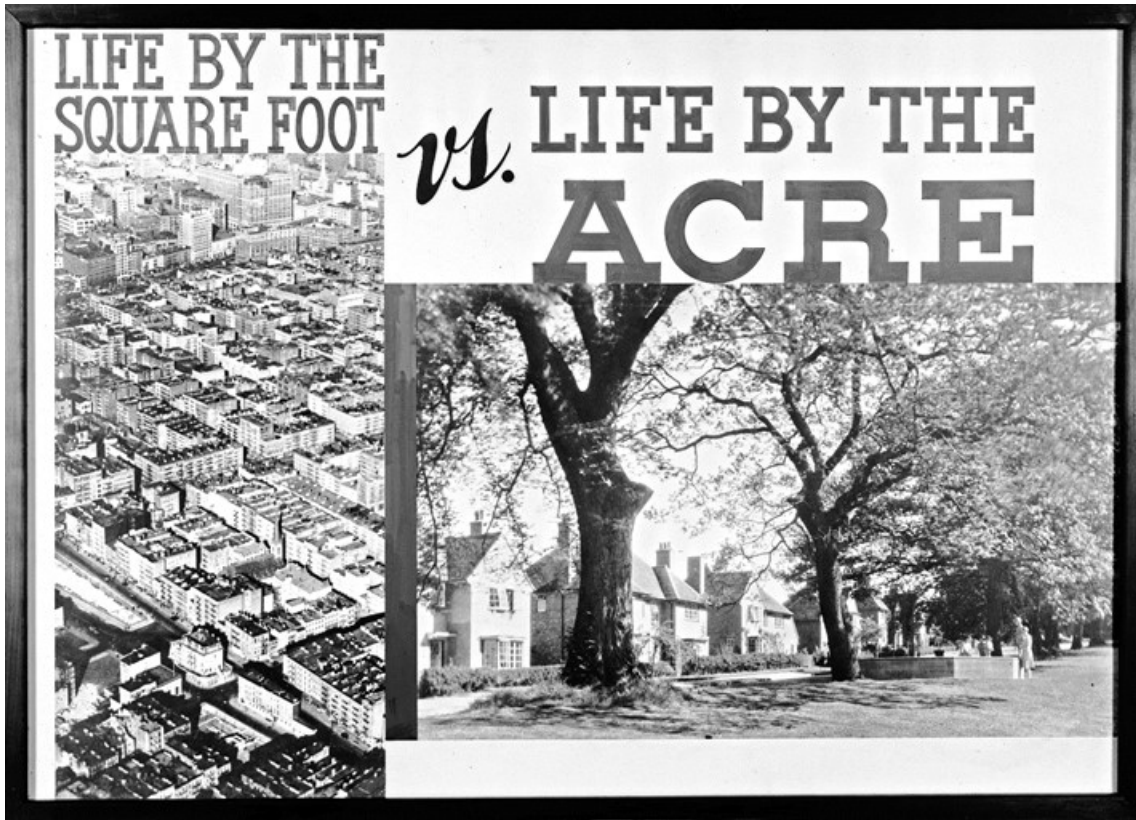


Figure 5-2. Suburban Resettlement Administration poster.

Date: March 1936.

Farm Security Administration-Office of War information Photograph Collection (Library of Congress), fsa.8e03202.

Figure 5-1. (page 159) Montage. “Substantial citizens.” Promoting Greenbelt plans, the Resettlement Administration [RA] practiced public relations using modern media to advance its populist agenda for change. Photographs from the Farm Security Administration [FSA] under Roy Stryker were used to create posters to help citizens visualize their place and participation in New Deal programs.

Figure 5-2. Suburban Resettlement Administration poster. To sell its policies, the RA used compare-and-contrast methods. This poster introduced the idea of a better place for the future, backing the idea of moving out of the city and upbuilding suburbs, to represent how life should be, not how it was, for the possibilities of a heaven on earth.



Figure 5-3. United States Resettlement Administration exhibit. City Club Building, Washington, D. C.

Date: 1936.

Farm Security Administration – Office of War Information Photograph Collection (Library of Congress), fsa.8e04533.

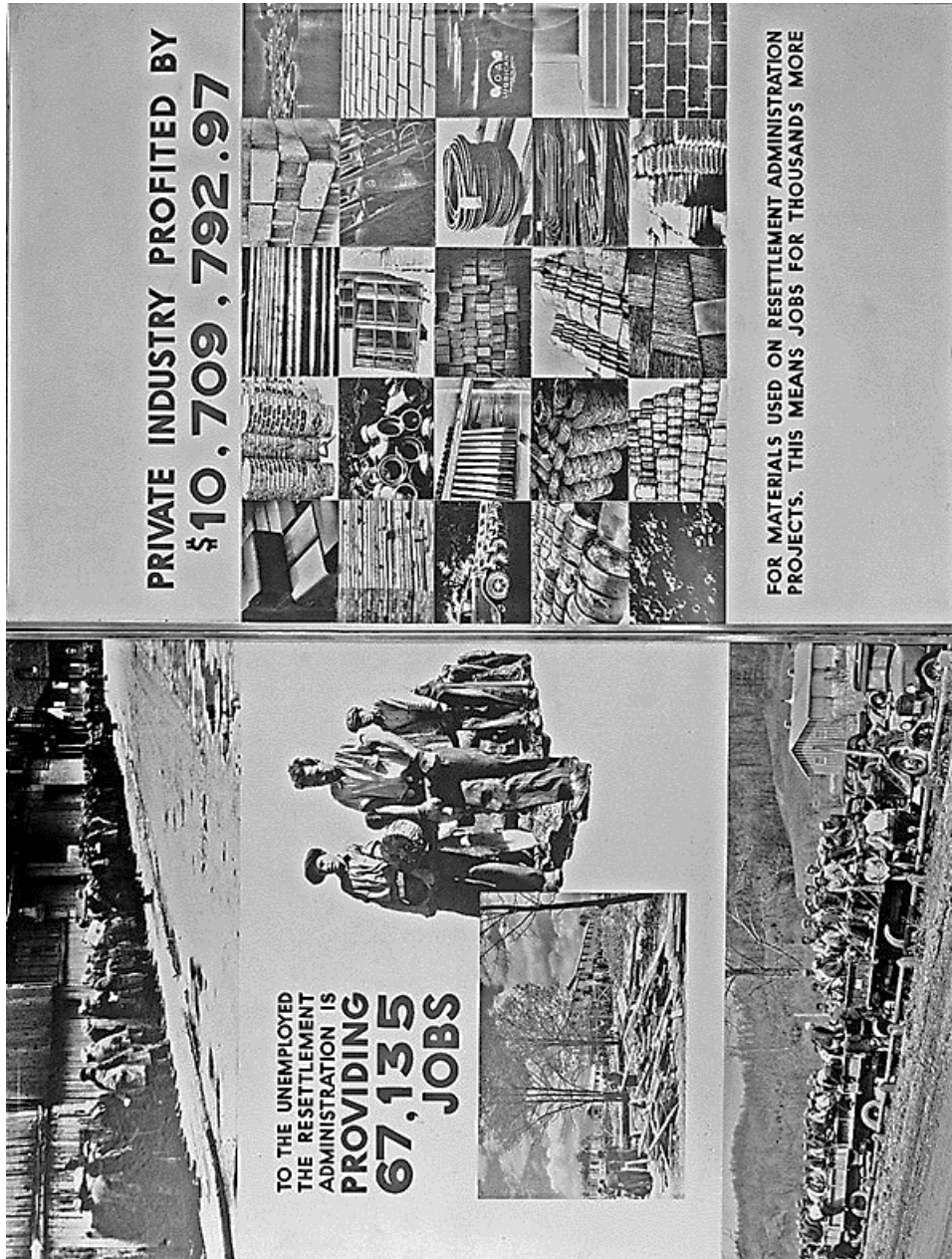


Figure 5-4. United States Resettlement Agency exhibit. City Club Building, Washington, D. C.

Date: 1936.

Farm Security Administration – Office of War Information Photograph Collection (Library of Congress), fsa.8e04534.

Figure 5-3. (page 171) **United States Resettlement Administration exhibit.** RA informational practices are identified in a Populist Media Paradigm. This example arranges FSA photographs to illustrate socioeconomic problems affecting many ordinary Americans, to appeal to viewer emotions. Dorothea Lange's destitute "Migrant Mother" image is juxtaposed against the contented farmer reaping benefits from RA aid. Attractive rural and suburban housing aims to draw relief families from cities to the underdeveloped hinterlands and new opportunities that await.

Figure 5-4. (page 172) **United States Resettlement Agency exhibit.** The unemployed – abled-bodied workers – traveled the nation headed to towns other unemployed migrants left. Each man and his story was relatable to the public. Yet a solution lies within a symbolic triangle - men need jobs, the RA needs project materials and private industry will profit. "Labor makes wealth . . . the use of material makes wealth . . . to translate into great national possessions . . . energy . . . that otherwise would be wasted" – a win-win situation for all, and a rebuttal to business interest opposition to the New Deal (Franklin Roosevelt, speech dedicating Boulder Dam, 30 September 1935)

Figure 5-5. (page 174) **Checkerboard montage used for Suburban Resettlement exhibit.** RA programs and policies put the forgotten man back to work. The checkerboard pattern of photographs demonstrate the value of human power. The common man can still make a respectable living among modernity and technology. This montage gives each worker an identity by his trade – a representative publicity technique – that symbolized the labor force en masse. The display compiled individual American workmen into a larger collective to show results of RA programs.

Figure 5-6. (page 175). **Portion of Panel of Resettlement Administration exhibit at San Diego Fair, California.** FSA photographs were utilized to present the problem – wasted land. Images of destitute Americans illustrated its socioeconomic results. The RA offered solutions that were explained to the public by visual symbols and accompanying text.

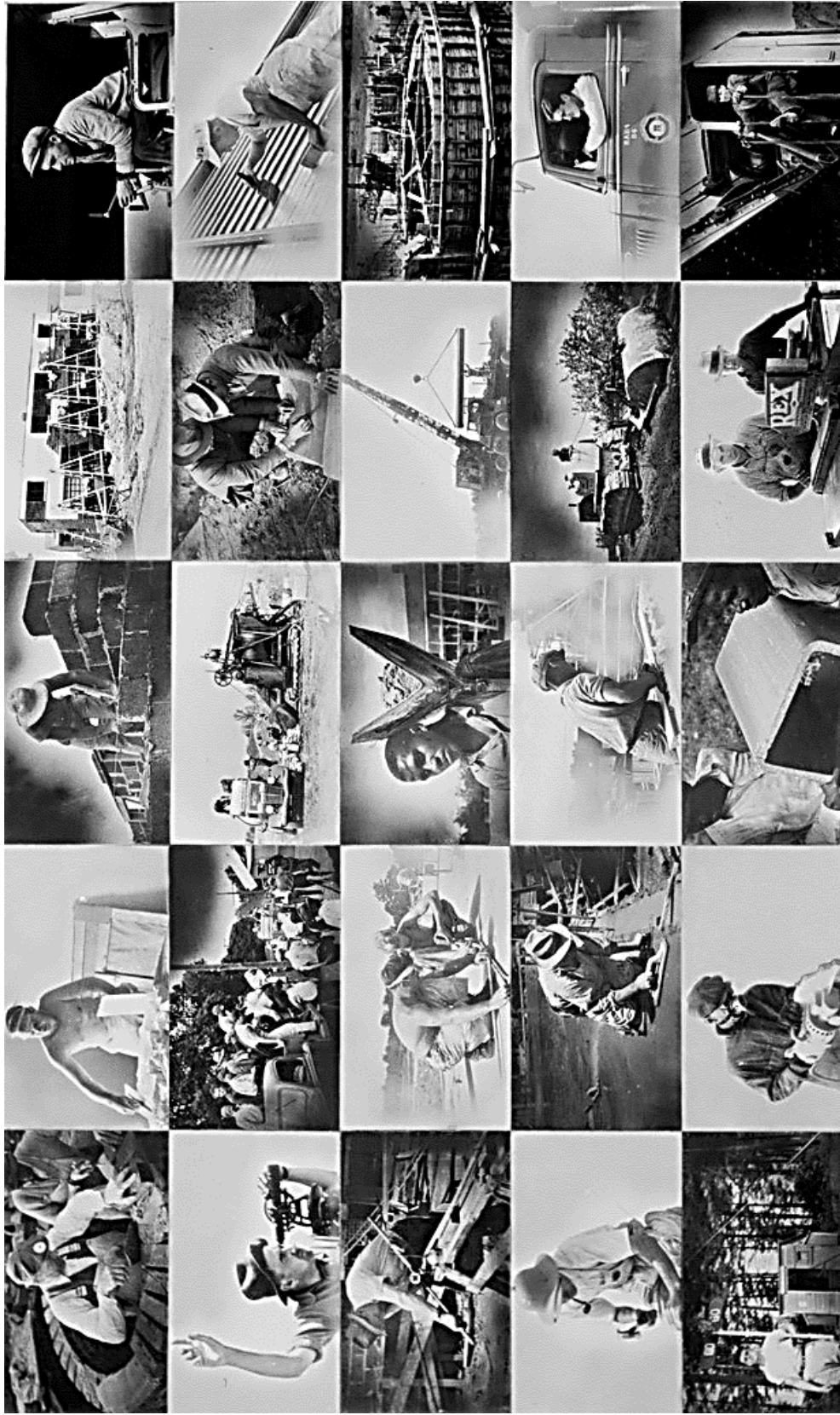


Figure 5-5. Checkerboard montage used for Suburban Resettlement exhibit.

Date: 1936.

Farm Security Administration – Office of War Information Photograph Collection Washington, D. C. (Library of Congress), fsa.8e04522.



Figure 5-6. Panel of Resettlement Administration exhibit at San Diego Fair, California.

Date: May 1936.

Farm Security Administration-Office of War Information Photograph Collection (Library of Congress), fsa.8e07293u.

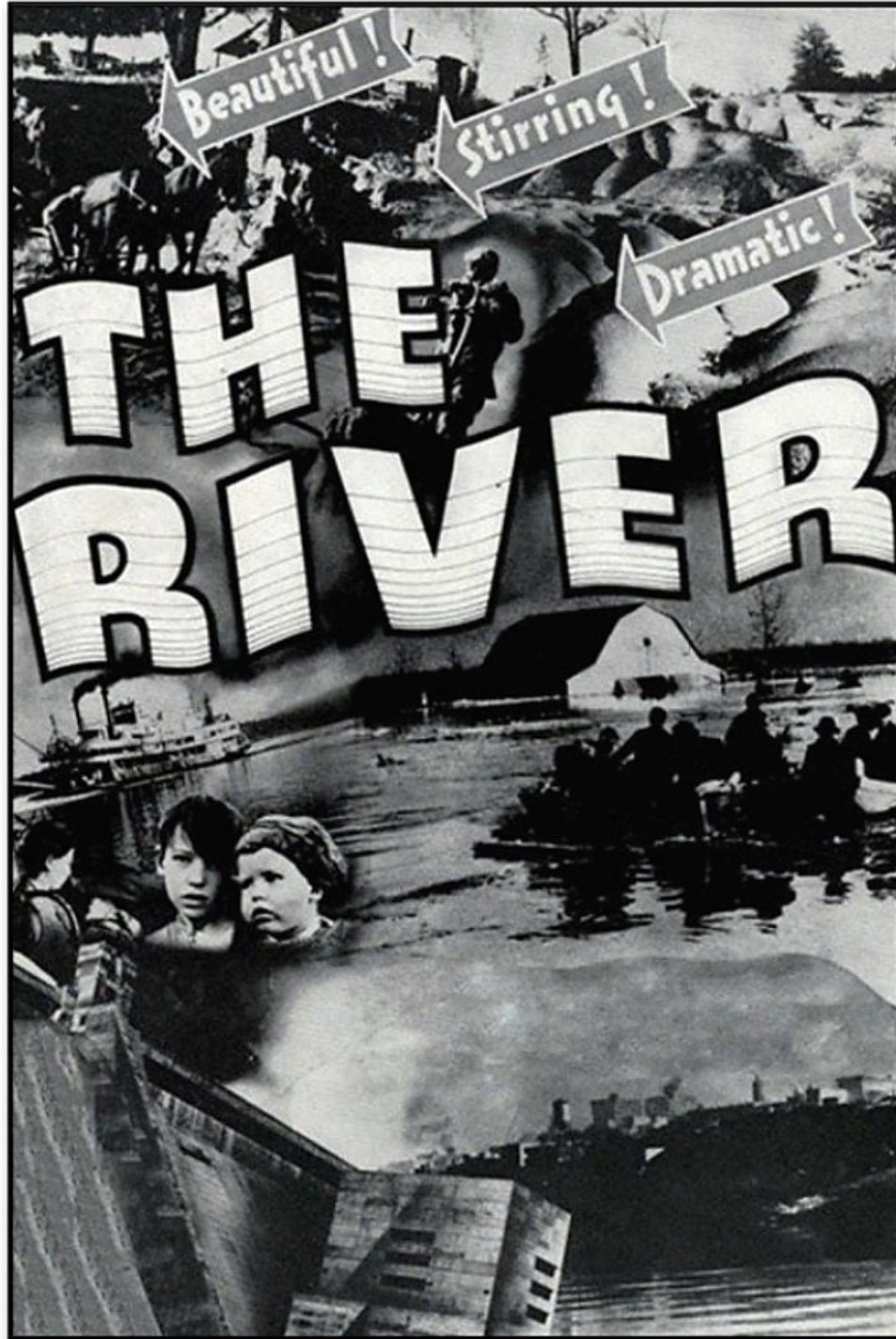


Figure 5-7. *The River* Poster.

Date: 1938.

Obtained from the Pare Lorentz Center at the Franklin D. Roosevelt Presidential Library, Presidential Library website, maintained from Hyde Park, New York.

<http://www.fdrlibrary.marist.edu/daybyday/resource/september-1937-8/>

Figure 5-7. Movie Poster of *The River*. A symbolic composite of themes presented in *The River*. From top to bottom, representations signify the problem, “poor land makes poor people; poor people make poor land,” a dystopic river landscape. Generational abuse of the Mississippi River environment resulted in catastrophic land damage and flooding that left despair among its people. The riverboat reminds the audience of the nation’s regional Southern heritage, and a connection to the federal government’s interest in rebuilding its great regional river culture, to connect a usable past with a better future. The faces of the two young boys add emotion to the dire circumstances. Their placement just above a big federal dam reinforces a landscape in transition to a better future. The largest single structure in the composition is the dam, denoting monumentalism and an optimism only to be found through government intervention. Federal power, represented in many forms, can tame the river and order the landscape through utopian solutions that rescue and empower the people.

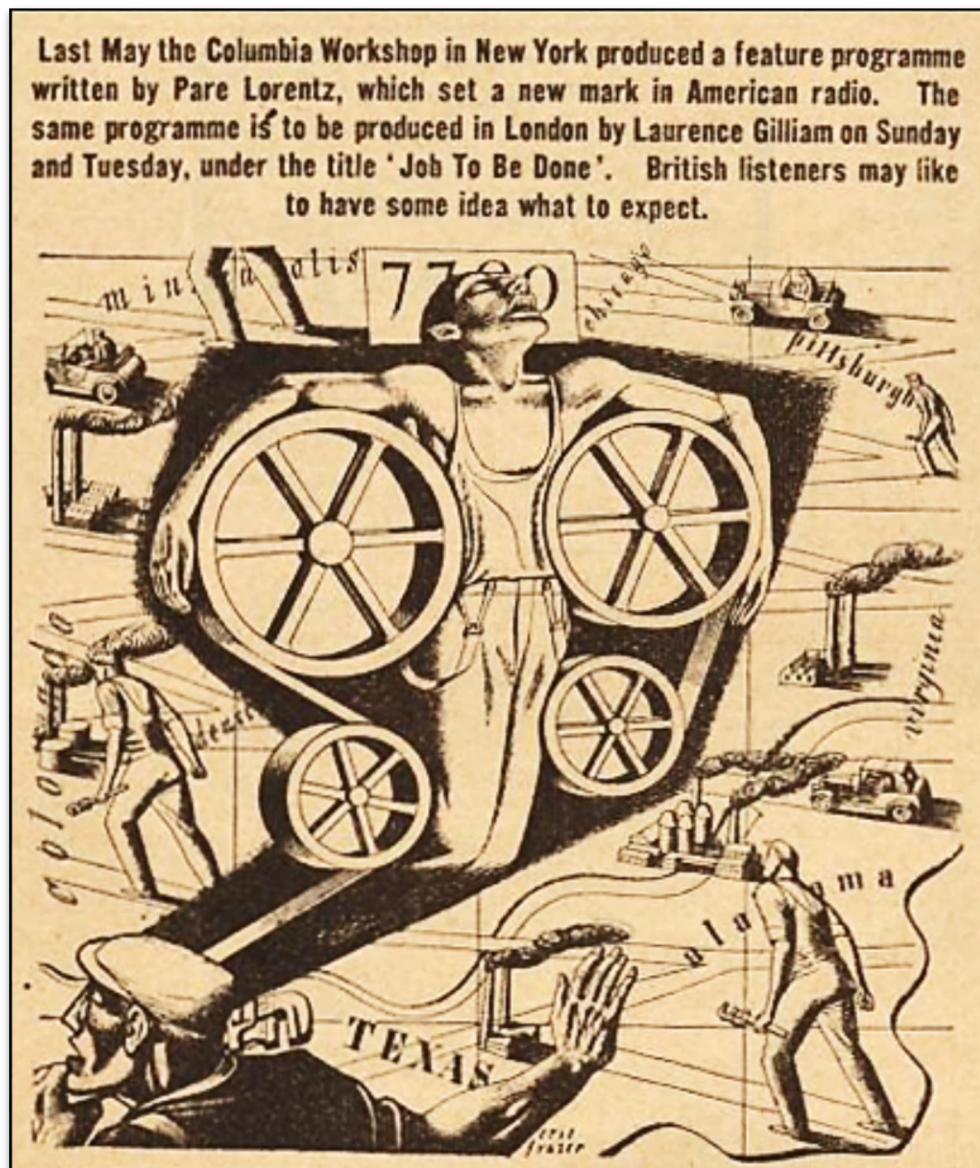


Figure 5-8. Artist Rendering of "Job to Be Done," BBC adaptation of *Ecce Homo!*

Artist: E. Frazer.

"Panorama of American Industry." *Radio Times* 60 (776) 6.

Figure 5-8: Panorama of American Industry. The main character, Worker No.7790 is symbolized as a powerless and distressed worker who falls victim to the power of machines, a theme explored earlier by Charlie Chaplin in *Modern Times*. This image illustrates the paradox that the United States, a great organized industrial nation, yet had millions of men unemployed. Workers on the map, from all corners of the nation, tools in hand, are heading to the big dam works in the West, to aid in the massive government job of taming nature to create a Promised Land at Grand Coulee.

Chapter 6: The Propaganda of *Power*

[B]ut unless you concern yourself with the why, and especially for what your construction exists . . . you're a general with a passion for military tactics and abysmal ignorance of the nature of human beings who fight wars but yearn for peace and freedom If you were allowed to build this dam unhampered by the rest of us, it might provide electricity, but for whom? ²⁸⁷

Eleanor Buckles, *Valley of Power* 1945

A successful valley authority depended on consumer access to affordable electricity, a New Deal campaign promise. Reduced rates were key to modernizing rural areas to benefit residents, who were intended to gain benefits ahead of the giant industrial and commercial users. New Deal federal planners believed that “cheap power” was attainable through municipal and public power schemes that would counter private utilities’ high rates, malpractice, and propaganda practices.

Electric power was the future but people had questions. The Living Newspaper unit of the Federal Theatre Project presented *Power*, a 1937 stage production developed to educate ordinary people about electricity, public power, and its adoption into modern culture. The script satirized private utilities and their evil monopolies, which offered electric power to the few, to be counterbalanced by Roosevelt’s democratic solutions for public power, resource distribution, and benefits for the common good. But the plot thickened as the New Deal plan was put in jeopardy by a news flash of a pending decision by the Supreme Court: Who would control distribution of electric power, the evil power trusts, as they were portrayed, or the people’s government? The climax of the

²⁸⁷ Eleanor Buckles, *Valley of Power*. New York: Creative (1945) 121-3.

performance prompted the cast of characters to gather together on stage, face the audience, and ponder the dilemma, “What will the Supreme Court do?”²⁸⁸

State-Sponsored Theatre

Harry Hopkins, a Roosevelt Brains Trust member and New York’s Deputy Administrator of the Temporary Emergency Relief Administration (and later appointed head of the Federal Emergency Relief Administration [FERA] in 1932), believed that society had as much obligation to safeguard the talents of actors in the arts as of workers in the factories. Arts participation benefited the cultural life of the nation. Theatre was a longstanding interest of both Eleanor and Franklin Roosevelt, who supported national arts and culture. After being appointed WPA director in May 1935, Hopkins began to implement Roosevelt’s call for a national theatrical project or at least a series of projects whose mission was to provide musical and dramatic entertainment for small and remote communities. In the activist administration, Hopkins already worked closely with First Lady Eleanor Roosevelt to promote and defend New Deal relief programs that included the TVA among others.²⁸⁹

As early as 1910, a decline in commercial theatre limited performances to an urban clientele so that by the end of World War I, the Midwest, Far West, and large parts of the South suffered from a lack of first-rate theatrical entertainment. Film took over many legitimate theatre stages by 1930, although isolated colleges and universities retained

²⁸⁸ *Note.* The *Alabama Power Company, petr., v. Harold L. Ickes (1938)* upheld PWA loans to municipalities to construct public power plants that could be granted. This decision was written into the *Power* script finale after the 3 January 1938 ruling.

²⁸⁹ Lorraine Brown. “Melodrama, Social Protest, and Genius.” Library of Congress, American Memory: Federal Theater Project. Obtained from <http://memory.loc.gov/ammem/fedtp/fibrwn00.html> (9 July 2017).

innovative stage productions that addressed current events. The 1932–1933 season began with 253 theatre companies in and around New York City. By the season’s end, only six legitimate theatres remained open on Broadway. Federalized work-relief programs such as FERA provided some work for actors in sponsored performances at hospitals, schools, and CCC camps.²⁹⁰

In July 1935, with Mrs. Roosevelt’s blessing, Hallie Flanagan, then-director of Vassar Experimental Theatre, was appointed director of the Federal Theater Project (FTP) by Harry Hopkins.²⁹¹ The First Lady had high hopes for a great national cultural arts program. Flanagan consulted with E. C. Mabie, head of Speech and Dramatic Arts at the University of Iowa, and a Broadway playwright, Elmer Rice, before formulating a scheme for a regionally centered national theatre. In Rice’s original plan, community centers would stress arts decentralization by adapting regional projects for community needs, with an eye to employing 30,000 people in state and regional centers and educational institutions throughout the nation.²⁹² This plan, however, was deemed too costly and far beyond the WPA’s funding capacity. The organization that finally did emerge focused primarily on professionals in commercial theatre — community or regional theater would be secondary — and concentrated in New York City. Early idealists sought theatre presentations that emphasized rethinking the future rather than remembering the good old days.

²⁹⁰ Ibid.

²⁹¹ *Note.* The FTP was part of the Federal Project Number One or “Federal One,” created in 1935 as a subdivision of the WPA that sought to extend New Deal relief employment to artists, actors, writers, and musicians. Eleanor Roosevelt strongly believed that American society did not adequately support the arts. Congressman Martin Dies of Texas targeted this program as chairman of the House Committee on Un-American Activities, by dissolving the FTP in 1939 and instituting budget cuts for the Writer’s Project, the Federal Music Project, and the Federal Art Project. By June of 1943, the WPA itself was dissolved.

²⁹² Brown, “Melodrama.”

“New days are upon us and the plays that we do and the ways that we do them should be informed by our consciousness of art and economics of 1935 . . . The theatre must become conscious of the implications of the changing social order, or the changing social order will ignore, and rightly, the implications of the theatre,” Flanagan said.²⁹³

After a chaotic start, Flanagan discovered that theatregoers yearned for all sorts of productions encompassing social and economic themes, contemporary problems, antiwar plays, living newspapers on regional themes, children’s plays, and plays on religion. Five overarching FTP units were established in New York City and housed in their own assigned theatres.²⁹⁴ The centralized FTP Living Newspaper unit, sponsored by the Newspaper Guild and supervised by Morris Watson, was housed at the Biltmore Theatre in Midtown Manhattan. Regional FTPs were divided nationally into thirteen areas. Existing FERA regional and folk drama units partnered with one of the new FTP units. Where no companies existed, independent theater groups were organized with a goal of integrating themselves within local community life. For example, a regional Living Newspaper unit presented *Flax* — about the Willamette Valley expansion of crops and their industrial use — to local rural communities in Oregon.²⁹⁵

A Living Newspaper production included “a dramatization of a problem – composed in greater or lesser extent of many news events, all bearing on the one subject and

²⁹³ Hallie Flanagan quoted in Brown, “Melodrama.”

²⁹⁴ *Note.* There were five FTP New York units: (1) The Living Newspaper, Biltmore Theatre; (2) the Popular Price Theatre, designed to present original plays, Manhattan Theatre; (3) the Experimental Theatre, Daly’s 63rd Street Theatre; (4) the Negro Theatre, Lafayette Theatre; and (5) the Tryout Theatre sponsored by the League of New York Theatres.

²⁹⁵ In Joanne Bentley. *Hallie Flanagan*, New York: Alfred Knopf (1988) 282. The other regional Oregon Living Newspaper was *Bonneville Dance*, a production about the Bonneville Dam. No script is currently available.

interlarded with typical but non-factual representations of the effect of these news events on the people to whom the problem is of great importance.”²⁹⁶ Productions dramatized social, economic, and racial newspaper headlines of the day that called upon the audience to enact change.²⁹⁷ Newspaper articles, facts, statistics, photographs, and anecdotes of actual events were collected and filed by the Living Newspaper research staff as source material. Thematic stage designs favored an experimental dramaturgy, encompassed within the psychological underpinnings of the characters, and elements of metaphoric expressions. It was “experimentation with factual material made dramatically effective by light, sound, acrobatics and cinematics.”²⁹⁸

Living newspapers originated during early 20th century social upheavals of revolution, civil war, and economic depression, with roots in Russia. The Bolshevik government of the Soviet Union, formed in 1922, attempted to establish a large and flexible venue for information, news, and education to be distributed across a geographically vast and culturally complex country. This theatre style started as a populist forum where leading members of the Soviet workers’ club read newspaper articles to other club members while onstage. Illiteracy was quite widespread and reading aloud had a propagandistic purpose: to impart to the illiterate the social and economic reforms promised by the revolutionary government. Soon Russian Living Newspaper troupes put on masks, changed

²⁹⁶ Arthur Arent quoted in Stuart Cosgrove, *Liberty Deferred and Other Living Newspapers of the 1930s*, Federal Theatre Project, Ed. Lorraine Brown. Fairfax: George Mason University Press (1989) x.

²⁹⁷ Note. One of the most successful Living Newspapers was *One-Third of a Nation*, whose title is taken from a phrase in Roosevelt’s second inaugural address, “I see one-third of a nation ill-housed, ill-clad, ill-nourished,” to detail public housing problems and the need for better housing conditions for the poor. “Living Newspaper Performances,” on Coast to Coast: The Federal Theatre Project, Library of Congress website. Obtained from <https://www.loc.gov/exhibits/federal-theatre-project/living-newspaper.html#obj2> (17 July 2017).

²⁹⁸ Hallie Flanagan. Speech delivered Birmingham, Alabama. Hallie Flanagan Collection, New York Public Library, (n.d. possibly in 1936).

clothes, shouted slogans in megaphones, and added songs, dancing, acrobatics, pantomimes, and film to their performances. Hallie Flanagan, an instructor at Vassar College, was named a Guggenheim Fellow in 1926, which permitted her to travel to Europe and Russia in 1926-1927. While in Russia, Flanagan sought to see shows by these theatrical troupes, especially one Russian-Soviet troupe called the Blue Blouses, who dramatized the news as a Living Newspaper. In its ideal form, the Living Newspaper offered a forum for popular discourse on current social issues, an idea Flanagan brought home and developed for the Federal Theater Program.²⁹⁹

***Power*: “A Living Newspaper” (1937)**

More than an amusement or leisure activity, *Power* was a medium to advance the New Deal ideology for government distribution of electric power. There is no record of any conversation between Flanagan and Hopkins regarding the original idea of *Power*, but Joanne Bentley’s biography of Hallie Flanagan states that Flanagan began to write a play about private-utility companies and the public need for electricity while teaching at Vassar College, soon after the signing of the TVA legislation. According to Edith Isaacs, editor of *Theatre Arts Monthly*, Flanagan’s play was titled *Power*. Bentley reports that Flanagan set aside the *Power* script after her appointment as director of the FTP in 1935; but in 1936, Flanagan must have given Morris Watson the idea for a Living Newspaper drama on the power issue and assigned Arthur Arent to write the script.³⁰⁰ Flanagan then

²⁹⁹ Bentley, *Hallie Flanagan* 73.

³⁰⁰ *Note*. Though Arthur Arent wrote *Power*, research was conducted under Jean Laurent. Flanagan and Hopkins reviewed Arent’s draft, then directed the script to be reviewed by the regional Federal Power Commission for accuracy.

directed Watson to have the regional director of the Federal Power Commission fact-check the draft of the script.³⁰¹

Power debuted in February 1937 at the Ritz Theatre in New York City. In Flanagan's original set design, the production opened with symbols and allegories of power. An enormous projection of Niagara Falls filled the proscenium arch and spilled over into the audience. Props symbolizing powerful machines contrasted with the powerless and distressed humans who manned them, mimicking an idea dramatized by Charlie Chaplin in his 1936 film *Modern Times*.³⁰² Humanity's discovery of electricity and increased knowledge and ability to control its power drove the overall message: Electric power served humanity to empower people. Flanagan sought images that impressed upon the audience the social meaning of electric power and its humanistic qualities, going beyond inventors and captains of industry (Fig. 6-1). To Flanagan's dismay, her directives were not followed.³⁰³ Instead of Flanagan's giant machines, there were light-hearted "comic scenes [presented] . . . in the nature of cartoons," with the stage "jammed with realistic properties, . . . [using] infantile paintings of such properties," causing Flanagan to question the director's and the set designer's grasp of the play's concept and purpose. Nonetheless, the production clearly endorsed New Deal policies favoring publicly-owned power.

Power is a complex representation of many facets of power. Not only an educational forum, the production was an onstage technological spectacular. It embraced every

³⁰¹ Bentley, *Hallie Flanagan* 248.

³⁰² *Ibid.*, 249.

³⁰³ *Note*. The cast of *Power* was disorganized and there was a lack of internal order (as noted in Director's Notes).

kind of electrical gimmick, projected scenery, film, slides, live music, and the iconic “Voice of the Living Newspaper,” its signature loudspeaker narrator. The Voice supplied explanations, data, and statistics for various power scenarios. It portrayed power-trust magnate, Samuel Insull, as a vaudevillian character, who along with his business partners formed one large villainous congregate of private-utility interests that proved no match for a heroic New Deal government and its electric power plan for the people. Power rates and the emblematic power “yardstick” – the key to accessible electricity for all – was championed by an overarching federal bureaucracy that implemented public power schemes. As a populist symbol, “The Consumer” played a unique role in the Living Newspaper staging as the “little” or average individual.³⁰⁴ Norman Lloyd originally was cast as Angus K. Buttonkooper, the prototypical Consumer.³⁰⁵ Buttonkooper was the epitome of the people, a character that broached politics of electric power at the level of the everyday individual. Perhaps measured in his character’s message, Buttonkooper’s curiosity provided some comic relief and distinctive dialogue to foster interest, social debate, and raise questions about electricity and the power question that ordinary people might find uncomfortable (Fig. 6-2 to Fig. 6-4).

