



John Steuart Curry's Hoover and the Flood: Painting Modern History

Charles C. Eldredge

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In 1940, John Steuart Curry painted a scene of Herbert Hoover directing relief efforts after the Mississippi River flood of 1927 as part of a series of paintings depicting modern American history commissioned by *Life* magazine. In this in-depth case study, Charles Eldredge examines the story of the artist and his painting as well as the American cultural and political era in which it was made.

Eldredge asks several provocative questions. Why did Curry, an artist associated with his native Kansas, choose to depict a subject from the Mississippi Delta? As a painter of nineteenth-century or contemporary agrarian scenes, what prompted Curry to select a specific historical event rather than a more generalized statement of American life? Who was the presumed audience, and what role did it have in the painting's creation? Because of its position in the artist's career, its role in a notable publishing venture, and its appearance at a crucial political moment, *Hoover and the Flood* provides a revealing look at American art and culture--both political and journalistic--of 1940.

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