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Karen L. Cox. *Dreaming of Dixie: How the South Was Created in American Popular Culture*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2011. 224 pp. \$34.95 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-8078-3471-8.

Reviewed by Samuel L. Schaffer
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Dixified: The South in the American Imagination

Mammies and colonels. Belles and hillbillies. Plantation balls and cotton bolls. These are the images of Dixie in American popular culture, and these are the subjects of Karen Cox's *Dreaming of Dixie: How the South Was Created in Popular Culture*. Using popular songs, advertising, radio shows, movies, and travel literature, Cox investigates how non-southern Americans came to understand the South in the period from the late nineteenth century through World War II. Although southerners sometimes had a hand in this process, Cox argues, it was largely non-southerners who marketed and disseminated what the nation came to understand as Dixie. Through a catalog of stock southern images, Madison Avenue, Tin Pan Alley, and Hollywood perpetuated the idea of a romantic, premodern South that appealed to non-southern Americans grappling with the challenges of a modern, urban, industrial world. Southerners, too, capitalized on the connection between mass culture and consumerism and provided non-southern tourists with exactly what they expected of Dixie. These images, of course, also helped sustain beliefs about race that cemented Jim Crow as the southern racial status quo. Ultimately, Cox concludes, "Dixie" was not simply a reference to a region" (p. 36). It was an idea, it was a brand, and, she contends, it was shaped outside the South.

Each of Cox's chapters explores a different cultural source, starting with popular music. "Dixie was the muse," she begins, "for songwriters and songpluggers" (p. 17). Most of these were first- and second-generation

Jews who had never traveled to the place about which they wrote but who nevertheless understood that songs about the South sold. From "coon songs" to "Back-to-Dixie songs," from lyrics to sheet music artwork, from Irving Berlin to George Gershwin, Cox shows how these formulaic pieces about singing darkies, moonlight, and cotton fields romanticized Dixie as a region still wedded to its agrarian past.

Realizing that they were selling values as well as products, advertisers also sought to transport consumers back through time to the Old South. As Cox's chapter "Selling Dixie" describes, firms such as J. Walter Thompson successfully used southern images—a grinning Aunt Jemima serving up "old-time Southern flavor" or leisurely elites sipping coffee in Nashville's Maxwell House—to appeal to non-southern consumers. Dixie, in their hands and on their products, represented "a culture of leisure, pastoral romance, and loyal servants" far from the noisy rush of modern urban life (p. 37).

Early radio shows and films, the subjects of Cox's third and fourth chapters, did similar cultural work. Radio programs such as *Amos 'n' Andy* reinforced already existing vaudeville stereotypes of African Americans as either plantation Negroes or urban dandies, while films such as *The Littlest Rebel* (1935) and *Gone with the Wind* (1939) maintained the cultural mythology of the Old South. Even the hillbilly, through radio shows such as *National Barn Dance* and films such as *Joan of Ozark*

(1942), came to be seen as a representation of “the goodness of ‘plain folk’” (p. 100). Non-southerners thus heard, saw, and embraced Dixie and its stock characters as the rustic, the primitive, and the exotic all at once.

One of the most powerful features of Dixie’s images in American culture was that they reinforced each other across different media. “The southern mammy was more than an advertising icon,” Cox explains. “She appeared in popular music, on early radio shows, in Hollywood movies, and in popular literature” (p. 7). Exploring this last field in her fifth chapter, Cox shows how northern publishers marketed literature about the South—often written by Southerners—as an accurate portrayal of Dixie. From the dialect of Joel Chandler Harris’s Uncle Remus tales to the romantic landscape of *Gone with the Wind*, publishers promoted these stories not as fiction but as authentic.

Thanks to these cultural phenomena, southerners came to realize that Dixie was a “cultural commodity,” and Cox’s final chapter, “Welcome to Dixie,” shows that it was “a commodity from which [southerners] intended to profit” (p. 129). Making sure that the twentieth-century craze of “motor-touring” included the South, southern entrepreneurs formed groups such as the Dixie Highway Association to lobby their states to build better roads and promoted historical tourism to Civil War battlefields and southern plantations. The “Natchez Pilgrimage,” adver-

tised a group of Mississippians, could transport travelers to the place “where the Old South still lives” (p. 155).

Dreaming Dixie is a useful, interesting, and well researched book. Karen Cox has unearthed some fascinating cultural sources, and she has helpfully placed them in conversation with each other. She has showed how, across different genres, they projected a consistent image of Dixie as a place of pastoral leisure and racial stability. She has effectively applied the work of cultural historians such as Jackson Lears regarding modernity and mass culture to explain why non-southerners so eagerly subscribed to the myth of Dixie. Some readers may wish for a little more historical context, while others may look for a more thorough discussion of the southern origins and the political consequences of these symbols. Nevertheless, Cox leads the reader through a compelling catalogue of cultural productions.

In the years from the late nineteenth century to World War II, non-southerners were searching for the authentic, the anti-modern. As *Dreaming Dixie* shows, they found it in the images of white-columned mansions, mustachioed colonels, loyal slaves, and southern belles. Americans bought the myths of the Old South and the products associated with it. When they dreamed of a place where values and traditions still had meaning, they dreamed of Dixie.

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