Power’s purpose was not to dictate electric-power policy but to inform and educate consumers. Its sponsors wanted entertaining dialogue and artwork — a discourse — to generate enthusiasm among its audience and word-of-mouth publicity for the issue. In

³⁰⁴ *Note.* A common stage or other media characterization during the mid-to-late 1930s decade was the “little man” idea cast as an “ordinary Joe-like” character that voiced or offered current political views or knowledge in the dialogue. Sometimes offered as a sidebar or sidekick, and at times a main character.

³⁰⁵ Stuart Cosgrove. “Living Newspaper: History, Production and Form,” (PhD Dissertation), University of Hull (1982) 108.

Note. *Power* was the first Living Newspaper production to use the Buttonkooper character.

theory, the audience was left to decide who would best serve their electricity interests: the power trusts with their monopolistic practices or public ownership with democratic distribution of electric power. Yet critics complained that *Power* was a form of propaganda for New Deal electric-power policies. Flanagan remarked that *Power* was “propaganda for a better understanding of the derivation and the scientific meaning of power and its wide use.”³⁰⁶ Harry Hopkins concurred, stating that *Power* was “to educate the consumer who’s paying for the power . . . The big power companies have spent millions on propaganda for the utilities. It is about time the consumers had a mouthpiece.”³⁰⁷

At the end of Act One, a white scrim projected a motion picture of water flowing over the TVA’s Norris Dam as commonplace men and women from various walks of life strolled onstage holding lanterns to sing the show’s mantra, the “TVA Song.” This was a timely Kentucky mountain folk ballad that reflected individual experience with the federal TVA program, as chronicled by Jean Thomas and sung by Jilson Setters:³⁰⁸

My name is William Edwards
 I live down Cove Creek way
 I’m working on the project
 They call the T.V.A.

The Government begun it
 When I was a child

³⁰⁶ Bentley, *Hallie Flanagan* 315-316.

³⁰⁷ Hopkins quoted in Bentley, *Hallie Flanagan* 250.

³⁰⁸ *Note.* The original nine-verse song was titled “Ballad of the TVA.” *Power’s* script bibliography was listed in its playbill. *Power* at the Ritz Theatre Playbill. Library of Congress, American Memory: Federal Theater Project. Obtained from <http://memory.loc.gov/music/ftp/fprpb/1096/109660002/0001v.jpg> (17 July 2017).

But now they are in earnest
And Tennessee's gone wild!

All up and down the Valley
They heard the glad alarm:
The Government means business
It's working like a charm

Oh, see them boys a-comin'
Their Government they trust
Just hear their hammers ringing
They'll build that dam or bust!

Beyond the question of electricity generation, *Power* represented the power of social transformation to raise the quality of life for people of the region. The TVA Song translated the message into a vernacular for ordinary people. A successful TVA and other proposed valley authorities depended upon constituents' acceptance of technocratic regional development of not only electric generation and transmission, but also integration of engineering, social planning, new agricultural methods, and industrialization. Acceptance was neither easy nor automatic. Many constituents had to move from their ancestral homes due to reservoir inundation.

Nevertheless, electric-power generation and other TVA programs were of interest to everyday folk because they promised employment, income security, and social improvement that represented optimism about the future. Staged depictions of Tennessee Valley images of poverty and poor social conditions invoked humanitarian sentiment. The orchestra was directed to play the TVA ballad as an overture leading into the Second Act, which featured the TVA and its programs. As a motion picture continued to fill the

backdrop with a map of TVA territory, the overall scene suggested a visual and theatrical celebration of a “democracy on the march,” in praise of governmental concern and intervention for the social well-being of all its people (Fig. 6-5 to Fig 6-8).³⁰⁹

But the onstage revelry prompted by the TVA celebration came to a sudden halt when well-funded private utilities challenged the constitutionality of the federal government’s involvement in the power-distribution business. The judicial question in the then-pending Supreme Court case *Alabama Power Company, petr., v. Harold L. Ickes* was whether to uphold or strike down the law granting PWA loans to construct public power plants. The nation’s fight for cheap power and public ownership would culminate symbolically in the Tennessee Valley. “What will the Supreme Court do?” (Fig. 6-9).³¹⁰

Power in Seattle (1937)

Power opened in Seattle on July 6, 1937 at the Metropolitan Theatre. As a locally organized project, over 100 relief workers were paid to produce a work targeting the wider regional issue of public power and regionalization. The drama was in part a civic celebration of Seattle’s achievements during what was declared to be “Power Week,” June 21-26, 1937.

Seattle Mayor John F. Dore declared:

POWER is the life of industry; industry the incentive of trade; history the progress of civilization, advancing step by step within our very lives.

³⁰⁹ Arthur Arent. *Power* script, Act 1, Scene 15-16 from Records of the Federal Theatre Project, Subject: “Living Newspapers,” *Power*. National Archives, College Park, RG 69.5.4, Box 540.

³¹⁰ Note. In *Alabama Power Company, petr., v. Harold L. Ickes*, 302 U.S. 464 (1938), the Supreme Court upheld PWA loans to municipalities to construct public power plants. This decision was written into the *Power* script finale after the 3 January 1938 ruling.

Within the boundaries of our own state lies one-fifth of this potential possibility so rapidly guiding our country to its new goal. In the State of Washington lies the electric power that is to control the destiny of this new civilization; an energy to be used for the benefit of all.

THEREFORE, in recognition of these nature bestowed benefits, to further publicize Seattle as the hub-city of this progressive march of industry and to make our citizens more aware of this progressive march fostered by our power resources.

I HEARBY DECLARE AND DECREE the week of June 21 to 26 to be set aside as POWER WEEK: A week in which it shall be brought to the attention of the nation that the CITY OF SEATTLE is a HUB-CITY of the land of power.³¹¹

The Bonneville Dam was a couple of months from completion, federal plans for marketing its power were being debated, and construction of the Grand Coulee Dam was progressing. In fact, the local production altered the script of *Power* to substitute construction of the Grand Coulee for any mention of Boulder Dam.³¹² This event was co-sponsored by the municipally-owned utility, Seattle City Light, whose superintendent was federal Security and Exchange Commissioner, J. D. Ross, still active as the utility's head supervisor. At that time, City Light was embroiled in a fierce competition over power distribution shared with privately-held Puget Sound Power and Light.

City Light formed an advisory committee with the FTP that met on May 25, 1937 to offer technical advice and company backing for a "City Light Night." Correspondence

³¹¹ In *Power*: Seattle Director's book, Federal Theatre Project Collection, Library of Congress, Finding Aid Box 1057. Obtained from <http://memory.loc.gov/cgi-bin/ampage> (17 July 2017) 6.

³¹² Barry Witham, "Living Newspaper 'Power' in Seattle," in *Theatre History Studies* 9: (1989) 25.

from City Light engineer, Robert Beck, to J. D. Ross described an ideal opportunity to dramatize and publicize City Light's work.³¹³

We are making every effort to put Power Week over as a big success. In order to create further interest we are putting on a \$10.00 range wiring program and have invited the dealers to cooperate. I wish we could get everybody in the City to see the play called "Power" and immediately afterward take a trip to Skagit. I believe our troubles would be pretty well over.³¹⁴

City Light's positive publicity from this stage production might have been a good marketing tool to increase business, giving it an edge in its competition with Puget Sound Power and Light. This might suggest a political partnership between *Power* and City Light.

The Seattle FTP unit contributed significantly to the Power Week publicity campaign. Five-thousand newspaper handouts, entitled *The Living Newspaper*, were made available free of charge to schools, groups, and meetings to circulate public power information. In another local FTP publicity gimmick, public power patrons received a mock electricity bill with a demand note for the bearer to attend the theatre under threat of prosecution. Five hundred posters were distributed throughout the city, many on City Light power poles, featuring an iconic worker's hand grasping a lightning bolt (Fig. 6-10). Seattle City Light erected generators to power a large sodium-light display outside the Metropolitan Theatre. Local radio aired twenty-three dramatic programs about electric power during the first three weeks of June 1937. On June 1, 1937, three Seattle daily papers and

³¹³ Ibid., 27.

³¹⁴ Ibid., 28.

thirty-five weeklies conducted a local press campaign on electric power. Unfortunately, the WPA had to postpone the stage drama allegedly due to WPA cutbacks, weakened the publicity's impact because newspaper were not anxious to extend their publicity.³¹⁵

Opening night for *Power* was called "City Light Night." Seattle Mayor Dore who attended, had all but endorsed City Light Supervisor, J. D. Ross, as the new administrator for the Bonneville Project. The theatre was backed by progressive supporters who cheered the heroes and hissed the villains. As one observer recalled, "[A]bout the third scene the audience caught the rhythm and the play never failed to get at least four curtain calls."³¹⁶

Created from film donated by Seattle City Light, the so-called "Eisenstein Montage" was added to the top of Act 1, Scene 10. In the original script, the montage compared public- and private-utility budgets and outlays to imply that public power saves costs. However, in the regional version, the montage seemed to affirm the "public interest" principle espoused by then-presidential candidate Franklin Roosevelt in his 1932 speech, in which he presented the justification for public power in the Pacific Northwest. A film of "clouds, rain and snow precipitation; snow, ice, glaciers, streams, rivers, waterfalls" filled the backdrop of the stage, and concluded with double-exposure images of "energy coursing through turbines and out over transmission lines"³¹⁷ as the Voice of the Living Newspaper narrated,

³¹⁵ Guy Williams et al. *Power in Seattle*. Federal Theatre Project "Report on the Production" (1937) 3, 5. *Note*. Seattle City Light telegraphed J. D. Ross in Washington D. C. to intervene by contacting WPA head Harry Hopkins to postpone this postponement. In another theory, the WPA postponed *Power* to a later date to coincide with the release of its pamphlet, *Power in the State of Washington*. In Witham, *Power in Seattle* 28-29.

³¹⁶ Guy Williams et al. *Power in Seattle*. Federal Theatre Project Production Bulletin (1937) 17.

³¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 19.

“Seattle – municipal – Seattle,”
 Mountains – Snow – Ice – Glaciers
 Nature’s reservoir of potential power
 Who put it there?
 Who rightfully owns its resources?
 Who is most entitled to its benefits?
 You – the public.
 Streams – Rivers – Waterfalls
 Ideal energy
 Energy that is the property of every man.
 Who guides its course?
 Who governs its destiny?
 Man can
 Man has
 Water power – *the property of every man.*³¹⁸

The montage asserted the government’s right to convert water, a natural resource, into electricity for distribution to its people as “the property of every man.” For a Pacific Northwest audience in transition to a modern 20th-century culture, technology perhaps conjured notions of the frontier: conquering a new type of wilderness, made easier with electric machines to reside within the natural landscape. Hydroelectric power symbolized the conflation of nature and human culture, underpinned by the social process represented by an increasingly electrified world. Roosevelt greatly desired a Columbia Valley Authority to validate his great public power works promise of 1932: to develop a river system to serve all the people. However, sharp regional divisions remained between the industrial motivations of Oregon Governor Charles Martin and his allies and the New Deal

³¹⁸ Ibid.

policy to develop public-electric power in the Columbia Basin for the widest use and distribution.

Living Newspapers, as modified for community performances, set the parameters for local culture's perspective on issues, which exposed regional pulls in opposite directions. In the Northwest for example, *Power* uncovered partisans on one side who believed the Depression had so changed regional dynamics, local communities now favored a shift toward progressive values, finding communal identity, value and security in government programs and social democracy. City Light supported Roosevelt's progressive stance on Bonneville and their own municipal-power interests. On the other side of the spectrum, industrialists and conservatives satisfied with traditional regional culture, were anxious about *Power*. For example, J. Willis Sayre of Hearst Newspapers' *Seattle Post Intelligencer* wrote:

The private utilities are assailed, satirized, ridiculed, exposed, attacked, flayed, and condemned. A campaign has been waged industriously for a week or more to assure a big turn out [sic] of public-ownership advocates for the opening night Last evening was "City Light Night." No night for the Puget Sound Power and Light has been set yet.³¹⁹

In addition, Sayre's critique commented on the populist characterization of *Power*'s actors, and noted their sway over the audience to the government's cause:

The abused light consumer, the farmer who still lacks power and the remote rural homes which still have to depend on kerosene lamps are skillfully played up to gain sympathy. The holding companies are lambasted, country newspapers are

³¹⁹ J. Willis Sayre. " 'Power' Has Big Opening at the Met," in *Seattle Post Intelligencer*, 7 July 1937 in *Power: Seattle Director's Book* 34.

represented a purchasable by power minions and even the courts are not spared. “Power” is a real field day for those who believe the government should own and run all utilities.³²⁰

Despite the sold-out Seattle performances, *Power* proved controversial. It upended the state WPA administration, led local FTP directors to resign, and convinced the state’s FTP Project Director to abandon controversial productions. The regional FTP’s funds were cut, reducing the work force of local theatre supervisors, directors, and technicians.³²¹ According to BPA librarian, Lillian Davis, the Oregon Federal Theater went ahead and performed *Power* at Benson Polytechnic School in Portland, March 26-27, 1938 as an “indication of how the subject of power was uppermost in the minds of the entire community.”³²² The Portland performances took place shortly before the April 8, 1938 special elections on the question of whether to establish seven public utility districts in Oregon.

Power: A Witness to a Social Process

The River and Lorentz’s New Deal media employed a wide-ranging and dramaturgical approach to raise social awareness of problems facing the American public due to the Depression, and to give voice to government’s power to implement solutions for citizens’ relief. Electric-power generation was one such solution. Most Americans viewed electricity as a scientific phenomenon, but had little real interest in understanding the source of its generation. The ordinary person was more interested in the potential of electricity and

³²⁰ Ibid., 34.

³²¹ Bentley, *Hallie Flanagan* 281-2.

³²² Lillian Davis, *History of the Bonneville Power Administration* (unpublished). Portland, Oregon: BPA (1943) 27-28.

its personal meaning to his or her own well-being to ensure a better and secure future. In contrast, the Living Newspaper Production *Power* addressed complex social processes of assimilating electricity into American society and reinforcing its cultural transformation into community for power and empowerment.

Electricity could enable transformation. But people had to accept and facilitate transformation to permit individual empowerment for a better way of life. The attributes of electricity imposed a natural monopoly for its generation and distribution to dictate economic power. Its governance required a political structure that functioned both socially and culturally to concentrate power in the hands of private corporations or public utilities. Electricity modified the meaning of landscapes embedded in daily life – the electrified home, the modernized farm – to put power and empowerment into the hands of ordinary people. Electric power afforded new social agendas to integrate community; however, this power could also divide community by its uses and choices. As a cultural platform, *Power* brought an awareness to such new technocratic meanings to its audience, raising awareness that “electric machines had social and symbolic uses that belie the idea they were ever purely functional devices.”³²³

³²³ David Nye. *Electrifying America: Social Meanings of a New Technology*. Massachusetts: MIT Press (1997) 391.



Figure 6-1. *Power* Poster.

Date: 1936.

Media: Silk Screen Print.

Work Progress Administration (W.P.A.) Federal Art Project, Library of Congress. Digital ID cph 3f05339.

Figure 6-1: *Power* Poster. Endless whirling energy feeds mechanical gears to serve humanity by empowering people.



Figure 6-2. “Angus K. Buttonkooper,” the Consumer.

Date: 1937.

Photographer: Harry Shaw.

Power: Seattle Director’s Book (1937). Federal Theatre Project Collection, Library of Congress, Finding Aid Box 1057.

Figure 6-2: Angus K. Buttonkooper, the Consumer. As a stereotypical emblem of the energy-consuming public, Buttonkooper carries a market basket, and wears a straw hat to ask “man-on-the-street-questions” about simple concepts of electricity. A common stage or other media device during the mid-to-late 1930s decade was the “little man,” cast as an “ordinary Joe-like character” offering current political views or knowledge.



Figure 6-3. "Samuel Insull," the villainous private utility interests.

Date: 1937.

Photographer: Harry Shaw.

Power: Seattle Director's Book (1937). Federal Theatre Project Collection, Library of Congress, Finding Aid Box 1057.

Figure 6-3: Samuel Insull. A vaudevillian-style caricature represents the villainous private utility interests of power trusts. During the era, capitalists and bureaucrats were symbolized as jovial, well-dressed, overstuffed men to provide visual contrast with the common worker or farmer.



Figure 6-4. The “Tennessee Valley Farmer,” a populist character.

Date: 1937.

Photographer: Harry Shaw.

Power: Seattle Director’s Book (1937). Federal Theatre Project Collection, Library of Congress, Finding Aid Box 1057.

Figure 6-4: The “Tennessee Valley Farmer.” This populist character was given the role to educate the audience about what electricity would do for the farm.



Figure 6-5. “Democracy on the March.” TVA Director David Lilienthal poses before Wilson Dam in northwest Alabama

Date: September 1934.

Photographer: Unknown.

National Archives, College Park, Maryland. RG 69.5.4 Box 560.

Figure 6-5. Symbols of Power. “Waters of the Tennessee River roar through the spillways at Wilson Dam, TVA plant in northern Alabama.” TVA Director David Lilienthal, in silhouette, marvels at the government monumentalism represented by Wilson Dam. Federal power, the photograph suggests, has the means to control nature’s power for the “common good” and empowerment of the individual.



Figure 6-6. Workers at Norris Dam construction camp.

Date: 1933.

Photographer: Unknown.

National Archives, College Park, Maryland. RG 69.5.4 Box 560.

Figure 6-6: Symbols of *Power*. “A group of several hundred workers at Norris Dam construction camp during the noon hour.” A posed, positive propaganda image to strengthen the populist New Deal message that government public works employ men who are happy and healthy as a result.



Figure 6-7. Aunt Lizzie Reagan weaving old-fashioned jean.

Date: 14 November 1933.

Photographer: Unknown.

National Archives, College Park, Maryland. RG 69.5.4 Box 560.

Figure 6-7: Symbols of Power. “Aunt Lizzie Reagan, at Pi Beta Phi School, Gatlinburg, Tenn., weaving old-fashioned jean. Very few can weave this kind of cloth now. She is 75 years old and lives near the school, earning her living by weaving.” While power programs promised social improvement, energy-centric regionalism respected the nature of folkways. Adoption of modern conveniences still required connections to tradition, represented by an elder weaving cloth, to win acceptance by the people.



Figure 6-8. Tiny fingers are kept warm.

Date: Unknown.

Photographer: Unknown.

National Archives, College Park, Maryland. RG 69.5.4 Box 560.

Figure 6-8: Symbols of *Power*. “Tiny fingers are kept warm by this electric wall type heater in one of the homes in the Town of Norris.” Electric power is for the service of humanity, providing warmth for the region’s young citizens. To pose a youth with an electric appliance suggests connection to a modern future.



Figure 6-9. Final Scene of Power, “What will the Supreme Court do?”

Date: 1937.

Photographer: Unknown.

National Archives, College Park, Maryland. RG 69.5.4 Box 560.

Figure 6-9: Final Scene of Power, “What will the Supreme Court do?” The High Court was signified by nine masks high above a group of ordinary citizens (government monumentalism) from all walks of life. They faced the audience to solicit common sympathies. The administration’s public power and energy-centric regionalism was then in the hands of the judicial branch. Public Works Administration (PWA) grants were an important funding source necessary to build power transmission infrastructure, especially in poorer areas of the country. The scene suggests backhanded pressure on the Supreme Court for a favorable decision — this at a time when the Judicial Procedures Reform Bill of 1937 was being pushed by President Roosevelt in an overt attempt to circumvent Supreme Court resistance by “packing” the court with added justices.



Figure 6-10. Seattle *Power* Poster.

Date: Unknown W.P.A. Worker.

Medium: Silk Screen Process (14" x 22").

Seattle Director's Book (1937). Federal Theatre Project Collection, Library of Congress, Finding Aid Box 1057.

Figure 6-10. The human fist grabbing a lightning bolt symbolizes the capture and control of nature's energy by public hydropower dams that serve all the people.

Chapter 7: Transforming the Abstract

Millions of kilowatt-hours of hydroelectric power are wasted annually because people will not pay exorbitantly high rates . . . water goes over the dam. Wasted power and wasted human resources If the great federal project on the Columbia River can introduce this concept into America's use of power, it will render a high use of service to the men and women of the nation. It will be conservation at its best and fullest sense – conservation of natural resources and conservation of human values.

J. D. Ross, "The Kilowatt Year," 1938

The Bonneville Project was realized under its first administrator, J. D. Ross, who was officially appointed by Secretary Ickes on October 10, 1937.³²⁴ The challenge that lay ahead for the new agency was not at the dam site, but rather with the people — how to persuade residents of the Pacific Northwest to buy into the Bonneville Project. A federal regional plan was needed to build and integrate a regional electric-transmission system, develop reclamation and irrigation programs, and improve navigation and flood control for promised jobs and income security. It was not economically practical to build a random dam for the sole purpose of power generation without considering other provisions. For example, soil conservation and reforestation programs were essential to curb erosion; without such programs, silt would be impounded behind upstream dams. Although Columbia River development favored a federal valley-authority agency, such as a Columbia Valley Authority (CVA), initial federal legislation had created a power-marketing agency. The first eight months of this new agency entailed staff employment, land

³²⁴ Gus Norwood. *Columbia River Power for the People: A History of the Policies of the Bonneville Power Administration*. Portland: BPA (1981) 66.

Note. Ross continued to serve at Seattle City Light as superintendent from 1931 until his death in 1939.

surveys, planning, procuring materials, and other necessary steps before actual construction of a regional electric power system could begin.

The Bonneville Project had two immediate information objectives. It needed to: (1) educate and explain the young federal power administration's activities to the public, and (2) counteract the private utilities' well-organized, well-financed, and effective opposition to government intrusion into power generation. Early on, the Project's Information Division wanted to assure people that public power would be available, that rates would be more favorable than private utilities offered, and that communities could organize into public or municipal utilities, to secure these power benefits for all. Even more essential, public relations had to establish the basic concept that public power existed — private utilities were not the only source of electric power. Daily press releases on activities, additions to personnel, and drawing board plans were sent out in a constant stream, sometimes up to a half a dozen a day. J. D. Ross originally offered a Portland-*Oregonian* journalist, Richard L. Neuberger, the position of Chief Information Officer for the Bonneville Project, and Stephan B. Kahn an initial 30-day position as Special Advisor on Public Relations. Kahn later became the Bonneville Project's first information officer.³²⁵

Populist Origins

Kahn and Neuberger, both young, pre-BPA, progressive Oregonian foot soldiers, were enthusiastically engaged in local Democratic reform politics to advance New Deal

³²⁵ Lillian Davis, *History of the Bonneville Power Administration* (unpublished). Portland, Oregon: BPA (1943) 255; Letter Gendron to Ross, 20 November 1937, obtained from Seattle City Light, James D. Ross Reference Material, Seattle Municipal Archives. Collection Number 1200-14, Box 76 (May 2016). *Note.* Kahn was appointed Assistant Chief Informational Officer. There is a conflict in dates. See Davis, *BPA History* 254.

policies in the Pacific Northwest. Kahn had persuaded Neuberger, his then-roommate at the University of Oregon and a staunch Herbert Hoover backer, to adopt the social and economic platforms of Franklin Roosevelt. By Inauguration Day in March 1933, Neuberger was a New Deal enthusiast. Both Neuberger and Kahn had a keen interest in the public power debate. Neuberger, recognized as a talented journalist, was distracted by numerous political projects, eventually leaving the University of Oregon in 1935 without a degree. In 1936, he became Northwest correspondent, the stringer, for *The New York Times* while working locally for the Portland *Oregonian*.³²⁶ Neuberger particularly respected J. D. Ross, publicizing the City Light Skagit River Project and promoting the New Deal party line on public power in many of his writings. These activities led him to become an associate and ally of Ross.³²⁷

At the University of Oregon in Eugene, Kahn was introduced to the idea of public power through the local Eugene Water and Electric Board (EWEB), which was generating hydropower from the Leaburg-Walterville dam complex on the McKenzie River. Kahn served as Secretary of the “People’s Power Conference” while at the university.³²⁸ In 1935, after completing his second semester of law school, Kahn was awarded a summer internship from the National Institute of Public Affairs at American University in

³²⁶ William G. Robbins. “Richard Neuberger (1912-1960)” from *The Oregon History Project* (n.d.) obtained from https://www.oregonencyclopedia.org/articles/neuberger_richard_1912_1960#.V6fDKFRHanN (7 October 2016).

³²⁷ Letter Neuberger to Ross, 3 December 1936, J. D. Ross Reference Material, obtained from Seattle City Light, Seattle Municipal Archives. Collection Number 1200-14, Box 76 (May 2016); Letter Neuberger to Ross, 21 July 1937, J. D. Ross Reference Material, obtained from Seattle City Light, Seattle Municipal Archives. Collection Number 1200-14, Box 76 (May 2016); Letter Neuberger to Ross, 26 July 1937, J. D. Ross Reference Material, obtained from Seattle City Light, Seattle Municipal Archives. Collection Number 1200-14, Box 76 (May 2016).

³²⁸ Stephen B. Kahn “Oral history interview with Stephen B. Kahn” [Sound recording] conducted by Bill Murlin and Gene Tollefson (1984) obtained from The Oregon Historical Society published 1994, Tape 2.

Washington D.C., becoming an intern for Wisconsin Senator, Robert M. La Follette Jr., a member of the Wisconsin Progressive Party.³²⁹ With an interest in the national electric-power problem debate, Kahn spent the summer lobbying for legislation to establish a Columbia Valley Authority (CVA).³³⁰ Kahn, as a New Dealer and public power advocate, echoed the great federal dream, which was to have a CVA, “to develop a great river for all its values and for all its potential . . . not just a question of producing power but a question of raising the potential of a livelihood for the many people of the region . . . a great river can become a river of transportation . . . we can stop all the floods . . . even save the salmon [by] climbing up the fish ladders.”³³¹

At the end of Kahn’s summer internship, Senator George Norris arranged employment for Kahn as a clerk stenographer in the legal division of the TVA in Knoxville, Tennessee. This instigated Kahn’s transfer from the University of Oregon to the Law School at the University of Tennessee to complete his final year of school. While serving at the TVA, Kahn was privy to research on the landmark case, *Ashwander v. Tennessee Valley*

³²⁹ “La Follette, Robert Marion, Jr.,” from “Biographical Guide of the United States Congress,” obtained from <http://bioguide.congress.gov/biosearch/biosearch.asp> (12 November 2017).

³³⁰ Libby Burke. Re: “Our Emails.” Message to Katherine Heslop 14 Aug 2017. Email; Libby Burke. “Citizen Kahn,” BPA Presentation (2015), obtained from https://bonpow1.ent.sirsi.net/client/en_US/default/?rm=HISTORY0%7C%7C%7C1%7C%7C%7C0%7C%7C%7Ctrue (23 August 2016). No longer available on line.

Note. In letter written by Kahn (to *Oregonian editor?*), dated 1 July 1937, Kahn said Senator Charles McNary with Portland Chamber of Commerce Vice-President, W. D. Dodson, opposed Kahn’s lobbying efforts to reserve 50% of power generated from Bonneville for public agencies and his lobby efforts against the Army Corps of Engineers to oversee distribution of Bonneville power. Letter Kahn to Editor, 1 July 1937, J. D. Ross Reference Material, obtained from Seattle City Light, Seattle Municipal Archives. Collection Number 1200-14, Box 70 (May 2016).

³³¹ Kahn, Oral history conducted by Murlin et al.

Authority, led by high-powered attorneys, John Lord O’Brian of New York and Paul A. Freund of Harvard University, and the TVA staff attorneys at Knoxville.³³²

Upon returning to Portland, Oregon in mid-1936 to take the Oregon bar examination, Kahn, with Neuberger in tow, continued to engage in progressive politics linked with the Oregon Commonwealth Federation (OCF). Correspondence indicates that Kahn unceasingly continued his public power advocacy in Portland, becoming an associate of Ross in the public power movement. His ground-level activism sought to organize “people’s utility districts” while fighting to counter anti-New Deal and anti-public power propaganda as the Bonneville Project neared completion.³³³ In the midst of the political chaos in the tug-of-war for control of Bonneville power, Kahn was one of the organizers of the People’s Power League, an offshoot political organization of the OCF, formed on August 15, 1937. The League sought the implementation of Roosevelt’s power policies in the Pacific Northwest and lobbied support for Ross as the first administrator of the Bonneville Project. Ross needed the help. His appointment as administrator to the Project was opposed by private utilities, “tax leagues,” citizens’ committees, conservative groups, the Portland Chamber of Commerce, and Oregon Governor, Charles Martin.³³⁴ This opposition would continue to haunt Ross during his tenure at the Bonneville Project.

³³² *Note. Ashwander v. Tennessee Valley Authority*, 297 U.S. 288 (1936), decided on February 17, 1936, upheld the legality of the TVA and found Congress had the authority to construct dams for national defense and for the improvement of interstate commerce.

³³³ Burke, Email to Heslop 14 Aug 2017; Letters Kahn to Ross, 14 July 1937, J. D. Ross Reference Material, obtained from Seattle City Light, Seattle Municipal Archives. Collection Number 1200-14, Box 70 (May 2016). Kahn to Ross, 25 July 1937, J. D. Ross Reference Material, obtained from Seattle City Light, Seattle Municipal Archives. Collection Number 1200-14, Box 70 (May 2016).

³³⁴ Letter MacDonald to Ross, 17 August 1937, J. D. Ross Reference Material, obtained from Seattle City Light, Seattle Municipal Archives. Collection Number 1200-14, Box 78 (May 2016).

Among Ross's initial appointments, a letter dated November 20, 1937 from Executive Assistant Ulric Gendron to Ross referred to a pending appointment of Richard Neuberger as Chief of Public Relations. Gendron suggested appointing Stephen Kahn to the staff for a 30-day period as special advisor on public relations.³³⁵ In a letter dated October 18, 1938, Neuberger declined Ross's original offer as the "publicity man" because "a newspaperman . . . must write events and occurrences as I view them . . . expressing legitimate facts either about the personnel of a government office or about various policies adopted in the course of a government project."³³⁶ In the meantime, Neuberger served as a temporary assistant until he severed his relationship with the Bonneville Project in October 1938, due to a published article about the Bonneville Project and public power districts that Ross had found unfavorable.³³⁷ Kahn was appointed as Assistant Chief of the Information Department.³³⁸

The Ross Years: 1937–1939

Bonneville Administrator J. D. Ross, began his tenure by acquainting public power commissioners with Bonneville policy. As administrator, Ross issued public statements and gave informational talks about the advantages of low cost electricity, urging Northwest citizens to "catch the President's vision of the future."³³⁹ He supported good public

³³⁵ Letter Gendron to Ross, 20 November 1937, J. D. Ross Reference Material, obtained from Seattle City Light, Seattle Municipal Archives. Collection Number 1200-14, Box 76 (May 2016); Davis, *BPA History* 19

³³⁶ Letter Neuberger to Ross, 18 October 1938. J. D. Ross Reference Material, obtained from Seattle City Light, Seattle Municipal Archives. Collection Number 1200-14, Box 76 (May 2016).

³³⁷ Ibid. *Note.* Neuberger article was "Power Play," in *Collier's*, 22 October 1938.

³³⁸ *Note.* There is a conflict on dates of appointment between Gendron's letter and Davis's *BPA History*. Even so, Kahn was appointed early in the administration to Assistant Chief of the Information Department.

³³⁹ Ross in Davis, *BPA History* 22.

relations, issuing regular mimeographed Bonneville Project Bulletins to explain his concept for “postage stamp” electric rates, his support for public-utility districts, and his plans for a master transmission grid within a transformative landscape to realize a prosperous Northwest future. Citizen groups were eager to hear Ross speak. Ross consistently identified the construction of Bonneville Dam as a humanitarian act measured in terms of its impact on human achievement, following the party line that Bonneville was a model for the rest of the nation. At its first meeting in November 1937 the Bonneville Advisory Board discussed power-rate schedules, plans for future installation of added generators at Bonneville, and acquisition of further funding for the design and construction of electric-grid transmission facilities. The early Board correspondingly had a mandate for long-range regional development with respect to soil conservation, rural electrification, and farm resettlement. These early actions taken by Ross favored ideas for a nascent federal regional plan, and implicitly supported Roosevelt’s utopian visions for a Columbia Valley Authority based on dam development.³⁴⁰

Even though the dam structure was built and a marketing agency created, the Bonneville Project in 1937 had no electrical power to sell because design and construction of the transmission network was still incomplete. The community of Cascade Locks, Oregon, was the first community to be served by Columbia River Power on July 9, 1938. Towards the end of 1939, the backbone Bonneville to Vancouver line was energized.³⁴¹ Nevertheless, the Project’s administration spearheaded a public power educational campaign led by Ross, to excite and emotionally engage Northwest citizens about

³⁴⁰ Davis, *BPA History* 21.

³⁴¹ Craig Holstine. “Power to the People: Construction of the Bonneville Power Administration’s ‘Master Grid,’ 1939-1945” in *The Pacific Northwest Forum* (1988), 1:(2)35-46.

the coming opportunities of low cost and plentiful power. Besides finding markets for the new federal power, the startup agency had four general responsibilities with public relations implications: (1) to establish the Project's electric rates, (2) to promote industrial growth and its associated jobs, (3) to assist public power-utility districts (PUDs) to succeed, and (4) to build the necessary power transmission networks.³⁴²

Regional industry, utility, and commercial interests in the late 1930s continued to favor the sale of Bonneville power to private investor-owned utility companies at the dam site, in order to back the development of a local electrochemical industry. But Ross had a different vision: that the dam serve the entire region. Evidenced by his postage-stamp rate idea, Ross wanted everyone to pay the same electric rate for Bonneville power, whether in Portland or Idaho. In fact, Congress's intent was to empower the Administrator to take every step necessary to make Bonneville power available for regional development to accommodate population growth and alleviate unemployment in the region's traditional industries of agriculture and wood processing. This was to be the people's power.³⁴³

"Government or Private Ownership of Our Electric Utilities?" was a 1936 memo to Ross from Edwin S. Lincoln, who wrote *The Electric Home*. The memo outlined how to approach the domestic consumer, with a neutral investigation of various schemes of

³⁴² Gene Tollefson. *BPA and the Struggle for Power at a Cost*. Portland: BPA (1987) 131.

