

## BUILDING HISTORICAL IMAGINATION WITH THREE POTATOES, TWO CARROTS, AND ONE ONION

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Cultivating historical imagination in undergraduate students is often a difficult task. The distance between their lives, generally lived in the last quarter century, and the ways in which people lived in the pre-World War II period can be enormous. The task becomes even more difficult when students think that certain elements of their lives in the present are much more similar to those of previous eras than they actually are. Case in point is the Great Depression. Given the current economic downturn, many students are convinced that, in some ways, they are living in a situation akin to that of the 1930s.

As historians, however, we know that (at least for now) the distance between the depression of the 1930s and the economic troubles of today is significant. The U.S. Department of Labor posted a 9.8 percent unemployment rate for the nation in September 2009. This number, of course, masked significant differences between states. North Dakota boasted the lowest unemployment rate in the nation, at 4.3 percent. Iowa's unemployment rate was 6.8 percent, while neighboring Illinois' was at 10 percent. Michigan suffered the highest unemployment rate, with 15.2 percent unemployed in August.<sup>1</sup> Reflecting the general level of distress, mortgage foreclosures are as high as they have been in a generation. Consumer confidence has slumped significantly. In most parts of the country, retail sales fell considerably at Christmas 2008. Families have found themselves scrimping and saving, trying to remember long forgotten strategies for getting by in difficult economic times. Given the situation and constant news coverage, it is altogether too easy for today's students, whose context for understanding history is the period since 1990, to draw erroneous comparisons between the hard times their grandparents and great grandparents faced with the economic downturn of 2008-09.

During a class lecture, a few historical facts will demonstrate that in the winter of 2008-09, the United States was not again in the depths of the Great Depression. Unemployment between 1929 and 1933 soared to around twenty-five percent. Another twenty-five percent of working Americans were underemployed, working part time when they needed full time work, taking drastic pay cuts, or doing jobs that did not make use of their skills. Unemployment remained above twenty percent in 1934 and

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<sup>1</sup>U.S. Department of Labor, [www.dol.gov](http://www.dol.gov), accessed October 6, 2009; "Unemployment Rate by States, August 2009," U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, [www.bls.gov/web/laumstrk.htm](http://www.bls.gov/web/laumstrk.htm), accessed October 6, 2009.

1935, and did not fall below fifteen percent until 1941.<sup>2</sup> Other economic indicators were equally grim. Gross national income declined more than 44 percent between 1929 and 1933. In the same period, personal consumption declined nearly twenty percent. By the time Franklin Roosevelt took office in March 1933, nearly every bank in the United States had closed.<sup>3</sup> By any measure, the depression of the 1930s was a staggering economic calamity.

It can be difficult, however, to impress this information in any meaningful way on a group of 18 to 24-year olds who do not have the context to understand the day-to-day impact of these numbers. I began planning a senior seminar on the Great Depression in the fall of 2008, anticipating that the current economic turmoil might make it difficult to imagine the difference in degree between the problems of the thirties and the problems of today. I was looking for a very concrete way in which to demonstrate the differences between their grandparents' and great grandparents' depression and their own recession. I decided that one of the most concrete and immediate ways to demonstrate this difference was to use food.

Food is, of course, incredibly important to all of us. Without it, we perish. The degree of difficulty families in the U.S. have experienced obtaining adequate food has varied enormously. Although the variety of food available for purchase grew significantly in the early years of the twentieth century, obtaining sufficient food often depended upon income. Depression-era families had to be extremely careful about how they spent their food dollars. In 1935-1936, 41.7 percent of all American families had an income of \$1,000 or less per year. More than 75 percent of all families receiving relief had incomes of \$1,000 or less per year.<sup>4</sup> Food was the greatest single expense of most American families. Families with incomes of \$1,000 a year and less generally spent forty percent or more of their money each month on food, but still suffered from malnutrition.<sup>5</sup> Among wage earners at the lowest income levels, ninety percent consumed too little calcium, more than eighty percent too little iron, and seventy-five percent too little Vitamin C.<sup>6</sup>

When the Department of Agriculture's home economists tackled the problem of budgeting for hard times, they were pressed to reduce cost estimates to the income levels many families faced. In *Diets to Fit the Family Income* (1936), home economists

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<sup>2</sup>Lester V. Chandler, *America's Greatest Depression, 1929-1940* (New York: Harper and Row, 1970), 34.

