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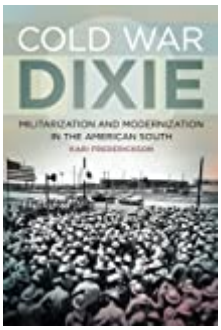

Kari A. Frederickson. *Cold War Dixie: Militarization and Modernization in the American South.* Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2013. xii + 226 pp. $69.95 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-8203-4519-2; $24.95 (paper), ISBN 978-0-8203-4520-8.

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Atoms for Change

Kari A. Fredericksonâs *Cold War Dixie* is a good book on an important topic: the social, cultural, geographic, and political impact of the Savannah River Plant (SRP), which produced primarily tritium and plutonium-239 for the American nuclear arsenal. Built and managed by Du Pont Corporation beginning in 1951, the SRP was situated on over three hundred square miles of mostly rural South Carolina at the Georgia border. Frederickson chronicles the transformation of the area in and adjacent to the site, arguing that the military necessities of arms production and the corporate culture of Du Pont elided a traditional southern culture and facilitated the rise of one corner of the modern, suburban Sunbelt. Significantly, she asserts that despite the racism of conservatives who abandoned the Democratic Party in the years following the 1964 Civil Rights Act, the ascendency of Republicans in southern states can also be traced, to a large degree, to the modernization that projects like the SRP brought to the region.

In a brief first chapter, Frederickson explains the strategic decision to expand the nuclear arsenal and the political decision to locate the facility in South Carolina. In the former, her limited range of sources leads to some problematic assertions. For instance, it is not entirely incorrect to claim that âthe United States ... sought international control of atomic energy, a plan that ultimately failedâ (p. 12). However, the truth is rather more complicated. Likewise, discussing the beginning of the Korean War, she writes that âinternational events dictated an immediate military response to the communist threat,â and quotes John Lewis Gaddis, describing it as a ââchallenge [to] the entire structure of postwar collective securityââ (p. 16). Gaddisâs orthodox views on the Cold War inform Fredericksonâs analysis without apparent reservation or acknowledgment of the complex historiography of the era. But when she takes up the political issue of the location of the plant, Frederickson digs deeper, notably on the efforts of South Carolina boosters like James Byrnes, Mendel Rivers, and Strom Thurmond to attract federal projects.[1]

In the second chapter, Frederickson turns to the early history of the area, particularly around the town of Aiken. Again, her reliance on secondary sources mars the narrative. Frederickson quotes too much from other historians, and readers familiar with Drew Faustâs biography of James Henry Hammondâwhich Frederickson properly acknowledgesâwill feel like they have been here before. Even so, it is a useful digression, providing a contrast to the changes that the SRP would bring in the twentieth century.

After a shaky start, Frederickson gets to the principal subject of her book and finds her voice. The third chapter examines the process by which the government claimed and cleared the land on which the plant would be built, expelling residents who had held the land for generations, with little provision for their future or adequate compensation for their losses. She writes, âThe rapid nature of the militarization of the southern economy left many of modernizationâs losers in its wake, struggling with the cultural loss that often accompanies progressâ (p. 50). Employing local sources, she finds that âthe governmentâs inattention and abuse was antithetical to a rural community that saw land as alive and productiveâ (p. 65). And while African Americans suffered the most devastating losses and received the least compensation, nearly all of those displaced saw their former lives bulldozed, paved, and eventually poisoned for the greater cause.

Frederickson then examines the construction of the plant, and the failure of either Du Pont or federal officials to follow federal guidelines that should have guaranteed more employment opportunities to black workers. While many African Americans worked at the plant, they were routinely pressed into lower paid, more dangerous work, whatever their qualifications, and despite the efforts of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) and the National Urban League. The Cold War may have brought modernization to the South, but it did not have an immediate effect on the racial order in western South Carolina.

