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One Third of a Nation: Lorena Hickok Reports on the Great Depression. Richard Lowitt and Maurine Beasley (Eds.). Review by John M. Herrick

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Richard Lowitt and Maurine Beasley (Eds.), *One Third of a Nation: Lorena Hickok Reports on the Great Depression*. Champaign, IL: University of Illinois Press, 2000. \$21.95 papercover.

The New Deal Era continues to fascinate anyone interested in how the US government responds to social problems. New Dealers flocked to Washington, D.C. after the inauguration of Franklin Delano Roosevelt as President in 1932 buoyed by challenges of creating and implementing innovative ways to combat the Great Depression and the havoc it created. Harry Hopkins, a New York social worker who had worked on state relief for President Roosevelt when he was Governor of New York, became head of the Federal Emergency Relief Administration. Hopkins understood that he was a trailblazer and that there was enormous hostility among many to the fundamental notion that the federal government should play an expansive role in the provision of relief and welfare. Perhaps to provide ammunition to support his work as well as to provide employment for a close friend of Eleanor Roosevelt, Hopkins hired Lorena Hickok, an Associated Press reporter who had been a journalist for the Minneapolis Tribune and the New York Daily Mirror, to travel throughout the country as his "confidential investigator" to report on what the depression meant to the American people and how his relief programs were working. Her poignant letters to Hopkins and Eleanor Roosevelt, written in 1933 and 1934, are collected in this book which was first published in 1981. Her insightful, humorous, caustic and sometimes overtly prejudiced comments about relief recipients and oftentimes bungling local efforts to implement relief undoubtedly influenced the thought of leading New Dealers. When placed alongside the famous depression era photographs of Walker Evans and Dorothea Lange, Hickok's letters show the devastating social impact of the economic collapse and how difficult it was to implement complex relief programs in ways that assured assistance would actually reach those most in need.

With her trained journalist's eye, Hickok would arrive in a community, arrange to meet local politicians, relief workers and anyone who could help her in crafting reports for her Washington, D.C. based audience. She visited thirty-two states and her writings are primary, eye-witness reports that are rich resources

for those who interested in the human face of the depression as well as the difficulties inherent in undertaking a massive federal relief program.

Writing in 1934 from Columbia, South Carolina, Hickok opined: "Well CWA (Civil Works Administration) came. Fulfilled its purposes, and, I believe, should go. We made mistakes. They were bound to be made. No doubt there's been graft. No doubt there's been politics. No doubt there's been misuse of CWA. All that money constituted too much of a temptation for many American politicians, businessmen, and small fry in the office personnel to withstand. And yet- I think you will find that most people will agree that it did more good than harm." Her biases sometimes seem shocking yet undoubtedly they were shared widely. Convinced that rural poor in the South needed more than relief and showing her feelings about many poor southerners she wrote "What these people need is to be taught is how to build toilets." Visiting Minneapolis just before Christmas in 1933, she saw shoppers jamming the streets on Saturday evening just as they had when she lived in the city before the crash of 1929. They had some money to spend, "CWA wages, wheat money, corn money, after several years of being broke." She felt things were getting better and her reports must have been welcomed in Washington, D.C. She suggested writing a book about "Unsung Heroes of the New Deal" referring to embattled local relief administrators struggling with local politicians, ineptitude, indifference and sometimes brazen dishonesty. In South Dakota she found local county officials trying to administer relief who could barely read themselves. In Nogales, Arizona, there were so many poor waiting to be buried that she suggested coffin making as a suitable work relief project. Throughout her journeys across the country, Hickok she saw federally initiated relief and jobs making positive differences in the lives of the destitute. Her reports show how truly indomitable is the human spirit. With so little, people still got together to sing, to pray, to assist one another, to talk about their hopes that things would get better even after devastations like dust storms, drought, job losses and premature deaths.

Hickok believed relief itself was an ineffective response to unemployment and the problems of that one-third of a nation President Roosevelt said must be assisted. She wanted people to

have good jobs which would sustain their lives and give them dignity. The transition from the Federal Emergency Relief Administration (FERA) to the Works Progress Administration (WPA) which offered jobs and wages was a natural progression for many New Dealers. Though not an historian, Hickok's lively writings, despite her biases, can serve as an informative and invaluable history of the early New Deal. The editors' work in compiling Hickok's reports is commendable and the University of Illinois Press's reprinting of this book is especially timely given current debates about the purpose and function of federally directed public welfare programs and services.

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Price V. Fishback and Shawn Everett Kantor, *A Prelude to the Welfare State: The Origins of Workers' Compensation*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000. \$37.50 hardcover

In *A Prelude to the Welfare State: The Origins of Workers' Compensation* Fishback and Kantor claim to "offer an alternative interpretation of the success of workers' compensation that builds on and enhances the analysis of earlier scholars." (p. 198). The authors' substantial, well-written, and compelling book does just that, integrating their earlier work concerning workers' compensation with the writings of other thoughtful scholars. The end result is an in-depth analysis of how workers' compensation was created and initially implemented in the United States at the beginning of the twentieth century.

The overall structure of the book, eight chapters and eleven appendices, allows for either a medium or in-depth reading. In total there are 316 pages of which 203 are the eight-chapter heart of the book. The layout of the chapters, an introduction wrapped around an example vignette, the concise defining of key players, the identification of the questions to be answered during the chapter, supporting evidence, findings, and summary provide a clean structure. The footnoting is lavish, with the use of multiple parallel examples that augment and support the authors' primary points. The appendices offer the kind of detailed