

***Remembering the Great Depression in the Rural South.* By Kenneth J. Bindas.
(University Press of Florida. Gainesville, FL. pp. 184. Cloth \$59.95)**

The Great Depression is usually described as a time when people were waiting in soup lines, jumping off buildings, and struggling to work and eat. In *Remembering the Great Depression in the Rural South*, Kenneth Bindas moves beyond the repetitive and predictive accounts in most history books, and instead weaves together over 600 oral histories and interviews to construct a cohesive, personal, and thoughtful study of the Great Depression.

The rural South was most affected by the Great Depression, having suffered from low wages and low crop prices long before the 1930s. If Southerners were lucky enough to have a job, they worked as sharecroppers, tenant farmers, or factory workers, never making enough money to save, but enough to pay for their home and food for their families. Others, who were less fortunate, were forced to beg, train hop, or look for monthly or daily work, making very little money and rarely having enough to feed their families or pay their debt. However, even those with very little knew they were lucky and tried to scrape together a small meal for anyone who asked. As many interviewed by Bindas and his students' recall, "those were the good old days, but those good old days were pretty rough times."⁽³⁾

With little money and a dying hope, people of the rural South had little to look forward to, until 1932. As interviewed one man remarked, if Hoover had been reelected "everybody in the south would have starved to death."⁽³⁷⁾ Instead, Franklin D. Roosevelt was elected president and many interviewed remembered their excitement because "he had ideas and things" that were going to help the people.⁽³⁷⁾ FDR's New Deal programs and fireside chats gave the people of the South "a ray of hope."⁽⁴²⁾ His fireside chats utilized oral tradition, popular in the South, allowing the people to trust the president and feel as if they could make a difference. Along with hope and motivation, the president provided jobs and money for workers to take back to their families. Even those interviewed without a direct connection to the Civilian Conservation Corps or the Works Progress Administration had a story of the benefits the programs brought to the people and the country.

The interviews and analysis in Bindas's section on consumption make the Depression and its consequences more human, because most know what it is to want something and not be able to buy it. With these memories, Bindas paints a picture of the Depression in a way no textbook can.

The latter half of the book is what makes it so impressive. Bindas takes the interviews and molds them into a story about daily life, hopes and dreams, and privation. The Depression becomes real, not just some section in a history book that everyone knows about, but a story of regular people going through hard times and surviving. By grouping oral histories and memories into categories of privation, consumption, politics, and daily life, Bindas is able to analyze the interviews, without talking over those who lived through the Great Depression and have something genuine to say.

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