The Truman administration did not provide housing for construction crews or for long-term plant employees, instead hoping that local communities would absorb the increased population. This was in part a political decision and in part a fiscal decision; however, Frederickson points to a deeper, ideological choice. She asks, âCould the nation appropriately arm itself for a permanent condition of total war without resorting to the creation of a garrison state in which the preponderance of resources were harnessed for military and defense purposes, and in which ultimate power shifted from civilian to military authorities?â (p. 107). In the case of the people affected by the SRP, she answers, âSouth Carolina residentsâ demands for government intervention, controls, and assistance illustrate their level of comfort with the ideal of the compensatory welfare state as well as their antipathy toward the garrison stateâ (p. 108). It is a large claim, and consistent with the bookâs thesis. However, it is hardly addressed by the evidence she provides. Certainly people wanted to be compensated for their losses, and certainly the Truman administration left decisions of housing, schools, and infrastructure to local markets and politicians. That white southerners welcomed federal dollars at the same time that they resisted federal intervention in local practices may have less to do with garrisons than it does with segregation. In any case, it was not a policy decision that local residents were in a position to confront.[2]

Next, Frederickson focuses on the changes wrought in the town of Aiken, a resident community for employees of the SRP. She fruitfully returns to her themes of changing landscapes and modernization, examining the impact of Du Pontâs corporate culture and advocacy of consumerism on the lives of the townâs residents. Employing a variety of local sources, she finds that the influx of white-collar workers and chain stores, and the building of suburbs accelerated the eclipse of the cultural localism that the building of the plant and the displacement of locals had begun. There were holdouts, older residents who objected to the âdecision to sacrifice aesthetics for commerce, to substitute a landscape of consumption over a landscape of leisureâ (p. 142). The residual dissonance was signified by the adoption of a new town seal for Aiken, which incorporated pastoral images from its past with a celebration of its new place in the atomic age. But, as Frederickson shows, by the mid-1950s Aiken looked more like an American suburb than a southern hamlet.

In a chapter on politics and race, Frederickson examines the persistence of racial politics, tempered by the influx of northern workers, the rise of the Republican Party, and the modernization of the region. It is a well-crafted analysis of local politics, party affiliation, and school desegregation. She persuasively demonstrates that, at least in Aiken, the conservative culture of Du Pont and its employees was as important to the early successes of the Republican Party as the embrace by the national Democratic Party of a civil rights agenda. Still, even in Fredericksonâs account, as the reemergence of politicians like

Thurmond demonstrates, the white noise of racism can overwhelm the shifts in precinct-level electoral politics.

No too long ago, students of postwar America could think about the history of the Cold War and the history of the civil rights movement as if they had happened on different planets, except insofar as civil rights leaders might be accused of communist sympathies, or southern governors might be accused of providing grist for Soviet propaganda. But the two historical developments simultaneously transformed the politics and culture of the nation, nowhere more obviously than in the South.[3] Federal projects like the Savannah River Plant did not eliminate racism in South Carolina. There were racists enough in Washington who had no interest there. Nor did the modernization and suburbanization of the new Sunbelt entirely overwhelm those distinctively southern elements of South Carolina politics and culture. Even so, there is value in this case study. Frederickson writes, âPaying closer attention to the relationship between the local and the national, the influence of specific corporate or military cultures, and the interplay with specific historical dynamics within individual southern communities may ultimately yield a more compelling narrative of southern history in the post-World War II eraâ (p. 169). *Cold War Dixie* does not revolutionize our understanding of the postwar South, but it does enrich it.

Notes

[1]. A thoughtful critique of the orthodox view of the Cold War, and a still-valuable overview of the historiography at the end of the twentieth century, is Melvyn P. Leffler, âThe Cold War: What Do âWe Now Knowâ?â *American Historical Review* 104, no. 2 (April 1999): 501-524. A recent collection of essays from a variety of perspectives is Joel Isaac and Duncan Bell, eds., *Uncertain Empire: American History and the Idea of the Cold War* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012).

[2]. On the broader rejection of a âgarrison state,â see Michael J. Hogan, *A Cross of Iron: Harry S. Truman and the Origins of the National Security State, 1945-1954* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1998); and Aaron L. Friedberg, *In the Shadow of the Garrison State: Americaâs Anti-Statism and Its Cold War Grand Strategy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000).

[3]. The history of the confluence of federal policy, modernization, and race in the Sunbelt is now a rich field. See Bruce J. Schulman, *From Cotton Belt to Sunbelt: Federal Policy, Economic Development, and the Transformation of the South, 1938-1980* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991); Matthew D. Lassiter, *The Silent Majority: Suburban Politics in the Sunbelt South* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2006); and Gavin Wright, *Sharing the Prize: The Economics of the Civil Rights Revolution in the American South* (Cambridge: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2013).