³⁴³ *Note*. Ross originally assigned Ivan Bloch to find solutions to ease regional unemployment through Bonneville power generation and transmission. Influenced by Stanford-trained economist, Sam Moment, Bloch realized that the main way to reduce unemployment was to attract industries that could process the region's raw materials for shipment to the rest of the nation. In 1940, BPA's General Counsel issued an opinion to Congress that recognized the majority of Bonneville's generated power could not be consumed without further regional development. Marketing of Columbia River Power depended largely on regional population and industrial growth. General Counsel urged Congress to authorize the BPA Administrator to take every step necessary to make Bonneville energy available for regional development. See Tollefson, *Power at a Cost* 132-144.

how electricity was supplied to the end user. Many of Lincoln's points appeared in early Bonneville Project informational literature. According to Lincoln, such analysis should cover all aspects of the subject from a neutral standpoint and aim at everyone's interest in lower rates. The final study results should be "written for the 15-year-old intelligence and . . . be brief."³⁴⁴ The outline's key points were to (a) establish a yardstick for the industry, defined as 100% access to service for the lowest possible cost; (b) explain how electricity is generated and the means of transmission from generation to consumer; (c) use plain language to discuss complex concepts such as electric rates, regulations, and holding companies; (d) disseminate results of investigations to the press, radio, and public through printed booklets; (e) explain the ideal power plant; (f) represent differences in power systems using private and municipal schemes that describe the TVA and Hydro-Electric System of Ontario; and (g) explain differences in rate schedules from a consumer standpoint. Above all, Lincoln advised that every study conclusion should point out that "only the increased consumption of electricity . . . will rightfully reduce its cost to all class [sic] of users."³⁴⁵

In March 1938, one month before an Oregon special election to seek approval for the formation of seven public-utility districts (PUDs), Ross engaged in an eight-city tour to conduct Bonneville power-rate hearings.³⁴⁶ In a press statement, Ross said, "[The people's money] will pay for the project and they should have an opportunity to say what

³⁴⁴ E.S. Lincoln, memo to Ross. n.d. (1936) "Government or Private Ownership of Our Electric Utilities?" obtained from J. D. Ross Papers, University of Washington Libraries, Special Collections, Box 21 (October 2015).

³⁴⁵ Ibid.

³⁴⁶ Davis, *BPA History* 30 106.

sort of rates they should pay. I want their views on how Bonneville power can best serve the homes and farms of the Northwest, increasing manufacturing and irrigation, and develop all their great resources.”³⁴⁷ Inviting the public to participate in a highly technical topic — the establishment of rates — was a ploy by the administrator to stir interest and publicize public power throughout the region. The dam site’s wholesale bus-bar rates had already been submitted to the Federal Power Commission on March 2, 1938 for approval.³⁴⁸

Ross’s premise for power distribution was to adopt a wholesale electric-rate structure based on a *kilowatt-year*, a system to supply plentiful electricity at an inexpensive cost for the people. It supported the technocratic notion of abundance instead of scarcity.³⁴⁹ A kilowatt-year was defined as “1000 watts taken steadily for 365 days a year.”³⁵⁰ In this model, there are 8,760 kilowatt hours in a kilowatt-year, to be sold at a given price, taken all or in part during that 12-month period. The proposed kilowatt-year unit rate applied to power sold from Bonneville dam to cities, districts, or private utilities, and then resold to the consumer at a low per kilowatt-hour sales unit. Utilities would be encouraged to adopt new strategies for consumer power distribution to stoke a steady rate of electricity consumption. To bolster his argument, Ross compared Bonneville to the Canadian Ontario Hydroelectric Commission scheme that “sold power to scores of cities on a basis similar to the kilowatt-year . . . resold by municipal systems to retail customers at a

³⁴⁷ Ross in Davis, *BPA History* 30.

³⁴⁸ Davis, *BPA History* 29.

³⁴⁹ J. D. Ross, “The Kilowatt Year—Your Money’s Worth of Electricity,” pamphlet. Portland: Bonneville Project (1938) 1,10; Davis, *BPA History* 106.

Note. This was the technocratic idea.

³⁵⁰ Ross, “Kilowatt Year” 2.

fraction of the [then-current] American cost.”³⁵¹ Ross wanted individual retail customers to take on a full power load all the time to reap the benefits of the Columbia River and its tributaries.³⁵²

The first public hearing was held in Salem, Oregon, on March 10, 1938.³⁵³ Concurrently, Ross released Special Bulletin #6, a questionnaire distributed to seek the views of Northwest residents for guidance on setting rate schedules.³⁵⁴ As Lillian Davis observed, few in attendance could offer practical suggestions toward fixing rates schedules, since any attendees from among the general public would lack sufficient technical and financial knowledge of the Bonneville situation to offer any constructive criticism. The hearings became a general discussion with the administrator about the Bonneville Project and electric power, preference for reasonable and uniform rates, and control of overall resale rates by the proposed kilowatt-year rate structure. Arguably, the most important accomplishments of these public meetings were the ordinary citizens’ sense of having participated in a government process and Ross’s opportunity to disseminate “excellent propaganda and [a] source of a great deal of good will for the Administration and public power . . . [that] ‘brought many friends to Bonneville.’”³⁵⁵

³⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 3.

³⁵² *Note.* From a business prospective, it was essential retail electric consumers to take on a full power load because electricity proved to be a unique manufactured product – massed produced, transported, distributed and consumed all at the same instant. Businessman Samuel Insull in 1907 understood this concept, to develop a successful and profitable power marketing paradigm. See dissertation Chapter 3, “The Insull Scheme.”

³⁵³ *Note.* Subsequent meetings took place on 12 March at Olympia, WA; 14 March at Boise, ID; March 15 at Pendleton, OR and Walla Walla, WA; 16 March at Spokane, WA; 17 March at Yakima, WA; 18 March Portland, OR. Davis, *BPA History* 31-32.

³⁵⁴ J. D. Ross, “Special Bulletin#6: Special Questionnaire,” 10 March 1938.

³⁵⁵ Davis, *BPA History* 37; Ross in Davis, *BPA History* 37. See Lillian Davis, *BPA History* on “Establishment of Rates” 29-41.

“The Kilowatt-Year: Your Money’s Worth of Electricity” was written by Ross and printed after the eight-city Bonneville-rates hearing in late March 1938.³⁵⁶ This pamphlet reinforced three messages: (1) understand the concept of the kilowatt year, (2) support the administration’s populist message, that “the people have a chance to say what price they thought they should pay for electricity,” and (3) make known what these benefits will mean to the individual.³⁵⁷ Although simple, the pamphlet’s primitive “grass-roots” style and green-inked illustrations sought to inculcate a populist association with a regional power landscape as the basis for a future valley authority and regional modernity.

The pamphlet cover introduced an ordered energy landscape with selected symbols — the Bonneville spillway and powerhouse on the Columbia River and the curvilinear salmon fishway set within the iconic Northwest mountains and forests — to demonstrate the region’s rich tradition and natural resources, now engineered and controlled for the benefit of its people (Fig. 7-1). The pamphlet’s interior revealed a simple map of the Northwest with a spillway icon to identify the Bonneville Dam on the Columbia River, which included the Snake River tributary, a potential future dam site. The map pinpointed each venue visited by Ross during the rate-hearing tour (Spokane was misidentified). Icons and text identified resources and industries that would benefit the modern Northwest due to Columbia River Power development. The graphics, supported the text and depicted a new sense of place for a forward-looking Northwest through a projected image of landscape decentralization (Fig. 7-2).

³⁵⁶ Davis, *BPA History* 106.

³⁵⁷ Ross, “Kilowatt Year” 2.

Three simple drawings depicted some rather complicated abstract ideas about power – horsepower, the kilowatt year, wholesale power, retail power, and kilowatt hours – that required supplemental text to complete their meanings.³⁵⁸ The corresponding copy was to inform and educate the public about an electric phenomenon that was basically defined, understood, and represented by cultural symbols of its “end-products.” Lighting alone was not enough; power was encased in symbols such as appliances, radios, and hot water heaters to exemplify its benefits as part of the modern social process. The new symbology might include a home transformation with a makeover for the lady of the house, the “modern woman,” with the latest hairdo, wearing a polka dot dress and high heels. Power to the farm represented profitability, with cheap rates promised by the kilowatt-year manifesting as chicken brooders, electric incubators, and water pumps for a new security and satisfaction with rural life.

The most significant message was to address the ordinary people, down on their luck, who became migrants, “burned out by dust and drought . . . among the best and bravest of our citizens.”³⁵⁹ Ross went on to say, “Power and water are the magic combination that will give them a new start in our Promised-Land.” The kilowatt year was the key to “opening . . . irrigation to thousands of new farmsites. It was the ‘American way’ of bringing hope and opportunity to those who are eager to sow their future in the fertile acres of our Northwest empire.”³⁶⁰ This text was accompanied by a simple metamorphic drawing of “wasteland” transformed into useful farmland for settlement, not only to

³⁵⁸ *Note.* Richard Neuberger in “J. D. Ross – Northwest Dynamo” (1938) said literature and pamphlets of the Bonneville Project were inadequate compared to other government agencies, nor did the agency under Ross produce one leaflet up to TVA standards.

³⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 7.

³⁶⁰ *Ibid.*

represent (then-vice-presidential candidate) Franklin Roosevelt's 1920 vision for a Northwest Promised Land, but to reiterate the "public interest" principle that the government had the right to convert natural resources and distribute them for the common good of its citizens (Fig. 7-3).

Ross encouraged community participation in granges, schools, clubs, and commercial organizations to "act in concert to see that the power is distributed at retail rates that will allow consumption to be doubled and trebled. The theory of high rates and lower consumption must give way to a saner, a more humanitarian practice."³⁶¹ Ross continued:

We must have a concerted campaign to increase the use of electricity, to replace human fatigue with the magnetic energy of our mighty streams. The wires that run into your home can carry many times the energy you use. The kilowatt-year will provide continuous consumption. Whoever distributes Bonneville power in your community – public district or private company – must encourage such a policy.³⁶²

The pamphlet text concluded with an appeal to traditional emotion and patriotism.

"Thomas Jefferson's dream of 'a great, free, and independent empire on the banks of the Columbia' can come true. Our broad acres can be a haven of happiness for millions of Americans whose eyes are westward to the Pacific . . . We must have the vision to conserve and develop this heritage for all the people. Electricity must not be used for profit of the few, but for the prosperity of the many."³⁶³ The final illustration displayed a small scale farmhouse and barn structures, arguably populist symbols, in the shadow of the large scale, tall piers of the Bonneville Dam spillway, the symbol of empowerment. "The

³⁶¹ Ibid., 10.

³⁶² Ibid.

³⁶³ Ibid.

Kilowatt-Year” reinforced federal technocratic ideology and implementation of public power through traditional themes of rural life, labor, land, and American history, which supported the upbuilding of small town America and the common man.

Public Utility Districts

In December 1937, U.S. Senator Lewis Schwellenbach inserted into the *Congressional Record* a statement by J. D. Ross entitled, “The Power Truce as the Administrator of the Bonneville Project Sees It.” “It is my [Ross’s] problem to get Bonneville power to your gates . . . how to get it to the homes and farms and factories is for the voters to decide.”³⁶⁴ Originally, this was believed to be a written reply to a press question by the *United States News*, “What is the best plan to end the power war?”³⁶⁵ As an administrator, Ross initially had a limited advisory role in the campaign to establish local public-utility districts (PUDs). But Ross’s “power truce” to refrain from his pre-Bonneville advocacy for public utilities as the Bonneville Project’s administrator did not last long.

As an Oregon PUD special election approached in April 1938 and Washington PUD elections in November 1938, private utilities in well-financed and organized campaigns railed against Ross and the municipally-owned Seattle City Light that Ross had headed for twenty-one years. According to Stephen Kahn, as a strategy to defeat PUD initiatives, the opposition claimed that a vote for a PUD was a vote for socialism, with the next thing to “socialize the grocery store and then they’ll socialize your wife, and it’s

³⁶⁴ Ross quoted in Tollefson, *Power at a Cost* 134; “Power Plan Up to Voters, Ross Advises,” in *Oregonian* 5 April 1938.

³⁶⁵ Davis, *BPA History* 42.

going to be the Russian system coming over and taking over.”³⁶⁶ Kahn said, “That got under Ross’s hide . . . and he hadn’t seen any socialized grocery stores or wives up in Seattle.”³⁶⁷ Spurred to action, about 10 days before the April 8 Oregon PUD elections, Ross released to the public the Bonneville Project’s “objective rates” as a follow-up to the local-rates hearing tour in March 1938.³⁶⁸ Although the average consumer might not understand the concepts of wholesale rates and the kilowatt-year, objective rates were cost breakdowns, constructed in a language more meaningful to the consumer. Ross wanted to demonstrate that “objective retail rate[s] would provide ordinary lighting and small appliances for \$1 per month, better lighting and a good-sized refrigerator for \$2.25 a month,” and so on.³⁶⁹ Pictographic symbols and educational illustrations communicate this message to help people understand how power rates would fit into their budgets.³⁷⁰

The pamphlet “Bonneville Power – To Our Homes at Cost!” was written by Kahn at about the same time when objective rates were released in late March. This pamphlet rebutted an *Oregon Voter* (a weekly publication) exposé entitled, “Astonishing Truths About Seattle City Light,” which circulated throughout the state of Oregon and sought to discredit the honesty and efficiency of J. D. Ross as Roosevelt’s appointed administrator of Bonneville. The pamphlet pushed back against private interests and their tactics, using

³⁶⁶ Kahn quoted in Tollefson, *Power at a Cost* 134.

³⁶⁷ Ibid.

³⁶⁸ Ibid.

³⁶⁹ Ibid., 132.

³⁷⁰ *Note.* BPA primary document research on the Information Division’s visual education material referred to images in the context of drawings, illustrations, pictographs, photographs, pictorial exhibits, dioramas, charts, posters, film strips and films. No formal BPA definition of each category was found. For the purposes of this project, clarification is noted for three categories: Drawings – freehand sketch; illustrations – visual explanation or interpretation of text, a concept, or process for published media; and pictograph – (1) a graphic representation of statistical data, or (2) symbolic representation of a physical object that could be conjoined with an idea or concept (an ideogram). To impart unfamiliar power ideas, e.g., a dam spillway, symbols were conceived to represent the concept.

cartoon-styled illustrations to reinforce the text. Kahn, recalling his activist days, accused *Oregon Voter* editor, C. C. Chapman, of devoting his publication to discrediting individuals who represented the interests of the people, pointing out that its advertisers were bankers, power companies, and mortgage associations. One political tactic of anti-public power and anti-New Deal groups was to buy substantial amounts of business advertisement in small town newspapers and publications to make them financially dependent on these ads, gaining clout with editors to influence the news content of the publication.³⁷¹ In a controversial twist, Kahn had written the copy for “Bonneville Power – To Our Homes at Cost!” as an information officer at the Bonneville Project. In fact, Bonneville Project artists, Harold Price and Carroll Pawson, created the booklet illustrations.³⁷² “Bonneville Power – To Our Homes at Cost!” pamphlet as rebuttal to the “Astonishing Truths” exposé was credited and distributed under the guise of the People’s Power League (PPL), a political group that Kahn had helped found seven months earlier. According to an *Oregonian* article dated April 5, 1938, the then-current PPL Board of Directors claimed that they knew nothing about the pamphlet, complaining that use of the PPL title was “without any right.”³⁷³

Private utility and holding companies’ response to the Kahn pamphlet was predictable. Paul McKee of Electric Bond and Share charged that a once underfunded public

³⁷¹ *Note.* Private-utilities were known to submit articles to local publications and advertisers to disseminate private-utility propaganda against public power.

³⁷² Tollefson, *Power at a Cost* 134.

³⁷³ “Power Leaguers Oust Dr. Hosch,” in *Oregonian* 5 April 1938, 6; “Fathers of Power League Sabotaged Its Activities, Charges Dr. Hosch of Bend,” in *Oregonian* 6 April 1938, 12.

Note. The Kahn pamphlet used a People’s Power League (PPL) address @ 302 Oregon Building, Portland, whereas the PPL Board of Directors claimed their address was Box 741, Portland.

power movement overnight allegedly “found itself generously financed with public funds and the driving power of the [Bonneville Project] behind it.”³⁷⁴ In 1940, a Federal Power Commission investigation found that holding companies such as Stone and Webster and Electric Bond and Share had spent more than a million dollars during the 1938 Oregon PUD elections to further “political and legislative interests and to influence public opinion through ‘front’ organizations, publications, press and radio, and employees on company time and money.”³⁷⁵

Columbia University professor and vice-chairman of the New York State Power Authority, James Bonbright, visited the new federal project in July 1938 to recommend the purchase of private-electric systems by public agencies to avoid duplication of power facilities. Ross agreed with Bonbright’s findings only to become further distracted and ensnarled in the PUD issue. Another controversial issue was how to finance these public power districts. The Bonneville Project’s legislation was written to specify that 50% of Bonneville power have public preference, one being public power districts. Yet, the lack of federal funding for PUDs created a dilemma, causing confusion and uncertainty for PUDs and electric cooperatives. Ross urged PUD commissioners to maintain harmony with private facilities to obtain results and avoid controversy that could delay advancement of any public power program. As a proposal to finance the formation of public-utility districts, Ross favored selling revenue bonds in an open market, with Wall Street broker, Guy Myers, acting as a fiscal agent for the venture to negotiate deals

³⁷⁴ McKee quoted in Tollefson, *Power at a Cost* 134.

³⁷⁵ In Tollefson, *Power at a Cost* 134.

between all parties. Enabled to acquire private utilities at a fair market price, PUDs could join the power business more quickly.³⁷⁶

The region's overall political climate at the time, especially in Oregon, was not favorable for the rapid establishment of public power utility districts. In some propaganda campaigns, the Townsend National Recovery movement, still formidable in Oregon in 1938, was unleashed to persuade voters to oppose public power districts, even deceiving senior citizens with rumors that private utilities were willing to pay a 2% transactional tax to help secure a \$200-a-month senior pension.³⁷⁷ Too many Pacific Northwest constituents still held traditional cultural values that rejected progressive ideology and government intrusion in their daily lives. In Oregon, private utilities successfully argued that establishment of local PUDs would require taxation or other payments to increase revenue to offset possible reduction in funding for other local government services. In December 1938, Ross proposed a 2% tax on new PUDs to help support local governments, vowing to withhold Bonneville power unless the PUD agreed. This taxation was incorporated into new power contracts with the PUDs.³⁷⁸

Lillian Davis wrote that although Bonneville's public relations activities were numerous, its plan and mission had not been well coordinated within the overall agency, nor with allied forces outside the agency's administration. In Davis's opinion, the Project's early public relations initiatives were misdirected toward extending Ross's (pre-

³⁷⁶ Davis, *BPA History* 106; Neuberger, *Our Promised Land* 117-120; Tollefson, *Power at a Cost* 134-135. *Note.* Myers helped Ross finance early projects at Seattle City Light.

³⁷⁷ *Note.* The Townsend Plan, proposed by Francis Townsend in 1933, called for a \$200-a-month pension to citizens over 60, paid in script and to be spent within a month. Funds would be raised by sales tax. The movement lost headway after passage of the Social Security Act in 1935.

³⁷⁸ In Tollefson, *Power at a Cost* 135; "Reasonable Tax Sought by Ross," in *The Oregonian*, 1 December 1938.

Bonneville) crusade for public power, especially forming public-utility districts. His position as administrator simply gave him a bigger platform from which to expound his public power philosophy. As a result the Project mainly focused on the immediate formation of public-utility districts, even though power-transmission facilities would not be in service for at least two years.³⁷⁹ This perhaps hindered overall development of a comprehensive regional plan in the Northwest. Although one goal was to bring electricity to the individual home consumer and farm, the region also needed to attract new industry, not simply to purchase large quantities of Columbia River hydropower, but also to provide promised employment and opportunities for resettlement. The Recession of 1937–1938 focused criticism on Columbia River public-works projects as questionable expenditures. In addition, Ross’s emphasis on public-utility districts significantly distracted from broader promotion of populist values inherent in energy-centric policies that might support a Columbia Valley Authority.

Transforming the Abstract

“Bonneville Power – What it Costs; How to Get It” was a follow-up pamphlet to Ross’s “Kilowatt-Year,” produced by Stephen Kahn and the Information Division. Ross reviewed the pamphlet text in September 1938; artist Harold Price illustrated it.³⁸⁰ This booklet had a more polished, retail federal message, denoting the Bonneville Project as the opening step in a federal program for the development of the Columbia River. A

³⁷⁹ Davis, *BPA History* 258.

³⁸⁰ Stephen Kahn to Neal Jones. Inter-office communications, “Informational activities during the next ten days,” 20 September 1938. National Archives Seattle, Washington, Central Subject Files (1937-1956), RG 305.2 File 180.1.

revision of Bonneville Dam's primary purpose was noted in this publication, calling for the elimination of Cascade Rapids as a navigation obstacle, and regarded the generation of electricity as a surplus product. It restated Ross as the administrator was given the authority by the Seventy-Fifth Congress to make available to the people power generated from the navigation development at Bonneville Dam "within economic transmission distance at rates reasonable and non-discriminatory."³⁸¹ The pamphlet publicized the wholesale yardstick-rate schedule to be charged by the Bonneville Project and delivered to retail power-distribution agencies: "The Federal Government provides the power yardstick. Local citizens must use it."³⁸² This wholesale unit price was confirmed at \$17.50 per kilowatt-year; a half cent rate per kilowatt hour was offered to smaller distributing agencies. The kilowatt year, the means to cheap electricity, was trusted to be the foundation of the Promised Land regionalism, and therefore reinforced Ross's conviction, it was his job to provide pledged inexpensive electricity to the people.

The text was supported by illustrations and pictographic symbols to communicate the wholesale-retail power-rate structure and consumer objective-rate schedules. Specific dollar-and-cents meanings were assigned to consumer end products that people could understand: "Under this objective schedule, \$1 will pay for 40 kilowatt-hours of energy a month . . . to light an average home and operate a radio, toaster, vacuum cleaner, washing machine, and iron."³⁸³ Rates were denoted as a "new deal" and "a fair deal" for

³⁸¹ "Bonneville Power – What it Costs, How to Get It." Bonneville Project pamphlet. Portland: U.S. Government Printing Office (1939) 2.

³⁸² *Ibid.*, 13.

³⁸³ *Ibid.*, 6.

electricity, explaining that “load building” was key for delivery of cheap electricity to consumers at the “end of the line.”

Refined rhetoric now focused on an emerging technocratic order: (1) the Federal government made the investments to yield the generation of power; (2) municipalities, districts, and cooperatives were encouraged to accept wholesale power for local distribution; and (3) citizens were responsible to prepare to receive this electricity from the initial Bonneville Project transmission network. For the farm, low cost electricity promised to raise farmers’ incomes through electricity for water pumps to supply supplementary irrigation for better crops and higher yields. “Idle land acres of good land [sic]” would be put into production to grow fruits and vegetables. Stated in a populist context, “No one stands to gain more from the Federal power program than the man and woman on a farm (Fig. 7-4 to Fig. 7-6).”³⁸⁴

The pamphlet’s most noteworthy feature was a two-page reference map of the Bonneville Project’s initial transmission (Fig. 1-3). Although its overall aim was to educate ordinary citizens on the retail basis of the project, the map’s added references helped the reader form a connection to the new landscape and power environment. Basic geospatial data referenced the transmission grid, radiating from the Columbia River system and featured as the heart of the Northwest. Location data pinpointed current public power districts, municipal systems, cooperative associations, and Bonneville substations to highlight important information about local participation in public power programs. In particular a cluster of cooperative associations in Idaho’s panhandle region was noted. New

³⁸⁴ Ibid., 13.

power images of the landscape supported the map's story with details such as Bonneville's powerhouse and spillway on the Columbia River, with its twin transmission towers and wires branching off from the river infrastructure for distribution to the region. It gave a physical geography to Franklin Roosevelt's Promised Land. More than anything else, this map would convey one's place in the new energy environment. It conveyed actual development of a space within a framework of time to provide context for the concepts explained in the pamphlet.

As government infrastructure promised new, productive agricultural lands, lower power rates, and improved river navigation, local populations still needed to be persuaded of its legitimacy and efficacy. Publications partly served as progress reports to ordinary Pacific Northwesterners on the headway made on Roosevelt's Promised Land as envisioned in his Portland campaign speech in 1932. "The Bonneville Project" pamphlet was perhaps prepared for this purpose in October 1938. In the Federal Art Project-style, the booklet featured a distinct mix of pen-and-ink graphics, photographs, and drawings of power-transmission grid maps and schematics. These selfsame grids and schematics appeared in the 1938 Bonneville Project Annual Report prepared by Portland staffer, Ivan Bloch, and Washington D.C. staffer, Engineer J. Perry Alvey.³⁸⁵

Distribution of this booklet marked a one-year progress report on Columbia River development to celebrate the Bonneville Project's accomplishments and tout President Roosevelt's perceived signature policies. "Nature's gifts belong to all the people,"

³⁸⁵ Norwood, *Columbia River Power* 106-107. *Note.* Norwood stated that Bloch and Alvey wrote the 1938 Annual Report.

declared Harold Ickes in the booklet.³⁸⁶ The cover depicted the dam's powerhouse connected to transmission wires radiating out into the region, with less attention devoted to the surrounding natural resources compared to the earlier "Kilowatt Year" pamphlet cover. Photographs of President Roosevelt, Interior Secretary Harold Ickes, and J. D. Ross portrayed them as leaders of government investment, hailed for modern achievements made for the benefit of all people. Notable and significant graphics were small thumbnail pen-and-ink illustrations inside a left border ribbon, presented as before-and-after themes to represent New Deal progressive policies and Northwest life evinced by small-town culture, power projects, fertile farmlands, and forestry projects. A list of regional political accomplishments included employed men awarded construction contracts, energy charts, and transmission-grid schematics. The list reinforced the Promised-Land theme and emphasized that this modern Northwest derived from "the great hydroelectric heritage of the Columbia River and its tributaries (Fig. 7-7 to Fig. 7-8)."³⁸⁷

In a noteworthy national publicity project, the Bonneville Project Information Division in May 1939 assisted *Life Magazine* photographer, Alfred Eisenstadt, with an issue dedicated to America's future.³⁸⁸ The lead article, "The Pacific Northwest: the story of a vision and a promised land," explained the vision of "confident Northwesterners who see their region as America's 'last frontier' and 'promised land.'"³⁸⁹ Eisenstadt's black and white photographs captured the symbolic and iconic representations of a modern 1939

³⁸⁶ Ickes quoted in "The Bonneville Project" booklet, (October 1938). Obtained from J. D. Ross Papers. University of Washington Libraries, Special Collections. Collection 0838 Box 26, 5.

³⁸⁷ Ross, "Kilowatt Year" 2.

³⁸⁸ Davis, *BPA History* 113.

³⁸⁹ In "America's Future: Pacific Northwest: the story of a vision and a promised land." *Life Magazine*, 5 June 1939, 6:(23) 15.

American frontier, a land rich in natural resources such as lumber, metals, wheat, and fruit. The photographic essay spoke to a national audience about how “big ideas” from three ordinary Northwesterners, Bill Clapp, Rufus Woods, and Gale Mathews, were more than the imaginings of idle dreamers; they were advocates for a dam across the Columbia River to pump its waters back to the Coulee for irrigation purposes. Similarly, images depicted landscapes of “hopes and yearnings” for a modern future, as portrayed in a sidebar on the Yandle family, Kansas City migrants who were stuck in a transitional landscape. After settling in Portland, the Depression forced the Yandles to move to Yacolt Mountain in Washington.³⁹⁰ Mrs. Yandle had an electric washing machine, a vacuum cleaner, an iron, a radio, and three lamps – but no electricity. And power from the Bonneville Dam was only 30 miles away. Electric lines would not only lighten household chores, but offer hope for community and uplift by “trying to beat the depression.”³⁹¹ The Yandles symbolized Roosevelt’s modern pioneers, those who settled the Northwest Promised Land based on hopes and the assurance of federal regional-electric power that could justify their belief in the American Dream as publicized in government literature.

Power Dreams for a Better Society

In a July 1939 memo, Engineer Charles Carey noted ideas to deflect propaganda from private utility companies. At a time when critics of Northwestern water projects, led by Congressman Francis Culkin of New York, labeled the Grand Coulee the “white elephant in the desert,” Carey presented the Bonneville Project from a broad federal-policy

³⁹⁰ Ibid., 23.

³⁹¹ Minnie Howard Yandle quoted in “America’s Future” 23.

viewpoint and advanced a valley-authority concept. Carey wrote the government had invested, and continued to invest, large sums of money in federal Columbia River reclamation and navigation projects, and power generation was still considered secondary to these projects.³⁹² Revenue from sales of surplus electricity would become an important element in the “financial structure and liquidation of the investment,” but may only be developed as markets were found.³⁹³ Therefore the federal government needed to protect its investment by retaining control of all navigation and reclamation projects to carry over the “benefits of these projects . . . to the forgotten man.”³⁹⁴ Carey wanted to make the case that only a government could construct, operate, and maintain all the transmission facilities. He believed in the Roosevelt conviction, Columbia River development would realize a vision of a Promised Land, only previously dreamed of by some, to exemplify a progressive expression of the principles of democracy. In supporting this progressive regional vision of governmental power, generation and electric transmission systems should be considered one and the same and inseparable. Obstruction of the development of generation and transmission systems by any group or any interest would be tantamount to blocking the entire federal program, more specifically, Grand Coulee and its reclamation project, and the navigation projects at Bonneville Dam.³⁹⁵

³⁹² *Note.* The Bonneville Project Act (August 20, 1937, ch.20 720, 50 Stat.731) [Sec. 1. Completion of the dam by the Secretary of War – Surplus power to be distributed by Power Administrator.] . . . “The Secretary of War shall provide . . . facilities for the generation of electricity as the administrator may deem necessary to develop such electric energy as rapidly markets may be found therefor. The electric thus generated and not required for the operation of the dam and locks at such project and the navigation facilities employed in connection therewith shall be delivered to the administrator, for the disposition as provided in this act.”

³⁹³ Charles Carey to Stephen Kahn and Frank Banks. Memo, 21 July 1939, “Capacity of Power Lines in Bonneville Area.” National Archives, Seattle, Washington RG 305.2. File 180.1.

³⁹⁴ *Ibid.*

³⁹⁵ *Ibid.*

Government information on electric power was conveyed in terms of keys to a future abundant life rather than as a Bible for current everyday needs. Power was to fashion a new culture that required social evolution. Whereas traditional American democracy evolved from individual freedoms and laissez-faire government business policies, modern electric technology changed that concept by segregating the actual business of power generation from the production of manufactured goods. Power distribution required a collective approach to power distribution. The relevant question was: Should energy be sold and distributed solely to the most profitable markets or should it be dispensed for humanitarian needs and the common good, even to sparsely populated regions or those with an unprofitable market? Many segments of the American population still hand washed clothing, carried well water, and cooked under 19th-century conditions. Adapting technology, capitalism, and social democratic policies for a new American social order now faced a dilemma that challenged traditional American individualism.

The untimely illness and death of J. D. Ross in March 1939 resulted in the loss of Roosevelt's emissary to implement the vision of a Northwest Promised Land. Ross's populist message was founded on his long history of fighting for public utilities would give way to accommodate a landscape planned around large power sales to industry and business. Then-head engineer, Charles Carey, served as acting administrator until interim administrator, Frank Banks, chief construction engineer for the Grand Coulee, took over on May 11, 1939. Although Banks moved forward to construct the Bonneville-Grand Coulee powerline, he had come to the job from a then-Bureau of Reclamation project, and had no enthusiasm for building customer-service lines. Banks pulled away from the Bonneville Project's promotion and support of public power districts, a priority of the

Ross administration.³⁹⁶ Dr. Paul Raver was named new administrator on September 15, 1939.

³⁹⁶ Norwood, *Columbia River Power* 121.

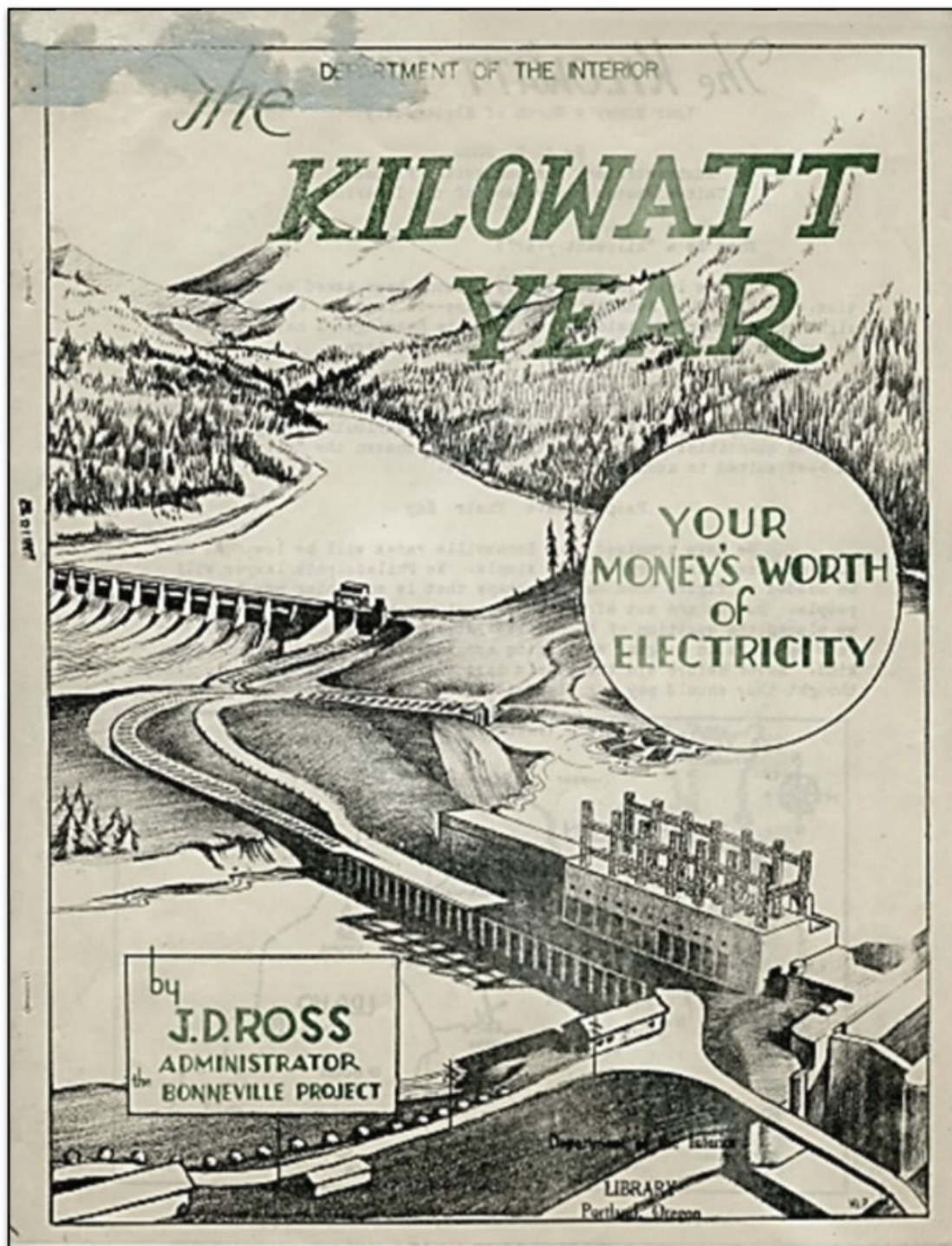


Figure 7-1. "The Kilowatt Year – Your Money's Worth of Electricity" Cover.

Date: 1938.

Artist: Unknown.

Bonneville Power Administration Archives BPA312 1937.

