Unfortunately, these significant conclusions, like the conclusions to Pivar's study, are often obscured. The title *Primers for Prudery* is catchy, but perpetuates a stereotype that Walters hopes to modify; the organization is confusing; the structure and format are frustrating.

Still, in spite of the stylistic and structural problems, both books serve a useful purpose. Like James H. Timberlake's and John C. Burnham's reevaluations of prohibition, they help to undermine simplistic assumptions about an important aspect of American culture that is often avoided or ridiculed. Indirectly these studies also pose some fascinating questions for further investigation, research which could transform popular caricatures into humane dramas revealing how public events and attitudes shape one of the most private corners of our identities.

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One need not object to the author's leaning upon a colleague's familiarity with recent studies, nor to his frequent use of impressionistic approaches. Both have their uses. But the discontinuous brief chapters of this book accomplish little more than do "pop sociology" accounts of similar topics. When it deals with the historiography of sex, it reviews material which specialists know. When it deals with contemporary behavior, it focuses, we assume, only on circles of acquaintances—perhaps Ruitenbeek's "saving remnant"—and thus fails to do more than ruminate a little about stuff we already know.

Scattered and unsatisfying essays, in other words: they remind one of McLuhan at his least good.

SGL


As Walter Rideout observes in *American Literature* (May 1974), "anyone interested in the American 1930's" should read Pells's book. I can offer no improvement on Rideout's succinct summary: "Essentially Mr. Pells argues that the creative radical ferment that marked the first half of the decade contained conservative impulses which emerged more pronouncedly in the second half under the Popular Front's pressure toward conformity."

While I agree that *Radical Visions and American Dreams* is not "a definitive study," I feel obligated to stress with awe the scope and depth of its coverage of the often ponderous polemics of the prolific proponents of change during the depression from once best-selling world-savers like Stuart Chase to obscure oracles like Rebecca Pitts. While the value of their achievement remains debatable, one need not leaf again through the crumbling volumes of *New Masses, New Republic, Nation* and the more ephemeral productions of a troubled time. Pells has performed this formidable task with an uncommon energy complemented by an affable style rare in a researcher.

Since no one could hope to master all the tracts and fictions Pells consulted, he makes some errors. To those Rideout points out I would add only that Steinbeck's vision in *The Grapes of Wrath* is lost in the film version and that Pells generally fails in his treatment of motion pictures, while correctly calling attention to the conservatism of Hollywood's output during the 1930's, to identify the oppressive role of the Hays office that administered the production code. It was not, for example, the producers of *Blockade*—a film that was supposed to be about the Spanish Civil War—who considered it "unnecessary to mention who was fighting for what," but the religiously controlled censors of the script.

Probably every reader of such a comprehensive book can find things to quibble about in his area of expertise that do not detract from the value of Pells's work in providing a foundation study. My major reservation is, however, that Pells leaves the impression that the radical intellectual community in the 1930's was larger and more influential than those who experienced the decade remember. The circulation of many of the books and magazines discussed was miniscule. Pells admits that "Americans still adhered to an outmoded individualism," that the Lynds found Middletown's residents "tended to regard the depression as a momentary interruption in the normal flow of progress and prosperity," and that "unable to convince or even reach the average citizen," radical theorists "assaulted one another in lieu of an enemy who