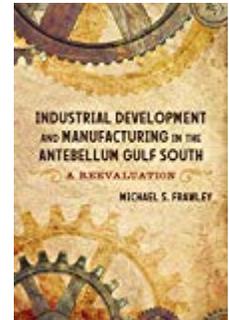


Michael S. Frawley. *Industrial Development and Manufacturing in the Antebellum Gulf South: A Reevaluation.* LSU Press, 2019. 256 pp. \$45.00, cloth, ISBN 978-0-8071-7068-7.



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Michael S. Frawley, an assistant professor of history at the University of Texas of the Permian Basin, has added another brick to the long historiography of antebellum industrialization in the US South. Like many before him, Frawley wants to dispel the myth that the South was not industrialized, and he specifically hopes to refute the thesis of economists Fred Bateman and Thomas Weiss's 1981 monograph, *A Deplorable Scarcity: The Failure of Industrialization in the Slave Economy*, which "proved" abolitionist claims that the South was indeed backward in its industrial efforts when compared to the North, and that slavery was to blame. Dr. Frawley's data and analysis focus on 1860, the census and the year. He is not interested in process or change over time. Like the census, Frawley's book is a static snapshot of society in a given year. Do not expect a story. His in-depth economic study of Texas, Mississippi, and Alabama as the "Gulf South" establishes that the US Census undercounted industrial firms in 1860, and thus underrepresented its production, labor, capital, profit, and promise. Augmenting the man-

ufacturing census, Frawley successfully combed R. G. Dun & Company credit reports for industrial firms, and he also searched an extensive list of 1860 newspapers in the three states for advertisements of locally produced goods. In the end, however, Frawley concedes that "the South was not as industrialized as the North" (p. 127), but he qualifies that conclusion by pointing out that previous scholarship demonstrated that most of the North was not as intensively industrialized as New England.

Frawley's book fits nicely into the framework I created for understanding the historiography of early Southern industrialization in my review of Bess Beatty's groundbreaking monograph, *Alamance: The Holt Family and Industrialization in a North Carolina County, 1837-1900* (1999), for H-South.[1] Like Robert Starobin's *Industrial Slavery in the Old South* (1971), Frawley lumps all non-agricultural production under the term "industrial." Starobin wanted to show the myriad ways enslaved labor had been used outside of agriculture and called this non-agricultural labor "industri-

ous." Frawley lumps all manufactures together to maximize his estimate of industrialization to include not only larger-scale textile, coal, or iron concerns, but also medium and small firms like shoemakers and agricultural processors. In his many charts, graphs, and GIS outputted maps, Frawley disaggregates his data into large, medium, and small firms, but it is difficult to know exactly which type or how many firms are in each sector. He has two appendixes, and also a website to explore his data, but his short 129 pages of text obscure as much as they reveal. I applaud Frawley's extensive data collection but find it difficult to follow his analysis.

The second way Professor Frawley's *Industrial Development* fits into the framework of older modes of understanding early Southern industrialization is that he attempts to aggregate data for large geographic areas. Prior to 1999, those aggregations were usually done at the state level, with the exception of Bateman and Weiss's work. Frawley attempts to aggregate roughly half of the southern Confederacy under the rubric the "Gulf South," which he states was "relatively homogeneous in ... [its] patterns of development" (p. 7). After showing a map of the Gulf South as stretching from Texas to Florida, Frawley immediately drops Louisiana and Florida from his discussion without explanation. His decision to exclude New Orleans, the South's largest city and most important port in 1860, clearly needs some explanation. Nor does this geographic lumping make sense for understanding the topographical differences of the area he discusses; the mountains, the piedmont, and the coastal areas of the South supported different agricultural and resource development regimes. Lumping several states together dissolves the boundaries of the legal frameworks in which business and industry operated as well, and this analysis therefore needs some other geographical organization to explain nuances.

Frawley's book has one very useful strength. It makes historians account for producers we do

not normally consider "industrial." So, while we have many books dealing with textiles, iron, and coal, we still lack works dealing with small to medium custom manufacturing or artisanal manufacturing of carriages, doors and windows, shoes and other products, as well as agricultural processors. If you add molasses to tobacco, does chewing tobacco constitute an industrial product? Personally, I would say yes. I wish Dr. Frawley had divided his findings among more traditional industrial sectors so his work could be better evaluated.