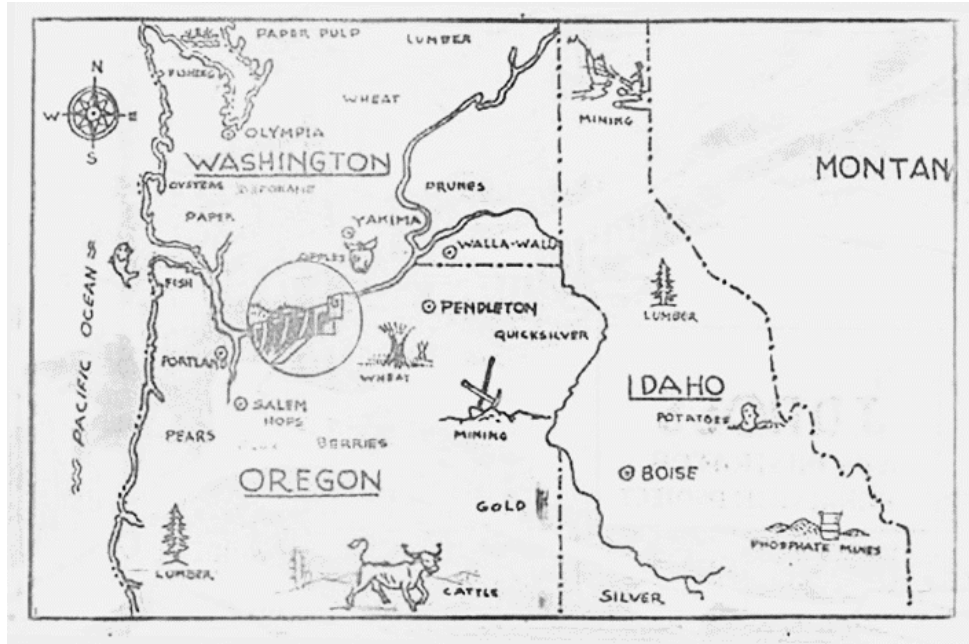


Figure 7-2. (Map) from “The Kilowatt Year” Pamphlet, 2.
 Date: 1938.
 Bonneville Power Administration Archives BPA312 1937.

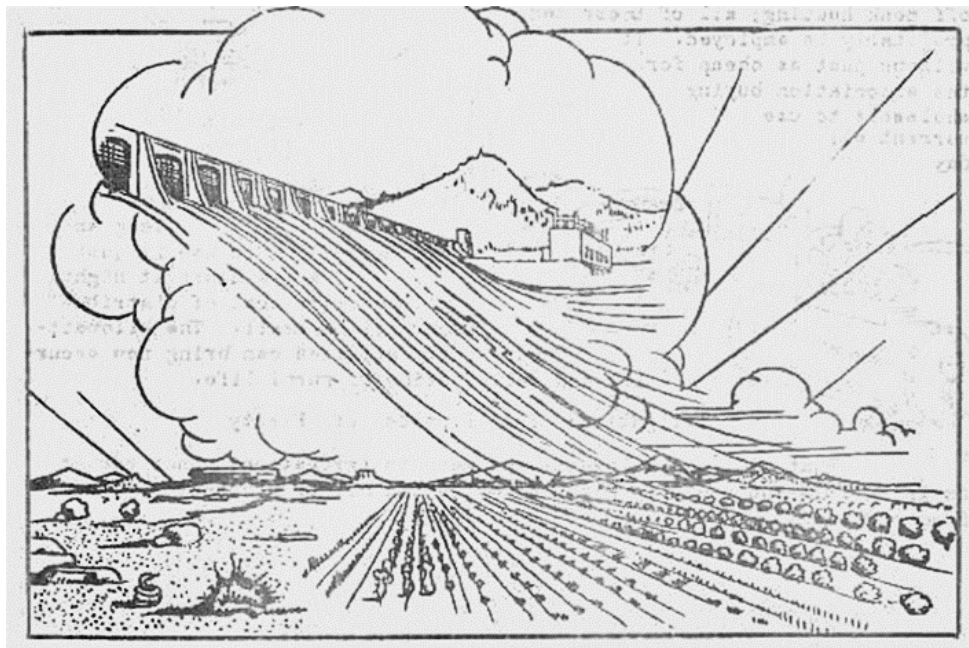


Figure 7-3. Illustration from “The Kilowatt Year” Pamphlet, 7.
 Date: 1938.
 Bonneville Power Administration Archives BPA312 1937.

Figure 7-1. (page 235) “The Kilowatt Year – Your Money’s Worth of Electricity” pamphlet Cover. Selling power through the concept of the kilowatt-year became a symbolic electric rate structure to signify technocratic abundance. Initiated by first Bonneville Administrator J. D. Ross, it was a yardstick to measure and compare electricity costs. Public power represented a democratic means to deliver inexpensive electricity to every citizen, fulfilling the Roosevelt vision. This pamphlet was subsequent to an eight-city public rate hearings tour conducted by Ross.

Figure 7-2. (page 236) Map from “The Kilowatt Year” pamphlet. This pamphlet map documents the eight cities visited by J. D. Ross. It defines an initial three-state region that Ross envisioned would be served by the Bonneville Project and future Columbia River dam projects. Small icons of local resources, represented as pictographs, are identified, possibly suggesting new economic development from government public works.

Figure 7-3. (page 236) Drawing from the “The Kilowatt Year” pamphlet. A simple metamorphic drawing of Northwest depicts “wasteland” transformed into useful farmland for settlement. This not only represented (then-vice-presidential candidate) Franklin Roosevelt’s 1920 vision for a Northwest Promised Land, but reiterated the “public interest” principle, that government had the right to convert natural resources and distribute the end-products for the common good of its citizens.



Figure 7-4. Preliminary Art for Pamphlet “Bonneville Power – What it Costs, How to Get It.”

Date: 1938.

Artist: Harold Price.

National Archives, Seattle, Washington. RG 305.2.Box 2. E112667.

Figure 7-4. The official purpose for Bonneville Dam was eliminate Cascade Rapids as a navigation obstacle. This was denoted as the opening step in the federal program for the development of the Columbia River. Generation of electric power was considered a surplus product.

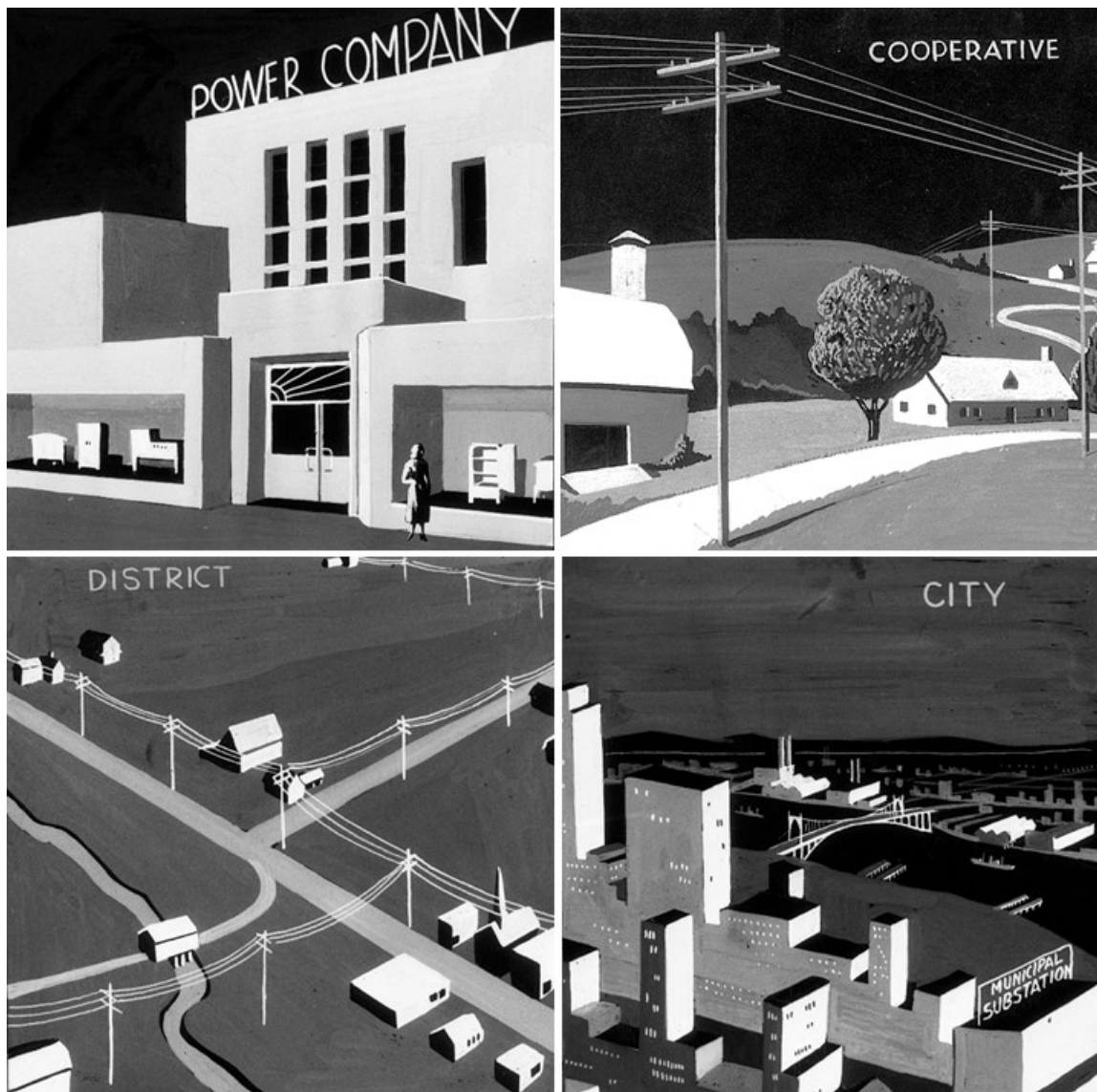


Figure 7-5. Preliminary Art for Pamphlet “Bonneville Power – What it Costs, How to Get It.”

Date: 1938.

Artist: Harold Price.

National Archives, Seattle, Washington. RG 305.2. Box 2. E112674, E112675.

Figure 7-5. Retail distribution of electricity would become a local task. Each community must decide how to distribute wholesale electric quantities to public and private distributing systems: (1) private power companies, (2) cooperative associations, (3) public power districts, or (4) municipal distribution systems. Each graphic incorporated a prominent modern symbol of power.



Figure 7-6. Preliminary Art for Pamphlet “Bonneville Power – What it Costs, How to Get It.”

Date: 1938.

Artist: Harold Price.

National Archives, Seattle, Washington. RG 305.2. Box 2. E112667.

Figure 7-6. The Federal Government provides the power yardstick. Local citizens must use it. The wholesale yardstick-rate was \$17.50 per kilowatt year. A simple pictograph was devised to explain “Ten 100 watt bulbs burning continuously for 365 days = 1 kilowatt year.” But this held little meaning to consumers. Objective power rate schedules became a more accepted way to explain utility costs to the retail customer -- \$1 per month would light the average home and operate a radio, toaster, vacuum cleaner, washing machine, and iron.



Figure 7-6. Examples of Objective Rates. “Bonneville Power – What it Costs, How to Get It” pamphlet.

Date: 1939.

Artist: Harold Price.

Bonneville Power Administration Archive. BPA204 1939.

Figure 7-6: Objective Rates. Objective rates were cost breakdowns, constructed to be meaningful to the consumer. These illustrations supported the pamphlet text to help people understand how power rates would fit into their budgets.

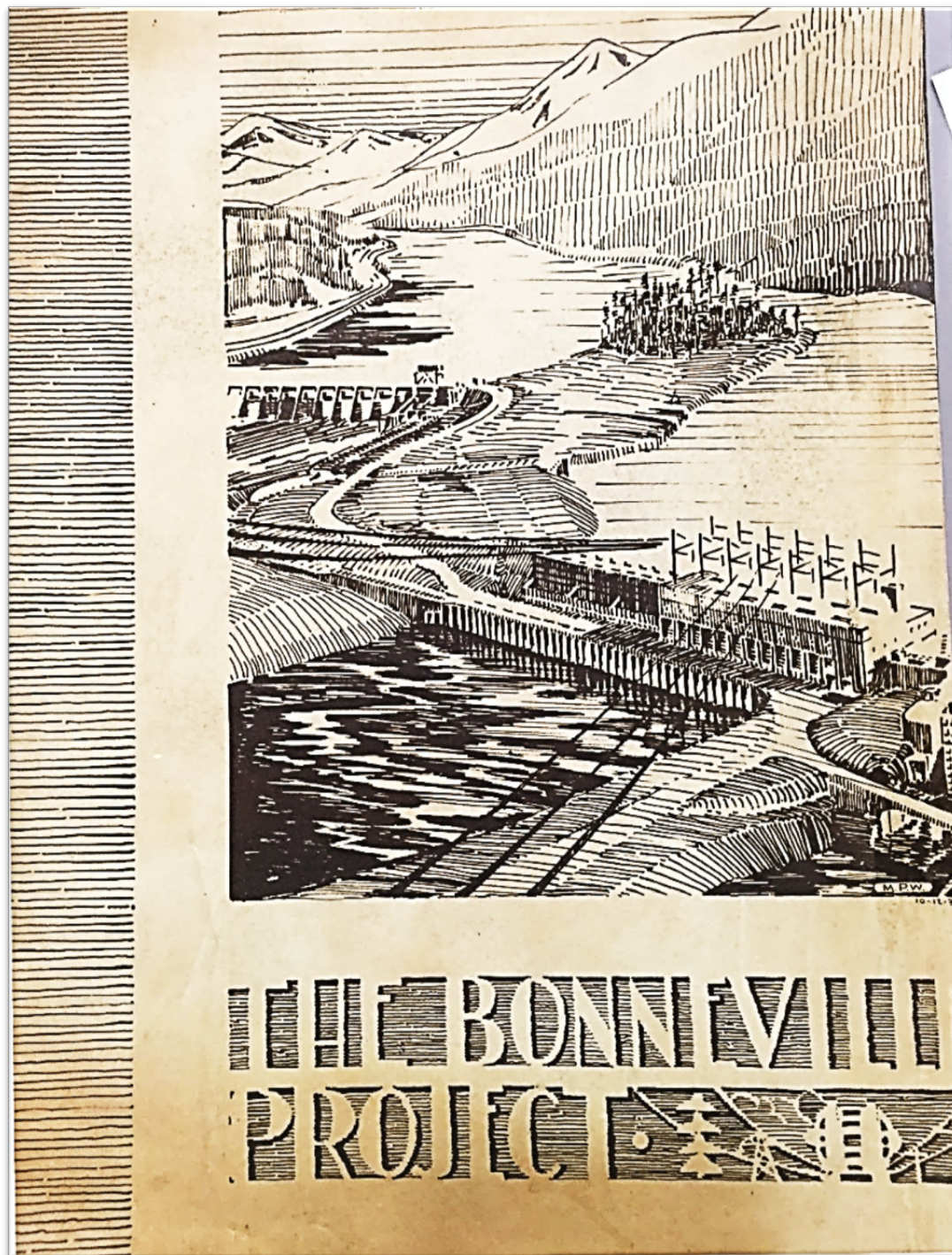


Figure 7-7. "The Bonneville Project" booklet, Cover.

Date: October 1938.

Artist: MPW.

J. D. Ross Papers. University of Washington Libraries, Special Collections. Collection 0838 Box 26.



Figure 7-8. "The Bonneville Project" booklet.

Date: October 1938.

Artist: MPW.

J. D. Ross Papers. University of Washington Libraries, Special Collections. Collection 0838 Box 26.

Chapter 8: “The Northwest is a Saga of Commerce”³⁹⁷

In the act creating the Bonneville Power Administration Congress instructed the Administrator to build a transmission system ‘to encourage the widest possible use of all electric energy that can be generated’ and, in selling that energy at wholesale, at all times to ‘give preference and priority to public bodies and cooperatives,’ and to prevent monopolization by limited groups.

“Columbia River Power and Northwest Industry” 1940 pamphlet³⁹⁸

In a 1939 letter to President Roosevelt, Oregon Congresswoman, Nan Wood Honeyman, described the ideal individual to fill the late J. D. Ross’s administrative post. “What we must have,” Honeyman asserted, “is a man with a public ownership policy not only in the mind but in heart and to come as near as possible to Mr. Ross’ vision.”³⁹⁹ Former Northwestern University professor and Illinois Commerce Commission chairman, Dr. Paul J. Raver, was appointed by Secretary Ickes to fill the Bonneville administrator’s post. Raver’s interest was in public-utility economics. Labelled an outsider and carpetbagger by some Northwest residents, Raver recruited his own staff, new to the Oregon and the Washington scene, many of whom he had worked with in Illinois. His former graduate student, D. L. Marlett, who had expertise in state public-utility regulation, became Raver’s right-hand man.⁴⁰⁰ Dr. Raver served as the second BPA administrator from 1939 to 1953, until he was appointed Superintendent of Seattle City Light in 1954.

³⁹⁷ Stephen Kahn et al. *Hydro*, Film. Portland: BPA (1940).

³⁹⁸ “Columbia River Power and Northwest Industry” pamphlet, Portland: Bonneville Power Administration, May 1940. BPA225 1940.

³⁹⁹ Gene Tollefson, *BPA and the Struggle for Power at a Cost*. Portland: BPA (1987) 144

⁴⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, 144. According to Gus Norwood, Harold Ickes was a Bull Moose Republican from Chicago, who knew Raver from the Illinois Commerce Commission, and wrote articles on municipal electric systems. Ickes described the Bonneville Project a mess when Raver took over. See Gus Norwood, *Columbia River Power for the People: A History of the Policies of the Bonneville Power Administration*. Portland: BPA (1981) 121.

The Pre-War Raver Years, 1939–1941

When Raver took office on September 16, 1939, he found a sound and well-advanced Bonneville transmission-construction program but few signed power-sales contracts.

During Roosevelt's second-term attempt to balance the national budget, the country suffered from an economic recession in 1937-1938. National unemployment spiked to 19% in 1938.⁴⁰¹ Columbia River development, particularly at the Grand Coulee Dam, was again considered a financial boondoggle. Under these conditions, Raver shifted the policy focus of the previous administrator to emphasize (a) power sales, (b) power-rate savings, and (c) regional planning to accommodate electric power. The new administrator was able to concentrate on these three general policies now that Bonneville was able to deliver power over its lines — twenty-one months after Congress had made its first appropriation for electric transmission-grid construction. Ross, favored by Roosevelt as the first Administrator, had long experience as a people's public power crusader in Washington State; as such, he had little faith in a regulatory agency's ability to negotiate with holding companies. Chosen by Ickes, Raver hailed from an elite academic background, and did not share Ross's interests in public power districts. Warren Marple, a member of Raver's Advisory Staff Council at the BPA, recalled:

Raver did everything he conceivably could . . . to support anybody who wanted to form a PUD, get a municipal into business, get a[n] REA formed [H]e felt there were limits [to] what a Federal officer could do. He would not intrude. . . . He could respond, however, to requests for technical help, legal advice . . . but it

⁴⁰¹ Ives, Stephen. *Grand Coulee Dam*. Film. PBS American Experience (2012).

could be quite possibly true that he pulled back from the very strong crusading attitude of J. D.⁴⁰²

Stephen Kahn agreed:

I don't think that Raver ever was very enthusiastic about running head on against people who believed the other theory that distribution of electricity should be a private monopoly rather than a public project. If you have public and private systems competing, they take the place of the regulatory body.⁴⁰³

Raver felt there was an abundant power market to meet the needs of all interests. He staked his position on there being space for both public- and private-distribution systems in the region's economy.⁴⁰⁴ At Bonneville, this amounted to a major ideological change.

Raver could focus on power sales because the backbone line from Bonneville Dam to Vancouver, Washington, and Portland, Oregon, was energized on November 15, 1939. To the east, the Bonneville-to-Grand-Coulee line was well underway, along with surveys for a second circuit to connect the Grand Coulee Dam to Bonneville Dam via Seattle. Shorter finger lines branching off the main Bonneville network were either under construction or under survey. A detailed resale-rate schedule or retail-customer charges were presented within a "power savings" program that focused on reduced power costs for the end-of-the-line consumer. Per-kilowatt-hour rates dropped with more end use of electricity. As Raver assumed the administrator position, Tollefson wrote that some evidence showed that distribution of Bonneville power had influenced regional-utility

⁴⁰² Warren Marple quoted in Tollefson, *Power at a Cost* 144.

⁴⁰³ Stephen Kahn quoted in Tollefson, *Power at a Cost* 144.

⁴⁰⁴ Lillian Davis, *History of the Bonneville Power Administration* (unpublished), Portland, Oregon: BPA (1943) 321.

competition for lower power rates.⁴⁰⁵ A recalculated schedule of public, municipal, and private resale-power rates was devised to further aid in negotiating wholesale contracts with retail distributors to bring the lowest rates to the consumer. With these two policies in place, and with additional transmission-line construction and new power-rate schedules, Raver sought to establish the importance of Columbia River Power as a central component in regional and national geography and planning. In working with other Pacific Northwest planning agencies, Raver hoped to find ways to increase employment opportunities through Northwest development and industries that depended on large quantities of low-cost electric power.⁴⁰⁶

Two other notable policy changes took place. First, the Bonneville Project's name was officially changed to the Bonneville Power Administration (BPA) on February 21, 1940.⁴⁰⁷ Second, and more significant, the Raver Administration in early 1940 "[proposed to the] Secretary of the Interior an order which assigned the marketing power from Grand Coulee power to the Bonneville Power Administration."⁴⁰⁸ In August 1940, Executive Order 8526 directed the BPA to market Grand Coulee power to allow contracts to be signed for the sale of its power, and to ". . . do region-wide planning and development."⁴⁰⁹ Marlett explained, "It was important to our thinking that we had to have an integrated power system connecting with . . . load centers and with all utilities, public and

⁴⁰⁵ Tollefson, *Power at a Cost* 146.

⁴⁰⁶ Davis, *BPA History* 320-323.

⁴⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, 273-274. *Note.* Per the Bonneville Act statute, transmission of power generated at the Bonneville Project was the duty of an administrator, given the title Bonneville Power Administrator, and hence compelled to use the agency name, the Bonneville Power Administration.

⁴⁰⁸ D. L. Marlett quoted in Tollefson, *Power at a Cost* 146.

⁴⁰⁹ *Ibid.*

private, in the Pacific Northwest.”⁴¹⁰ Arguably the idea to form a Columbia Valley Authority as promised early in the decade had essentially ended when (a) the BPA was assigned to market Grand Coulee power, (b) the Columbia Basin irrigation project remained under the control of the Bureau of Reclamation, and (c) river navigation projects were assigned to the Army Corps of Engineers.

By the end of fiscal year 1939, the Information Division’s program of education and public-relations responsibilities had increased. The Department expanded to fourteen employees. A photographic unit was established during fiscal year 1939, with Henry Alderman as photographer. With the death of first Administrator J. D. Ross in March 1939, and after subsequent interim administrators, the Information Division did not undertake any major projects until Raver succeeded Ross in September 1939. Raver appointed John Wheeler, a former Northwest regional correspondent for the Associated Press in Washington State, as Chief of the Information Division on October 16, 1939.⁴¹¹

In September 1939, Ivan Bloch of the Marketing Division recommended a plan to the new Administrator to start a “power-load” building program. The preliminary proposal involved (a) preparing literature, (b) training sales managers for public bodies, (c) investigating financing for appliance purchases, (d) examining the possibility of group appliance purchases, and (e) initiating studies of electric house heating, sprinkler

⁴¹⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹¹ Davis, *BPA History* 107, 199, 254.

Note. This might suggest that with Wheeler’s appointment, Kahn was assigned to other projects, such as creating a film about the Columbia River. See Stephen Kahn’s oral history [transcript] conducted by Michael Majdic (1998), University of Oregon Knight Library, UO Media Services.

irrigation, and refrigeration.⁴¹² However, many public-relations programs were put on hold until Raver had addressed and concluded more urgent organizational matters.⁴¹³

By 1940, the BPA administration faced intense pressure — particularly from Congressional Democrats — to sell enough power to justify to the nation the economic feasibility of the Bonneville and Grand Coulee power projects. Business and industry became Raver’s primary focus. Except for small municipal systems, the overall public infrastructure and its agency to sell Bonneville power to the ordinary retail consumer was not ready. Giant transmission lines pointed toward industry that would pay good rates was one thing. But building rural power infrastructure was a more limited and far-reaching undertaking. There was an urgent need to sell power elsewhere. ALCOA Aluminum was the first major industry to sign on with the BPA as its power supplier; in December 1939, it announced a new aluminum reduction plant to be built on the Columbia River near Vancouver, Washington. But marketing power for industrial development would go beyond aluminum to the metallurgy and chemical industries.

In March 1940, an internal BPA meeting was held to proceed with a tentative power-marketing program, including preparation of five pamphlets: (1) Industrial Use of Bonneville Power, (2) Urban Use of Bonneville Power, (3) Farm Use of Bonneville Power, (4) Commercial Use of Bonneville Power, and (5) a general pamphlet about the entire Bonneville program. Bloch was to supervise pamphlet preparation with Samuel

⁴¹² Davis, *BPA History* 336- 337.

⁴¹³ Note. Herbert Marks, General Counsel, to Stephen Kahn, memo, 14 November 1939, “Attached Memoranda.” National Archives, Seattle, Washington. RG 305.2, File 180.1. “Dr. Raver and I had no opportunity to discuss the policy of issuing resale posters or of filming a motion picture of the Columbia River.” A few preliminary sketches of rate posters were found, pre-1940, labeled “The Bonneville Project.” This memo brings into question the completion date of *Hydro*.

Moment's assistance, and Harold Price would prepare pictographs and illustrations for the pamphlets.⁴¹⁴ The program was to be coordinated with Raver's announcement of new rate schedules for Bonneville Power. The new cost of one fifth cent per kilowatt hour was lower than the TVA rate or any other alternative energy utility, primarily in order to stimulate expansion of industry in the region.⁴¹⁵ This announcement was to be followed by press releases and silkscreen posters graphically illustrating comparative power resale-rate savings through maps and charts. The tentative distribution date for these pamphlets and informational media would not be later than May 1, 1940.

The content and style of BPA media noticeably changed. Publications featured consumer products, particularly modern electric appliances and other conveniences, enticing people to get connected and "wired." Typically, electric lighting was the initial reason that an individual, business, or farm chose to hook up to the grid. Less attention was given to the populist theme of resettlement for Dust Bowl migrants or Roosevelt's interest in planning for a modern agrarian and regional small-town culture. Inexpensive electricity suggested that a modern Northwest economy should be based on industrial ambitions. Abundant power for primary development of natural resources was promoted as a way to launch secondary industries, which offered unique regional opportunities for labor and population growth. Not only low electric-rate schedules, but power availability became key to regional development. With Grand Coulee power to be sold by the revamped BPA, the symbol-rich icons of Grand Coulee's spillway joined other established power symbols and began to appear in informational material to broaden its regional appeal. The

⁴¹⁴ D. L. Marlett, memo, 21 March 1940, "Conference on Informational Material." National Archives, Seattle, Washington. RG 305.2. File 180.1.

⁴¹⁵ Tollefson, *Power at a Cost* 161.

moniker, “The Biggest Thing on Earth,” was applied to the Grand Coulee Dam by the Bureau of Reclamation, which depicted river development as the embodiment of American ambition and accomplishment, the pathway to a better future.

BPA’s marketing department began to recruit “various division and section heads” to fulfill speaking engagements,⁴¹⁶ reversing an early administrative ban against addressing citizen groups about power programs of the Bonneville Project. As Kahn wrote in April 1939, “one of the weaknesses of the Project is its failure to have speakers acquainted with the situation actively present our [public power] case.”⁴¹⁷ In Kahn’s opinion, the great regional popularity of the TVA was due to its speakers repeatedly appearing before local audiences and telling people the “facts which newspapers so often refuse to print.”⁴¹⁸ This new information program would be subject to new legal structures to comply with the Hatch Act of 1939. Publications had to be free of opinion and refrain from active participation in political management or campaigns to influence the outcome of an election. Government funds could not be directed toward supporting candidates in office. However, the Hatch Act did not affect publication of facts. Facts were facts.⁴¹⁹

In September 1940, one year after his appointment as administrator, Raver formally outlined an educational program for public power in Administrative Order No. 33.

⁴¹⁶ D. L. Marlett, memo, 21 March 1940, “Informational Material.”

⁴¹⁷ Stephen Kahn to Charles Carey, memo, 17 April 1939, “Policy regarding speakers for the Project.” National Archives, Seattle, Washington. RG 305.2, File 180.1.

⁴¹⁸ Ibid.

⁴¹⁹ Acting General Counsel Allan Hart to Paul Raver, memo, 6 May 1940, “Validity of sending attached pamphlets, photographs and photostatic copies of charts.” National Archives, Seattle, Washington. RG 305.2, File 180.1.

The order implemented the Congressional directive that there be public ownership of power-distribution facilities, “to insure [sic] that the facilities for the generation of electric energy at the Bonneville project shall be operated for the benefit of the general public, and particularly of domestic and rural consumers.”⁴²⁰ In order to prevent an energy monopoly at the dam, the administrator needed to afford “public bodies or cooperatives reasonable . . . opportunity to . . . arrange . . . to construct or acquire necessary and desirable electric distribution facilities, and in all other respects legally to become qualified purchasers and distributors of electric energy available” under the Bonneville Act.⁴²¹ Carrying out this charge involved educating the public about the ways and means of obtaining Bonneville power and insuring that this energy was used in larger and larger amounts. Publications and other informational activities were intended to aid in customer load-building tactics.

Pamphlets to Spread the Raver Gospel

Steps to introduce the BPA’s forward-looking strategy of “power load building” involved a new direction for public information and education. Repeated pronouncements about federal power objectives appeared in informational material, which encouraged the public to request, if not lobby for, having local power utilities purchase wholesale Bonneville power to ensure lower retail-power costs. Media summarized Bonneville and Columbia River development activities to date to validate federal power plans. “Power rate savings”

⁴²⁰ Paul Raver, Administrative Order No. 33, “Public Power Program,” 10 September 1940. National Archives, Seattle, Washington. RG 305.2. File 180.1. *Note.* Presidential Executive Order 8526 placed the marketing of Grand Coulee power under the Bonneville Power Administration.

⁴²¹ *Ibid.*

schemes — plans to reduce consumer’s monthly power costs — were based on increased energy use, stoking a new culture of accessible technical modernity. Setting the foundation for a future landscape dependent on electricity, the overall aim was to persuade Northwesterners to embrace increased power usage as key to a new era of regional development. All this would result from the power load-building promotion.

“Bonneville Power: Are you getting your share?” was a pamphlet distributed in early 1940 as part of an initial load-building strategy to motivate the general consumer to request that local energy distributors, public or private, contract with Bonneville Power, to enable power rate reductions to retail consumers. The modest black-and-white text pamphlet advertised Bonneville Power as the promised 1932 wholesale yardstick to measure all electric rates in the Northwest. Text captions embodied regional symbolic meanings. The Columbia River watershed was labelled “America’s Greatest Stream” because it contained half the nation’s potential hydropower and was more valuable than “the oil field of Texas or the coal mines of Pennsylvania.”⁴²² The river was described as a natural resource to be utilized by the people for regional job-producing industries. Its potential power would develop local resources and provide plentiful electricity for homes and farms, in other words, for the public good. Given the tag, “America’s Cheapest Power,” inexpensive Bonneville power would allow the retail consumer to utilize more electricity on the job and in commercial applications. Public municipal districts or private companies, required low-cost distribution to encourage increased demand by consumers. In the pamphlet, certain public- and private-retail electric rates were plotted on a regional

⁴²² “Bonneville Power: Are you getting your share?” pamphlet. Portland: BPA (1939). BPA521 1939.

map, which became a signature BPA graphic. Comparing city and town power costs was an emblem of Raver's power-savings strategy. Without explicitly stating it, the pamphlet left the impression that Bonneville power as distributed through a public system might be the most advantageous, but arguably the pamphlet could have been useful to the BPA's private utility customers to aid in their load-building plans (Fig. 8-1).

Another pamphlet, "Columbia River Power," was issued in April 1940, which happened to coincide with PUD campaigns in Portland and other Northwestern localities. To inform the public of the federal plan's value, the pamphlet employed an objective tone to address and summarize BPA activities and accomplishments to date. The publication sets forth facts about Bonneville Dam construction, then-current electric-grid construction, the completion of initial transmission lines, and significant signed power contracts with industry and power utilities. Posed photographs of utility customers demonstrating end-product results from their initial "power savings" on utility bills accompanied mention of Forest Grove and Canby, Oregon, two early municipal systems that signed on to purchase and distribute Bonneville power locally.⁴²³ These two Oregonian municipalities would be held up as primary examples in many media pieces to validate positive outcomes due to reduced power costs and available extra energy for community upbuilding (Fig. 8-2).

This summary pamphlet reflected examples of then-current BPA load-building capacity accomplished through the strategy of power-savings rates: lower per-kilowatt-

⁴²³ *Note.* Forest Grove, signed BPA contract November 7, 1939 and the BPA began to supply power Canby in February 1940.

hour costs for the consumer as a function of increased electricity usage. Lower promotional rates would “stimulate the sale of new electrical appliances and encourage the modernization of farms, homes, and stores.”⁴²⁴ Government navigation projects from river development similarly enabled low-cost transportation of goods from inland ports for delivery throughout the world. To validate these accomplishments, photography rather than artwork was used to document the agency’s actual successes and demonstrate to the public the power-generation process, from its source to its end consumers. Using the photographic medium to document electric power would complement and communicate a message of modernity sought by BPA Administrator Raver. For example, the cover of “Columbia River Power” supported a crafted photographic arrangement with a text caption of its core message: The federal Columbia River Power system has begun to supply electricity at low retail rates to the consumer. This validated the promise that inexpensive electricity would effect societal transformation.

“Making Money, Making Jobs with Bonneville Power: a record of commercial electric costs,” issued in May 1940, was another customer-based, power load-building pamphlet aimed at small and commercial businesses. This publication utilized within-text photography to document the advantages and resultant social good achieved by ordinary people due to inexpensive public power in Forest Grove and Canby, Oregon. Small-town impressions of the Tip Top Ice Cream Shop and Forest Grove Creamery in Oregon bore witness to improved business conditions due to Bonneville Power. Local workmen posed in workshops for the reader to see how inexpensive power was returning men to work.

⁴²⁴ “Columbia River Power - A Summary of the Program of the Bonneville Power Administration,” pamphlet. Portland: BPA (April 1940). BPA226 1940.

