to learn from those who had engaged in the long struggle there as rural Louisianians had to learn from CORE.

University of Arkansas JEANNIE WHAYNE

Rethinking the Great Depression. By Gene Smiley. The American Way Series. (Chicago: Ivan R. Dee, c. 2002. Pp. xii, 179. $24.95, ISBN 1-56663-472-5.)

Gene Smiley's *Rethinking the Great Depression* is a book-length essay that seeks to distill for nonspecialists recent scholarship on the causes of the Great Depression and the reasons for its severity and duration. It also puts forth a revisionist critique of the system of activist government that emerged out of the 1930s. No longer, Smiley insists, is it possible to argue that the Great Depression demonstrated "the instability of market economies and the need for government oversight" and management (p. x). Indeed, government actions brought on the Great Depression, and once the contraction was underway, governments "caused [the depression] to be much longer and much more severe" (p. x). "The 1930s economic crisis," he insists, "is tragic testimony to government interference in market economies" (p. x).

Smiley argues that the Great Depression was caused by a decline in the money supply and disruptions to the gold standard. The money supply fell in part because of inadequate responses by central banking institutions such as the Federal Reserve Board, and the gold standard failed because national governments subverted the operation of international financial markets. Misguided government interventions intensified the deflation. The first of these was the Herbert Hoover administration's efforts at voluntary pledges to maintain wage rates. Under Franklin Delano Roosevelt and the New Deal, new interventions such as the National Recovery Administration (NRA) shackled production, generated immense confusion among business and industry, and undermined the 1933 recovery. The potential for a robust recovery after 1935 was destroyed by the combined effect of New Deal tax and regulatory policies and the "regime uncertainty" generated by Roosevelt's attacks on wealth and corporate bigness (p. 128). Roosevelt and "the New Deal ravaged the confidence of businessmen" who became "less and less certain that private property rights . . . would be protected and maintained . . ." (p. 128).

Smiley also challenges the view that governmental spending during World War II confirmed the basic assumptions of Keynesian economics. He argues instead that a more flexible monetary policy made possible increased deficit spending and that there were no measurable declines in unemployment or increases in consumption during the war. Prosperity returned only after the war when a more conservative Congress ended wartime controls and enacted the Taft-Hartley Act, thereby restoring "business confidence" and making possible the ensuing twenty years of economic growth (p. 147).

This book has two important strengths. One is its cogent discussion of the knotty topics of monetary policy and international exchange. The second is the forceful presentation of the argument that governments failed in the 1930s and not markets. Is the argument convincing? I think not. Smiley believes that had nations not undermined the gold standard, had Hoover not urged wage maintenance, had the New Deal not embarked on its first hundred days, and had Roosevelt never railed away at economic royalists, then the economy would have quickly righted itself. There would be no legacy of fiscal activism, no application of John Maynard Keynes's general theory, no regulatory interventions, and no social welfare state. Such a view ignores how markets had been reshaped by the 1930s, too readily assumes the inherent stability of market systems, and ignores too many flaws in the economic institutions of interwar America.

University of Kentucky — DAVID E. HAMILTON

Behind the Backlash: White Working-Class Politics in Baltimore, 1940–1980. By Kenneth D. Durr. (Chapel Hill and London: University of North Carolina Press, c. 2003. Pp. [xiv], 284. Paper, $19.95, ISBN 0-8078-5433-6; cloth, $55.00, ISBN 0-8078-2764-9.)

Industrial Baltimore before 1950 is recently a "hot" topic with the academic dissertation and monograph mill. Books on labor, women, African Americans, and social history abound. But this timely and relevant volume examines what is still quite unstudied about the venerable port city—working-class whites, together with their families and neighborhoods, late in the industrial era, when large-scale production peaked and went into decline. White workers' culture and social organization get their due in this text, but only to explain their political values and partisanship and to unravel a particular mystery: what caused loyal Democrats in the era of the Roosevelt coalition to evolve into conservative Reagan voters by the 1980s.

Underneath major shifts lies continuity, according to Kenneth D. Durr. White workers' chief concerns were always their neighborhoods and institutions. The changing objects of their scorn—economic royalists in the Roosevelt years and liberal university and government bureaucrats by the seventies—reflected an ever-present disdain for elites. Of course they were racially antagonistic, Durr says, but their rhetoric on workers' rights, citizen responsibilities, and community control are to be regarded seriously.

During and just after World War II, whites welcomed industrial unionism and wage hikes but opposed shop-floor integration and minority housing projects near their homes. In the fifties, loyalty to neighborhood churches and political clubs grew fierce among workers who did not join the migration to the suburbs. Albeit with fewer episodes of violence than in other industrial cities, Baltimore's working-class whites organized against school integration and black "intrusion" in all-white neighborhoods (p. 83). In the sixties, law-and-order Democrats supported George Wallace and other social conservatives for elective office out of what the author regards as a genuine commitment to working people's rights. In the seventies, they turned to community organizations rather than political clubs to oppose an interstate highway in their neighborhoods and the busing of children to achieve racial balance.

Durr takes to task twentieth-century Democratic liberals for their failure to understand and represent working-class whites. The white working class, he says, very rationally abandoned them. But in this reviewer's opinion, the criticism works only by use of the very narrow definition of liberal that white