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## An Opportunity Lost: The Truman Administration and the Farm Policy Debate

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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-

dance." Many farm organizations and farmers' representatives in Congress agreed, but the high degree of unity broke down in 1948 under pressures from election-year politics and from a fear of falling farm prices. Instead of something quite new, the legislators extended high price supports for a year and put off a new policy of flexible supports, linked with changing levels of production, until 1950.

After blaming Truman's and Brannan's rhetoric in the 1948 campaign for the rise of partisanship in farm politics, Dean moves on to an extended discussion of a plan Secretary Brannan introduced in 1949. He favored a continuation of price supports for some commodities, "production payments" (government subsidies) rather than high prices for producers of commodities that could not be stored for long periods, and a way of limiting the amount of money individual farmers could receive from the programs so that they would not encourage large operators to enlarge their farms still more. Highly controversial, Brannan's plan generated much debate in the press, within farm organizations, and among economists. It failed in Congress in 1949. Dean attributes that failure mostly to partisanship among both Democrats and Republicans; he also gives some credit to the southern Democrats, some to the American Farm Bureau Federation, and some to Secretary Brannan. Instead of enacting the Brannan Plan, Congress in 1949 once again delayed implementation of flexible price supports and extended high supports. The next year, war in Korea became an additional obstacle in the path of change in farm policy.

Dean does not regard the Brannan Plan as an adequate response to the new situation. It was too close to the old program. He appears to prefer the policy of flexible price supports, and he notes that the Eisenhower administration established a flexible program but that it had only a short life.

Dean builds his history on a strong research base, taking full advantage of the riches now available for work on the Truman period. He draws together the relevant and abundant scholarly work. That includes the basic book on the subject by Allen J. Matusow, *Farm Politics and Policies in the Truman Years*, published 40 years ago. Since then, many scholars have made contributions to Truman-era historiography, but Dean still finds much value in Matusow's early work. Dean's book also benefits from manuscripts that could not be seen in the 1960s, including the Anderson and Brannan papers and important portions of Truman's papers.

There is one underdeveloped theme in this good book. That is the discussion of the agricultural revolution that Dean regards as *the* source of the need for a change in policy. He refers to it often, but his references

are short and scattered. He defines it as technological, but it was more than that. It was demographic, too. Technology was replacing people in farming. Participants in his story knew that farmers were becoming more productive and that that change had implications for policy, but they, he suggests, were not really aware that something so big as to be labeled a revolution was under way. How far had it progressed? Was there much discussion of it in the press, in the congressional committees, and elsewhere at the time? A discussion of such questions would have strengthened the book. A full chapter on the revolution, following the introduction, could have been a helpful addition.

Even without such a chapter, the book makes a significant contribution on a topic of great importance in Iowa and much importance elsewhere as well.

*Phyllis Schlafly and Grassroots Conservatism: A Woman's Crusade*, by Donald T. Critchlow. Politics and Society in Twentieth-Century America Series. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005. xi, 422 pp. Illustrations, notes, index. \$29.95 cloth.

Reviewer Glen Jeansonne is professor of history at the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee. His many books and articles on right-wing politics in the twentieth-century United States include *Women of the Far Right: The Mothers' Movement and World War II* (1996).

Some years ago I delivered a paper on Elizabeth Dilling at the American Historical Association's annual convention. My paper was appropriately critical of Dilling, who preferred to fight beside Hitler rather than against him. After the paper was applauded, the first questioner asked me to compare Dilling to Phyllis Schlafly. I replied that Schlafly was a mainstream conservative who worked within the system and seldom lost her temper; Dilling belonged to the lunatic fringe, was infatuated with conspiracy theories, and described herself as "even-tempered, mad all the time." I could not persuade my listeners that Schlafly and Dilling were not ideological soulmates. The session quickly disintegrated, and I left the room feeling as if I had been exiled to the academic equivalent of Siberia.

More than a decade later, the stereotype of Schlafly persists in academia that lumps her with the Ku Klux Klan and the John Birch Society and just short of Lizzie Borden. Donald Critchlow's book is a useful corrective. Some people are misled to label Schlafly a fanatic by her ferocious drive, powerful energy, and fierce determination. But it is a focused, purposeful, controlled drive, although passionate.