Good lighting helped businesses provide modern and healthy working conditions in stores, schools, and commercial industry. “Making Money” acknowledged that Bonneville Power had reduced previous commercial electric-power rates 30% to 65% to stimulate the local economy. BPA’s signature-styled regional rate-plan map compared standard representative commercial electric rates all over Northwest power districts to define the Northwest a two-state power regionalism by electric rates and power grids (Fig. 8-3).⁴²⁵

Photographs of everyday life were a valuable vessel of government persuasion. Many images featured the faces of people identified as ordinary citizens, happy and hopeful, thanks to inexpensive electricity, the people’s power, leaving the impression that there was no end to the good things electricity could bring! Photographs could dramatically communicate modern progress, eliciting a visceral reaction and curiosity from viewers beholding bold modern innovations. Influenced by the federal documentary format first established by Roy Stryker, BPA photographers sought images that promoted value of federal intervention on the Columbia River. Depicting extensive progress in response to its critics, would build support and appetite for a hopeful Northwest future. Standard poses of a housewife cooking on an electric range, a farmer before a faucet of running water, or a cylindrical heater giving a barber hot water became recognizable symbols of improvements in everyday social life. Business outlets for dealers in hardware, plumbing, and appliances jammed their showroom floors with electric devices for local power customers eager to participate in modernity. The end products of electricity — luxuries

⁴²⁵ *Note.* Some 1940 regional rate maps show that some standard rates were higher in Seattle with municipal power than Portland with private-utility power.

twenty-three years earlier — were depicted as commonplace even in small town America. Besides affirming the desirable uses for Bonneville power, the pamphlets upheld it as inexpensive, available, and an example of government effectiveness.⁴²⁶

Light Up! represented the iconic modernity and the innovative potential of electricity. The contemporary homemaker — depicted with a stylish hairdo, polka dot dress, and high heels — denoted the new sense of self made possible by electric conveniences. Technical iconography displayed a new power landscape that featured dam spillways, transmission towers, wires, and substations. Images of ongoing commerce and workmen on the job associated electricity with positive socioeconomics. BPA-selected utility rates were plotted on maps to define region by power costs. Common to virtually every piece was the word *power*. “Columbia Power,” “Bonneville Power,” “powerhouse,” “America’s Greatest Power Stream,” “Cheapest Power,” and “Bonneville Power News” all highlighted the project’s key attribute. Text images of *power* stood out in graphics, titles, and captions, suggesting monumentalism and strength. Themes of power in government, and the power for government to accomplish “big things” for the common individual were explored in the FTP production of *Power*.⁴²⁷ Power in all its forms was a strategic link bridging away from the dystopia suffered by many during the Great Depression toward an optimistic future. (Fig. 8-4 to Fig. 8-8)

⁴²⁶ Allan Hart to Paul Raver, memo, 6 May 1940, “Validity of the Issuing Pamphlets, Photographs and Photostatic Copies of Charts. National Archives, Seattle, Washington. RG 305.2, File 180.1; “Making Money with Bonneville Power,” Portland: Bonneville Power Administration (May 1, 1940). University of Washington Libraries, I 44.2:P 87/3. *Note*. The pamphlet “Bonneville and Taxes” was issued in May 1940.

⁴²⁷ *Note*. See this Dissertation Chapter 6 “The Propaganda of *Power*.”

Public circulars and handouts distributed in 1940–1941 were another form of educational media used in coordination with the power-savings and load-building campaigns. These targeted forms of information could be given to the consumer at Grange halls, county fairs, and other public events, to be read at his or her convenience, brought into homes, businesses, or farms, and passed on to others. Circular 1 (issued in April 1940) was entitled, “Average Kilowatt Hours Used by Electric Equipment for Farms and Homes,” and contained standard charts of electric appliances, uses of electricity, and costs of electricity on the farm and in the home. Its cover sported folk-inspired symbolic drawings to represent connection to community and region. They illustrated the social-democratic theme of a government-supplied generation source, from which power was distributed long distances to all residents of the region. On the back cover, water measurement was used to explain the kilowatt hour.

A KILOWATT HOUR is a unit of measuring the electrical energy. It compares to gallons of water used per hour from your water system.

In a similar manner that four quarts equal one gallon, a 100-watt lamp used for ten hours equals one kilowatt hour.

If you may pay two cents a kilowatt hour, a 100-watt lamp burning for ten will cost you two cents, or 1/5 of a cent an hour.⁴²⁸

⁴²⁸ “Average Kilowatt Hours,” circular. Portland: BPA (April 1940). BPA191 Circular 1 1940.

The BPA was preparing regional residents to think in terms of increased energy use, essential for Northwest development and future Columbia River expansion.

Circular 2 (issued June 1940) equated low Bonneville Power rates with low cost appliance operation as a rationale for consumers to increase power use. Pen-and-ink sketches of the Bonneville spillway not only signified power generation, but also provided a striking display of governmental monumentalism, reinforcing its responsibility to empower people. Simple lines transported abundant power, symbolically embedded in the dam, to connect kilowatts to farms and homes, now ready to operate the new technology. A strategy of power load-building was in play in the brochure: “If your [electricity] bill is \$2.50 a month, an additional penny spent for electricity [on the farm] will . . .

Pump 500 gallons of water from a deep well.

Milk one cow twelve days.

Cool 100 pounds of milk.

Incubate and brood on chick per season.

Separate 2000 pounds of milk.

Grind 200 pounds of meat.

Pump an acre inch of water against eight feet of head.

Grind and mix 200 pounds of feed.

Cut four tons of hay.⁴²⁹

These improvements promised a more convenient future of increased income, decreased everyday expenses, and reduced drudgery, all ensured by government-generated power.

For Northwest homes, farms, stores, and factories to benefit from Columbia

⁴²⁹ “Columbia River Power at Bonneville Standard Rates,” circular. Portland: BPA (June 1940). BPA191 Circular 2 1940.

River development, all or most electric energy had to come from the BPA. The federal government expected the BPA to drive this emphatic message home. In fact, rate schedules pursuant to the power-load strategy were structured so that the more consumers used, the less they paid. And low public power rates meant good lighting and electric cooking within the reach of nearly everyone. To counter accusations of socialism, public power systems (municipal and public-utility districts) invoked traditional American patriotism, with power systems standing on their own in the American way, “no way . . . subsidized by the taxpayer.”⁴³⁰ Like private utilities, local public power systems paid into the local public treasury. Overall, citizens obtained three-fold energy savings through (1) lower residential and commercial power rates, (2) tax revenue returned to the community, and (3) lower municipal electric bills related to street lighting, schools, and local government. Residents were encouraged to envision a Northwest power landscape through the BPA’s distribution of rate-schedule information as well as other informational circulars and pamphlets. Other educational materials were (a) “Why Substations?” (1940) to explain power-transmission infrastructure; (b) “Bonneville and Taxes,” (1940) to answer questions about public power’s effects on tax revenue receipts; and (c) “Electric Heating for your Home” (1941) to encourage adaptation of Northwest homes to electric heating (Fig. 8-9).

BPA media espousing policies to define domestic and rural interests in terms of consumption rather than production had its critics. Stuart Ewen argues for workers to accept the new technical order of the modern industry necessitated a trade-off, making

⁴³⁰ Ibid.

available an abundance of mass-produced goods for consumption. As technology shortened the workday, it also laid claim a new consumer market to fill new leisure time with radio and movie entertainment, and in new appliances for the home and farm. In addition, David Nye argues domestic electrification was not a vision of progressives in government or ‘corporate imagination,’ but the vision of women reformers, home economists and builders. According to Nye, electrical utilities and corporations saw greater profits primarily elsewhere. The domestic use of electricity was a result of cultural preferences for the single-family dwelling, strengthened by advances in home economics. Electricity did not reduce the hours of housework. Electricity redefined domestic chores on the rural and home front.⁴³¹

A Saga of Commerce

A two-booklet series entitled, “Columbia River Power and the Northwest” (CRPNW), boosted interest in vast possibilities of regional planning and development about electrical power. This series was more polished than previous paper pamphlets. The first, a sixteen-page booklet issued in May 1940, covered Northwest industry and industrial development. The second, a thirty-page booklet issued November 1940, covered general information on power and Northwest regional development and, building on the first booklet, expanded the meaning of electric power to Northwest residents. Whether other CRPNW series booklets were produced is unknown. Although possibly artwork for

⁴³¹ *Note.* See Nye, *Electrifying America*, Chapter 6, 238-277.

a third CRPNW booklet was produced to address farmers, in pre-war 1941, it was not located.

The “CPRNW: Industry” booklet utilized pictographs and illustrations with minimal text in a distinctive format “to acquaint the general public in the Northwest with what industry means to them and what the power being generated at Bonneville and Grand Coulee dams means to industry.”⁴³² The pamphlet made three main assertions: (1) “Industry has helped build the nation – it can help build the Northwest,” (2) “[i]ndustry needs power,” and (3) “[t]he Northwest has enormous hydro-electric resources.”⁴³³ The booklet presented a simple vision of governmental solutions for a modern Northwest through Bonneville and Grand Coulee power, implying fulfillment of the American Dream through electricity. This booklet, unlike others, promoted regional decentralization through a hydropower- and energy-transmission infrastructure in ironic contrast to an unbalanced regional population concentrated in urban areas and rooted in early ideas of reforest, reclaim and resettle. Decentralization motivated industry to locate or expand in the Northwest to spur employment and lower the price of consumer goods. The government made its case using pictographs and symbols to remind citizens of the pre-Depression, a time of limited employment opportunities in a region so dependent on agricultural and forest products. The booklet emphasized hydropower’s capacity to attract new industries, specifically chemical and metallurgical plants that required large quantities of inexpensive energy. These new regional industries would thrive on low cost energy and encourage migration of unemployed workers to the Northwest to fill job posts. Secondary

⁴³² “Columbia River Power and Northwest Industry,” pamphlet. Portland: BPA (May 1940) 5. BPA224 1940.

⁴³³ Ibid.

industries (e.g., shipbuilding, manufacturing machine parts, airplane assembly, alloy metals, plastics, pulp and paper products, and fertilizers) would emerge. A small, but important, map identified the Bonneville and Grand Coulee dams and seven proposed dam sites on the Columbia River, with BPA transmission lines built, under construction, or proposed. Columbia River Power promised an infinite availability of electric power — so much so, that electricity would abound (Fig. 8-10a to Fig. 8-10f).

However, more than cheap power was needed to attract companies. Other data and facts were essential to a decision to relocate. The pre-war BPA lacked sufficient knowledge of minerals, available raw materials, and finance — knowledge especially crucial to smaller investors. More important, the BPA at the time did not understand how its own effectiveness would function to improve its future and that of the region.⁴³⁴ Missing from the power load-building concept was Franklin Roosevelt's humanitarian vision of a Promised Land for the resettlement of Dust Bowl migrants. The question was not only power production, but thoughtful socioeconomic planning for the wise use of natural resources, technology, and power development to address populist hopes and realize human potential. One must have means before being able to take advantage of power savings.

The purpose of the second CRPNW pamphlet was “to explain to various classes of consumers of electric energy what Bonneville and Grand Coulee power means to them and how they may receive it.”⁴³⁵ The booklet summarized the BPA's mission and mandate and reinforced the then-BPA marketing and power load-building campaign. An

⁴³⁴ Davis, *BPA History* 469-470.

⁴³⁵ “Columbia River Power and the Northwest,” pamphlet.

introductory graphic of selected symbols represented the multipurpose Bonneville Dam infrastructure, perhaps building the symbology of a power landscape to imbue its meaning within a new Northwest culture. The booklet's message was simple: Human technology mastered the river environment to provide power for the Northwest, navigation locks permitted low cost transportation to the Inland Empire, and fish ladders protected the regional fishing industry. All would provide for a greater Pacific Northwest. Consistent meanings assigned to electric power were restated as less drudgery and more leisure for housewives, more profits for the farmer, lower cost for the commercial consumer, and encouragement for the businessman to develop unique regional industries dependent on power. Bonneville was to be only a beginning.

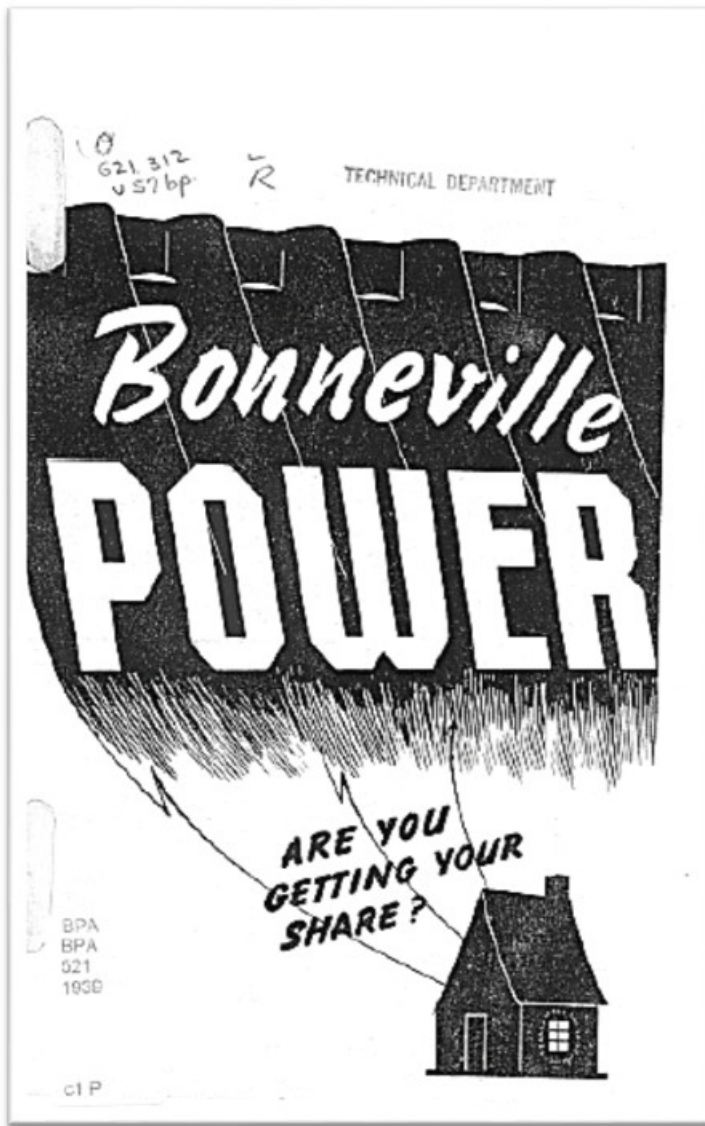


Figure 8-1. “Bonneville Power- Are you getting your share?”

Date: Early 1940.

Artist: Lloyd Hoff.

Bonneville Power Administration Archives. BPA521 1939.

Figure 8-1. “Bonneville Power – Are you getting your share?” This graphic expresses a federal monumentalism suggesting a populist empowerment through a connection of the individual household to inexpensive Columbia River Power. The government takes responsibility for generating power; however, it is up to the people to form public utility districts, a collective action, and distribute power to the factory, farm, store and home to insure low power rates.

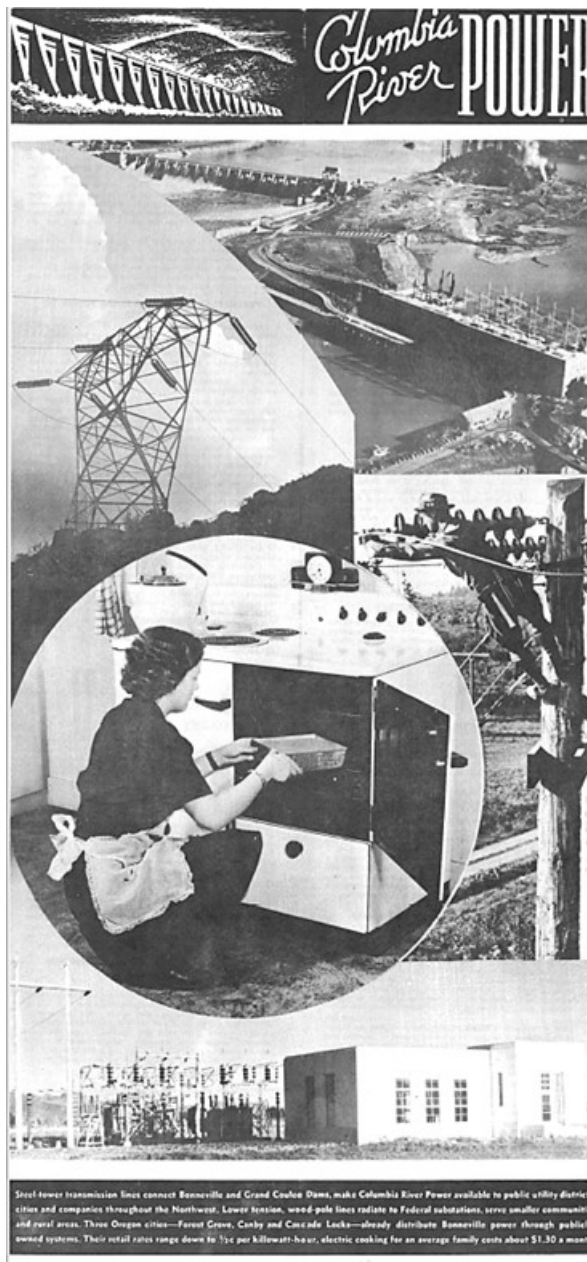


Figure 8-2. “Columbia River Power. Summary Pamphlet.”

Date: April 1940.

Artist: Unknown.

Bonneville Power Administration. BPA226 1940.

Figure 8-2. “Columbia River Power. Summary Pamphlet.” Then-current BPA load-building programs were a means to modernization. Photography rather than artwork documented the agency’s actual success by demonstrating the power generation and distribution process from its source to its end customers.



Figure 8-4. “Low Electric Rates” from Making Money Making Jobs with Bonneville Power, page 8”

Date: May 1940; Artist: Unknown.

University of Washington Libraries, Gov’t. Publications, U.S. Stacks. I 44.2:P 87/3.

Figure 8-4. The end-products of electricity are seen as part of everyday life.

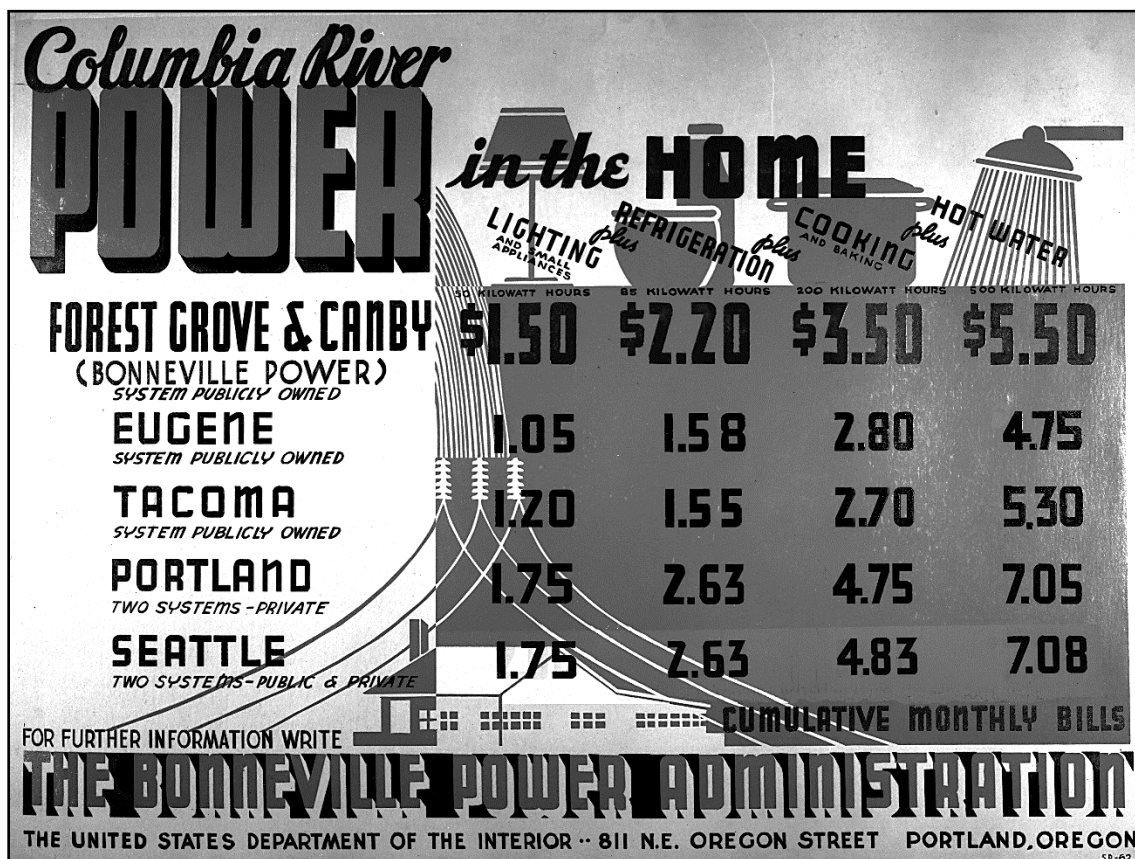


Figure 8-5. "Columbia River Power in the Home (Chart)."

Date: 1940.

Artist: Unknown.

National Archives, Seattle, Washington. E113002..

Figure 8-5. "Columbia River Power in the Home (Chart)." Charts and graphs, like pamphlets, were designed to show the many uses for electricity with low power rates. This chart illustrates rate comparisons charged by distributors using Bonneville power (Forest Grove and Canby, Oregon) with other rates in the Pacific Northwest. No attempt is made to show that public ownership is necessarily cheaper than private ownership.



Figure 8-6. Light Up!

Date: 1940

National Archives, Seattle, Washington E112207

Figure 8-6: Light Up! Now Bonneville Power is Cheaper. The idealized housewife is a comfort symbol, and a guardian of the home front's values. The artwork of the modestly dress housewife interpolates electric technology into the home, and reinforces Bonneville power is now "cheaper," no longer a luxury, making it affordable for the home and farm.

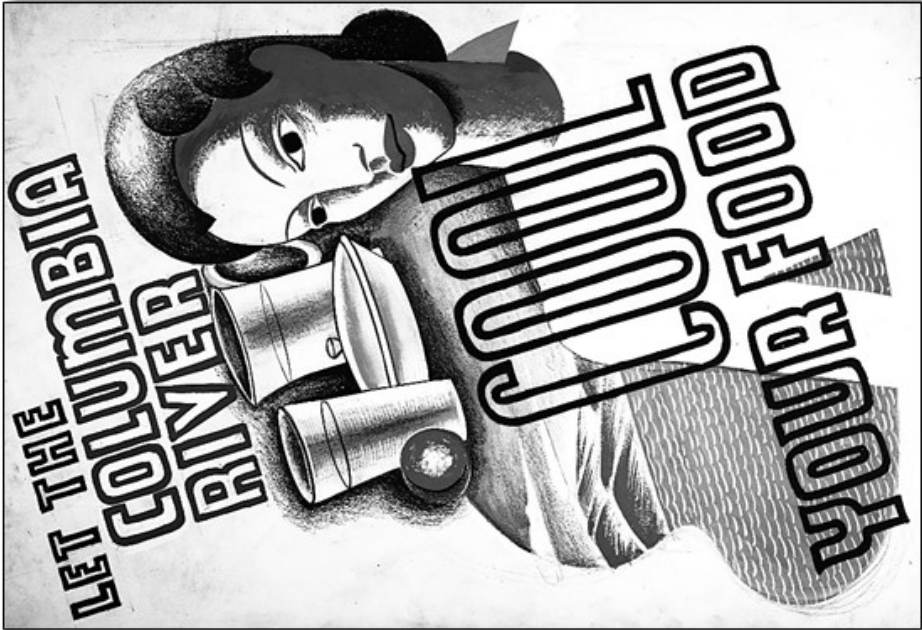


Figure 8-7 a and b. Posters for Power Sales and Power Rate Savings (1940).

Fig. 8-7a. "Let the Columbia River Cool Your Food." National Archives Seattle, Washington. E112219.

Fig. 8-7b. "Your Power Rates Cut 30% to 40%." National Archives Seattle, Washington. E112206.

Figure 8-7a: “Let the Columbia River Cool Your Food.” Electric refrigerators were not cost competitive. Early refrigerator motors required higher wattage many 1930s homes did not have. However, by the end of the 1930s, the refrigerator became tied to a fundamental and unifying middle-class culture: the daily meal and an important middle-class status symbol (Matt Novak, Refrigeration).

Figure 8-7b: “Your Power Rates Cut 30% to 40%.” Collectively, domestic electric power was not sold merely for the lighting or appliances themselves, but sold to modernize the home or farm. “Free Music While You Work” — the radio embodies an end product of electricity, suggesting a liberation of the housewife’s energies, to find emotional satisfaction in routine tasks, implying a more relaxing and more pleasant life.

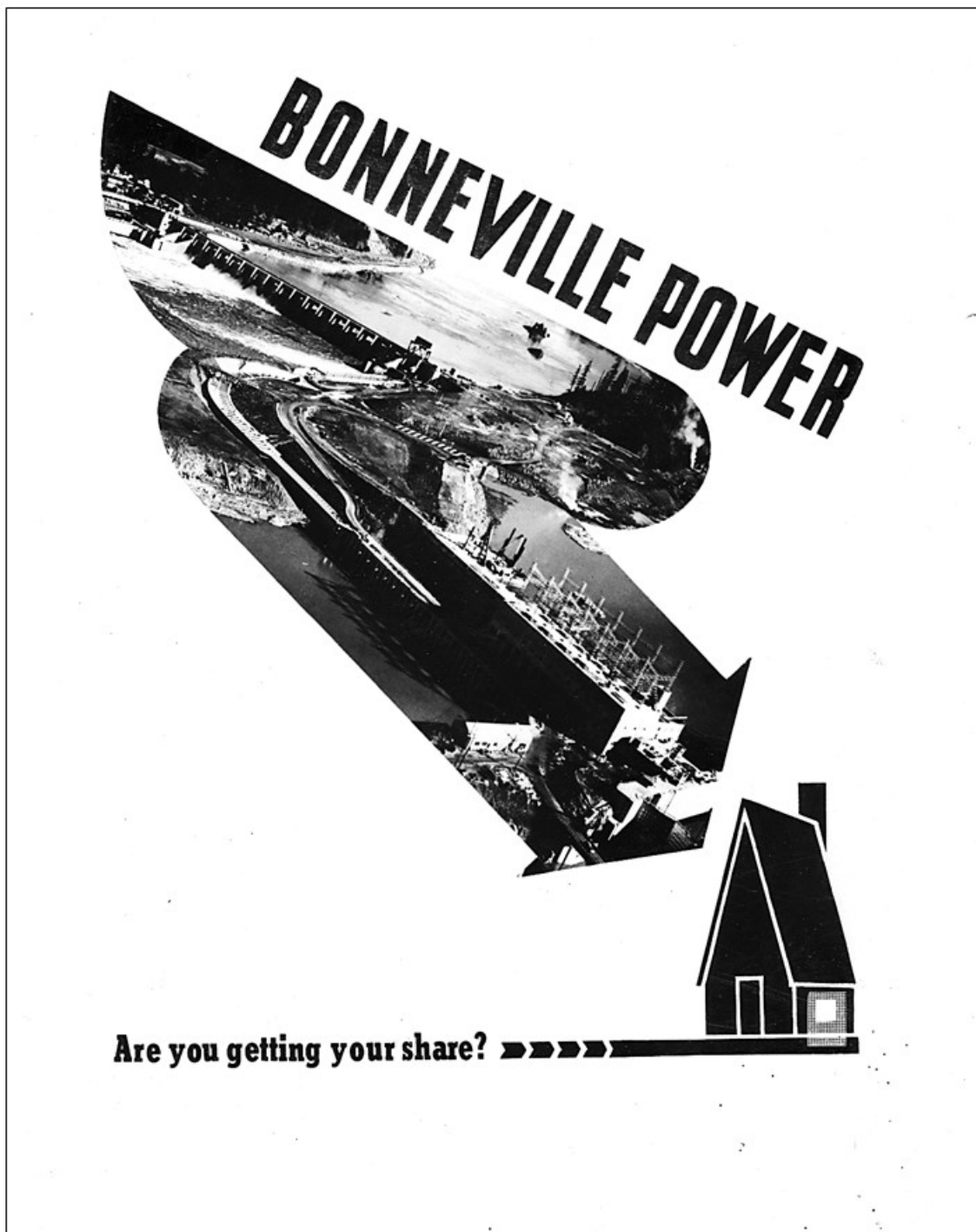


Figure 8-8. "Bonneville Power. Are you getting your share?"

Date: 1940-41?

Artist: Lloyd Hoff.

Bonneville Power Administration Archives. 2011.Gift.Hoff-007.



Figure 8-9. “Electric Heating for Your Home.”

Date: 1941

Bonneville Power Administration Archives. BPA920 1941

Figure 8-9. Electric Heating for Your Home. Poor building insulation, improper or absent electric wiring, and inefficient electric home heaters resulted in only 250 electric heating customers before 1940 in the Pacific Northwest. The BPA saw this as an opportunity to increase installation of electric heating in homes. This pamphlet was promoted as a guide to successful home heating installation that included improved methods of insulation, weather stripping, double-glazed windows and properly designed electric heating equipment. By the next year, 1941, “Electric Heating for Your Home” boasted of approximately 3000 successfully electric heating installations (BPA “Electric Heating” 5).

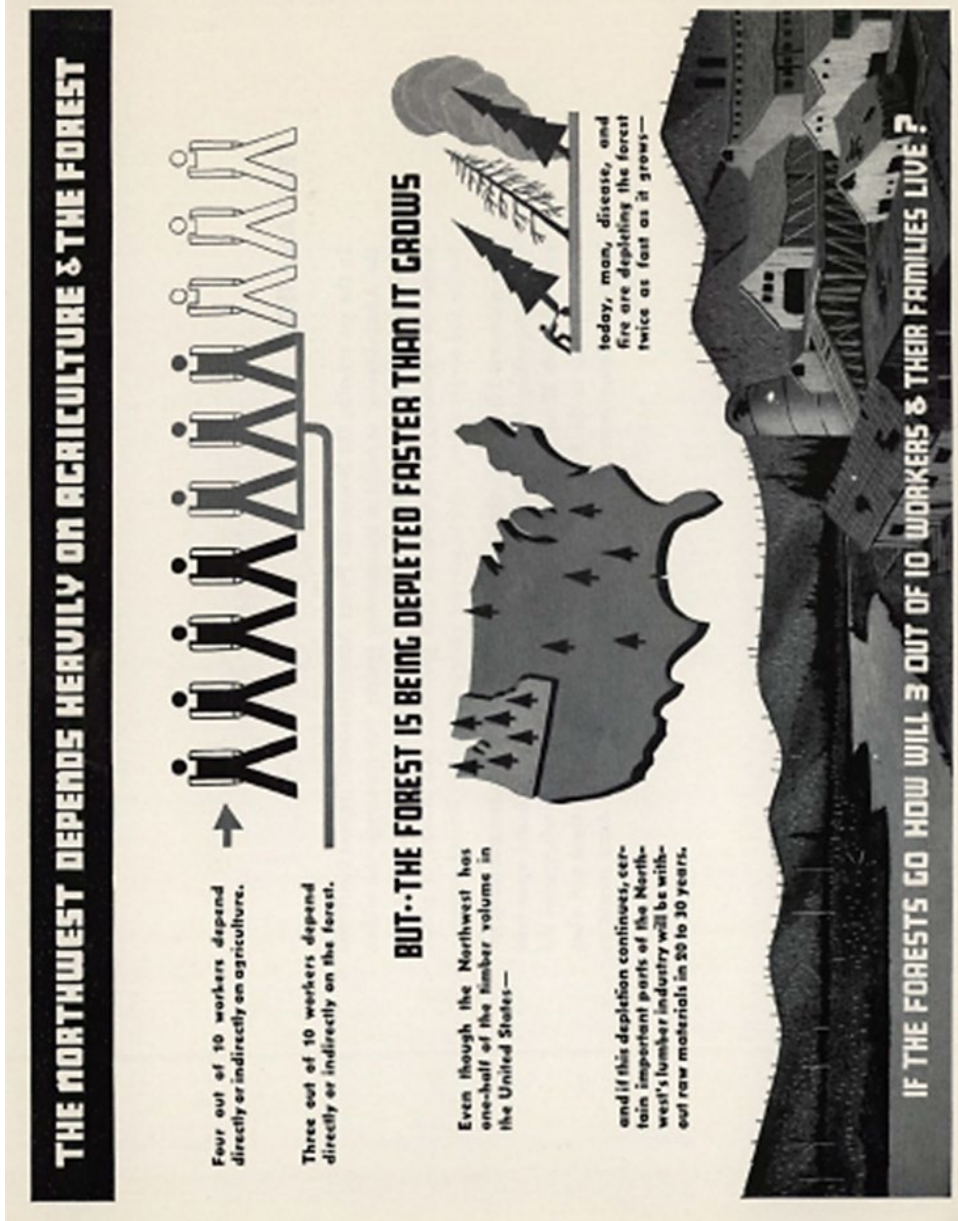


Figure 8-10a. "The Northwest Depends Heavily on Agriculture & the Forest."

From Columbia River Power and Northwest Industry, pamphlet, page 6.

Date: May 1940.

Bonneville Power Administration Archives. BPA224 1940



Figure 8-10b. "How can the Northwest Stabilize and Produce More Jobs."

From Columbia River Power and Northwest Industry, pamphlet, page 9.

Date: May 1940.

Bonneville Power Administration Archives. BPA224 1940.

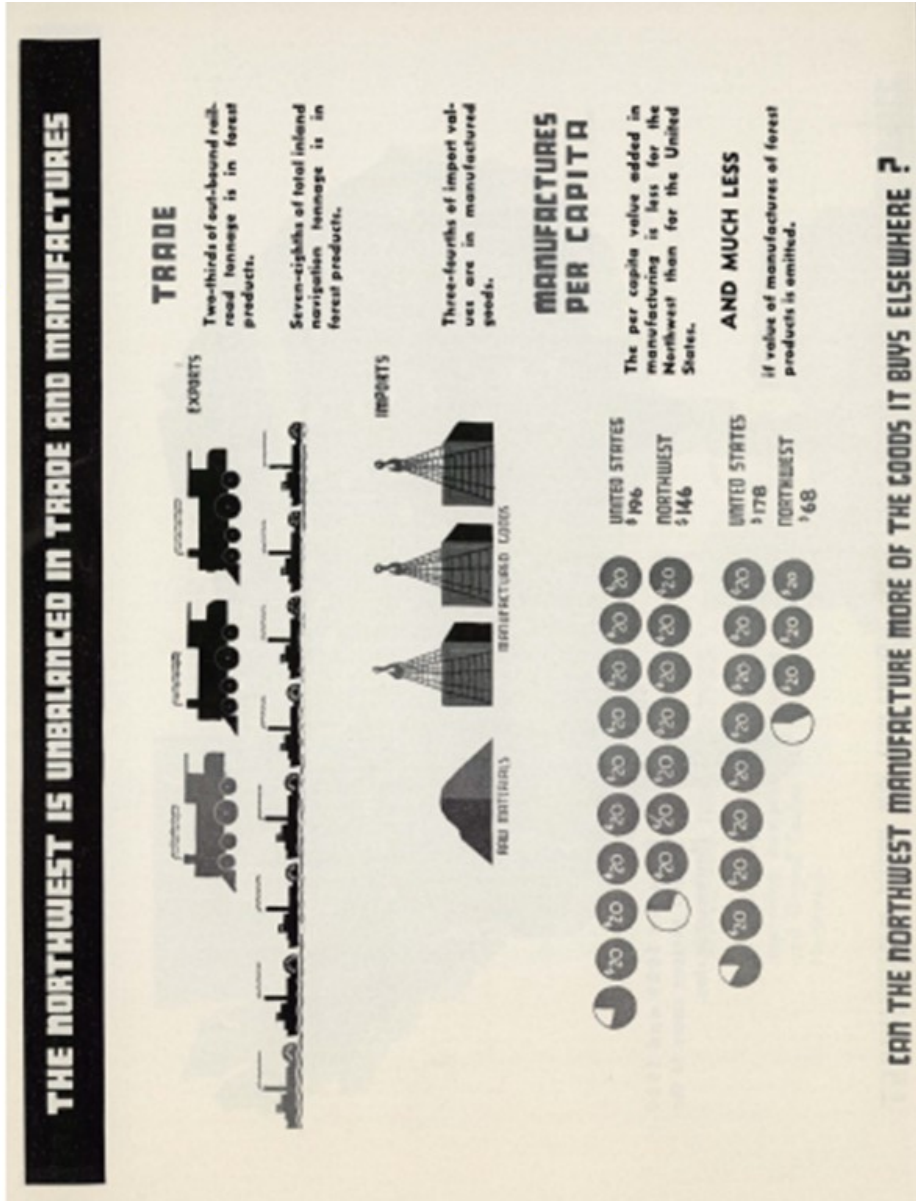


Figure 8-10c. "The Northwest is Unbalance in Trade and Manufactures."
 From Columbia River Power and Northwest Industry, pamphlet, page 9.
 Date: May 1940.
 Bonneville Power Administration Archives. BPA224 1940.

