

banks. His concluding section, in which he reprints some public and journalistic reactions to the speech, helps illustrate the chat's impact.

His book is well executed and contains few flaws. He says there were twenty-seven fire-side chats. David Levy and I believe there were thirty-one. He invests his narrative with references to Roosevelt's "going rhetorical" and the resolving of the banking crisis with mere words, hence giving greater emphasis to rhetoric than action. He does not distinguish between the Glass-Steagall Act of February 1932 and the Glass-Steagall Act of June 1933, which established the Federal Deposit Insurance Corporation. In fact, he does not even mention the latter, though that legislation surely did more for the health of banks, as well as public confidence, than all the words in the world. Those observations aside, the book reminds us of FDR's extraordinary ability to communicate his thoughts to the American people. Indeed, it is refreshing to recall that the United States once had a president who could speak the English language so simply, clearly, fluently, and persuasively.

Russell D. Buhite
*Missouri University of Science
 and Technology*
 Rolla, Missouri

Nature's New Deal: The Civilian Conservation Corps and the Roots of the American Environmental Movement. By Neil M. Maher. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008. xii, 316 pp. \$35.00, ISBN 978-0-19-530601-9.)

In this long-overdue study, Neil M. Maher handily weaves together several different threads of historical change. He provides a comprehensive account of the depression-era Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC), demonstrates the work program's significance for popular support of Franklin D. Roosevelt's New Deal, and links the CCC (and its opponents) to the rise of a modern environmental movement. The book begins to address the lack of attention given to the Corps by environmental historians as well as the yawning narrative gap between Progressive Era conservation and post-World War II environmentalism. It also suggests the importance of

environmental history for political historians, making a strong case for why they need to be attentive to people's evolving relationship with the natural world.

The organization of *Nature's New Deal* is easy to follow. It starts with an examination of the CCC's guiding ideology, namely the convergence of assumptions about natural resource conservation as well as previously tangential notions about the way nature restores peoples' health and general well-being. Subsequent chapters trace the impact of CCC work on the American landscape and local communities, the transformation of enrollees during their stints, growing criticism of the work program by former supporters, democratization and reorientation of the conservation movement, and the program's political significance and legacy.

Perhaps most interesting and novel among the book's various claims is the seemingly counterintuitive argument that opposition to the CCC helped give rise to environmentalism. It is no great leap to fathom how CCC enrollees and the local residents they helped would emerge from the 1930s with a better appreciation for soil and forest conservation, but Maher takes this history a step further. He identifies two main objections to the work program, one ecological and the other grounded in wilderness advocacy, embodied in the likes of Aldo Leopold and Robert Marshall. He then contends that those criticisms prompted a national dialogue about the purpose and means of conservation, which set the stage for broad-based grassroots activism.

In terms of environmental historiography, *Nature's New Deal* also adds to the literature by giving us a bottom-up view of conservation policy. Most of that work has emphasized resistance to state and national park creation as well as to restrictive fish and game laws. Clearly, however, there was a point at which common people began to become more amenable to the ideas and practices promoted and implemented by elites. The Civilian Conservation Corps seems to have been an important part of that shift, particularly for the young men who participated, but also for farmers, loggers, and others who lived near camps, as well as urban and suburban dwellers that merely heard and read about the program.

Yet as much as this history of the CCC provides a needed window on key aspects of American history, Maher's interpretation falls somewhat short in continuing the line drawn between Progressive Era, New Deal, and post-war conservation. From the book we can only speculate about how and why a widening and deepening movement became the basis for greater concern with pollution, which seems to define modern environmentalism. If, as the title suggests, the point is to find the "roots" of the American environmental movement, there is more left to do. This is more a matter of scope, however, than a lack of analytical rigor.

Chad Montrie
*University of Massachusetts
 Lowell, Massachusetts*

This Land, This Nation: Conservation, Rural America, and the New Deal. By Sarah T. Phillips. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007. xii, 289 pp. Cloth, \$75.00, ISBN 978-0-521-85270-8. Paper, \$23.99, ISBN 978-0-521-61796-3.)

Were New Deal agricultural and environmental programs simply the next phase of an earlier progressive political tradition, as embodied by conservation champions such as Gifford Pinchot? Or did New Deal conservation policy represent a distinct historical shift? The latter was the case, says Sarah T. Phillips, in her impressive environmental history of the New Deal.

Phillips sets out to place environmental regulation front and center of New Deal reforms. New Deal conservation programs such as the Tennessee Valley Authority (TVA) were far more than regional, albeit bold, initiatives; they formed the very core of a rising American liberalism. New Deal theorists, according to Phillips, saw a fundamental economic problem in unequal incomes between rural and urban areas. Correcting that inequality required redistributing land and creating a more sustainable resource base. In that way, the federal government could propel the country out of the depression while protecting Americans (especially the most vulnerable rural Americans) from the cumulative imbalances of an unregulated free market. The best tools were flood

control, soil and forest conservation, land retirement, and hydropower development coupled with rural electrification. Franklin D. Roosevelt's "permanent agriculture," then, was not a single strand of the New Deal, but the central means to a comprehensive, socially just industrial development of the entire country.

Phillips traces the evolution of New Deal environmental and agricultural regulation from its intellectual origins in the 1920s through World War II. She provides a long-overdue synthesis of landmark federal laws, agencies, events, policy makers, and planners associated with classic New Deal projects such as the TVA, rural electrification, land utilization, and resettlement. Phillips also points out the limits and paradoxes of New Deal ideals. In the end, an irreconcilable tension between hydroelectric industrialism and agrarianism produced orphans that continue to haunt agricultural policy today: namely, the small farmer, who was ultimately abandoned by the federal government; and conservation, which was abandoned whenever and wherever it conflicted with commodity output. Phillips finishes with an exploratory epilogue on the export of New Deal policies and paradoxes to the world's poorest rural populations.

One of Phillips's principal arguments is that the "new conservation" of the New Deal was distinct from the "old conservation" of the Progressive Era, in part because of its locus in agricultural landscapes and agrarian ideals. In this she is both subtle and convincing. But Phillips also makes a more ambitious argument: that New Deal environmental regulation "shaped the evolution of the modern American state" (p. 4). Here Phillips is less persuasive. Her research often shows the reverse, that the New Deal regulatory framework was constantly buffeted by and reacting to larger economic forces, especially the concentration of industrial capital, including, ultimately, agricultural land. Her claim would be stronger if it included the most productive and economically important agricultural regions of the country—especially the Midwest. Instead, she limited her examination to the most impoverished rural lands and communities—those under the TVA, Lyndon B. Johnson's district in Texas, and the dust bowl area. A geographical extension of this work may yet clinch her important argu-

Copyright of Journal of American History is the property of Organization of American Historians and its content may not be copied or emailed to multiple sites or posted to a listserv without the copyright holder's express written permission. However, users may print, download, or email articles for individual use.