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Sarah Phillips. *This Land, This Nation: Conservation, Rural America, and the New Deal.* Cambridge University Press, 2007. 312. $23.99 (paper), ISBN 978-0-521-61796-3.

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New Deal, Environment, and New Conservation

"Between 1933 and the early 1940s," writes Sarah Phillips, "federal programs aimed to sustain the rural way of life and to help people remain on the land" (p. 9). In *This Land, This Nation*, Phillips casts an extremely tight focus on this time period and this specific initiative while also demonstrating the broad connections that such policies might have to contemporary ideas and policies. Her penetrating analysis offers historians of policy and agriculture a critical new look at the New Deal and its connection to new strategies for managing natural resources.

Most previous historians have looked at the New Deal initiatives piecemeal, studying specific organizations, such as the Tennessee Valley Authority (TVA), the Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC), or the Agricultural Adjustment Administration (AAA). Other scholars have focused on specific phenomena, such as the dust storms of the Great Plains and the federal response. Instead, Phillips studies all the initiatives at once in order to specify one of the desired outcomes that they held in common. By doing so, *This Land, This Nation* demonstrates how collectively these efforts shared a primary goal to improve poor lands and, simultaneously, to improve the lives of poor people. Using the inclusive term "New Conservation," Phillips argues that the new initiatives harkened back to a Jeffersonian emphasis on the strength of country life and the need to maintain a sustainable agricultural countryside in order to benefit those residing in it.

Phillips's effort provides us with a language with which to link together these diverse initiatives previously grouped under singular terms such as "New Deal." Highlighting the agrarian idealism that these initiatives pursued, Phillips writes, "The New Conservation was a movement for social and environmental justice. Building upon the arguments of the Progressive era, these ... advocates asserted that rural resources should be developed for the use and benefit of an area's most immediate inhabitants" (p. 10-11). Franklin D. Roosevelt and other New Conservationists made land-planning policies an essential part of America's economic well-being. In particular, Phillips shows how many of these planners believed that America's economic problems emanated from those of the rural farmer. Extending their logic, New Deal planners believed that the nation might be lifted from economic difficulty by going to the farmers and instructing them on the proper use and fair distribution of resources.

For historians of environmental thought and policy, Phillips illuminates the period between the two histories of environmental policy written by Samuel Hays, *Conservation and the Gospel of Efficiency* (1959) and *Beauty, Health, and Permanence* (1987). The technically-minded professionals of Progressive conservation found in the New Deal a great laboratory of problems in which to apply their ideas on the landscape of real-life America. Phillips's work, similar to Neil Maher's recently published *Nature's New Deal* (2008), builds on the effort of Donald Worster and others to explore the importance of the New Deal for environmental history. In contrast to these works, Phillips's falls more completely in the arena of policy history.

In order to pursue its emphasis on policy, *This Land, This Nation* steers around other categories of consideration. In particular, Phillips might have done a great deal more to develop the ecological impact of these policies on the landscape and, therefore, the policy's overall influence on the evolution of ecological thought. However, Phillips leaves these grander connections to the reader and, instead, remains focused on tracing strands of change in U.S. agricultural policy.

This Land, This Nation is divided into six parts. After discussing the gaps in the existing literature on the New Deal, Phillips uses chapter 1 to trace the evolution of

the New Conservationists' ideas from Progressive roots. She specifically delineates two separate subsets within this group: land economists and public-power proponents. Their beliefs coalesced and shaped the direction of New Deal initiatives, including the TVA, the Resettlement Administration (RA), and the Soil Conservation Service (SCS). In the third chapter, Phillips blazes new ground by discussing how these policies influenced those of the young congressman Lyndon Johnson. She uses his efforts as an indicator of the shift in overall political thought from agrarian to industrial liberalism. Phillips argues that the New Conservationism survived within the Democratic Party, even though it had lost its agrarian focus. Her epilogue follows how New Deal policies and programs were implemented abroad, with both success and failure.

The in-depth policy analysis makes *This Land, This Nation* a book primarily for scholars and advanced undergraduates. However, Phillips has written a book that scholars of agriculture and land-use must read, and one that will no doubt inform the field for years to come and also inspire similar policy analysis of this important era. Phillips has created that rare book in environmental history: a title that simply must be consulted by political historians and, in fact, anyone trying to properly understand the use of policy in the New Deal.

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