H-Net Reviews
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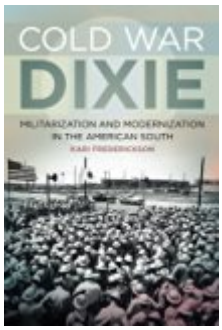
Kari A. Frederickson. *Cold War Dixie: Militarization and Modernization in the American South.* Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2013. xii + 226 pp. $24.95, paper, ISBN 978-0-8203-4520-8.



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The Cold War and the rise of the national security state and its impact on American society in general and the American West in particular has been well chronicled over the last few decades,[1] but Kari Frederickson focuses our attention on a region that has been slighted in many accounts, despite the fact that changes wrought in the American South were of great significance, both for the region and the nation as a whole. It could be argued that, with the exception of the elimination of slavery, the Second World War was a far more transformative event for the American South than the Civil War, in terms of social, political, economic, and environmental changes. Frederickson's excellent work provides strong additional evidence for that argument.

The book is focused narrowly on the Department of Energy's Savannah River Plant (SRP) and the surrounding region of upstate South Carolina. Frederickson argues that the establishment of the plant in a rural, still largely agricultural area was a significant catalyst for development, economic progress (although primarily for whites), and demographic change in the surrounding region, especially the nearby community of Aiken, South Carolina, and, to a lesser extent, Augusta, Georgia. She believes that "the SRP imprinted the modern military state on the southern landscape, transforming not only the space within its boundaries but the surrounding communities" as well (p. 1). The massive site (more than three hundred square miles) hosted five separate nuclear reactors that produced fuel for nuclear weapons throughout the Cold War, and remains today both an active research facility and a "national sacrifice zone" for victory in the Cold War.

Frederickson methodically traces the transformations, starting with an overview of the Cold War and events that led to the site's establishment in the early 1950s (the Korean War and the new "hydrogen" bomb both played a large role in the expansion of the nation's nuclear arsenal) through the end of the Cold War in the late 1980s. Along the way, she explores the site's early geography and culture; the decision to build the plant; the construction process; local reaction; and

changes in the region's social, cultural, and political composition. The case for the SRP as the primary agent of change in the upstate region is compelling and soundly proven through a wide variety of sources, from official plant records to Du Pont-produced "propaganda" programs on radio and television, to minutes of local government meetings. Significant personalities, most notably, Aiken attorney and longtime U.S. senator and presidential hopeful Strom Thurmond, make cameos, but the work focuses on the lives of the everyday residents of the region and how the SRP reordered the physical and cultural landscape, bringing in a better educated but also politically conservative workforce and a "corporate" mentality to a previously populist region. She argues that "the military and the federal government created a new, high-tech, industrial workforce whose cultural tastes, spending habits, and political allegiances changed the face of the South" (p. 24).

With apologies to Steven Hahn, Frederickson's work could have been subtitled "The Death of Southern Populism." In 1983, in *The Roots of Southern Populism: Yeoman Farmers and the Transformation of Georgia Upcountry, 1850-1890*, Hahn found the origins of a southern anticorporate populist movement in up-country counties of Georgia that approximate the region around Aiken. Frederickson demonstrates that the introduction of a large federal facility, operated under contract by a major corporate entity, the Du Pont Corporation, drastically reduced if not eliminated anticorporate feelings that had once been prevalent in the region. As a result, the political culture shifted from one identified with a labor-friendly Democratic Party to the more business-friendly Republican Party. While it is impossible to ignore the role of race in this shift in political alignment, Frederickson adds nuance to the rise of southern conservatism and the regional embrace of corporate culture, with a detailed discussion of its antitax, antiunion, and generally pro-business focus, along with an interest in maintaining social stability and therefore interfering minimally with local racial customs. She asserts that Aiken's "begrudging but nonviolent acquiescence to social change is perhaps more typical of southern communities" (p. 8).

While the work touches on a wide variety of topics, and explores several in great detail, it, in general, leaves the reader wanting more. For example, does the example of Aiken and the SRP apply generally across the South? Frederickson makes several comparisons with the Hanford site in Washington state, but are there similarities between SRP and, for example, Redstone Arsenal and Huntsville in Alabama; Oak Ridge, Tennessee; Cape Canaveral, Florida; King's Bay, Georgia; Stennis Space Center, Mississippi; and other federal nuclear/space/research facilities across the region? Hopefully other scholars will follow Frederickson's ground-breaking example and initiate new scholarship on the wider impact of the Cold War on the American South.

The work has few flaws, other than a misleadingly broad title, minor factual errors (the Confederate general at the insignificant "Battle of Aiken," which has spawned a major reenactment and commemoration in the area,[2] was Joe Wheeler, not Weaver [p. 38]); and the excessive use of the passive voice (see page 34 as an example), which do not detract from a fresh, insightful approach and a quick and enjoyable read. The book could be used to supplement the traditional narrative of the civil rights era in the South in a reading seminar on the region (and already has been in one such course at the Air Force Academy) or part of a broader study of the Cold War's economic and environmental impact, using John McNeill's recent *Environmental Histories of the Cold War* (2013) as a guide, although the discussion of environmental aspects (including the accidental creation of a large research area largely free of human disruption) forms only a disappointingly small part of the book. The work demonstrates balance, offering a discussion of the Nobel Prize-winning discovery by scientists at the SRP alongside critiques

of forced relocations for the area's residents and the detrimental effects of warm water releases from cooling facilities on the local ecology.

Overall, ***Cold War Dixie*** is a masterful examination of one particular community's encounter with the modern military state, but one that has broader significance across the region and the nation. While military histories of the Cold War often focus on the political confrontations and the few "hot wars," Frederickson carefully explores the sometimes hidden economic and social costs on the home front and examines how some parts of the nation are still living with the repercussions of this period of American history. In connecting military activity, even outside of major conflict, with wider social change, Frederickson reminds us of the broad explanatory power military history has to help explain change over time.

Notes

[1]. See Elaine Tyler May, ***Homeward Bound: American Families in the Cold War Era*** (New York: Basic Books, 1988); Lisa McGirr, ***Suburban Warriors: The Origins of the New American Right*** (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2002); Kevin Fernlund, ***The Cold War American West*** (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1998); Michele Stenehjem Gerber, ***On the Home Front: The Cold War Legacy of the Hanford Nuclear Site*** (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1992); and Gretchen Heefner, ***The Missile Next Door: The Minuteman in the American Heartland*** (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2012).

[2]. See, for example, www.battleofaiken.org (accessed on December 26, 2013).