<sup>3</sup>Chandler, 8-10, 22.

<sup>4</sup>Clair Brown, *American Standards of Living* (Cambridge, MA: Blackwell, 1994), 100.

<sup>5</sup>Brown, 105, 114, 455.

<sup>6</sup>Brown, 110.

Rowena Schmidt Carpenter and Hazel K. Stiebeling offered sample grocery lists and menus for families in liberal, moderate-cost, minimum-cost, adequate, and restricted levels. They wrote "this restricted-diet plan is for emergency use only, because it may not provide a sufficient surplus of protective foods (milk, eggs, tomatoes, and green vegetables) to insure good health over an indefinite period." The grocery list, which was heavy in potatoes, dried beans, peas, peanut butter, and cereals, did not, they believed, contain adequate protein, vitamins, and minerals for the long haul.<sup>7</sup> The menus Carpenter and Stiebeling suggested were pretty bleak. In a sample week's menu, their Monday offerings included a breakfast of hot cereal, with tomato juice for children, a lunch of boiled beans with salt pork for adults and eggs and bread for children, followed by a dinner of onion soup with cheese and toast and a side of fried potatoes. Other bare-bones suggestions included a soup of potatoes and oatmeal, cheese mush, kidney bean stew, and whole-wheat chowder.<sup>8</sup> They predicted that feeding a family of four at this barely adequate level would have cost \$6.15 per week, or nearly \$320 for the year. By contrast, the "minimum cost adequate diet," which included twice or more the meat, eggs, fruits, and vegetables of the restricted diet, would have cost \$9.15 per week, or nearly \$475.80 for a year.<sup>9</sup> Families with incomes of at least \$1,000 a year might have been able to make this minimum, but millions of families with incomes below this mark might not have been able to afford even the restricted diet.

When unemployment struck, families had to be even more careful about their spending. In 1931 in Pennsylvania, for example, most destitute families received only eight to twelve dollars per month in aid. Some states rationed their aid, providing funds to only the most "worthy" of the poor, generally meaning widows, orphans, and the disabled. Many states ran out of money for aid by 1932 and 1933, leaving the poor to fend for themselves.<sup>10</sup> In a situation such as this, food was not entertainment. Food was a matter of survival.

But in the period after World War II, a time of relative prosperity, people came to think of food as entertainment as well as sustenance. Rising standards of living and changes in the American family have changed food and eating significantly. Today, families eat out regularly. Since the 1970s, American families, on average, have spent as many of their food dollars on meals in restaurants as on groceries for home. "Home cooking" is more likely to involve heating pre-prepared foods than making a meal from

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<sup>7</sup>Rowena Schmidt Carpenter and Hazel K. Stiebeling, *Diets to Fit the Family Income*, U.S. Department of Agriculture, Farmer's Bulletin No. 1757 (Washington, DC: U.S. GPO, 1936).

<sup>8</sup>Carpenter and Stiebeling, 29.

<sup>9</sup>Carpenter and Stiebeling, 10-12.

<sup>10</sup>Chandler, 43-47.

basic ingredients.<sup>11</sup> These are generally post-World War II developments. During the depression, eating out was a rare and expensive treat. Most families made the majority of their meals at home from basic, minimally-processed ingredients. Prepared and convenience foods were expensive and less common than today. For example, in 1937 when Kraft Macaroni and Cheese made its first appearance in grocery stores, it cost nineteen cents for four servings. While this might sound like an insignificant sum, for family budgets in 1937, it was not. That nineteen-cent box of macaroni and cheese is the equivalent of a \$2.85 purchase today, far more than we would pay for the same product.<sup>12</sup> In the 1930s Kraft Macaroni and Cheese was not survival food, but a small luxury.

