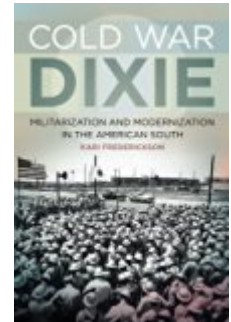


Kari A. Frederickson. *Cold War Dixie: Militarization and Modernization in the American South.* Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2013. xii + 226 pp. \$24.95, paper, ISBN 978-0-8203-4520-8.



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Cold War Dixie sketches one of the many cultural clashes that took place between the Cold War-era military-industrial complex and the rural South. The region benefited from a massive increase in defense construction during and after World War II, yet few scholars have examined the ramifications of this stimulus in any detail. Kari Frederickson argues that the construction of the Savannah River Plant (SRP) in western South Carolina brought the national security state further into Dixie, sparked a rapid modernization in the surrounding area, and disrupted the locals' way of life. Frederickson, whose excellent first book *The Dixiecrat Revolt and the End of the Solid South, 1932-1968* (2001) traced southern disaffection with Harry Truman and the Democratic Party, delivers a highly readable case study that calls into question, but does not completely dispel, the dominant narratives of political, cultural, and racial change in the region. Though local in nature, *Cold War Dixie* argues that the evolution of the South is more complex than scholars have previously allowed.

From the outset, it should be noted that *Cold War Dixie* is not a work of diplomatic history. Though the author addresses the global events that hastened the development of the hydrogen bomb, namely the first Soviet nuclear tests and the Korean War, she is most interested in the impact of military apparatus on the local level. Occasionally she will touch on how some southerners internalized their role in the Cold War, such as the individual who blamed construction of a road through his property on Josef Stalin rather than the U.S. government, but for the most part this is a domestic story.

The SRP was a joint venture between the Atomic Energy Commission (AEC) and the Du Pont Corporation built in the early 1950s to manufacture a new "Super" bomb. Choosing Du Pont was fairly straightforward, given its previous onsite experience with the Manhattan Project. The selection of western South Carolina, however, was more complicated. Planners needed an area that was largely rural in character with low real estate prices and a hospitable climate, yet close enough

to existing communities to sustain its employees. Sites in Texas, Illinois, and Wisconsin were considered, but the sandy hills south of Aiken, South Carolina, and southeast of Augusta, Georgia, were eventually chosen. Both the lower prevailing wage rates and the guarantee of cheap electricity from a nearby federal dam were key selling points for the committee. By the time the project was completed in the mid-1950s, it was the largest construction project undertaken in the United States up until that time and had a 1.3-billion-dollar price tag.

Frederickson divides the work up thematically, with each chapter addressing one specific impact the SRP had on the surrounding community. Most of the white-collar employees who relocated to the factory resettled in Aiken, making the town one of the central characters of the story. Aiken itself had a checkered past. It was part of the first wave of southern industrialization, with the nearby town of Graniteville becoming a model of early textile mill construction. Though spared by Sherman's march to the sea, the Edgefield and Barnwell districts that surrounded the town were home to some of the most violent clashes between freedmen and the Redeemers during Reconstruction. After the turn of the century, Aiken reinvented itself as a tourist destination for sportsmen. A number of America's elite built winter homes there and, through the 1930s, the members of this "Winter Colony" had an oversized influence on its development. Most of the town remained poverty-stricken into the 1950s, with jobs coming from surrounding farms, the textile mills, or seasonal service jobs associated with the Winter Colony. Clearly, Aiken was an atypical southern town and Frederickson does a good job of highlighting its unique characteristics.

Using archival and newspaper sources and a number of interviews, Frederickson painstakingly details the problems the SRP's arrival caused for its inhabitants. From the initial announcement of construction in late 1950 through the early 1960s,

life within a fifty-mile radius of the SRP site was thoroughly transformed. In some cases, the changes were severe. The entire town of Ellenton, comprising around eight thousand people, fell within the boundaries of the SRP and was relocated. In other cases, residents were forced to adjust to new neighbors, new institutions, and new social relationships. The author makes a compelling argument that, as community boundaries changed and the physical landscape was remade, the area's traditional way of life disappeared. Where Du Pont and AEC officials saw empty land open for development, the residents saw prime hunting territory. Planners sent to purchase shacks and dilapidated dwellings found resistance from those whose family had owned the land for several generations. The sense of tragedy these people felt is palpable in Frederickson's writing.

As construction began in earnest in 1951, Aiken and its infrastructure staggered under the weight of an estimated 40,000 temporary workers and their families. The region's systemic poverty meant that the housing stock and infrastructure was sorely lacking and an acute housing shortage soon developed. The AEC was determined not to build a company town and relied on private enterprise to meet most of the demands. Slowly and with assistance from the federal government, new subdivisions and the accompanying amenities were developed. From 1950 through 1953, Aiken doubled in size, with many of the educated, white-collar workers settling in these new suburban communities. By 1960, according to Frederickson, these individuals composed a new middle class. Soon national retail chains opened locations nearby and accelerated the growth of consumer culture. Though some of the Winter Colonists and others clung to their vision of "Old Aiken" and attempted to freeze the SRP employees out of civic life, modernization and progress transformed the town almost completely in a decade.

Yet, not all of the ways of life changed. The conservative culture of Du Pont meant that the

customary racial discrimination in hiring would remain in place. Despite intense activity from both the NAACP and the National Urban League, jobs for African Americans were initially limited to the lowest-ranking positions. During the construction phase of the project trade union locals, themselves organized on racial exclusion, successfully kept most African American employees from acquiring skilled positions. By the end of 1953, only four African Americans out of a workforce of five thousand held white-collar jobs. Over the course of the next decade, more opportunities arose and by 1955 7 percent of the facility's workforce was African American, more than any other AEC facility. Likewise, after the requisite foot-dragging by the local school board, Aiken public schools desegregated with few incidents. Clearly the addition of federal dollars affected the town's social patterns, but that change was limited.

Perhaps the most persuasive aspect of the book, and the one most likely replicated in other communities, details the SRP's effects on the region's politics. Frederickson argues that the suburbanization and immediate modernization of the area around the SRP directly resulted in the development of the two-party system at the local level. The South Carolina Republican Party, like its counterparts elsewhere in the South, had been ineffective since the end of the Reconstruction era. Many of the skilled workers from the North brought their allegiance to the GOP with them. Building off of the work of the 1952 Citizens for Eisenhower movement, SRP employees organized at the precinct and county levels. Du Pont expected its employees to be civically engaged, a requirement that likely pushed many into local politics. Success was slow in coming, but by the mid-1960s the Republican Party was competitive in town council and state legislative races. Historians of southern politics have generally overlooked the impact of Yankee transplants and defense workers and have instead focused on the backlash against the civil rights movement. In this context, Aiken resident Strom Thurmond's high-

profile switch to the GOP in 1964 overshadows events on the ground. Frederickson lays the groundwork for a more nuanced interpretation that builds on the work of other Sunbelt scholars, most notably Matthew Lassiter's *The Silent Majority: Suburban Politics in the Sunbelt South* (2005).

Ultimately, *Cold War Dixie* is the story of how one southern community reacted to the massive defense spending of the postwar era. How well Aiken was representative of the rest of the South remains to be seen. Frederickson, to her credit, does not overstate her findings. She contends that closer examinations of the relationship between the defense industry and the communities it transformed "may ultimately yield a more compelling narrative of southern history in the post-World War II era" (p. 169). She has made a commendable and important first effort in this regard.

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