

JUSTICE AS PROTECTOR



1938
U.S. COURTHOUSE
AIKEN, SOUTH CAROLINA

JUSTICE AS PROTECTOR & AVENGER

STEFAN HIRSCH

The mural *Justice as Protector & Avenger*, a New Deal Treasury Department commission, shows Justice in her twin guises as arbiter of the deserving and the undeserving. The central figure of Justice raises a nurturing right hand to those who live righteously, on the left, but her left hand repels miscreants with a condemning gesture.

When first installed, the mural was controversial. Local residents criticized Hirsch's depicting Justice as a dark-skinned, barefoot woman. The judge, disavowing racism, objected to portraying Justice as an avenger. Treasury officials believed these criticisms reflected ignorance but advanced a compromise to lighten Justice's skin color and cover the mural while court was in session. Owing to fears that the artist's return would inflame the controversy, the mural was never repainted.



The self-taught artist, **Stefan Hirsch** (1899-1964), was raised in Germany by American parents and returned to the United States at age 17. In the 1930s, he taught at Bennington College and the Art Students League in New York and chaired Bard College's Art Department from 1944 until his death.

AND AVENGER

BEAUX-ARTS NEW DEAL GREAT SOCIETY ART-IN-ARCHITECTURE