But how does one convey to students what eating for survival means? An instructor could take a small pile of vegetables into a class—say, three potatoes, a carrot, and an onion—and explain to students that for many poor families of the 1930s, this was dinner for five. What would be more effective, however, would be to *give* the same ingredients and a few instructions to them and see what they make of the challenge.<sup>13</sup>

Preparing the assignment required a good bit of advance preparation. I made root vegetables the center of the meal. Potatoes, onions, and carrots were inexpensive in the 1930s, readily available, and central to many different regional cuisines. Additionally, they would be familiar to most students (and readily available), unlike turnips, parsnips, cabbage, or rutabagas, which often were eaten in the thirties. The students would also need less expertise in cooking than would be required if I gave them other inexpensive 1930s staples, such as dried beans, peas, or grains. After doing a bit of counting and weighing, I determined that I needed approximately twenty pounds of potatoes and four pounds of carrots for a class of seventeen, and I purchased nearly thirteen pounds of onions. I also bought five and a half pounds of inexpensive, fatty bacon to approximate the salt and fat pork that many families in the thirties used as a source of calories and protein. (If a local grocery has a full service meat counter, slab bacon could be substituted.) All of the food supplies cost \$21.43. At 2009 prices, this is the equivalent of 75 servings at .29 per serving, making this budget food indeed. Using contemporary grocery advertisements, I calculated that the same amount of food in 1933 would have cost approximately \$1.31, or 75 servings at .02 per serving. Groceries actually cost

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<sup>11</sup>Cathy K. Kaufman, "The Rise of Restaurants," *The Oxford Companion to American Food and Drink*, edited by Andrew F. Smith (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), 501; Sylvia Lovegren, "Historical Overview: 1960s to the Present," *The Oxford Companion*, 296.

<sup>12</sup>Caroline Wyman, *Better than Homemade: Amazing Foods that Changed the Way We Eat* (Philadelphia: Quirk Books, 2004), 22. Relative cost computed using EH.Net's "Purchasing Power of the American Dollar," <http://www.measuringworth.com/ppowerus>, accessed February 20, 2009.

<sup>13</sup>For this idea I thank Richard Kehrberg, who suggested that making students cook would be far more effective than just showing them a pile of vegetables.

more relative to family incomes in 1933 than today, a reflection on technological changes that have increased the supply and reduced the price of most foodstuffs in the last 75 years.<sup>14</sup>

The week before the class was to discuss the topic of "poverty and dislocation," I announced that they would be completing a "mystery assignment" for the next week. I gave the following instructions to each member of the class, plus a small brown paper bag of food, including three to four potatoes, one or two carrots, and one large onion. Students who had no objections received a small bag of bacon.

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### Mystery Assignment: Food and Eating in Impoverished Families

During the Great Depression, food and eating were an obsession for many. Because money was so tight, finding resources to provide a family with healthy, satisfying meals was difficult and sometimes impossible. In the bag provided, you will find three potatoes, an onion, and two carrots. If you have no objections to bacon, you will be provided a small portion of bacon pieces. During the depression, these were all common elements in the Midwestern family diets.

During the next week, use the items in your bag to make a meal. You can use your own spices and water. If you aren't quite sure what to do with your potatoes, onion, and carrots, get help. Call a parent, grandparent, aunt, uncle, Boy or Girl Scout leader, 4-H leader, or other person knowledgeable about cooking on a budget. Remember: In the 1930s, people relied on friends and relatives to provide them the support they needed to survive. If you are absolutely, positively stumped about how to turn these ingredients into a meal, you may spend up to \$1 on additional ingredients (the equivalent of \$.05 in 1933 money). If you do spend \$1 on additional ingredients, they MUST be ingredients that were available in 1933. In other words, you CANNOT buy a \$1 frozen pizza and call it dinner. You CANNOT buy a box of Kraft Macaroni and Cheese, since that would have cost .19 when it was first marketed in 1937. You could buy canned milk, a small portion of meat, or bread, for instance.

When you come to the next class, bring a short written discussion of your cooking and eating experience, answering the following questions.

1. What did you cook with your ingredients? Did you purchase any additional items? What?
2. Did you get any help from a parent, grandparent, or other experienced cook? Remember, this is OK.
3. How many people would your meal feed?

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<sup>14</sup>David Danbom, *Born in the Country: A History of Rural America* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1995), 239.

4. If this was what your family ate on a regular basis, during the depression (and remember, for poor people, those on relief, and farm families, this or something like this often was), what does this tell you about what daily life was like for the poor?

If you are feeling inspired to further inquiry, feel free to take in a free dinner at the Fellowship Hall of the First United Methodist Church in Ames. They will not try to convert you. You will then have a small (very small) idea of what the "soup kitchen" experience might have been like during the depression.

