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Like Fire in Broom Straw: Southern Journalism and the Textile Strikes of 1929-1931 (Contributions in American History)

Robert W. Whalen

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The southern textile strikes of 1929-1931 were ferocious struggles--thousands of millhands went on strike, the National Guard was deployed, several people were killed and hundreds injured and jailed. The southern press, and for a time the national press, covered the story in enormous detail. In recounting developments, southern reporters and editors found themselves swept up on a painful and sweeping re-examination and reconstruction of southern institutions and values. Whalen explores the largely unknown world of southern journalism and investigates the ways in which the upheaval in textiles triggered profound soul-searching among southerners. The southern textile strikes of 1929-1931 were ferocious struggles--thousands of millhands went on strike, the National Guard was deployed, several people were killed and hundreds injured and jailed. The southern press, and for a time the national press, covered the story in enormous detail. In recounting developments, southern reporters and editors found themselves swept up on a painful and sweeping re-examination and reconstruction of southern institutions and values. Whalen explores the largely unknown world of southern journalism and investigates the ways in which the upheaval in textiles triggered profound soul-searching among southerners.

The worlds of labor, journalism, and the American South collide in this study. That collision, Whalen claims, is the prelude to the stunning social, economic, and cultural transformation of the American South which occurred in the last half of the twentieth century. The textile strikes shocked the mind of the South, a fact that can readily be seen in hometown papers, as reporters and editors ran the gamut from denial and scheming to hoping and dreaming--sometimes even bravely confronting the truth. The reevaluation of southern manners and mores that would culminate in the Civil Rights struggles of the 1950s and 1960s can be dated back to this period of turmoil.

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