The book's greatest weakness is Frawley's seeming lack of awareness that the field moved on from Bateman and Weiss some time ago. Most scholars of Southern industrialization from the mid-1990s to the mid-2010s belonged to the Southern Industrialization Project (SIP), an organization dedicated to discussing all forms of industrialization in the South. This organization supported an H-Net discussion list with scholarly reviews (H-Southern-Industry), a book series with the University of Missouri Press,[2] an annual luncheon/meeting as an affiliated organization of the Southern Historical Association (SHA), and occasional standalone conferences at the University of Tennessee-Knoxville, Kennesaw State University (twice), St. Louis Community College, the University of Southern Mississippi-Gulf Park, and the University of Alabama in Huntsville. Most of us thought that a 1997 article by Kenneth Sokoloff and Viken Tchakerian dealt a death blow to the arguments of *A Deplorable Scarcity*. [3] Sokoloff and Tchakerian found that the South had no more of a lack of industry than did the areas of the North where agriculture predominated (most of today's Midwest), and that the comparative advantage of agricultural production over manufacturing was more important in determining the extent of industrialization than the existence of slavery. That Frawley is refighting a battle already won twenty years ago is puzzling.

Instead of simply trying to convince historians that industry existed in the antebellum South,

a new line of historiography opened with Bess Beatty's book in which describing the process of industrialization in Southern places took central focus. And yes, that meant looking locally rather than at larger geographic units. Beatty explored the development of cotton textile mills by Edwin Holt and his heirs in Alamance, North Carolina. While producing a social history of place, she also successfully argued against the "Prussian Road" description of post-Civil War industrialization in North Carolina promulgated by sociologist Dwight Billings. Following Beatty came Curtis Evans's *The Conquest of Labor*, which won the 2002 Bennett Wall Award for the best monograph in Southern economic history from the SHA for exploring the role of Daniel Pratt in developing the manufacturing center at Prattville, Alabama. Next, in 2006, Tom Downey's *Planting a Capitalist South* explored the political economy of the Edgefield and Barnwell districts in antebellum South Carolina, which included the Graniteville and Vacluse factories, owned or operated by William Gregg. Downey's monograph took Chris Morris's cultural development thesis in *Becoming Southern* and applied it to South Carolina, and then added business and financial history to show how the most conservative Southern state actively supported non-agricultural economic development. The last of this new historiographic line (thus far) was my own 2012 book on industrialization in Athens, Georgia. My intent was not merely to show the process of industrialization with an intense look at place, but also to demonstrate how Athens's industry fit into an expanding network of non-agricultural economic activity.[4]

Reviewers who were not industrial historians frequently hated the focus on the local that was used throughout this new line of historiography. They misunderstood that the purpose of case studies, or microhistories, is to uncover the story of a particular place or industry. Instead, they wanted grand unified theories, or at least comparisons to other places. The problem is that not enough case studies have been completed to make

meaningful comparisons. When sufficient case studies are completed, they can be the building blocks for developing a more coherent framework for understanding why Southern places did or did not industrialize in the antebellum period. At present, we only have four such case studies. Much work remains before a grand theory will be viable.

Michael Frawley's book is not wrong; he has good instincts as to what might be the next big push in understanding early Southern industrialization. This book is a good starting place for thinking about the role of small-scale and custom-production manufactures in the South. Focusing on place and its changes over time might prove useful for this endeavor.

Notes

[1]. Michael Gagnon, review of Bess Beatty, *Alamance: The Holt Family and Industrialization in a North Carolina County, 1837-1900*, H-South, H-Net Reviews (October 2000), <https://www.h-net.org/reviews/showrev.php?id=4599>.

[2]. Susanna Delfino and Michele Gillespie, eds., *Global Perspectives on Industrial Transformation in the American South*, vol. 1 of *New Currents in the History of Southern Economy and Society* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 2005); Susanna Delfino and Michele Gillespie, eds., *Technology, Innovation, and Southern Industrialization From the Antebellum Era to the Computer Age*, vol. 2 of *New Currents in the History of Southern Economy and Society* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 2008); and Susanna Delfino, Michele Gillespie, and Louis M. Kyriakoudes, eds., *Southern Society and Its Transformations, 1790-1860*, vol. 3 of *New Currents in the History of Southern Economy and Society* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 2011).

[3]. Kenneth L. Sokoloff and Viken Tchakerian, "Manufacturing Where Agriculture Predominates: Evidence from the South and Midwest in

1860," *Explorations in Economic History* 34 (1997): 243-64.

[4]. Bess Beatty, *Alamance: The Holt Family and Industrialization in a North Carolina County, 1837-1900* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1999); Dwight B. Billings Jr., *Planters and the Making of a "New South": Class, Politics, and Development in North Carolina, 1865-1900* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1979); Curtis J. Evans, *The Conquest of Labor: Daniel Pratt and Southern Industrialization* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2001); Tom Downey, *Planting a Capitalist South: Masters, Merchants, and Manufacturers in the Southern Interior, 1790-1860* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2006); Christopher Morris, *Becoming Southern: The Evolution of a Way of Life, Warren County and Vicksburg, Mississippi, 1770-1860* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995); and Michael Gagnon, *Transition to an Industrial South: Athens, Georgia, 1830-1870* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2012).

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