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After distributing brown paper bags of food to my stunned class, I took some time to answer questions. Yes, they could use a crock pot, which would be equivalent to the long, slow cooking that many people used during the 1930s. No, they could not use a microwave. Yes, they could buy proportionally, using a part of a bag of flour or a part of a can of chicken broth, as long as that part was equivalent to one dollar or less. Yes, they could work with another student, particularly if they did not have easy access to cooking facilities. No, they could not go out and kill a squirrel or rabbit to put in the pot, since I did not want to be responsible for anyone hunting out of season. This question did, however, provide an opportunity to discuss how Great Depression families extended their diets with hunting, fishing, foraging, and gardening. I encouraged students again to ask for help if they needed it, since grandparents, aunts, uncles, and other older relatives are generally interested in sharing their historical experiences and expertise. In a roundabout way, I hoped they would learn some of their own families' Great Depression stories.

Anticipating the next week's discussion, I also participated in the assignment, making a pot of potato soup for my family. I used the same ingredients as I had given the students, but added half a can of evaporated milk to the soup. This fell well within the limit of \$1.00 of additional ingredients. I also dug into my own cache of Great Depression stories about food and eating in hard times, in order to be able to extend the story beyond the students' sacks of groceries. In my research with Dust Bowl families living in southwestern Kansas, I found that people had relied upon oatmeal, cornmeal mush, sauerkraut, macaroni dishes, beans, wild game and weeds, and many different versions of potatoes. Families ate repetitive diets with very little in the way of meat or fresh fruits and vegetables.<sup>15</sup>

Other sources provided additional information on 1930s cooking. *Stories and Recipes of the Great Depression of the 1930's and More from Your Kitchen Today* by

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<sup>15</sup>See Pamela Riney-Kehrberg, *Rooted in Dust: Surviving Drought and Depression in Southwestern Kansas* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1995), chs. 3 and 5; for descriptions of other Depression meals, see also Pamela Riney-Kehrberg, editor, *Waiting on the Bounty: The Dust Bowl Diary of Mary Knackstedt Dyck* (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 1999).

Janet Van Amber Paske and Rita Van Amber is readily available and provides an array of truly budget recipes from the thirties. These include such culinary treats as "Baked Macaroni and Tomatoes," created from bacon fat, tomatoes, and cooked macaroni, and "Pigs in a Potato Patch," concocted from a bowl of mashed potatoes, studded with sliced wieners. The cookbook also explains how to prepare rabbits, squirrels, and partridge, as well as dandelion greens.<sup>16</sup> The authors gathered most of these recipes from families in the upper Midwest, Wisconsin, Iowa, and Minnesota. Further descriptions of budget cooking, cooking from scratch, and preserving food can be found in *Voices of American Homemakers*, edited by Eleanor Arnold. Indiana farm women explained in oral interviews what their families ate, how they prepared food, and all of the work involved in keeping a family fed and healthy.<sup>17</sup> A vintage source of inspiration is the U.S. government publication *Selections from Aunt Sammy's Radio Recipes and USDA Favorites*, a collection of recipes broadcast into American homes by United States Department of Agriculture home economists.<sup>18</sup>

Another source available on the Internet and YouTube is very useful to anyone but particularly for those in heavily Italian-American areas: "Great Depression Cooking With Clara" provides recipes (and wonderful footage) of a ninety-three year old great grandmother preparing such Great Depression favorites as "Pasta with Peas," "Poorman's Meal," "Egg Drop Soup," and "Cooked Bread."<sup>19</sup> Much to my surprise, many of her recipes also begin with a potato and an onion. Armed with this information, as well as my own family's stories, I eagerly awaited the students' reports of their meals and reactions to the assignment.

The students came to class full of excitement about the project. They had seriously thought about the assignment and planned their meals carefully. The meals that students cooked, however, were not what I expected. Only two students chose to make a soup, something of a surprise, since soups, which could be watered down to stretch ingredients further, were one of the staples of poor people in the depression era. Several made stuffed baked potatoes, tasty, but hard to stretch beyond three hungry diners. Several happened into the idea of hash, which would have been fairly common in the thirties and easier to stretch. Two made mashed potatoes that they topped with

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<sup>16</sup>Janet Van Amber Paske and Rita Van Amber, *Stories and Recipes of the Great Depression of the 1930's and More from Your Kitchen Today* (Menomonie, WI: Van Amber Publishers, 1986), 35-36, 38-40.

