
There is a large body of literature dealing with the Great Depression and the New Deal which may be divided into three broad categories: first, that which deals with national issues and their effect upon the nation; second, biographical studies dealing with the impact of events upon the area. As a whole these studies have added little to an understanding of the effect of the Depression and the New Deal on the social processes involving particular groups and communities. The ten chapters which comprise People, Poverty, and Politics "offer a modest attempt to address some of these locality-relevant issues" by describing the centralizing tendencies of the New Deal and events of the thirties as an epoch in the process of modernization.

Chapters one, six, and seven are devoted to the economic, social, and political consequences of the Depression and New Deal among southwestern Pennsylvania coal miners. The data for these chapters came from the California Oral History Collection at California State College. Their use of interviews with miners is in the best tradition of the new history that shows how events affected people's lives and therefore altered basic social and political institutions. In chapter six, "The New Deal and Pennsylvania Coal Miners," the author demonstrates how New Deal programs were influenced by local forces such as the isolation of communities upon the operation of relief agency policy.

To provide a balanced perspective of the thirties the remaining seven chapters deal with both rural and urban effects of the Depression and New Deal. Donald D. Housley, one of three who contributed chapters to the book — the others being Ernest B. Fricke and W. Wayne Smith — prepared "The Rural Dimension: Welfare and Relief in Snyder County," which is the best of the remaining chapters. Professor Housley does an excellent job of demonstrating how the forces of modernization, rather than undermining local beliefs, ultimately harnessed them to a more efficient and able system of social services. Relief agencies in rural areas, Professor Housley states, "grudgingly relinquished [their] case-load responsibilities to a bureaucratically structured translocal welfare system" and "hastened the pace of modernization and brought rural Snyder County into the mainstream of the mass society" (p. 69).
There are two omissions in this work that are never explained. One is the lack of a chapter or chapters to describe the Depression and New Deal in the northwestern and northeastern parts of the state, or on Pittsburgh, and the other is the lack of attention given to ethnic groups (other than blacks). These omissions seriously detract from an otherwise fine study of Pennsylvania in the thirties.

If you are impressed with statistics, tables, and long lists of accomplishments and failures this is not the book for you. However, if you are interested in a good narrative describing the human, political, and economic consequences of the Great Depression then this book is a must. What statistical information there is is integrated into the text without being burdensome. Students of social history will benefit in reading the book for its information and skillful use of oral history and local primary sources.

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Steve Nelson: American Radical is the autobiography of an American communist. Based on a tape-recorded oral narrative, the book is actually a joint effort by Steve Nelson and two former history graduate students at the University of Pittsburgh, Jim Barrett and Rob Ruck. Nelson originally told Barrett and Ruck his life story and answered their questions during extended interviews; later these tape-recorded memories were transcribed and edited. Barrett and Ruck deserve credit for this excellent work, yet they correctly remind readers in their introduction that the book is essentially Nelson’s creation.

Nelson’s story makes fine reading mostly because it is told with both humor and candor. Its appeal also comes from the amazing range of experiences which Nelson recounts. Born Stjepan Mesaros in Croatia, Nelson came to America in 1920 at the age of seventeen. He began learning carpentry, while moving from Philadelphia to Pittsburgh (where he met his lifelong companion and future wife, Margaret Yeager) to Detroit. He joined the Communist party in the mid-1920s. Nelson became an organizer for the party at the beginning of the Depression and worked among the unemployed in Chicago and