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Kansas in the Great Depression: Work Relief, the Dole, and Rehabilitation. By Peter Fearon. Columbia and London: University of Missouri Press, 2007. Pp. xv, 316. $44.95.

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By shifting the emphasis towards a set of people often given short shrift in histories of the 1930s, Amity Shlaes provides a welcome addition to Great Depression scholarship. As an analysis of Roosevelt's New Deal economic policy during the 1930s, the book is less successful. However, the market-oriented underpinnings of her analysis will spark continued and much needed debate about the pluses and minuses of the wide range of policies with which Roosevelt experimented during a decade of extraordinary unemployment.

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Kansas in the Great Depression: Work Relief, the Dole, and Rehabilitation. By Peter Fearon. Columbia and London: University of Missouri Press, 2007. Pp. xv, 316. $44.95.

The provision of welfare in the United States was transformed in the 1930s as county-based relief efforts collapsed under the burden of massive and sustained unemployment. The system of federal-state partnership that emerged in its place developed less through systematic and conscious planning than as the accidental result of a process of trial and error driven by the interaction between federal government officials and their counterparts in the states. In *Kansas in the Great Depression* Peter Fearon offers a careful examination of how efforts to address the pressing needs of the unemployed evolved in one state, Kansas, over the course of the 1930s.

At the beginning of the Great Depression, the Kansas welfare system operated much as it had since its establishment in 1862. In each of the state's 105 counties, county commissioners were empowered to levy property taxes to support the indigent. County funds were often supplemented by private charities, which in the 1920s and early 1930s contributed close to a quarter of all relief funds in Kansas.

Methods of distributing these funds varied widely across counties, but only in rare cases was relief administered by individuals with the appropriate experience or training for the job. Instead, posts were filled through political and personal patronage. In general relief administrators and the public drew a clear line between the "deserving poor"—the blind, elderly, mentally and physically sick, widows, and dependent children—and unemployed able-bodied adult males. Whereas county residents in the first group were deemed worthy of support, those in the second group were provided only the most limited assistance and even this was often tied to harsh and demeaning requirements.

As the economy slipped into worsening depression after 1929, the ability of this system of locally funded and directed relief efforts to respond to the demands placed upon it was increasingly challenged, especially in areas such as southeast Kansas where the region's dominant industry, coal mining, collapsed, leaving large numbers without work and with few alternative employment opportunities. As the numbers of unemployed mounted so, too, did the fiscal challenge faced by county governments, which found it increasingly difficult to collect property taxes from their citizens. Meanwhile the state constitution constrained the ability of both the counties and the state to borrow to finance relief or public works spending.

The impetus for change came not from within the state, but from Washington, DC. On 21 July 1932 President Herbert Hoover signed into law the Emergency Relief and Construction Act, which extended the scope of the Reconstruction Finance Corporation (founded earlier in the year) and provided an additional $300 million to be loaned to the states for direct relief as well as an additional $1.5 billion to finance selfliquidating public works construction. Two days later, governor Harry H. Woodring established the Kansas Federal Relief Committee (KFRC) to administer funds received from Washington.

Woodring selected Dean E. Ackers, general manager of Kansas Power and Light Company, to chair the KFRC and appointed as its executive secretary John Stutz. Stutz, a Kansas native with degrees in political science and sociology from the University of Chicago was at the time the executive director of the League of Kansas Municipalities. Although Alfred M. Landon, a Republican, replaced the Democrat Woodring after the 1932 election, he retained the KFRC in its entirety, and the Committee and Stutz, in particular, played the central role in organizing the administration of relief in Kansas until the establishment of the Works Progress Administration in mid-1935 substantially shifted the balance between state and federal officials.

Drawing extensively on Stutz's papers, the focus of *Kansas in the Great Depression* is on the operations of the KFRC, which was renamed the Kansas Emergency Relief Committee (KERC) in August 1933 to conform to rules established under the Federal Emergency Relief Act (FERA). After setting the stage with an overview of the Kansas economy in the 1920s and a description of the impact of the Depression in the first chapter of the book, Fearon devotes the next two chapters to a description of the KERC's operations.

In the fourth chapter Fearon turns his attention to the rural parts of the state, where increasingly severe drought conditions reduced farm incomes and consequently produced continued downward pressure on the incomes of rural nonfarm residents who relied on serving the farm economy for their living. Although the numerous New Deal programs aimed at the farm sector were never seen as "relief" the interaction between these efforts and relief programs was crucial in alleviating hardships across rural Kansas.

In 1935 Federal relief efforts took a new course. With the establishment of the Works Progress Administration (WPA) the management of federally funded work relief projects was substantially centralized. At the same time, new federal-state partnerships were established to provide support for the elderly, disabled, and dependent through provisions in the Social Security Act. As a result of these changes, the KERC's activities were substantially curtailed. In Kansas this shift in authority over federally funded projects was further complicated by political rivalry between Roosevelt and Governor Landon, who became the Republican candidate in the 1936 Presidential election.

In the final chapter of the book Fearon offers an assessment of the changes in welfare provision wrought by the Great Depression, arguing that the scope of federal relief expenditures constituted the "truly revolutionary aspect" (p. 254) of this era. On the other hand, he notes that the continued focus on work relief reflected an essentially conservative element that reduced the efficiency of efforts to assist the needy.

Kansas in the Great Depression substantially enriches our understanding of how relief was administered in the 1930s and the process by which our modern welfare state came into being. But the value of this account is reduced by the lack of clearly drawn comparisons. Throughout the book I was left wondering how events in Kansas compared to what was taking place in other states. Without such comparisons it is not clear if we should view events in Kansas as worthy of our attention because they are exceptional or because they are representative of broader trends. Fearon's account would also benefit from more attention to some of the sharply drawn hypotheses that have emerged out of the growing cliometric literature that has econometrically analyzed the distribution of New Deal funds at the state and county level.

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