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The War Comes to Plum Street

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The War Comes to Plum Street, by Bruce C. Smith. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2005. xiii, 308 pp. Illustrations, note on sources, index. \$29.95 cloth.

Reviewer Terrence J. Lindell is professor of history at Wartburg College. His research has focused on Populism, immigration, and the World War II home front.

The war mentioned in this book's title is World War II, and Plum Street in New Castle, Indiana, is the focal point of this engaging study of a midwestern neighborhood's response to a global conflict. Bruce C. Smith, who earned a Ph.D. in history at the University of Notre Dame, promises "a different kind of book about World War II," one that "looks at the war through the eyes of people who lived through it" (xi). He does so by examining New Castle through oral history interviews with selected individuals and an intensive reading of the local newspaper. He attempts to see the war as it unfolded for those involved, not with the perspective that historians usually achieve with the wide study of primary and secondary accounts.

Smith begins his story in the years after World War I with the migration of couples to New Castle in search of jobs. From Kentucky came Fred Smith, followed by his fiancée Lillian Frogge. Jess and Ethel Moles journeyed north from Tennessee with their infant daughter Gemma in 1923. With a growing family—three more daughters were born in New Castle—the Moleses acquired a house on Plum Street. Smith's subjects consist principally of the Smith and Moles families (brought together with the marriage of the Smiths' son Ed to Gemma in 1943), their friends and acquaintances, and the families into which the remaining Moles daughters would marry. Only in his closing pages does Smith reveal that Ed and Gemma are his parents.

The first three chapters consider the lives of these families from their arrival in New Castle through the hopeful 1920s and the desperate Depression years to the outbreak of war in Europe. A fourth chapter takes the story to the attack on Pearl Harbor. Eight chapters examine the wartime years. A brief epilogue covers the postwar lives of the neighbors on Plum Street.

The war chapters trace the mobilization of New Castle residents into the armed forces and growing defense industries, the course of military campaigns overseas, and the attendant casualties from the area, who are noted one by one. Using newspaper coverage, Smith ably recounts the onset and evolution of rationing. Readers see how young people, faced with an uncertain future, chose to marry and how young wives followed husbands to training camps until their units departed for war. The wives, often pregnant, then returned to their parental homes to await anxiously the homecoming of loved ones.

Smith offers the most detail on the lives of Ed, who served in Europe, and Gemma.

This narrative history, providing insights into how the war affected average people in a typical community, is a welcome addition to the growing literature on the U.S. home front in World War II. The work lacks notes, so readers cannot always determine where the information comes from. Smith relies on a limited selection of secondary works, used largely as references on military affairs, and does not seek to fit his work into the historiographical framework of other home front studies. Conspicuously absent from his bibliography are citations to overviews of the home front, at least one of which, Paul Casdorff's *Let the Good Times Roll: Life at Home in America during World War II*, uses periodicals in an approach similar to Smith's. Although scholars would prefer more documentation and analysis, readers who seek to understand the lives of the generation that fought World War II will enjoy this book.

An Opportunity Lost: The Truman Administration and the Farm Policy Debate, by Virgil W. Dean. Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 2006. xv, 275 pp. Illustrations, notes, bibliography, index. \$39.95 cloth.

Reviewer Richard S. Kirkendall is professor of history emeritus at the University of Washington, Seattle. He has written extensively about American farm policy and international politics in the Roosevelt and Truman administrations.

This book is a welcome addition to the literature on the history of American farm policy. It makes a strong argument about the crucial significance of the Truman period for that history. It was a time of "opportunity lost," of failure to develop a much needed, new, and long-range policy to replace the New Deal program. Established in response to the Great Depression, that program had been reshaped during World War II into an emphasis on high price supports designed to persuade farmers to meet the heavy wartime demands for food and fiber. By the end of the war, Virgil Dean maintains, an "agricultural revolution" was increasing the output of American farmers and thereby generating pressure for a new policy, but the political system, headed by Harry Truman, failed to produce one.

Dean devotes most of his pages to a description and analysis of that failure during the years 1947 to 1950. Truman relied heavily on his secretaries of agriculture, first Clinton Anderson and then Charles Brannan. In 1947 Anderson believed that, because of the agricultural revolution, the United States must move away from a policy of supporting prices at high levels and should endorse a "policy of abun-