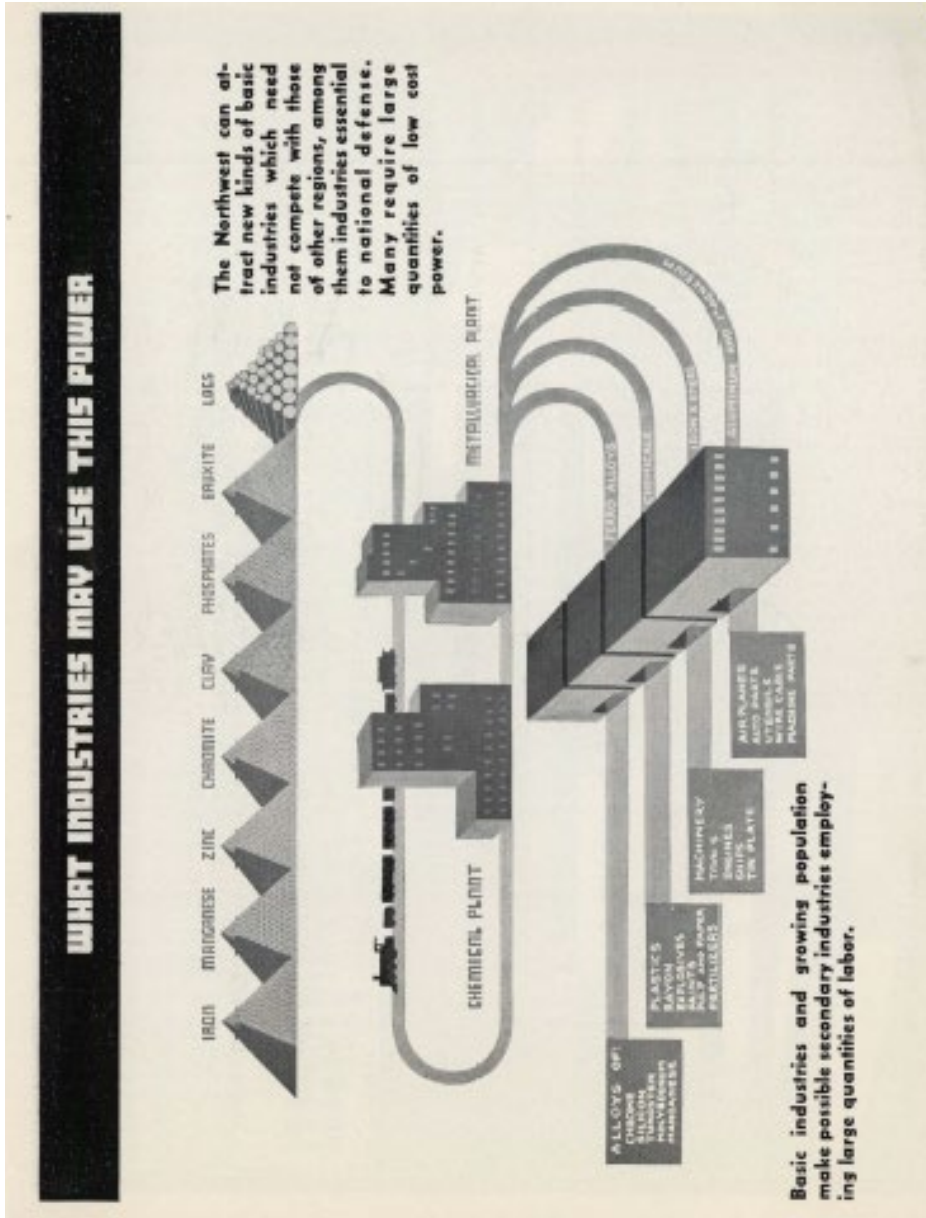


Figure 8-10d. "What Industries May use this Power."

From Columbia River Power and the Northwest Industries, pamphlet, page 13.

Date: May 1940.

Bonneville Power Administration Archives. BPA224 1940.

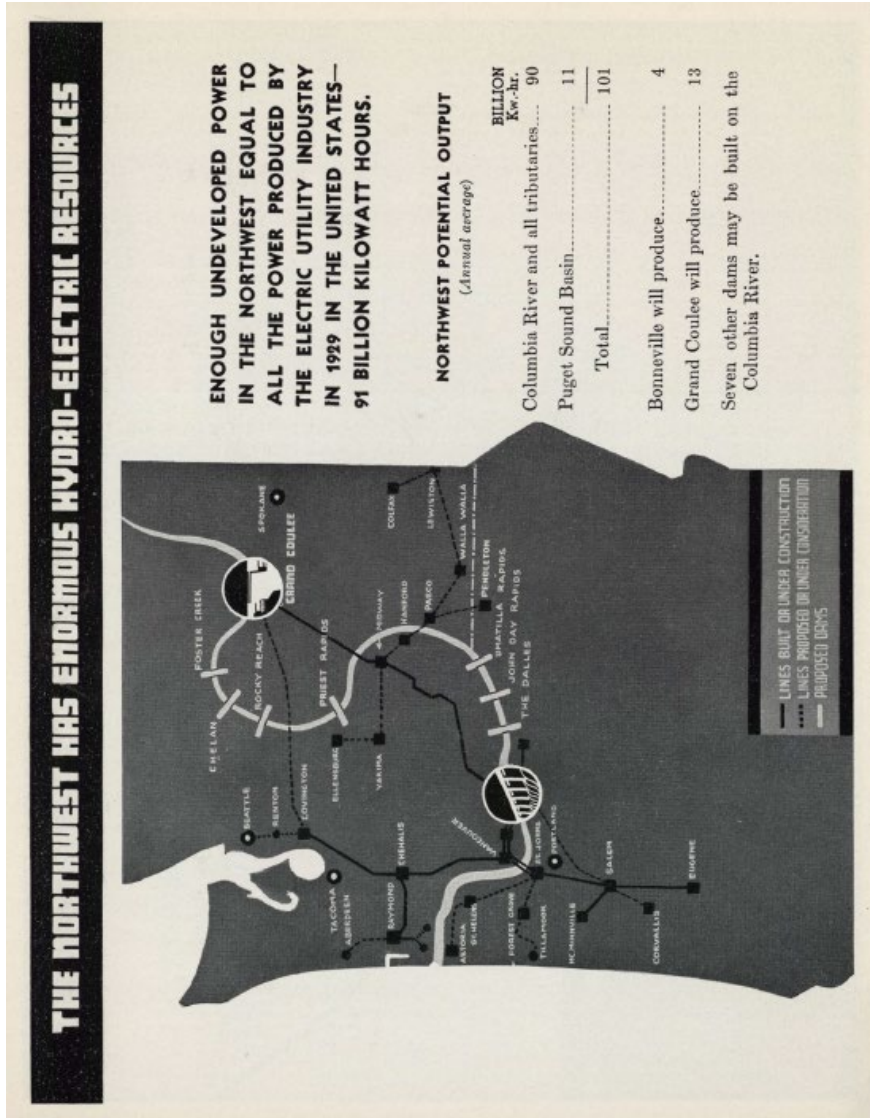


Figure 8-10c. "The Northwest Has Enormous Hydro-Electric Resources."

From Columbia River Power and the Northwest Industries, pamphlet, page 12.

Date: May 1940

Bonneville Power Administration Archives. BPA224 1940

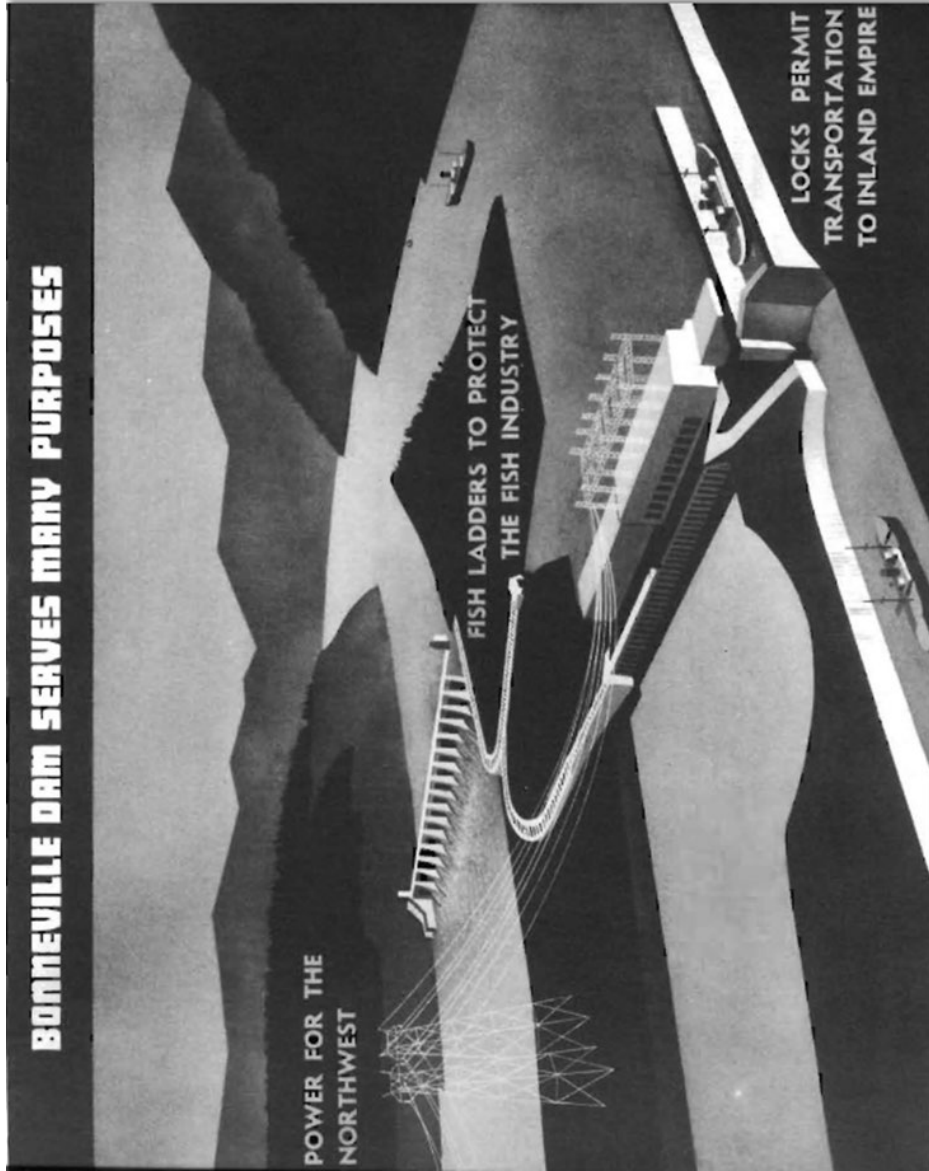


Figure 8-10f. "Bonneville Dam Serves Many Purposes."

From Columbia River and the Northwest, pamphlet, page 5.

Date: November 1940.

Bonneville Power Administration Archives. BPA225 1940.

Hydro ... the Movie

“Moving a River, Leaping Salmon, a new Northwest Passage, and Half a Million Horse-power”—*Hydro*, the 1940 Bonneville Power Administration movie, publicized the iconic culture of the Columbia River, promising a dramatic tale on “America’s Greatest Power Stream” to show what low cost electricity could do.⁴³⁶ Written by Stephen Kahn and produced Gunther von Fritsch, the story asserted that federal hegemonic technical management over the Columbia River built Bonneville Dam, for improved navigation and transportation, and the generation of electric power for distribution to thousands of Northwest residents. The script overall employed a social-democratic theme, to show how a democracy could develop the Columbia River, for all its values, for all the people, for a better life.

The old Oregon Trail “becomes the Northwest trail to America’s last frontiers. And Bonneville is the entrance to the Promised Land . . . To build the empire Thomas Jefferson visioned [sic].”⁴³⁷ The forgotten man’s plight and social despair was countered by uplifting government schemes for an engineered agrarian/industrial empire. With pride and patriotism, the film’s narrator bellows:

But the jack hammers of Grand Coulee thunder a call to arms against the desert.
Water!
Water for rich brown earth spreading out as big as Delaware.
Forty acres of garden land for the farmer burned out by dust and drought.

⁴³⁶ Lloyd Hoff. *Hydro* Movie Poster. Portland: Bonneville Power Administration (1940). National Archives, Seattle, Washington. RG 305.2. NARA E113000.

⁴³⁷ Ibid.

A chance for the little fellow in Big Bend country.
 Water and power and land.
 An American destiny for a half a million of migrant people.⁴³⁸

Reflecting the ups and downs of the region's outmoded lumber industry, hydro-power was promoted as a means to decentralize the population and create new economic landscapes, such as metallurgical and chemical industries, that might beat an almost ritualized boom-bust economic cycle. To echo a technocratic standard, Columbia River power and regional raw resources would "build an economy of abundance." Symbolic power rhetoric, some iconic, connected energy with employment: "Jobs for willing men. Jobs for skilled hands."⁴³⁹ Products produced from Bonneville hydropower would enrich daily life and demonstrate that the river had been engineered to realize a set of democratic values "[f]or navigation, protection of fish life, hydroelectric energy, and in its upper reaches, for flood control and reclamation."⁴⁴⁰ Columbia River Power was presented as a kind of safeguard for American liberty. Power could forge weapons of defense. In this way, the Columbia River was glorified, boosted to a modern iconic status to epitomize an anthem of energy, and serve as an artery of the Northwest. In fact, the Bonneville Dam signified the initial facilitator of this power and passage, with federal promises of more big dams.

The original film version featured a ten-minute film sequence — a "visual pamphlet" — explaining the then-current market strategy of the BPA's power load-building

⁴³⁸ Ibid.

⁴³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁴⁰ Ibid.

Note. *Hydro* did address the salmon question and federal technology was in place to protect this icon of the Northwest. *The Columbia* (1949), a revamped film version of *Hydro*, removed the salmon film sequence from its final release.

program. Lower retail rates brought electricity within everyone's reach that would see citizens reap the harvest. Images depicted ongoing construction of regional-transmission infrastructure by the Department of the Interior to confirm the government's legitimate intervention in the economy, citing its ultimate commitment to the American people. Just like photographs in pamphlet publications, the film bore witness to Northwesterners of a promised modernity due to government intervention during tough economic times.

Although commended at the time, *Hydro's* message expressed the rhetoric of a government documentary, and while perhaps entertaining, might not have convinced people overall to support the government's entry into the power business. A preliminary screening of *Hydro* took place on October 11, 1940 at the Benson Polytechnic High School in Portland.⁴⁴¹ Thereafter, the BPA entered into a contract with Fox Movietone News for *Hydro's* general distribution in March 1941. An edited version of *Hydro* was translated into a half dozen languages and taken overseas to Asia by then-Vice President Henry Wallace in 1944 (See Fig. 8-11 to Fig. 8-13).⁴⁴²

One last gasp of such pointed populism would arrive with folk singer, Woody Guthrie, hired to compose songs and ballads for a proposed second Bonneville Power Administration film in May 1941.

⁴⁴¹ Davis, *History of BPA* 462.

⁴⁴² *Ibid.*, 559.

Note. Davis stated that an estimated 15-million people viewed the Fox version of *Hydro*. In December 1941, the British government requested a copy of the film to strengthen troop morale and Federal contribution to the defense effort. In 1944, then-Vice President Henry Wallace took *Hydro* on his mission to Asia as the film had been translated into Chinese and several other languages. See Davis, *BPA History* 559.

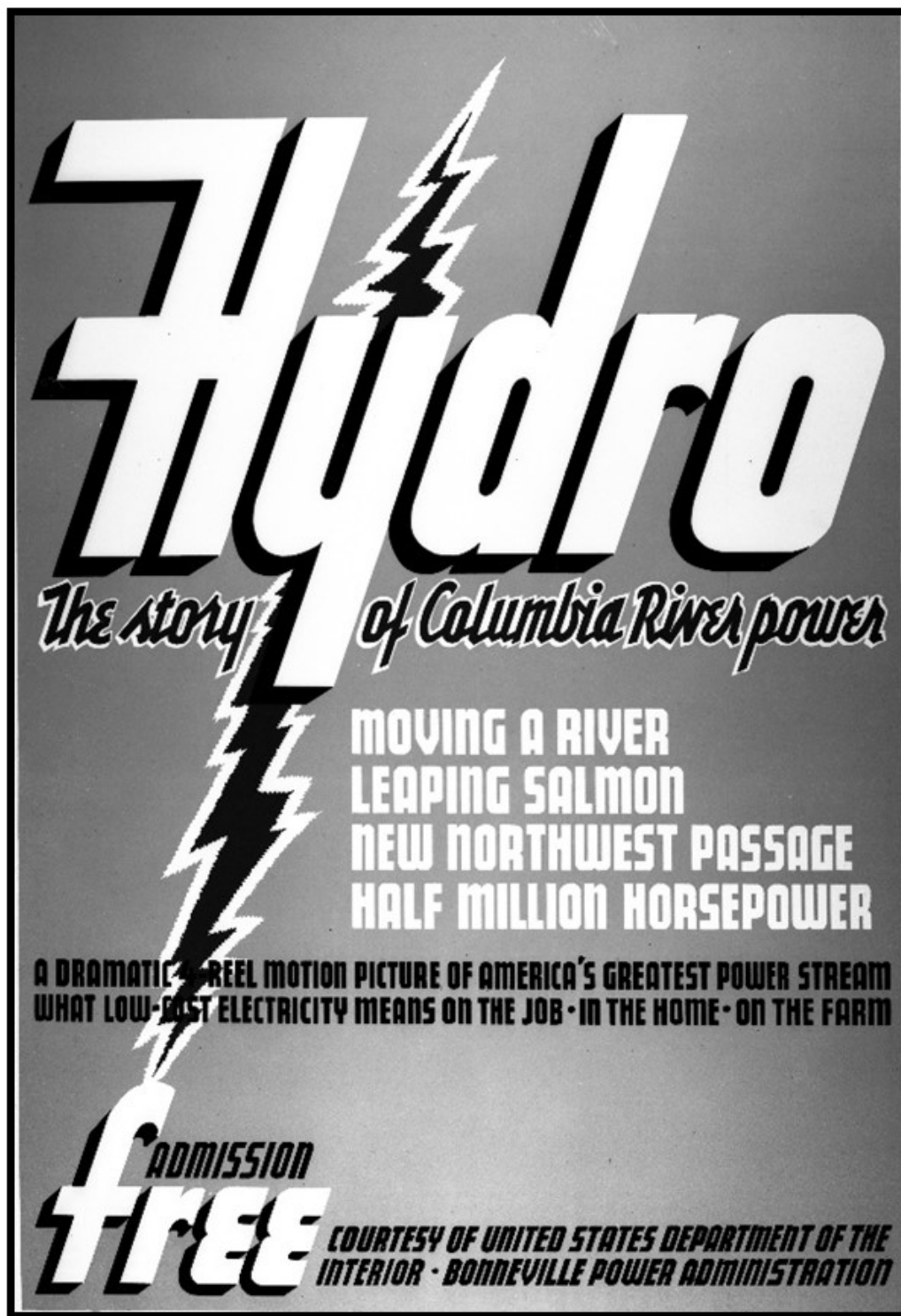


Figure 8-11. *Hydro: The Story of the Columbia River Power*. Film Poster.

Date: 1940.

National Archives, Seattle, Washington. E11300

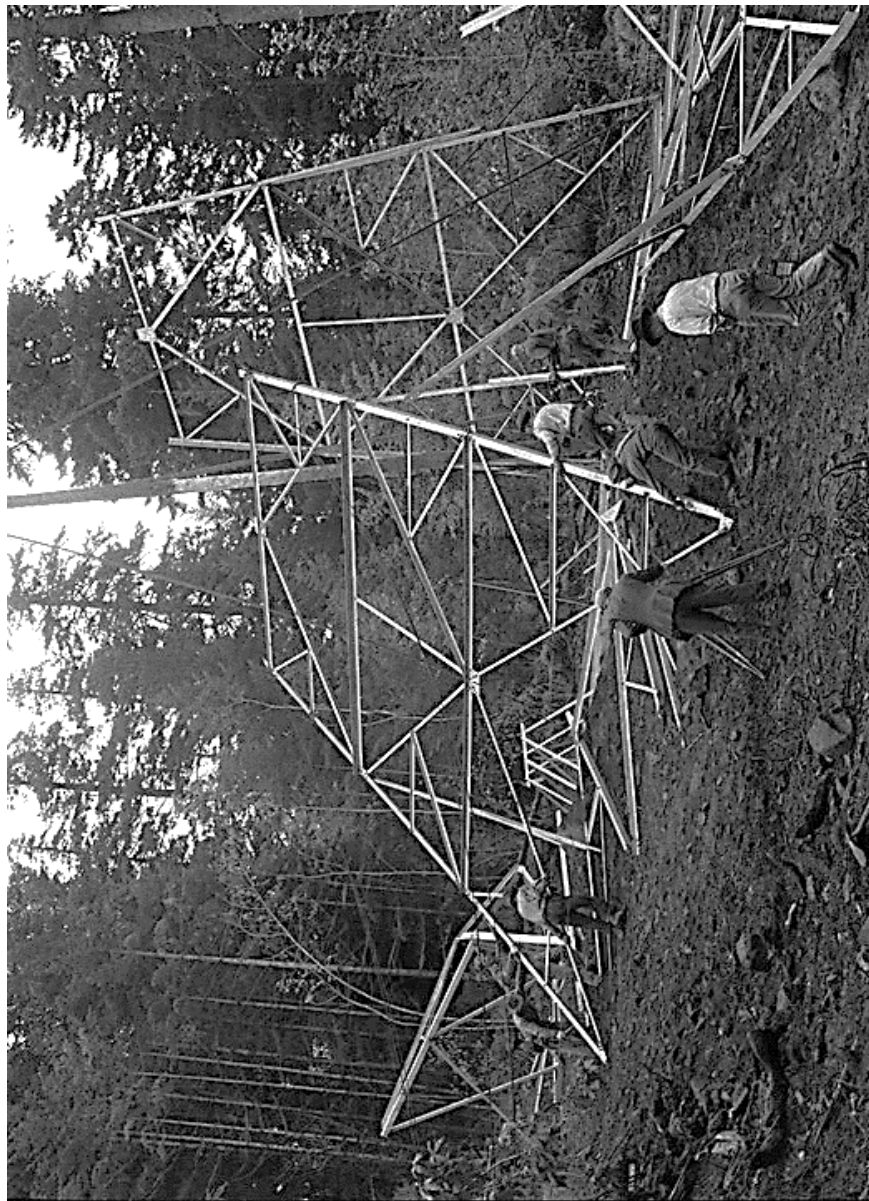


Figure 8-12. Parris Emery (cameraman) making movies (*Hydro*). Erection of tower looking north of Bonneville at or near tower No. 60.

Date: 19 October 1939.

Photographer: T.C.C.

National Archives, Seattle, Washington. E1681.



Figure 8-13. Making movies at Willard W.P.A. Camp (Parris Emery, cameraman for *Hydro*).

Date: 20 October 1939

Photographer: T.C.C.

National Archives, Seattle, Washington. E1685.

Chapter 9: Pastures of Plenty

Pastures of Plenty was such a simple song – didn’t realize how great a song it was . . . and only as the years past [sic] did I realize the subtlety of Woody’s words – My pastures of plenty must always be free – so it was a complaint, a protest but an affirmation too – of course this was Woody’s genius – he could get these different sides of a problem all in one simple song – other people might have had to write a book – to say as much as he said in one song.⁴⁴³

Pete Seeger, 1998

As the story goes, Stephen Kahn was asked to write a full-length follow-up feature film to *Hydro* that better spoke to ordinary people of the benefits of Columbia River development.⁴⁴⁴ During his second term, in the wake of the Recession of 1938–1939, Roosevelt had to justify the Grand Coulee Dam and Columbia River development once again. When the BPA obtained authority to conduct power sales from the Grand Coulee project in August 1940, Kahn was assigned to organize the film project, to support Northwest power development. World War II was heating up in Europe and the U.S. was slowly emerging from the Great Depression. According to Lillian Davis, the “Power Division of the Department” approved the film, which still needed an experienced director. The Administrator later recommended Gunther von Fritsch’s appointment at \$7,500 per annum.⁴⁴⁵ According to a 1998 oral history from Bill Murlin, BPA audiovisual specialist, a proposed plot scenario was to feature a folk singer, an ordinary individual who would act and perform in the film.⁴⁴⁶ In the winter of 1941 (most likely January to February 1941), Kahn

⁴⁴³ Pete Seeger. Oral History [transcript] conducted by Michael Madjic (1998). University of Oregon Knight Library, UO Media Services.

⁴⁴⁴ *Note*. In this account, some information was based on anecdotal comments from oral histories.

⁴⁴⁵ Lillian Davis, *History of the Bonneville Power Administration* (unpublished). Portland, Oregon: BPA (1943) 559.

⁴⁴⁶ Bill Murlin interviewed by Michael Madjic [transcript] (1998). University of Oregon Knight Library, UO Media Services.

recalled traveling to Los Angeles, New York, and Washington D. C. to discuss the new film with various bureaucrats and professionals, one of whom was Pare Lorentz, who counted Woody Guthrie as an acquaintance. At the time, Guthrie was known in folk music circles based on his work in Los Angeles in the late 1930s and in New York City for a brief time in 1940. An unidentified person at the Bonneville Power Authority, possibly Kahn, contacted the folklorist Alan Lomax, who at the time was at the Library of Congress and knew Guthrie. Although specific details are not available, it was allegedly Lomax who recommended Guthrie to the BPA.⁴⁴⁷

In April 1941, von Fritsch found Guthrie at a rented rundown house in the Echo Park neighborhood of Los Angeles. According to Greg Vandy, “some feller,” from the Department of the Interior came by to talk to Guthrie about a movie to be shot along the Columbia River.⁴⁴⁸ At that meeting, von Fritsch told Guthrie that the BPA was interested in hiring him for a one-year stint to act in and narrate a proposed film. Guthrie would be expected to compose and write songs about the Columbia River and its federal projects. Ironically, this opportunity was Guthrie’s hope for employment in the Northwest’s Promised Land, where he could seek relief from a desperate family and personal situation. Von Fritsch’s test-shot photograph of Guthrie and his family on the porch steps of their Los

⁴⁴⁷ Stephen B. Kahn “Oral history interview with Stephen B. Kahn” [Sound recording] interview conducted by Bill Murlin and Gene Tollefson (1984) Tape 2; Bill Murlin interviewed by Michael Madjic [transcript] (1998). University of Oregon Knight Library, UO Media Services; Stephen B. Kahn. Oral History [transcript] conducted by Michael Madjic (1998). University of Oregon Knight Library, UO Media Services; Pare Lorentz, *FDR’s Moviemaker: Memoirs and Scripts*. Reno: University of Nevada Press (1992) 163. *Note.* Versions varied depending on the source.

⁴⁴⁸ In Greg Vandy et al. *Twenty-six Songs in 30 Days: Woody Guthrie’s Columbia River Songs and the Planned Promised Land in the Pacific Northwest*. Seattle: Sasquatch Books (2016) 8-9. *Note.* Vandy attributes this quote to Woody Guthrie, the “feller” was Gunther von Guthrie, however, there is no citation for the quote.

Angeles bungalow capped a favorable report on Guthrie made to Kahn. An initial BPA Personnel Action form dated April 23, 1941 sought a narrator/actor, with specific duties to narrate a documentary film, appear in designated scenes, and to assist in writing narration, dialogue, and musical accompaniment. The personnel form stated, “This position requires a person with a distinctive voice and style of delivery.” Thereafter, Woody Guthrie was recommended for the position.⁴⁴⁹

However, Kahn still needed to obtain approval from the Department of the Interior and the U. S. Civil Service Commission in Washington D.C. On May 1, 1941, Director of Personnel, C. E. Lamson, sent personnel documents to Guthrie’s Los Angeles address to begin the employment process. But in the boom-bust daily life of Guthrie, he did not immediately receive the BPA’s letter about the proposed position because a broken sewage pipe had forced the family to abandon their Los Angeles house. Homeless, they scraped together a livelihood in the old California gold-mining town of Columbia, by cutting and hauling firewood in Guthrie’s new Pontiac. When the BPA’s letter finally caught up with Guthrie, the family headed for Portland, Oregon.⁴⁵⁰

Understanding Woody Guthrie

Woody Guthrie’s most productive years began after he left Pampa, Texas in 1937, until the first symptoms of his battle with Huntington’s Disease a decade later, in 1947. During that period, Guthrie produced an enormous catalogue of songs, poems, artwork, and

⁴⁴⁹ Bill Murlin interviewed by Madjic [transcript]; Greg Vandy et al. *Twenty-six Songs in 30 Days: Woody Guthrie’s Columbia River Songs and the Planned Promised Land in the Pacific Northwest*. Seattle: Sasquatch Books (2016) 9-10; Bonneville Project Personnel Action, Form BP-72, 23 April 1941 in “BPA Guide and Analysis of the Woody Guthrie Employment.” Portland: BPA (2016) 7.

⁴⁵⁰ Vandy et al., *Twenty-six Songs*, 10-13; “BPA Guide” 1.

essays. His pre-World War II residence in Los Angeles was key to understanding his transformation from a hillbilly singer to his iconic populist identity. According to Darryl Holter, the southern folk musician underwent rapid professional, musical, and political development that not only began in Los Angeles, but was the result of Los Angeles, a place that exposed Guthrie to the influence of urban intellectuals and celebrities. Guthrie's lyrics and songs, his core achievement, defined him in the public eye. But his musical evolution ran parallel with his political evolution, from the populist leanings of a Dust Bowl Democrat to the communist notions of a streetwise radical. Both shaped his unique "political Okie" persona as a rising star in the era's American popular culture (Fig 9-1).⁴⁵¹

Guthrie's hometown of Okemah, Oklahoma, was populated by people who were predominately rooted in the southern regional culture, having not lived in the territory for more than a generation. According to Guthrie, the town's population at the time was half white, a quarter Native American, and a quarter "Negro." When oil was discovered near Okemah, an influx of oil workers and other persons brought more diversity.⁴⁵² Daily life taught Woody the tales, salty sayings, and picturesque language of the region and its people. It was in Texas, not Oklahoma, where Guthrie encountered the Dust Bowl, the vivid, regional folk experience depicted so graphically in his songs.⁴⁵³ Whether the Dust Bowl

⁴⁵¹ Darryl Holter. "Woody Guthrie in Los Angeles, 1937-1940," in *Woody Guthrie L.A. 1937-1941*, Santa Monica: Angel City Press (2015) 13-14.

⁴⁵² Richard Reuss. "Woody Guthrie and His Folk Tradition," *The Journal of American Folklore*, Jul-Sep 1970 83: (329) 275. *Note*. The Anglo-American population largely consisted of settlers who had emigrated from nearby southern and prairie states.

⁴⁵³ *Ibid.* 275-276. *Note*. In 1929, Guthrie hitched-hiked and hoboed from Okemah, OK, to Pampa, TX, where his father had moved after being seriously burned. According to Greg Vandy, Guthrie helped his father run a "flophouse."

and migrants or industry and unions, Guthrie conceived narratives with specific detail about events, places, and people. Biographer Joe Klein wrote that Guthrie's music was "an afterthought. The words were important . . . almost all his lyrics simply ride off the back of someone else's music both folk and commercial songs."⁴⁵⁴ In his lyrics, Guthrie labored to portray the "forgotten man," to point out the greed and prejudice that made life hard and every day a struggle for ordinary people. Guthrie's lyrics often compared the nation's democratic myth and promise with the reality of his experiences as he "bespoke the unrealized ideals of the land and its people."⁴⁵⁵ Guthrie scholar, Mark Allen Jackson, wrote, "He tried to capture on paper and on recordings a part of history of this nation's underclass for others to know in years to come and offer a vision of what the country could be if this group joined together to demand a truly democratic and egalitarian society."⁴⁵⁶ Biographer Ed Cray characterized Guthrie's lyrics as having an unfailing sense of humor, optimism, and love of country that respected America's diverse population and the country's magnificent landscape.

Guthrie believed that the way an audience reacted to his song was more important than the song itself. Meaning had to be put into words to make his message accessible along with an easy-to-sing melody to capture the audience's attention. Above all, Guthrie's songs served as a mechanism for his survival — not purely as an art. His work demanded flexibility to make changes in the songs whenever required, a skill Guthrie honed

⁴⁵⁴ Joe Klein quoted in Holter, "Woody Guthrie L.A." 17.

⁴⁵⁵ Mark Allen Jackson, *Prophet Singer: The Voice and Vision of Woody Guthrie*, Jackson: University of Mississippi (2007) 7.

⁴⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 6.

when performing in the dubious venues of coffee shops, bars, and street corners to attract tips, busking in public spaces.⁴⁵⁷

The Transformation of Woody Guthrie

Rumors of California's abundance lured victims of the Dust Bowl west to seek out new lives all along the Coast. Woody Guthrie was one among them, and no different. In March 1937, he told his wife Mary that he was heading for California to search for work and would send for her once he did so.

Following the Dust Bowlers' path on Route 66, Woody found refuge at his Aunt Laura's house in Glendale, California. Guthrie joined forces with his cousin, Jack (a.k.a. "Oklahoma"), to look for opportunities in the era's popular western music. Oklahoma and Guthrie auditioned for KFVD, a local radio station that had opened its studio to western singers and musicians. In July 1937, *The Oklahoma and Woody Show* went on the air. The morning 15-minute live radio show featured the popular cowboy songs of the day with Oklahoma taking the lead and Guthrie as his sidekick. A month later, the pair asked singer Maxine Crissman to join the show. This proved a fruitful move. Frank Burke Sr., a democratic activist who owned KFVD, offered the trio a second show on the station to air at 11:00 PM. Oklahoma declined the offer to seek other opportunities, but Woody and Crissman remained to broadcast *The Woody and Lefty Lou Show*.⁴⁵⁸ The new duo found that traditional, old-fashioned songs and familiar narratives of the pre-Depression "old-days" connected with the large migrant population in Southern California and the San

⁴⁵⁷ Holter, "Woody Guthrie L.A." 17.

⁴⁵⁸ *Note.* Woody gave Crissman the name "Lefty Lou" because she was left-handed and Lou rhymed with Ole Mizzou, after the state where Crissman's family had migrated from to California.

Joaquin Valley. Nearly 100,000 migrants had arrived in the Los Angeles area between 1935 and 1940.⁴⁵⁹ According to Holter, despite varying degrees of poverty, Dust Bowl refugees had easy access to the radio.

