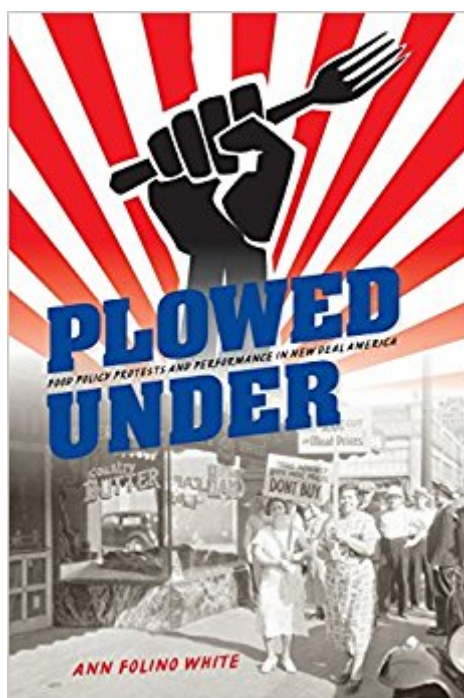


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# Plowed Under: Food Policy Protests And Performance In New Deal America



## Synopsis

During the Great Depression, with thousands on bread lines, farmers were instructed by the New Deal Agricultural Adjustment Act to produce less food in order to stabilize food prices and restore the market economy. Fruit was left to rot on trees, crops were plowed under, and millions of piglets and sows were slaughtered and discarded. Many Americans saw the government action as a senseless waste of food that left the hungry to starve, initiating public protests against food and farm policy. White approaches these events as performances where competing notions of morality and citizenship were acted out, often along lines marked by class, race, and gender. The actions range from the "Milk War" that pitted National Guardsmen against dairymen, who were dumping milk, to the meat boycott staged by Polish-American women in Michigan, and from the black sharecroppers' protest to restore agricultural jobs in Missouri to the protest theater of the Federal Theater Project. White provides a riveting account of the theatrical strategies used by consumers, farmers, agricultural laborers, and the federal government to negotiate competing rights to food and the moral contradictions of capitalist society in times of economic crisis.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

"This fascinating book speaks to the centrality of food in the New Deal and reframes food politics as a venue for cultural activism." — Tracey Deutsch, author of *Building a Housewife's Paradise: Gender, Politics, and American Grocery Stores in the Twentieth Century* "Plowed Under is thoroughly researched and skilfully conceived. Its performance-oriented approach illuminates

genuine tensions and disagreements between the administration and many of the nation's citizens and provides intriguing insights into New Deal culture." *Modern Drama* "[White's] book offers an insightful examination of how performance, and particularly food in performance, defines and questions the ethics of food production, sale, and consumption. *Plowed Under* contributes significantly to ongoing studies of the performance of food and the performativity of protests, and also serves as an important history of the Great Depression itself." *Theatre Journal* "*Plowed Under* provides a fertile field for future research on New Deal agriculture and social activism.... White's merging of performance studies and history will also offer a useful model to analyze the theatrical and cultural strategies that inform public protest in America."

*Register of the Kentucky Historical Society* "In this fascinating and rigorous study, Ann Folino White focuses on the agricultural crisis of the 1930s—particularly the New Deal AAA legislation—illustrating how American citizens performed their opposition in demonstrations, strikes, and living newspapers. Her cultural read of these performances illuminates how commodities like milk and beef became the political battleground for the expression of citizenship in the face of policy which sanctioned waste while people went hungry. White's thesis is principally moral: is the right to food implicit in the concept of citizenship, especially for farmers, consumers and landless laborers? Her answers are imaginative and compelling." *Barry B. Witham*, author of *The Federal Theatre Project: A Case Study* "White's study makes an invaluable contribution to history, theater history, cultural studies, American studies, and other fields."

*Journal of American History* "[A] stimulating study of New Deal America" *The Annals of Iowa* "An engaging book that tells a fascinating and compelling story." *Scott Magelssen*, author of *Simming: Participatory Performance and the Making of Meaning* "*Plowed Under* will prove useful for scholars of agriculture, public policy, political culture, and the New Deal, and it presents an invaluable perspective for any historian of the twentieth century."

*Indiana Magazine of History*

Ann Folino White is Head of Theatre Studies in the Department of Theatre at Michigan State University.

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