<sup>17</sup>Eleanor Arnold, editor, *Voices of American Homemakers* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1985), 118-149.

<sup>18</sup>Consumer and Food Economics Institute, Agricultural Research Service, *Selections from Aunt Sammy's Radio Recipes and USDA Favorites* (Washington, DC: GPO, 1976).

<sup>19</sup>"Great Depression Cooking with Clara,"

[http://www.greatdepressioncooking.com/Depression\\_Cooking/Welcomed.html](http://www.greatdepressioncooking.com/Depression_Cooking/Welcomed.html), accessed February 20, 2009.

a carrot and onion mixture. One chose to make potato pancakes; another inexpensive staple. Several chose to consult mothers and aunts. One student who did not know how to cook called his grandmother in Kansas. She talked him through the entire process.

Students also made some surprising decisions about how to use, or not use, the food in their bags. Two threw out carrots that had become slightly rubbery before they could be cooked. This was far different from the course most cooks would have pursued in the thirties, since even a rubbery carrot would have been too precious to discard. On the positive side, the students recognized that most home cooks would have considered this wasteful seventy years ago. One wrote, "The thing that really struck me after we ate was the fact that a poor family that was feeding four or five people would never have discarded a carrot simply because it was a little shriveled and spongy. I could not help but wonder how many families ate food that had gone bad simply because they otherwise would have gone hungry." (I commented in the margin of his paper that our ideas about what had "gone bad" and what was edible have probably changed significantly over the last seventy years.) Several students decided that their onion was too big, and they only used a small portion, without realizing that using the whole onion would stretch their ingredients significantly. While some students realized that cooking grease was an important part of the caloric content of Great Depression meals, several drained off the grease and used cooking oil instead, without even realizing that bacon fat, from the point of view of a depression-era housewife, would have been food. Others, however, really got into the spirit of the assignment. One commented, "My premeditated strategy was simply to use up all of the bacon grease ... I placed the mashed potatoes in the pan and used them as a sponge to soak up the grease." He also broke out a piece of hard tack, saved from a Civil War class the previous spring, and incorporated it into his bacon fat. Perhaps unsurprisingly, this was a thin young man, unconcerned with calorie counting, or the fattening consequences of eating so much grease.

One student decided to carry the assignment further than I had suggested. He created a much more elaborate meal plan by using the foods I provided as the base for his dinner, while researching additional ways in which to provide nutrients and calories within the one dollar guideline. Particularly useful to his assignment was the 1909 volume *Household Discoveries and Mrs. Curtis's Cookbook*, by Sidney Morse and Isabel Gordon Curtis, which is full of budget recipes.<sup>20</sup> Using this and the rest of his mother's extensive collection of period cookbooks, as well as her advice, he concocted a meal of boiled beans, biscuits, and vegetable soup. He was particularly concerned about increasing the protein value of his meal, given that so many families included pregnant women and growing children. Calculating fractional grocery purchases, he proved that his single dollar would stretch to cover the entire meal. While he believed

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<sup>20</sup>Sidney Morse and Isabel Gordon Curtis, *Household Discoveries and Mrs. Curtis's Cookbook* (New York: Success Company, 1909).



his three dishes would have served three adequately, his mother predicted five and his grandmother six.

When I asked other students how many people their meals fed, they reported that they fed between one and three people with their bags of vegetables. When asked how many people they *could have* fed, most agreed that between four and six people (two adults, two to four children) could have eaten a somewhat meager meal. All agreed that eating this kind of diet, day in and day out, would lead to serious nutritional problems. One wrote, "I also believe that this meal, or the ingredients given to prepare it, would not give me the sufficient energy needed to complete many of the manual labor jobs taken by the willing workers during the 1930s." Wielding a WPA shovel could be difficult, given the insufficiency of relief budget diets.

Students made other interesting observations as well. Predictably, many found the meal "tedious and dull," something of which they "would grow very weary," while another called it "surprisingly tasty." Another commented that it was "disgusting," making me wonder when plain food had become so undesirable. One student speculated about the psychological impact of this kind of diet: "Eating would be a constant reminder of the state your family was in because you have to eat everyday, there is no avoiding it." One young woman beautifully captured the difference between the way most Americans eat today, and eating for survival.