As Guthrie cultivated his radio audience, he developed a one-of-a-kind persona to distinguish himself from other artists. Like the comedian and commentator Will Rogers, who hit his peak in the early 1930s, Guthrie adopted an unpretentious air, playing to a crowd. During his KFVD stint, Woody perfected an exaggerated Oklahoma accent that purposefully mispronounced words to project an image of a plain, under-educated person. Yet, his comments made common sense, often holding double meanings that implied Guthrie's deeper understanding of the subject:

Though he was known and is now remembered as an authentic representative of a particular segment of downtrodden Americans struggling through the Great Depression . . . Guthrie's image was partly a persona constructed . . . as a radio personality in order to maintain a certain kind of relationship with his listening audience . . . Guthrie himself carefully chiseled out this identity and successfully hammered it into public consciousness.⁴⁶⁰

His signature lyrics reinforced commonplace language with verbal rhythms and bad grammar, long run-on sentences, lists of people's names, and details of specific places and dates of events. Resisting complex guitar chords, intricate guitar picking, and complicated melodies, his music consisted of simple, older treatments of vocals, melodies, and instrumentation.⁴⁶¹ Pete Seeger said, "Woody sometimes played a ten-verse song without

⁴⁵⁹ James Gregory. *American Exodus: The Dust Bowl Migration in Southern California*, Oxford: Oxford Press (1989) 41.

⁴⁶⁰ Thomas Conner quoted in Holter, "Woody Guthrie L.A." 21.

⁴⁶¹ Richard Reuss quoted in Holter, "Woody Guthrie L.A." 45.

changing chords.”⁴⁶² The biggest problem that confronted *Woody and Lefty Lou* was coming up with enough material for two radio shows. The shortage of songs forced Guthrie to compose more of his own songs, often writing new lyrics for old music. “Woody had about half-a-dozen songs that he had written to the tune ‘Little Green Cottage,’ ” said Crissman. “When we ran out of songs, Woody started putting his own words to old ones. When we ran out of them, he started writing his own lyrics.”⁴⁶³

In June 1938, *The Woody and Lefty Lou* show ended. Crissman was unable to handle the demands of two radio shows a day, six days a week. Burke suspended the program for six weeks while Crissman recovered, and then sent Guthrie out as a traveling correspondent for his newspaper, *The Light*, a media tool for the left-leaning California gubernatorial candidate, Culbert Olson. Burke wanted Guthrie to gain support for Olson among agricultural workers by reporting on difficulties in the agricultural campsites and Hoovervilles erected by migrant workers. Guthrie traveled from campsite to campsite in the Central Valley of California, living among the Okies, the Arkies, and other migrant workers, playing his music for food. He spent time in the skid row sections of Sacramento, Tracy, and Redding and the shantytowns near railroad stations, writing and composing songs about “my people.” He hopped freight trains; was arrested in Reno, Nevada, for vagrancy; and was stranded with a small army of unemployed men on the side of the road in the Mojave Desert; ending up in Kern County, California, in the midst of a cotton workers strike. Guthrie experienced the violence of roughnecks and vigilantes who attacked groups of migrants with guns and clubs.⁴⁶⁴

⁴⁶² Pete Seeger quoted in Holter, “Woody Guthrie L.A.” 45.

⁴⁶³ Holter, “Woody Guthrie L.A.” 20.

⁴⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 26.

On the road and rootless in the summer of 1938, Guthrie scholar, Charles McGovern, wrote, “Guthrie showed that [his] experience of displacement, movement, homelessness, and transit was not simply a condition but fundamental fact of life.”⁴⁶⁵ To interact with his people and connect with labor organizers, Guthrie composed songs as a partaker in the cause to raise his people’s voices in protest. During this era, American society and laws discriminated against those millions who had no home, no place to rest, or no place to make a community or to labor for their betterment. Songs of displacement, travel, resilience, and hope pointed to Guthrie’s deeper connections to migrancy, the forgotten man, and American life. With so much of the country in upheaval, Guthrie’s apparent devotion to the cause was due to profound dislocation rather than a subversive challenge to the American way of life.⁴⁶⁶

Guthrie returned to his radio show in January 1939 without Maxine “Lefty Lou” Crissman. Despite Burke’s doubts about the show’s survival without Crissman, he gave Guthrie a chance, assigning him an unpaid 30-minute afternoon spot called *Woody, the Lone Wolf*. The show was quite different from his previous shows without the old country songs and narratives about the good old days that had brought him early success. Woody favored new compositions or new adaptations of old music. Political songs were oriented to the progressive wing of the Democratic Party and progressive electoral initiatives with the titles “I’m Looking for that New Deal Now,” “Give Us an Old-Age Pension,” and

⁴⁶⁵ Charles McGovern. “Woody Guthrie’s American Century” in *Hard Travelin’: The Life and Legacy of Woody Guthrie* edited by Robert Santelli and Emily Davidson. Hanover, NH: University Press of New England for Wesleyan University Press (1999) 117.

⁴⁶⁶ Ibid.

“Roosevelt-Olson.”⁴⁶⁷ Crissman said of the show, “That was new to me. When we were on the radio there was no unions, no organizers, nothing like that The political stuff began after he went into the camps. I never heard that before he went to the labor camps.”⁴⁶⁸

Shortly after returning to KFVD, Guthrie introduced himself to political activist, Ed Robbin, a fellow radio host and Los Angeles editor of the *People's Weekly*, a daily publication of the West Coast Communist Party. Impressed with Guthrie's political acumen, Robbin invited him to perform at a downtown rally to celebrate the pardon of San Francisco labor leader, Tom Mooney, who was granted a pardon by Governor Olson. Dressed in his ragged migrant attire, Guthrie rambled onstage with his guitar hanging by a rope to sing his musical composition “Tom Mooney is Free.” Playing to the enthusiasm of the audience, Guthrie added more expressive rhetoric along with music and off-the-cuff stories about “my people, the Dust Bowl Refugees.”⁴⁶⁹ Robbin felt the energy at the rally and was impressed with the lyrical descriptions of Guthrie's experiences. More significant, that performance at the Mooney rally introduced Guthrie to urban intellectuals and political activists who had never seen or heard the political Okie. Woody tapped into the hot-button issue of migrant agricultural workers in California. Robbin stated:

Here was a skinny guy on stage, the very embodiment of these young [migrant] people, speaking their language in bitter humor and song, with the dust of his traveling still on him, a troubadour, a balladeer, a poet who has ridden the rails and the jalopies, worked the orchards and the fields, lain in the jails, faced the

⁴⁶⁷ Holter, “Woody Guthrie L.A.” 33.

⁴⁶⁸ Maxine Crissman quoted in Holter, “Woody Guthrie L.A.” 33.

⁴⁶⁹ Holter, “Woody Guthrie L.A.” 34-35.

cops and the clubs of vigilantes – here he was drawing out his hard, bitter, humorous songs.⁴⁷⁰

Ed Robbin helped Guthrie’s professional career in many important ways. Acting as Guthrie’s informal booking agent, Robbin found Guthrie work. “In those days there were so many causes that each night he was asked to sing at some fund-raising party in the homes or union halls. He would get five or ten dollars for each gig, if he remembered to appear.”⁴⁷¹ Robbin provided a roof over Guthrie’s head, frequently giving him the exclusive use of his home to work, leaving his wife Mary and his three children alone in their single motel room in Glendale. More important, Robbin’s Echo Park home was central to the era’s political and cultural activities, which caused Guthrie to move beyond the Okies, his former base of support, into “The Movement.”⁴⁷² Here Robbin introduced Guthrie to actor and political activist, Will Geer. In mid-1939, Geer introduced Guthrie to Pare Lorentz in Hollywood. Lorentz was searching for regional folk singers for *Ecce Homo!* Geer was filming *Fight for Life* at Columbia Pictures and had managed to get Guthrie a five-second cameo as an extra sitting on the stairs of a slum set.⁴⁷³ In turn, Geer introduced Guthrie to John Steinbeck,⁴⁷⁴ who connected Guthrie to several others, including Harry Hay, a Communist Party activist; Waldo Salt, a progressive screenwriter who lent Hollywood support to the striking cotton workers; and other progressives in the

⁴⁷⁰ Ed Robbins in Richard Reuss, “Guthrie and Folk Tradition” 278.

⁴⁷¹ Robbins in Holter, “Woody Guthrie L.A.” 35.

⁴⁷² Note. The “Movement” was a late 1930s leftist community of liberals and radicals in Los Angeles.

⁴⁷³ Will Geer in Ed Robbin, “Woody and Will,” in *Woody Guthrie in L.A.* 117; Lorentz, *Moviemakers* 163. Refer to footnote 255 in Dissertation Chapter 5 “A Populist Media Paradigm.”

⁴⁷⁴ Note. John Steinbeck was an advisor on *Fight for Life* when he met Guthrie. See Robbin in “Woody and Will” 117-118.

Hollywood scene. Guthrie scholar, Richard Reuss, wrote that Guthrie “found an intellectual climate within one segment of the Left where he was accepted essentially on [the town’s] terms.”⁴⁷⁵ Guthrie’s political positions began to cause tension at the radio station, offending KFVD’s owner, Frank Burke. As a result, Guthrie lost his job.

The years 1939–1941 were transitional for Guthrie, leading him to an urban, left-wing scene, where he remained until the end of his career. In February 1940, Guthrie departed from his earlier migrant environments when he traveled to New York for a prolonged stay. By the end of 1940, Guthrie would travel to and from the Southwest and the West Coast before resettling in New York in the fall of 1941. During this three-year transitional period, Guthrie produced most of his Dust Bowl Ballads; the Columbia River songs; the long ballads, including “Tom Joad”; and the lyric song “This Land is Your Land.”⁴⁷⁶ Reuss wrote, “This material is a creative fusion of Guthrie’s folk heritage with left-wing social consciousness.” Guthrie’s youth in the Southwest influenced his ballad structure, folk-song style, and folk idiom. Migrant and hobo wanderings provided themes, drawn from first-hand experience, that he rendered into verse and prose. Communist and radical contacts sharpened his social sense and concerns. Guthrie’s artistic abilities enabled him to weave these diverse strands into folk-styled poetry and gospel. Only after receiving the attention of urban intellectuals did Guthrie become a symbol of Dust Bowl trauma as experienced by the anonymous millions of Americans during the Depression.⁴⁷⁷

⁴⁷⁵ Reuss, “Guthrie and Folk Tradition” 295.

⁴⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 282.

⁴⁷⁷ *Ibid.*

Boom to Bust

At the “Grapes of Wrath” Evening held at the Forrest Theater, Woody Guthrie was introduced to New York City as the “Dustiest of the Dust Bowlers.”⁴⁷⁸ The New York audience witnessed an Okie singer, an alien to the crowd, telling stories from the heart of the Great Depression. This benefit concert had been arranged by Will Geer on the dark night of the play, *Tobacco Road*. In attendance — and at the core of the New York folk scene — was Alan Lomax, who found in Woody Guthrie a rare folksinger whom he wanted to get record.⁴⁷⁹ Although Guthrie still practiced his “Okie” persona, Lomax judged his ballads good. Lomax invited Guthrie to Washington D. C. to be a guest on his national radio show while he recorded Guthrie’s songs for the Library of Congress: “Soon, Guthrie was the toast of many far-left American commentators, who saw him as a manifestation of their homegrown socialist dream” (Fig. 9-1).⁴⁸⁰

After experiencing whirlwind success on the East Coast, Guthrie returned to Texas in June 1940 for a brief visit with Mary and the children. Pete Seeger and Guthrie bought a Plymouth and drove through the South before crossing into Oklahoma, where they witnessed that state’s worst Hooverville and met Bob and Ina Wood, Communist organizers. This visit impressed Guthrie, who wrote:

They gave me a good feeling . . . and made me see why I had to keep going
around . . . with my guitar making up songs and singing.
I never knew the human race was this big before
I never had been able to look out over and across the slum selection nor

⁴⁷⁸ Vandy et al., *Twenty-six Songs* 47.

⁴⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 54.

⁴⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 58.

sharecropper farm and connect it with the owner and the landlord and the guards and the police and the dicks and the bulls and the vigilante men with their black sedans and sawed off shot guns.⁴⁸¹

Guthrie was aware that Mussolini had already bombed and “strafed the Ethiopians to death, and Hitler was waving his arms and doing little jig dances toward Poland.”⁴⁸²

Upon his return to New York City he enjoyed solid bookings for performances, one of which was considered a big career milestone: an offer to sing and host Model Tobacco’s national broadcast, “Pipe Smoking Time” with a salary that “beats owning six farms in Oklahoma.”⁴⁸³ Guthrie wrote to Lomax, “It means so much not only to me but to my friends and relatives that I’ll be able to help.” His wife and three kids were “feeling pretty good for the first time in a long time . . . down there in the dust bowl.”⁴⁸⁴

Mary and the children joined Guthrie in New York in November 1940. At the same time, Guthrie bought a new Pontiac on credit. However, in parallel with Guthrie’s positive publicity in New York, rumors began to circulate, branding his politics as anti-American, a foreshadowing of post-World War red-baiting. In the meantime, “Pipe Smoking Time” proved too structured for Guthrie, giving him no room for spontaneity. Coupled with his column “Woody Sez” for the *Daily Worker*, the situation became uncomfortable. “If I thought for two minutes that anything I do or say would hurt America and its people in it,” Guthrie wrote, “I would keep my face shut and catch the first freight out of the country.”⁴⁸⁵

⁴⁸¹ Woody Guthrie in *American Folksong*, edited by Moses Asch. New York: Oak Publications, as compiled by the BPA for “BPA Guide and Analysis of the Woody Guthrie Employment” (2016) 5.

⁴⁸² Ibid.

⁴⁸³ Vandy et al., *Twenty-six Songs* 60.

⁴⁸⁴ Woody Guthrie to Alan Lomax, Letter, in Vandy et al., *Twenty-six Songs* 60.

⁴⁸⁵ Ibid.

With a good income, a family life, and a New York apartment, Guthrie found it hard to maintain his Okie authenticity. After seven radio shows, he abruptly packed up his family, headed to Washington D. C. to visit the Lomaxes, then drove back to the West.⁴⁸⁶ The family returned to Los Angeles in January 1941, arriving at Ed Robbin's Edendale residence.⁴⁸⁷ Woody spent long hours compiling material for what would become his autobiography, *Bound for Glory*, and convinced Burke to renew his radio program at KFVD. This time, Guthrie was unable to recapture the popularity of *Woody and Lefty Lou*. He then traveled once more to the San Joaquin Valley, hoping to find his people at the work camps, political rallies, and events, but they no longer existed. In fact, most of the shantytowns and Hoovervilles in Southern California had disappeared. The Okies and Arkies were finding jobs in the emerging war industries in the suburbs of Los Angeles. They were reinventing themselves. Playing for tips at old haunts on skid row was no longer attractive. Yet, Guthrie himself had changed, moving away from hillbilly themes to larger national and international political matters.

Greg Vandy wrote that Guthrie felt remorse for his impulsive decision to leave New York City just as his career was going well.⁴⁸⁸ In February 1941, Guthrie learned that his former employer in New York, the Columbia Broadcasting System (CBS), had given up on its project to broadcast folk music on the radio. To Guthrie, this was a sign that no one wanted to hear the truth about what Americans actually thought. Folk music

⁴⁸⁶ Vandy et al., *Twenty-six Songs* 60; Guthrie in *American Folksong* in "BPA Guide" 5.

⁴⁸⁷ Holter, "Woody Guthrie L.A." 47.

⁴⁸⁸ *Note*. In New York, Guthrie worked as a folk singer, script writer, and actor on several CBS radio broadcasts.

and culture was “[t]oo honest again I suppose? Maybe not purty [sic] enough. Oh well, this country’s a getting where it caint hear its own voice.”⁴⁸⁹

In April 1941, Woody scribbled the following:

4 – 4 – 41,
 Los Angeles.
 Broke, feel
 Natural again.
 But ain’t
 Natural to be
 Broke,
 Is it?⁴⁹⁰

Woody and the BPA

Twelve days after the BPA sent Guthrie the May 1st letter of potential employment as a songwriter, Guthrie showed up at the BPA for work. There, unannounced, bearded and unkempt, holding his guitar and wearing khaki shirt and pants, Guthrie was quite a contrast to the bureaucrats and engineers at the four-year-old government agency. Kahn, a power activist himself, knew little about Guthrie at the time. It was a gamble to hire for a government post someone who wrote columns for a communist newspaper. Nevertheless, Kahn asked Guthrie to play something and recalled telling him, “You have the common touch.”⁴⁹¹ In an impromptu solution, Kahn employed an emergency appointment to hire Guthrie for one month, which needed only the approval of the BPA Administrator, Dr.

⁴⁸⁹ Woody Guthrie to Alan Lomax, Letter, February 21, 1941 in Vandy et al., *Twenty-six Songs* 61.

⁴⁹⁰ Guthrie quoted in Holter, “Woody Guthrie L.A.” 47.

⁴⁹¹ Kahn quoted in Vandy et al., *Twenty-six Songs* 94.

Paul Raver. Anticipating Raver's more conservative public power viewpoint, Kahn recalled telling Guthrie to just play his songs for Raver and keep his talking to a minimum.

Woody Guthrie's official title at the BPA was "Information Consultant," under the general supervision of the Director of Information. Guthrie's duties, as described in a May 13, 1941 BPA Personnel Action form, provide some insight into the public-relations film project. His duties were to "engage in research on the federal program for the development of the Columbia River; to survey the economic and social conditions of the region, its history and folklore, to determine the feasibility of preparing a documentary film showing the relationship of the activities of the Administration to the solutions of such problems."⁴⁹² The stated duties included assistance in narrating and writing film strips and recordings, and analyzing activities and accomplishments of the Administration in order "to determine feasibility of preparing radio broadcasts dealing with the use of electric power for agricultural and domestic purposes." In addition Guthrie was to assist in preparation and performance of such programs, including writing, narration, and arrangement of musical accompaniment.⁴⁹³

According to Kahn, he explained to Guthrie the object of the Bonneville Project, which was to develop the Columbia River "from the Rockies to the sea." Kahn recalled taking Guthrie to Sullivan Gulch, the local Hooverville in Portland, and telling him the purpose of the project "was to lift the people's standard of living." It was not just a question of producing power, but of raising the potential offering livelihoods to many people of the region. Guthrie reportedly received reference material from Kahn: a history of

⁴⁹² Bonneville Project Personnel Action Form, Form BP-72, 13 May 1941 signed by Stephen B. Kahn. Title of Position: Information Consultant in BPA, "BPA Guide" 16.

⁴⁹³ Ibid.

Lewis and Clark, a history of the Columbia River, and a copy of *The Grapes of Wrath* (which he claimed not to have read, although he did say the film was the “[b]est cussed pitcher I ever seen”).⁴⁹⁴ Guthrie had written the ballad “Tom Joad,” in 1940. According to Bryant Simon, Guthrie had consolidated the essentials of the Joad characters of John Ford and John Steinbeck with his own migrant experience in the song. Guthrie’s Tom Joad became a participant in a down-home, left-wing political battle between the rich and poor. Joad advocated for working people to stick together, specifically within unions and through political action, to end their hardships.⁴⁹⁵ Guthrie understood at the time that something was wrong with a country that had an ample capacity to produce, yet left many people still hungry.

What Kahn desired were songs of geography, songs that sought to impact ordinary people and not glorify dam projects and powerlines. He believed that music was an effective way to reach the common people. Guthrie was to produce songs that covered the river programs and all its human aspects, to put the “whole picture in songs.” He was assigned a driver, Elmer Buehler, a BPA information division employee, who had a strong sense of the regional geography. One of Buehler’s job duties was to drive throughout the Northwest to present the BPA film, *Hydro*, at grange halls and other public meetings. Although there was no official or definitive itinerary of Guthrie’s tour with Buehler, its purpose was to educate Guthrie on the region’s landscape, people, and federal projects.

⁴⁹⁴ Bryant Simon et al. “The Ghost of Tom Joad” in *Woody Guthrie L.A. 1937 to 1941*, edited by Darryl Holter et al., Santa Monica: Angel City Press (2015) 157.

⁴⁹⁵ Kahn, Oral History [sound recording] conducted by Murlin et al. (1984); Bryant Simon et al., “The Ghost of Tom Joad” 157.

Driving a 1940 Black Hudson sedan from Portland, Buehler's route most likely followed the Columbia River through the Columbia River Gorge to the Hood River, going south through the small communities of Parkdale and Odell, Oregon and with a side trip to Lost Lake at the foot of Mt Hood. The duo traveled to The Dalles, past the Native American fishing platforms of Celilo Falls, and stayed the night in Arlington, Oregon. As the tour continued to Condon, Oregon, Guthrie was exposed to wheat fields and small rural communities. After the route turned east-northeast toward Boardman and Hermiston, areas sought for the Columbia Basin Project, Buehler recalled that Guthrie sat in the backseat singing "Land of Plenty." They passed a "vanguard of autos" loaded with Dust Bowl migrants seeking a better home. "They are my people," Guthrie said.⁴⁹⁶ From Hermiston, they traveled through Umatilla toward the Inland Empire city of Spokane, Washington, and then through the channeled scablands of Eastern Washington.⁴⁹⁷

From Spokane, Buehler drove west, across the scablands, observing the coulees, to the Grand Coulee Dam. Even under construction the structure was a tourist attraction. Buehler recalled that Guthrie spoke to industrialist Henry J. Kaiser, who gave him stories and printed material about the structure. Guthrie spoke to numerous people, surprisingly from every state in the Union. Impressed with the project, particularly the proposed irrigation program, Guthrie professed to be pleased because "no large consortium would be

⁴⁹⁶ Elmer Buehler. Oral History [transcript] conducted by Denise Matthews (1998). University of Oregon Knight Library, UO Media Services.

⁴⁹⁷ *Note*. The route Buehler traveled with Guthrie was compiled from an oral interview conducted by Denise Matthews (1998) and Vandy et al., *Twenty-six Songs* 103-105.

handling the land.”⁴⁹⁸ The two then made their way back to Portland via Chelan Lake and Wenatchee, Washington (Fig. 9-2).⁴⁹⁹

Twenty-six Songs in Twenty-eight Days

Woody Guthrie wrote twenty-six songs in twenty-eight days for the BPA.⁵⁰⁰ By Kahn’s own admission, some songs were better than others. Many of his Columbia River ballads described the misfortune of Dust Bowl refugees, contributing symbolic social imagery from a migrant standpoint. Guthrie’s lyrics dramatized the Dust Bowl refugee’s plight through the experience and culture of three landscapes: (1) the Dust Bowl as a dystopic landscape, (2) migratory travel as a transformative landscape, and (3) the hope and vision of a Promised Land as a utopian landscape.⁵⁰¹ The environmental disaster of the Dust Bowl destroyed the livelihoods of many rural dwellers in the heartland, driving them from their homes and forcing them into unknown lands seeking a better future. The transformative landscape resulted from this movement of the common folk, who rarely

⁴⁹⁸ Buehler, Oral History [transcript] (1998). *Note*. Guthrie supported federal government programs over business interests.

⁴⁹⁹ Vandy, *Twenty-six Songs* 103.

⁵⁰⁰ *Note*. The songs Guthrie wrote during this time were (1) A Ramblin’ Round; (2) Columbia Talkin’ Blues; (3) Columbia Waters; (4) Elecktricity and All; (5) Grand Coulee Powder Monkey; (6) Guys on the Grand Coulee Dam; (7) Grand Coulee Dam; (8) Hard Travelin’; (9) It Takes a Married Man to Sing a Worried Song; (10) Jackhammer Blues; (11) Lumber is King; (12) Mile an’ a Half from th’ end of th’ line (a.k.a. End of the Line); (13) New Found Land; (14) I’m A Gonna Hit That Oregon Line This Comin’ Fall (a.k.a. Oregon Line, a.k.a. That Oregon Trail); (15) Out Past the End of the Line; (16) Pastures of Plenty; (17) Portland Town to Klamath Falls; (18) Ramblin’ Blues (a.k.a. Portland Town); (19) Roll, Columbia, Roll; melody “Wabash Cannonball,” (20) The Ballad of Jackhammer John; (21) Roll on Columbia, Roll On; melody “Good Night Irene,” (22) Biggest Thing That Man Has Ever Done (a.k.a. The Great Historical Bum); (23) The Song of the Grand Coulee Dam (a.k.a. Way up in That Northwest); (24) Talkin’ Blues; (25) Washington Talkin’ Blues; and (26) White Ghost Train.

⁵⁰¹ *Note*. Guthrie’s lyrics follow the Populist Media Paradigm. See this Dissertation Chapter 2, “Methodology.”

traveled outside the sphere of their immediate communities, let alone taking a 1000-mile or more journey westward.

“Pastures of Plenty,” perhaps the most celebrated of Guthrie’s ballads among the Columbia River songs, was recorded in 1942 at the Reeves Sound Studio in New York as one of three songs for *The Columbia* film soundtrack. This ballad chronicled the Okie’s perspective, possibly seeded in Guthrie’s own experiences. It depicted Depression hardships faced by common Americans as a test of endurance and resolve. Putting lyrics to “Pretty Polly,” a familiar folk melody in the Appalachian region, “Pastures of Plenty” contrasted the Dust Bowl turmoil with the orderliness of the Grand Coulee’s Promised Land. Guthrie’s opening verse reflected the misery of Dust Bowl refugees:

It’s a mighty hard row that my pore hands has hoed,
And my pore [sic] feet has traveled a hot, dusty road;
Out of the Dust Bowl and westward we rolled,
And your deserts are hot, and your mountains they’re cold.⁵⁰²

Guthrie saw thousands of “his people” lining the highways, hungry and broke:

I worked in your orchards of peaches and prunes,
And I slept on the ground ‘neath the light of the moon;
I picked your cotton, out of the grapes from your vine,
And I set on your table your light sparkling wine.
We travel with the wind and rain in our face,
Our families migrating from place unto place;

⁵⁰² “Pastures of Plenty,” Words by Woody Guthrie. WGP/TRO-© Copyright 1960 (Renewed), 1963 (Renewed) Woody Guthrie Publications, Inc. & Ludlow Music, Inc., New York, NY administered by Ludlow Music, Inc. International Copyright Secured. Made in U.S.A. All Rights Reserved Including Public Performance for Profit. Used by Permission.

We'll work in your best fields till sundown tonight,
Travel 300 miles 'fore the morning gets light.⁵⁰³

Yet, the Dust Bowl migrants traveled on:

Arizona, California, we'll make all your crops,
It's northward to Oregon to gather the hops;
Strawberries, cherries, and apples the best,
In what sunshiny land call'd the Pacific Northwest.⁵⁰⁴

Guthrie bears witness to the Northwest Columbia Basin Project and a vision of a Promised Land:

I picked up a rich clod of dirt in my hand,
I crumble it back into strong fertile land;
The greatest desire in this world that I know
Is to work on my land where there's green things to grow.

I think of the Dust and the days that are gone,
And the day that's to come on a farm of our own;
One turn of the wheel and the waters will flow
'Cross the green growing field, down the hot thirsty row.
Look down the canyon and there you will see
the Grand Coulee showers her blessings on me.⁵⁰⁵

There was no better federal endorsement for Columbia River development than the lyrics of "Pastures of Plenty." Guthrie got down to the heart of the matter, as Kahn remarked, to translate what people could understand. He had his people's ear.

⁵⁰³ Ibid.

⁵⁰⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁰⁵ Ibid.

Another song, “Roll on Columbia, Roll,” seemed to express the essence of Roosevelt’s vision of river development for “his people.” Sung to the melody of “Wabash Cannonball,” the song supported the mythical Anglo-American experience that embodied the promise of America, the concept of manifest destiny to transform nature into a functional, modern landscape for the public good. Each verse is connected by a chorus that evoked the “progressive” power of the river:

Roll, Columbia, won’t you roll, roll, roll
 Roll, Columbia, won’t you roll, roll, roll.⁵⁰⁶

Guthrie’s lyrics described an untouched frontier:

There’s a great and peaceful river in a land that’s fair to see
 Where the Douglas-fir tree whispers to the snow-capped mountain breeze
 Cliffs of solid granite and valley’s always green
 This is as close to heaven as my traveling feet have been.⁵⁰⁷

Guthrie referenced abundant natural resources in the “commons” of the Northwest, including federally-funded infrastructure: “Where you’ll see the steel and concrete of the big Grand Coulee rise.” Guthrie opined,

Boats and rafts were beat to splinters but it left men dreams to dream
 Of that day when they would conquer the wild and wasted stream.⁵⁰⁸

The lyrics expressed governmental challenges to address navigation and uphold society’s

⁵⁰⁶ “Roll, Columbia, Roll.” Words and Music by Woody Guthrie. WGP/TRO-@ Copyright 1958, 1963, 1984 (Renewed) Woody Guthrie Publications, Inc. & Ludlow Music, Inc., New York, NY administered by Ludlow Music, Inc. International Copyright Secured. Made in U.S.A. All Rights Reserved Including Public Performance for Profit. Used by Permission.

⁵⁰⁷ Ibid.

⁵⁰⁸ Ibid.

utopian dreams, boosting the idea that a working Columbia River can exemplify America's potential greatness:

Uncle Sam took the challenge in the year of '33
 For the farmers and the workers and for all humanity
 Now river, you can ramble where the sun sets in the sea
 But while you're rambling, river, you can do some work for me.⁵⁰⁹

Now there's full a million horses charged with Coulee's 'lectric power
 Day and night they'll run the factory and there never will get tired
 Well, a coal mine gets dug out and an oil well it runs dry
 But Uncle Sam will find his power where the river meets the sky.⁵¹⁰

Guthrie's songs and ballads celebrated the Columbia River, hydroelectric dams, and government projects, the three conjoined to benefit the common man. As an advocate of Roosevelt's ideas, Guthrie supported public works and accepted its populist premise. He believed in the utopian dream that electricity would redeem the working man, and create a thriving landscape where a more fair and just society could flourish. A Promised Land would bring modern conveniences to every home and farm – electrification, irrigation, and land reclamation – for all to live well in a land of plenty

In symbolic acknowledgement of the folk culture of the public-works worker, the drillers, the powder monkeys, and the jackhammer Johns, Guthrie affirmed their worth and power to the nation through "Jackhammer John:"

I hammered on the Boulder, hammered on the butte,
 Columbia River on a five chute . . .

⁵⁰⁹ Ibid.

⁵¹⁰ Ibid.

Workin' on the Bonneville, hammered all night
 A-tryin' to bring people some electric light,⁵¹¹

In “Columbia Talking Blues,” a melody-free rhythmic speech, Guthrie lauded the values of the Bonneville and Grand Coulee dams to rebut northeastern “fellers” who believed that the old Columbia would never amount too much:

You just watch this river, and pretty soon
 Everybody's a gong [sic] to change their tune;
 The big Grand Coulee, and Bonneville Dam,
 Run a thousand factories for Uncle Sam
 Everything from fertilizer to bombing planes.

Uncle Sam needs houses, and stuff to eat,
 Uncle Sam needs wool, Uncle Sam needs wheat;
 Uncle Sam needs water and power dams,
 Uncle Sam needs people, and the people need land.
 Don't like Dictators. But the whole country'd ought to
 be run by Electricity.⁵¹²

In the mid-to-latter half of the 1930s, led by Representative Francis Culkin of New York, the Republican House of Representatives consistently opposed the Grand Coulee and western irrigation projects. Taking his argument beyond the House floor, Culkin argued that (a) federal resources were wasted on unproductive table lands, (b)

⁵¹¹ “Jackhammer John.” Words and New Music Adaption by Woody Guthrie. WGP/TRO-© Copyright 1960 (Renewed), 1963 (Renewed) Woody Guthrie Publications, Inc. & Ludlow Music, Inc., New York, NY administered by Ludlow Music, Inc. International Copyright Secured. Made in U.S.A. All Rights Reserved Including Public Performance for Profit. Used by Permission.

⁵¹² “Columbia Talking Blues (Talking Columbia). Words and New Music Adaption by Woody Guthrie. WGP/TRO-© Copyright 1961 and 1963 (Renewed), Woody Guthrie Publications, Inc. & Ludlow Music, Inc., New York, NY administered by Ludlow Music, Inc. International Copyright Secured. Made in U.S.A. All Rights Reserved Including Public Performance for Profit. Used by Permission.

Northwest irrigation projects would destroy California fruit farmers, and (c) river development would obliterate the salmon industry. In addition, Culkin alleged that the Northwest region was already over-electrified, and denounced the entire river project as an un-American exercise in socialism, stating that Grand Coulee reflected the efforts of “mad reclamationists,” who were bent on shifting the center of production in America.⁵¹³ A series of articles appeared in the 1930s, which countered the optimism of advocates of the Columbia River development, some suspected to be private power opponents of the New Deal.⁵¹⁴ Congressman Charles Leavy from eastern Washington countered Culkin and other Grand Coulee dissenters, noting the last great frontier for homesteading was the arid West. During the 19th century, the Midwest was called the “bread basket of the United States,” and the arid West was characterized as the “great American desert.”⁵¹⁵ Proponents of Columbia River development claimed a juxtaposition of the Dust Bowl in parts of the Plains states, with the reclamation projects in the arid west, was leading the partial role reversal of the two regions. Congressman Knute Hill of Washington viewed the “American desert becoming in a small measure the bread basket,” to provide food and shelter for those driven from their homes and came west to seek new ones.⁵¹⁶

Near the end of Guthrie’s one-month assignment at the BPA, there was doubt that the new Columbia River film would ever be made. After the Bureau of Reclamation offered

⁵¹³ Stephen Ives. *Grand Coulee Dam*. Film. PBS American Experience (2012); Wesley A. Dick. “When Dams Weren’t Dammed: The Public Power Crusade and Visions of the Good Life in the Pacific Northwest in the 1930s” in *Environmental Review* 13(1989) 126

⁵¹⁴ Dick, *When Dams Weren’t Dammed* 125.

⁵¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 126-127.

⁵¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 127.

some help to fund the film, Kahn began filming the movie, making some headway on the project, but available funding was still insufficient. After Pearl Harbor was attacked in December 1941, and the United States entry into World War II, the BPA's Information Division refocused its priorities on promoting hydropower for defense industries, completing its only wartime documentary, *Power Builds Ships* in 1942. Billed as "The Story of Columbia River Hydro's Part in the 'Modern Miracle of Ships,'" the film promoted the speed Oregon shipyards could build a Liberty ship, in only ten days, due to Bonneville-powered factories (Fig. 9-3).⁵¹⁷

With new BPA defense priorities, Kahn was forced to shelve the Guthrie songs and Columbia River film project for possible revival after the war. However, with the Allies' victory, a different and more optimistic nation had emerged from World War II. The Pacific Northwest war industries — made possible by Columbia River hydropower — bolstered a new peacetime industrial economy in the Northwest coastal urban areas. The populist message of the Dust Bowl migrants no longer took priority in the region. Kahn found little opportunity to revive his pre-war script of Franklin Roosevelt's 1932 Promised Land, imagined by Woody Guthrie's songs and ballads.

⁵¹⁷ In BPA Film Collection, Volume One 1939-1954, pamphlet, (2013) 3.



Figure 9-1. [Woody Guthrie, half-length portrait, facing slightly left, holding guitar]/World Telegram photo by Al Aumuller.

Date: 1943.

Photographer: Al Aumuller.

