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Building Louisiana: The Legacy of the Public Works Administration

Robert D. Leighninger Jr.

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Robert D. Leighninger, Jr., believes there may be a model for municipal building projects everywhere in the ambitious and artful structures erected in Louisiana by the Public Works Administration. In the 1930s, the PWA built a tremendous amount of infrastructure in a very short time. Most of the edifices are still in use, yet few people recognize how these schools, courthouses, and other great structures came about.

Building Louisiana documents the projects one New Deal agency erected in one southern state and places these in social and political context. Based on extensive research in the National Archives and substantial field work within the state, Leighninger has gathered the story of the establishment of the PWA and the feverish building activity that ensued. He also recounts early tussles with Huey Long and the scandals involving public works discovered during the late New Deal. The book includes looks at individual projects of particular interest--"Big Charity" hospital, the Carville leprosy center, the Shreveport incinerator, and the LSU sugar plant. A concluding chapter draws lessons from the PWA's history that might be applied to current political concerns. Also included is an annotated inventory of every PWA project in the state. Finally, this composite picture honors those workers and policymakers who, in a time of despair, expressed hope for the future with this enduring investment.

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