I realized when making this meal how focused we are these days on how good something tastes and even how pretty something is on a plate. Many of us don't worry about whether the meal will fill us up, or whether it is good for us, because we know we will get to eat again in a couple of hours. I don't think families trying to make it through the depression were worried about presentation, variety, or even taste. The focus of depression-era families, and mothers in particular, was to try to keep their families from starving, even if it meant eating the same three ingredients over and over again. We are privileged enough to be able to make food choices based on what we like, what tastes good, and what keeps us satisfied.

She had correctly identified the crux of the matter: Relief and poverty-level diets robbed families of the element of choice. Nothing but survival really mattered.

Interestingly enough, no one chose to visit the local charity meal program. Whether this was a result of tight schedules, the potential for embarrassment, or indifference, I do not know. Food at First, which is run by a consortium of local churches and charitable organizations, collects leftover food from various businesses, as well as having a modest budget with which to buy staples from local grocery stores. Food at First regularly serves main dishes such as sloppy joes, burritos, lasagna, and ham, accompanied by such dishes as rice, fresh vegetables, salads, jello, brownies, ice

cream, and cookies.<sup>21</sup> If the students had chosen to visit the meal program, we would have discussed the differences between the hearty meals of restaurant and fraternity house leftovers served at Food at First and the thin soup and dry bread of a depression-era charity meal.

Because of the cost and the logistics of portioning out the food, I would only recommend this assignment for a fairly small class. Fortunately, departmental funds paid for the groceries in this case. I also would recommend the assignment for upper-level students rather than freshmen, because of the problems of finding cooking facilities in dormitories. On a commuter campus, this would be less of a concern. Fortunately, only one student lacked basic cooking skills, and he was able to overcome this with the help of his grandmother.

This assignment can easily be paired with another project I developed and have used in the past, "Feeding a Family of Five: Role Playing the Great Depression," published in *Teaching History* in 1997.<sup>22</sup> In this assignment, students take on the role of a parent or guardian, with a relief budget of \$2.50 per week to care for themselves and their dependents. Using a selection of newspaper advertisements and period cookbooks, they must create a grocery list, a set of menus, and a written justification for their choices. A problem that I have encountered in the past is the enormous gulf between the eating habits of the past and those of the present; a number of students simply did not know how to formulate a meal plan using basic ingredients such as root vegetables, beans, and other cheap, less processed foods. I believe that if I required students to complete the "mystery assignment" prior to their attempts to "feed a family of five," the results would be more satisfactory, and more true to the eating patterns of the 1930s.

The assignment seemed to energize the students. They certainly wanted to talk about their meals and their reactions to them. One student commented, "this was the most exciting assignment I have had all year," while another wrote, "I would encourage you to use this with future classes." My primary goal, which I believe I achieved, was to create a "stop-and-think" moment, when students could measure the distance between the past and present, using a concrete medium, such as food. Instead of just reading or hearing about the distance between their own dinners and those of families on relief, they could actually plan a meal, cook the food, and eat it, weighing that meal against what they normally would have eaten for dinner. As a result, the class has a greater appreciation of the substantial difference between their eating habits and those of relief clients and other poor families of 75 years ago.

Making an assignment such as this does require trade-offs in terms of class time. The time spent explaining the assignment, and then discussing it with the class, does

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<sup>21</sup>"Food at First: Past Meals," [http://www.foodatfirst.com/past\\_meals.htm](http://www.foodatfirst.com/past_meals.htm), accessed February 27, 2009.

<sup>22</sup>"Feeding a Family of Five: Role Playing the Great Depression," *Teaching History: A Journal of Methods*, 22:2 (Fall 1997), 59-63.

mean that other content might be lost. There might be less of an opportunity to discuss economic change in the 1930s or New Deal programs. However, if an instructor is going to spend at least one class period on a discussion of the meaning of poverty in the thirties, this assignment would more than justify itself in terms of making the contours of hunger and deprivation more real. From my perspective, an important part of an education in history is the understanding that now is not then and that there have been enormous changes in the fabric of American life in the last eighty years. Fortunately, our students have not grown up in a time of want, but that does present certain challenges in impressing upon them the gravity of the situation in the 1930s. Presenting them with a few instructions and a small bag of vegetables is a gentle but effective means of demonstrating how much our world has changed since the Great Depression.