Library of Congress. Digital ID cph 3c13276//hdl.loc.pnp/cph3c13276

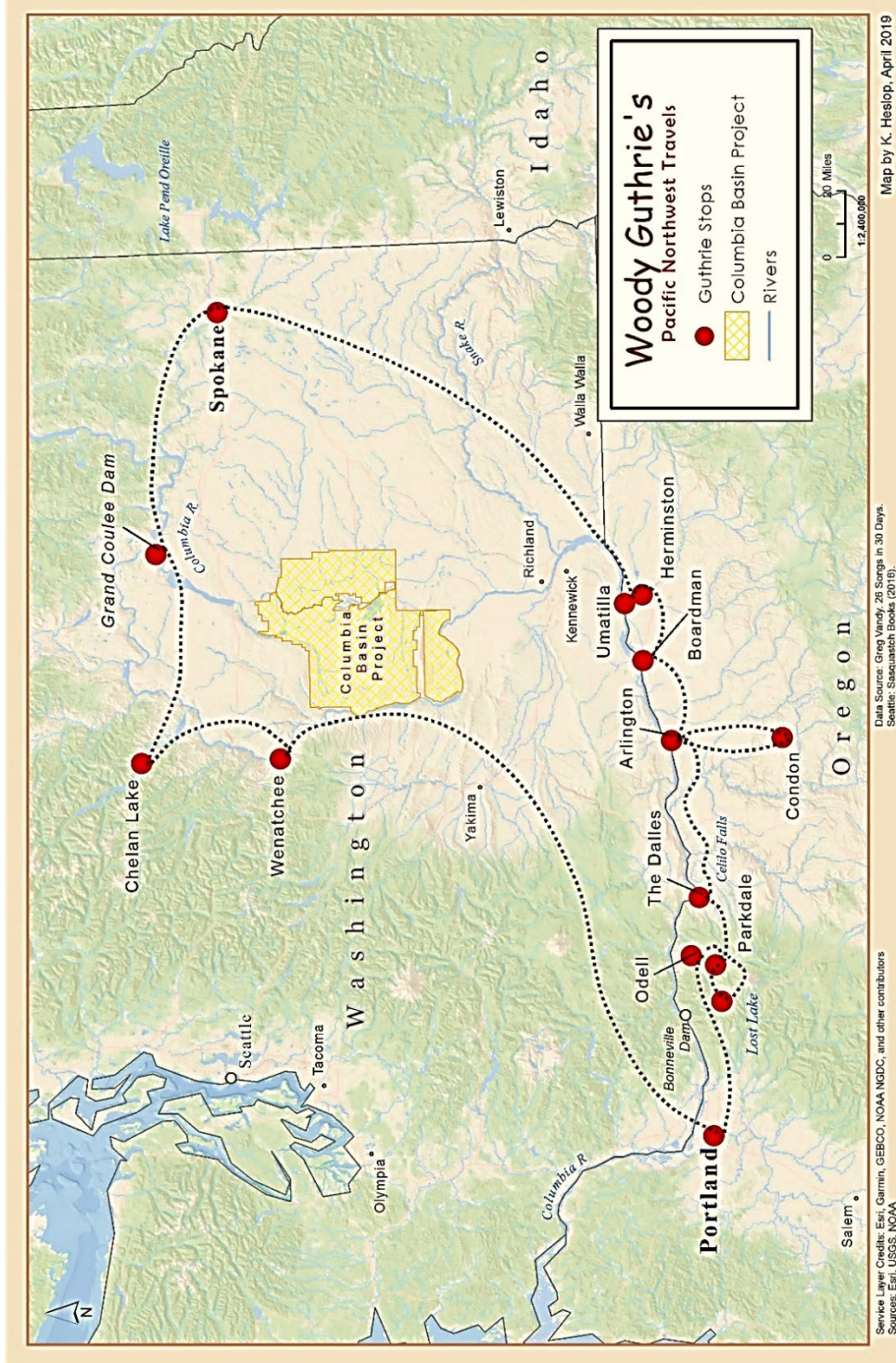


Figure 9-2. Woody Guthrie's Pacific Northwest Travels with Elmer Buehler.



Figure 9-3. “Power Builds Ships .. The story of the Columbia River Hydro’s Part in the modern ‘Miracle of Ships.’ ”

Date: 1942. Artist: Lloyd Hoff.

Bonneville Power Administration Archives.

Conclusions: Selling Technocracy — There is no going back

[T]he function of Bonneville is to bring to you a great supply of current so that you can be assured of getting it and when it runs out, by that time Coulee will be done and the two interconnected can bring you more power, and when they are done there is the Snake River in Idaho, and the more dams on the Columbia and the more dams that go up on the Snake the more help it will give you people.⁵¹⁸

J. D. Ross

The generation and distribution of electricity has a transformative power reaching well beyond its scientific origins. Electric power can literally redraw maps to redistribute populations into new energy-centric or technocratic landscapes. Electricity could — in the views of its federal promoters — break down perceived divisions between city and rural residents, and liberate the rural resident to enjoy a newfound modern independence. It would make available a greater quantity, quality, and variety of commodities to all. But energy's key to social reform was in cheap, inexpensive power available to the region's smaller municipalities and communities, to be equally serviced by hydropower at lower rates, allowing decentralization to check the tide of migration and economic disparity. Investment in Columbia River Basin and its tremendous return of generated power that operated under a public power system, would provide that basis for inexpensive power to fulfill the vision of a modern future in a Promised Land. However, the early 20th century Northwest lacked the economic demand and population to justify expensive public works projects to develop the Columbia River. So the creation of a desire — helping the population understand just how electricity would empower people and the region — became necessary.

⁵¹⁸ J. D. Ross quoted in Richard White. *The Organic Machine*. New York: Hill and Wang (1995) 69.

Franklin Roosevelt envisioned a “majestic enterprise” in the Pacific Northwest, where the Columbia River held the potential for being the greatest system for hydro-power to be found anywhere in America. The promise of Northwest hydropower would conjoin nature to restructure an economically depressed society, aiding the “forgotten” men and women in need of assistance. Grand Coulee – “The Biggest Thing on Earth” – was touted as being larger than the Great Pyramid of Giza. Dams and locks on the Columbia River would improve navigation to allow ocean-going vessels to travel as far as the Snake River, and bring water to fertile fields, putting four million acres of land into agricultural production. The idea was so grand, the only thing arguably greater was the electric-power-based modern society, seeded and waiting to be unleashed.

Early progressive regionalist movements of the 20th century sought reform through more resource-wise planning schemes. These schemes were to achieve a balanced rate of national growth, reversing concentrated wealth and power and discouraging urban growth at the expense of the hinterlands. Post-World War I electrical innovations and a utilitarian view of nature promoted the collectivism of power generation and distribution. Superpower schemes — developed by capitalists investing in holding companies — created large scale power generation to integrate existing energy sources through transmission networks to feed a common power pool that other utilities could distribute. The Ontario Hydro-Electric Power model was much studied by social reformers and set the standard for early hydroelectric regional systems as a means to improve socio-economic conditions through public ownership. Morris Cooke and Gifford Pinchot advanced the idea to convert and reorganize primary energy resources into a power pool to be distributed for the betterment of society, in particular to rural residents. Pinchot was

convinced that the government should regulate utilities to control electric power. While Senator George Norris advocated development of natural resources for the “public good,” capitalists, in a booming economy, branded these ideas as socialist.

The Great Depression made the Columbia River an attractive resource for public hydropower development by the New Deal government. Hard times made most local citizens enthusiastic about partnering with the federal government to establish a modern society. The nature of modernizing the landscape — selling technocracy — called for evocative images of huge concrete and steel structures that promised home comforts, modern farms, and power for industry. Visual knowledge was skillfully built to introduce modernity through abstract geometric shapes. Sleek linear and curved forms depicted a utopian great structure rising out of the river bed. Huge machines moved earth and rock to create a messy landscape of change – evidence of a democracy that was on the march for the betterment of its citizens. But technology acutely affected common laborers, both the number of laborers and the skills required for available modern jobs. A robust labor force of healthy males – youthful, venturesome, and resourceful – posed against the intricacies of a technical world, to provide a yardstick of scale and magnitude for what these great public works would represent to the American worker and public. Labor stamped an iconography on New Deal public works by embodying an intimate relationship with nature that produced a new beginning in a symbolic communal and physical frontier. The dam laborer engaged in preparing the landscape for the Dust Bowl migrant and the unemployed forgotten man. The culture of the no-name jackhammer johns and dynamite powder monkeys celebrated in song by Woody Guthrie clearly depicted the accounts of workers known not by name, but only figuratively by their trade.

Government agencies had to promote the products of Columbia River development – navigation, reclamation, and the generation of power – as agents of humanitarian change for the better. Populist-style media used graphics and the era’s realism genres to contrast dystopic socioeconomic problems to a utopian-like Promised Land. Electricity was visualized in pamphlets and other media by its end products, represented by modern cultural artifacts such as lights, appliances, and radios to suggest inclusion in an innovative social process. J. D. Ross sought to apply these progressive concepts in a Columbia Valley Authority concept, where a regional enterprise of public works would empower and support a traditional American culture. Public power would be the core of an energy-centric region. In BPA literature Bonneville and Grand Coulee spillways illustrated electricity’s connections with community and region via power lines and transmission towers. However, Dr. Paul Raver realized that a strategy of power load-building was needed to sell and dispose of a pre-World-War-II surplus of Columbia electricity. Through rate-schedule information to augment schemes of power sales, power load building, and regional planning around energy sources, Raver encouraged residents to envision a Northwest power landscape based on an infinite availability of hydroelectricity. His was an essentially technocratic, management-oriented solution to some of the organizational principles of public utilities and the provision of services.

When the United States entered World War II, government propagandists utilized the war to mute critics of the Bonneville and Grand Coulee dams, whose hydro-generated energy was now needed to upbuild the military arsenal of a righteous and expansion-bent democracy. The short BPA documentary film, *Power Builds Ships (1942)*, illustrated the copious supplies of Northwest electricity that allowed Portland shipyard contractors to

operate at peak capacity to assemble Liberty cargo ships in just ten days. As World War II progressed, the region conspicuously shifted from a pre-war regional economy of timber products and fisheries to an industrial, metropolitan-based economy. Furthermore, the nuclear energy site for the production of plutonium at Hanford, Washington, opened the Columbia to yet another perceived new landscape of power, although the plants at Hanford and Richland, Washington, in reality created a toxic terrain as a vestige of human technology (Fig. 10-1 to Fig. 10-5).

Yet this carefully crafted desire for power and modernity, instigated as a remedy for the ills of the Great Depression in the Pacific Northwest, came at a cost. The impact of reshaping the Columbia River into a utilitarian, energy-centric landscape quickly became evident to the region's stakeholders. Hegemony over a river system altered the Pacific Northwest by generating energy for industry, but government reclamation programs to resettle Dust Bowl migrants fell short of their Promised Land, goals instead offering small farmers only a backwards-looking rural plan.

The irrigated lands of Columbia Basin Project (CBP) of the late-1930s were estimated to be 1.1 million acres, (in 2019 the CBP irrigates 671,000 acres⁵¹⁹). The much touted planned farm settlements were to be 60- to 120- acre units, determined by the quality of soil, topography of lands, and the tract's relationship to the proposed irrigation system.⁵²⁰ But due to World War II defense priorities, it was not until 1948 that government-owned farm units on the CBP were even offered to qualified applicants, and then

⁵¹⁹ Bureau of Reclamation statistics. Obtained from <https://www.usbr.gov/pn/grandcoulee/cbp/index.html> (Obtained 30 April 2019).

⁵²⁰ Wm. Joe Simonds. "The Columbia Basin Project," Bureau of Reclamation History Project, Denver, Colorado (1998) 65-69.

proving the 1930s farm unit too small and insufficient when irrigation water — in 1948-1952 — began to reach project lands. Though farmers throughout the project had interest in development of region-wide irrigation systems, the Northwest climate changed in the 1940s to a wet-weather-cycle. With sufficient rainfall, and the irrigation user's required restriction to 60- to 120- acre units, many land owners withdrew from the CBP, making some planned irrigation canals redundant. In addition, promised funds to aid settlers in the development of their government farm units were never dispersed to recipients, because anticipated settlement levels never reached their goals. Though several hundred inquiries were received in 1948, only 15 government units were available to experienced, pre-screened farmers, and awarded through a Bureau of Reclamation drawing system.⁵²¹

Despite the New Deal planners hope for population redistribution, most of the project's farmers were Pacific Northwest residents.⁵²² As the Columbia Basin Project developed, and conditions changed, the larger goals of the 1930s proved antiquated and unrealistic.⁵²³ Any local control over Grand Coulee power generation for the promised agricultural-industrial empire was surrendered when Executive Order 8526 authorized the BPA to market Grand Coulee power. Chelan County PUD official Kirby Billington expressed some years later, “We [were] fighting the plundering of our region ... Grand Coulee Dam, who we fathered ... its power [was] building industry elsewhere and draining our manpower to run those industries.”⁵²⁴ Rather than a progressive agrarian future with electric power, irrigation water, communications and good roads for moving grain

⁵²¹ Ibid.

⁵²² Paul C. Pitzer. *Grand Coulee: Harnessing a Dream*. Pullman, WA: Washington State University Press (1994) 287.

⁵²³ Ibid., 289.

⁵²⁴ In Pitzer, *Grand Coulee* 238.

and other agricultural products, the post-World War II Columbia River Basin Project brought large-scale farming and agribusiness, which demanded more water upstream, making less water available downstream. Overproduction and a crop surplus during the post-war era belied Woody Guthrie's ode to Dust Bowl migrants finding their "pasture of plenty" in the Pacific Northwest.

Resources designated "for the public good" held different meanings to different groups at different times. Harnessing the resources of the Columbia River for the common good embodied a New Deal promise for an Anglo-American experience as exemplified by the contributions of electrical innovation to future growth. For the region's Native Americans, Columbia River development devastated cultures once — and even recently — nurtured by the river. The river was a work and trade route for Native American civilizations, and its salmon fisheries influenced the region's social and cultural human connections. Columbia River salmon populations faced a catastrophic decline. Although the smaller Bonneville Dam provided fish ladders for access to the lower reaches of the Columbia and Snake rivers, salmon habitat above the Grand Coulee effectively ceased to exist. Fish hatcheries that attempted to techno-manage the salmon population were not successful, and only functioned to maintain small remnants of the fishery as a cultural resource for the region. Inundation by dam development dispossessed Native cultures of almost everything belonging to their way of life, leaving behind empty promises and a symbolically dead river. Northwest hydropower and development of its surrounding resources may have given Anglo-Americans in the Northwest the potential for a middle-class lifestyle, but it operated to the detriment of the Native American population (Fig. 10-6 to Fig. 10-8).

To live within the current Columbia River landscape and understand its modern composition is to recognize both historical and current interactions between humans and nature and how these processes intertwine. Visions and dreams of the Columbia Basin arose from the federal media's aggrandized accounts of mid-20th century human technology and the Columbia River system. Bonneville Power Administration (and other government agencies) created a crafted iconography — progress through the adaption of new technologies, presented in contexts where electricity affects everyday life. The argument and images presented an average family, posed in their home, enjoying the benefits of electric lighting; mother's chores made easier with an electric stove, refrigerator, iron, and a vacuum cleaner; or the posed industrial worker, back on the job and productive, relating hydroelectric power to higher standards of living. BPA media reinterpreted modern electric technologies to become the familiar and desirable social ends, made possible by the guidance of the Roosevelt government to provide inexpensive electricity as the means to these desirable social ends. Technologies represented promises of increased productivity, but Columbia River hydroelectric power was epitomized as notions of desired consumption: electricity generated by infinite and powerful waters, connected consumers by an electrical grid, to instantly make power available at the flick of a switch. Pre-World War II crafted Bonneville media significantly put forward that public electric generation differed from the past, assuring people public power would be available, rates would be more favorable than private entities, and communities could organize public utilities as a democratic blueprint to allow power benefits to be secured by all.

Yet, New Dealers had imagined dams as social benefits, not merely for the energy they generated, but in terms of the social justice of ordinary men and women. How

humans use the Columbia River's natural resources, whether past, present, or future, is about supporting human ways of life, including work, values, parity, and the dreams of all generations. The wants and desires expressed in Woody Guthrie's lyrics, closing out the era of boosterism of the "valley authority," represented human passions and interests for something better — to see the present as a framework as hope for a better future.

For all the pre-war Promised-Land discourse, wartime generated hydropower for the World War II defense industry left its mark on the post-war Pacific Northwest, responsible for the coastal metropolitan regions of Portland and Oregon. Power production and productivity became compulsory for the post-war modern-day routine. The post-war government continued to count on the people's trust in the big ideas of New Deal public works, in that only a federal administration could bring perceived middle-class benefits to good, hard-working people of the Pacific Northwest through Columbia River development. After the disastrous Columbia River floods of 1948, there was a revival of the Army Corp of Engineers 1920s "308 Report," through the Columbia Basin Interagency Committee (CBIC formed in 1946), for an overall post-war program. This program included: seven more dams on the main stem of the Columbia River, irrigation, navigation aids, and facilities to produce addition power for the Pacific Northwest. But the unexpected election of Harry Truman in November 1948, brought back a new effort for a Columbia Valley Authority, to position himself against private power lobbyists, and

reinforcing “determination to build dams and other structure needed to control the nation’s river basins.”⁵²⁵

Stephen Kahn recalled that in 1948, the writing was on the wall. Post-war opinions in Pacific Northwest did not favor a CVA, that did not see benefits from a Tennessee Valley Authority-like governance. The Bonneville Power Administration, created as a temporary measure in 1937, became a permanent federal agency, charged with marketing the power generated at federal dams on the Columbia River vital to the Pacific Northwest’s energy-centric economy. While New Deal notions of an engineered society focused on the “forgotten man” never was realized in the Pacific Northwest, the populist appeal exhibited in the early Bonneville Power Administration and other government agency media, recorded a social democratic appeal for a better place, sharing in the bounty of the Columbia River Basin region.

⁵²⁵ Pitzer, *Grand Coulee* 244.

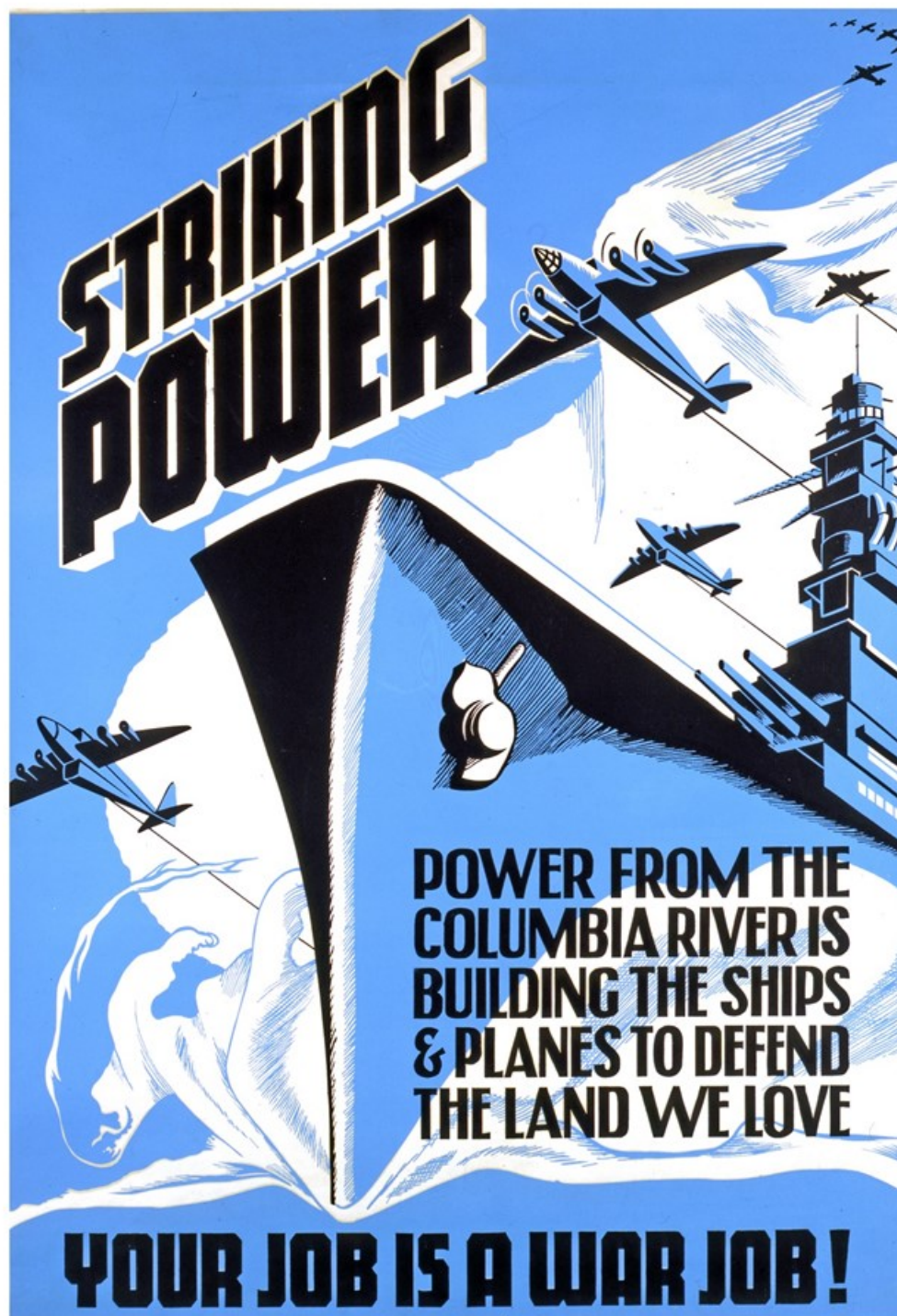


Figure 10-1. "Striking Power: Your job is a war job."

Date: 1941-1944.

Artist: Lloyd Hoff.

Bonneville Power Administration Archives.

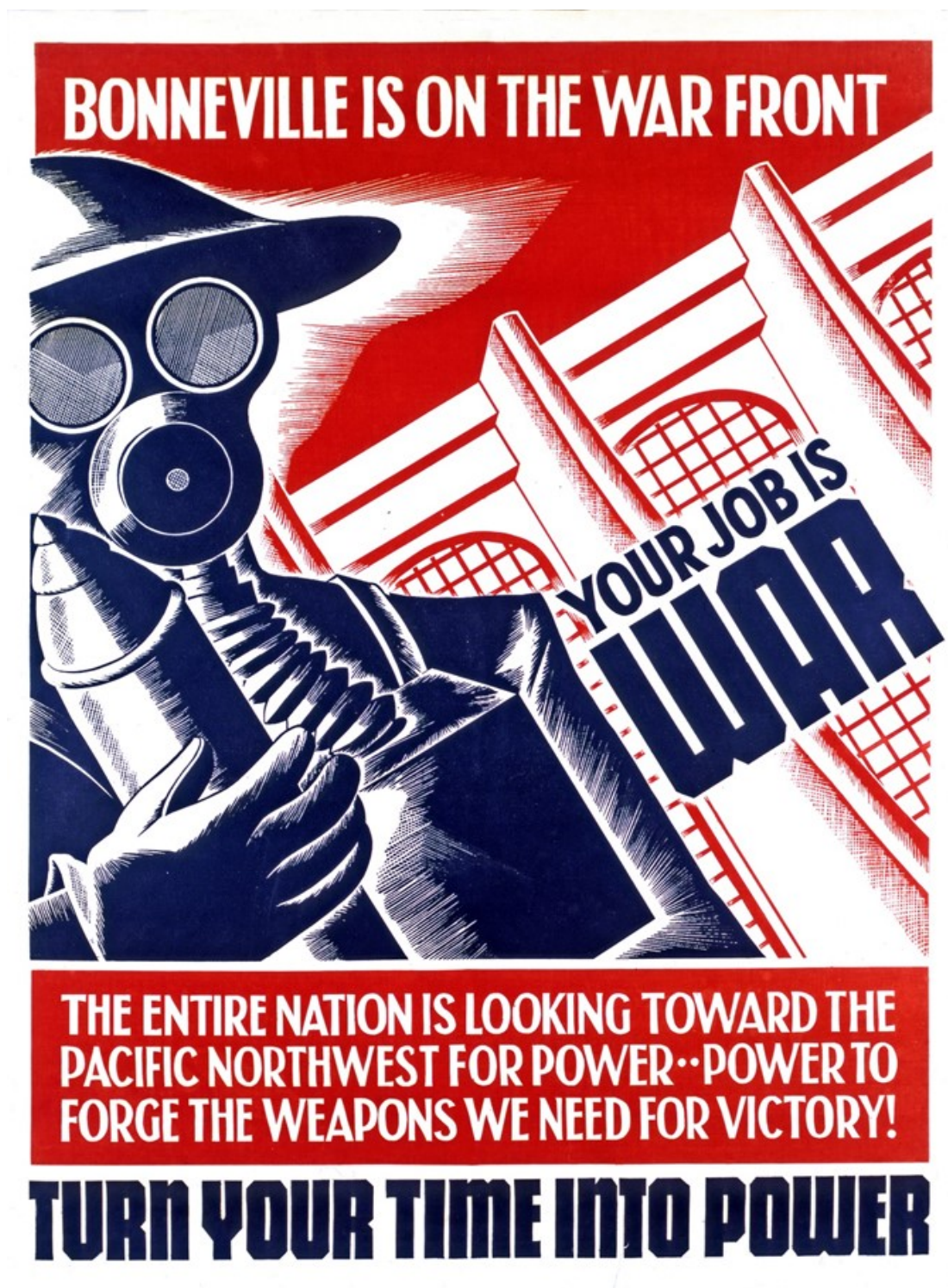


Figure 10-2. "Bonneville is on the war front."

Date: 1941-1944.

Artist: Lloyd Hoff.

Bonneville Power Administration Archives.

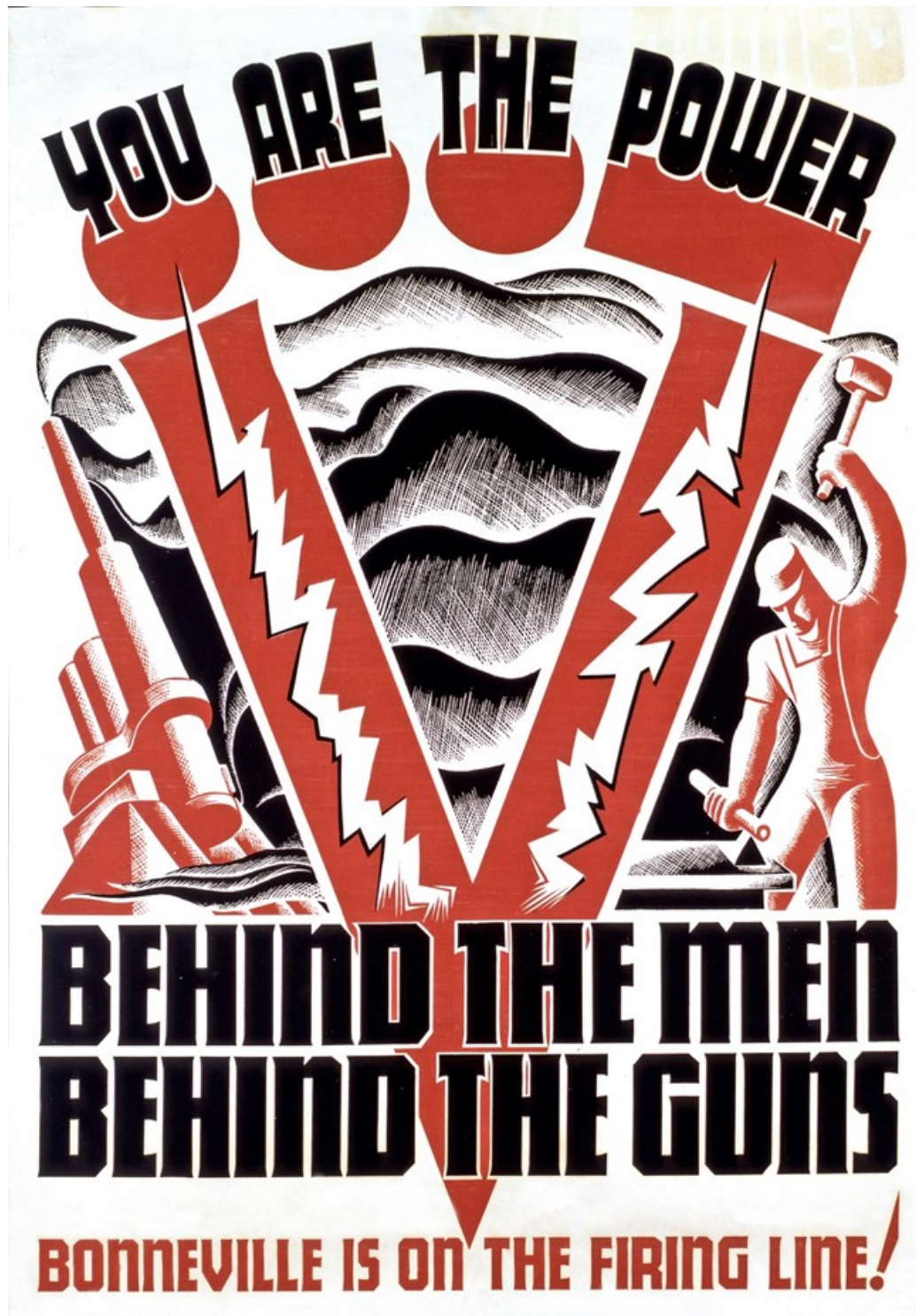


Figure 10-3. "You are the power. Bonneville is on the firing line!"

Date: 1941-1944.

Artist: Lloyd Hoff.

Bonneville Power Administration Archives.



Figure 10-4. "Bonneville Fights Time."
Date: 1941-1944.
Artist: Lloyd Hoff.
Bonneville Power Administration Archives.

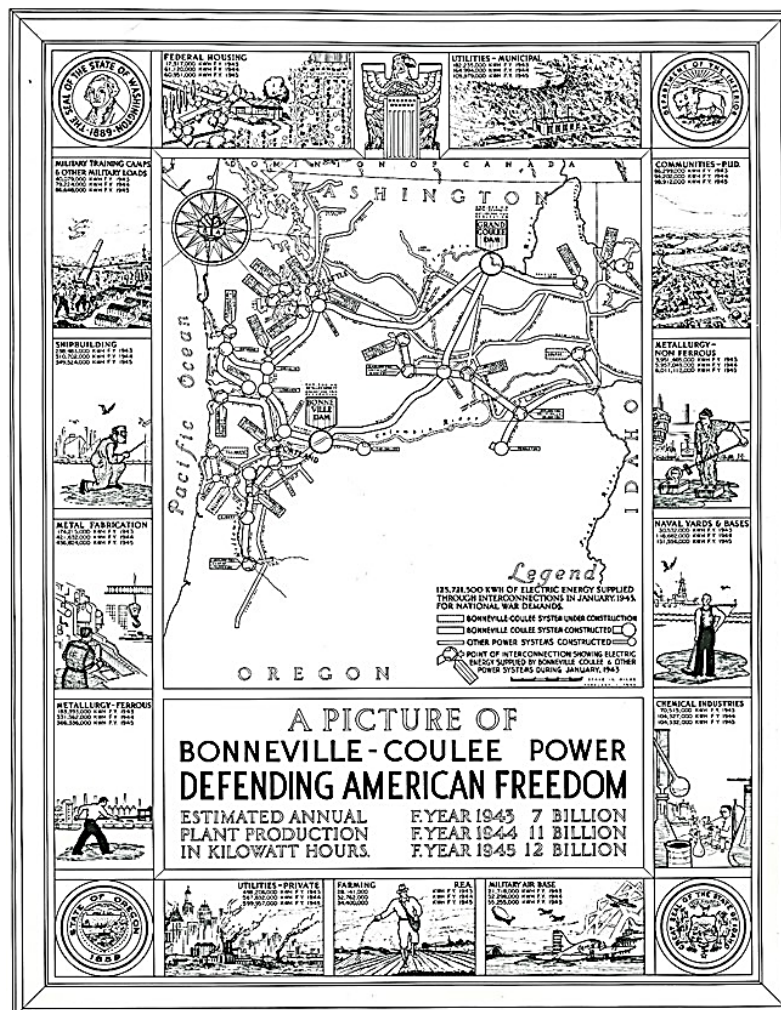


Figure 10-5. “A Picture of Bonneville-Coulee Power Defending American Freedom.”

Date: 1943.

Artist: Unknown.

Bonneville Power Administration Archives.

Figure 10-5. On the Pacific Northwest Homefront, defense and utilization of collectivized power helped to employ thousands of laborers providing more fruitful lives. Hydro-power was critical in wartime defense industries such as manufacturing aircraft, ordnance, and munitions, as well as ship building. Strategic and critical mineral reserves found in the Pacific Northwest were a matter of national interest. Merging Bonneville and Grand Coulee generation systems allowed for the more advanced Bonneville transmission network to interconnect with other utility systems, offering more efficient power distribution regionally, and hastening access to resources for military use and the war effort.



Figure 10-6. “Ankuty Tillikum Musem!” (May they rest in peace!).

Date: 4 April 1938.

National Archives, Seattle, Washington. NARA E1447 Ap4.

Figure 10-6. Ankuty Tillikum Musem! (May they rest in peace!) is the inscription on the granite memorial erected at Greenwood, Washington, to mark the reburial of twenty-two Native Americans whose graves were disturbed on Bradford Island during the construction of Bonneville Dam. Members of the Tumwater tribe, Chief Chenowith’s and Chief Poee Poee’s remains were found in the soft silt and riparian grasses of Bradford Island shoreline. This Columbia River tribe did not bury their dead in the earth, but laid remains on burial platforms along the river’s edge. The other twenty remains were not known or identified. A simple reburial ceremony was conducted in June 1936. (Lampman “The Granite Memorial” 7 May 1936)



Figure 10-7. “Nez Perce Indians in (Grand Coulee) Control Room.”

Date: 21 March 1941.

National Archives, Seattle, Washington. E113118.

Figure 10-7. “Nez Perce Indians in (Grand Coulee) Control Room (21 March 1941).” Interpreter Art Nanam Kim (left), Chief Jim James and Ernestine Nanam Kim (right) from Colville Indian Reservation pose beside modern electric technology. Native Americans were often used to visualize modernity. By providing a living connection to the past, they became symbols of the Federal government’s conquest of the Northwestern frontier. The event was staged to publicize the initial power generation at Grand Coulee Dam.



Figure 10-8. “Indians fishing for salmon at Celilo Falls, Columbia River.”

Date: August 1940.

National Archives, Seattle, Washington. E113038.

Figure 10-8. An image of Celilo Falls, where the full fury of the Columbia River has torn through the basalt landscape. Since time immemorial, the ‘Tye sammon’ have been the core of Northwest Native Americans’ culture and power. The Yakima and Warm Springs, Nez Percé, Klamath and Chinook tribes employ ancient traditions to harvest the salmon in their migratory passage to their spawning beds upstream. Native fishermen holding long-handled dipnets, stand on long perilous rocks, perched above the white water securing their catch. The salmon migration has provided a livelihood for thousands, but Bonneville and Grand Coulee began the severe decimation of the salmon population (Lampman “\$10,000,000 Fish Story” 14 September 1941).

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