

divergent, contemporary comments and reflections on the Dust Bowl adhered closely to the jeremiad, without ever questioning the promise of the frontier on which this particular declension sermon is based. The Dust Bowl also touched a deep chord in Americans' ecological imaginations, unfolding not just as a disaster, but as a dystopia: a cosmically ruined place, an interpretive gesture made to understand the depth of problems which had such vivid ecological effects, a gesture which in the end didn't teach us much.

Lookingbill's book is long on quoted sources and short but suggestive on analysis. It is especially interesting when he treats sources we don't see interpreted often: folk songs, or—too briefly—hymns of the era. His use of the cultural insights of Joseph Campbell and David Abrams, the clear influence of historiographer Hayden White and to some extent Michel Foucault, his assertion that this is a deconstruction of Dust Bowl narratives (it is really a gathering and reading of them), all point to other themes and preoccupations swimming somewhat below the surface of this book. The text abounds with muted allusions to his scholarly reading, and he enjoys word plays on *plot*—both stories and lands. And “the long and winding road” appears here, too, not once but twice (x, 113)—a throwaway Beatles reference that in fact intimates a different cast to the jeremiad. The book's shiny undercurrents suggest a sensibility a little at odds with what is otherwise sometimes a dry étude, so to speak, in the Dust Bowl.

Down and Out on the Family Farm: Rural Rehabilitation in the Great Plains, 1929–1945, by Michael Johnston Grant. Our Sustainable Future Series. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2003. x, 256 pp. Table, map, illustrations, notes, sources, index. \$39.95 paper.

Reviewer Michael W. Schuyler is emeriti professor of history at the University of Nebraska at Kearney. His research and writing have focused on agriculture and politics in the Midwest and Great Plains in the 1920s and 1930s.

Michael Johnston Grant's study of the New Deal's rural rehabilitation efforts in the Great Plains reflects the most recent trends in scholarship and is one of the best of a number of recently published books about the Great Plains experience from 1929 to 1945. Grant's study includes the states of Kansas, Nebraska, North Dakota, and South Dakota and focuses on the impact of rural rehabilitation on “borderline” farmers—those who were not desperately poor but lacked the necessary capital to increase their land holdings or to mechanize their farming operations. The author provides excellent background information about the efforts of early New Deal agencies, such as the FERA, CWA, WPA, and

AAA, to bring direct relief to farmers plagued by drought and depression, to reduce mortgage indebtedness, and to control agricultural production. To coordinate federal relief efforts and to emphasize the need for long-range reform, Roosevelt created the Resettlement Administration (RA) in April 1935. It lasted until December 1936, when it was replaced by the Farm Security Administration (FSA). The major objective of the New Deal reformers was to provide farmers with a balanced income so they could stay on the land. New Deal farm experts provided loans, grants, and technical assistance to farmers who in turn would follow farm management plans designed to make them self-sufficient in food and livestock feed. The plans encouraged farmers to diversify their crops and embrace farming techniques that promoted soil conservation. The agencies also developed a number of innovative programs, such as retiring submarginal land from production, resettling poor farmers on productive land, and providing loans for tenant farmers to become independent landowners.

Grant concludes that a number of factors combined to limit the success and undermine support for the RA and FSA. The goals of the rehabilitation program were often confused and contradictory; RA and FSA county supervisors were frequently conservative Republicans who lacked enthusiasm for the New Deal; the administration of the programs was sloppy at times; and the agencies were dramatically underfunded. Most important, however, was the lack of firm support from farmers, who never really accepted the New Deal's long-range goals and objectives. Farmers obviously benefited from, and generally supported, the emergency relief efforts of the RA and the FSA. They were, however, always skeptical about the efforts of reformers to change their lifestyles and farming practices. Even when they accepted federal assistance, farmers still saw themselves as rugged individualists, as commercial entrepreneurs who would realize the American dream through hard work, thrift, and increased production. Borderline farmers preferred to take their chances in a free market economy, gambled that they would find the resources to buy more land and machinery, and believed that they would be able stay on the land. Their destiny would be controlled not by government programs, but by a brutally competitive farm market and technological changes that would revolutionize agriculture on the Plains. Rural rehabilitation helped many marginal farmers stay in place during the depression, but not in the years that followed. Only large-scale farmers with the necessary capital to buy more land and machinery would survive on the land. World War II brought an end to the FSA when conservative political opponents, charging that rural rehabilitation was a dangerous and

radical experiment that regimented farmers and endangered America's freedoms, cut off its funding. Wartime prosperity accelerated the mass exodus in the Great Plains from the farm to the city.

One of the most impressive features of the book is the depth of the author's research, which includes work at the National Archives, the Herbert Hoover Presidential Library, the Franklin D. Roosevelt Library, the University of Kansas, Marquette University, and state historical societies in Kansas, Nebraska, and Wisconsin. His work is carefully documented, and the book includes a valuable comprehensive essay about sources. In addition to providing an account of the rehabilitation program at the state level, he also includes studies in microcosm of the results of the rehabilitation program in Barnes County, North Dakota, and Coffey County, Kansas. The writing is excellent, and the arguments are clearly stated and carefully reasoned. There are masterful discussions of the politics and culture of Great Plains farmers and of the complex programs and interrelationships that emerged from the bewildering array of government programs initiated during the New Deal. This book will be of particular interest to New Deal scholars and students of agricultural history and of general interest to readers who care about the history of the Great Plains.

Disputed Ground: Farm Groups that Opposed the New Deal Agricultural Program, by Jean Choate. Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Co., 2002. v, 232 pp. Illustrations, notes, index. \$32.00 paper.

Reviewer Michael W. Schuyler is professor emeritus at the University of Nebraska at Kearney. He is the author of *The Dread of Plenty: New Deal Agricultural Policies in the Middle West, 1933-1939*.

When Franklin D. Roosevelt became president in 1933, one of his greatest challenges was to restore prosperity to the farm economy. The policy of controlled production that he ultimately embraced, combined with a host of other New Deal farm programs, proved to be a watershed in the U.S. agricultural history. Although many farm leaders and agricultural organizations, including the American Farm Bureau Federation, supported Roosevelt, many other farm groups, particularly in the Midwest, bitterly opposed the president, his secretary of agriculture, Henry A. Wallace, and the New Deal's overall approach to the farm crisis.

In *Disputed Ground*, Jean Choate provides a detailed account of seven organizations that opposed the government's efforts to control agricultural production: the Missouri Farmers Association, the Farmers Union, the Farmers' Holiday Association, the Farmers Independ-

Copyright of Annals of Iowa is the property of State of Iowa, by & through the State Historical Society of Iowa and its content may not be copied or emailed to multiple sites or posted to a listserv without the copyright holder's express written permission. However, users may print, download, or email articles for individual use.