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It takes a village to raise a child, and in *The Dallas Story: The North American Aviation Plant and Industrial Mobilization during World War II*, Terrance Furgerson illustrates that it took a city and then some to build trainer, fighter, and bomber aircraft for the "Arsenal for Democracy." He narrates the history of an aircraft plant built under the auspices of the government Defense Plant Corporation and operated by North American Aviation (NAA) to expand US military-industrial capacity in preparation for and during World War II. He aims to bolster its place in the history of wartime mobilization and in Texan public memory. He explores cooperation between the federal government and businesses as well as the role of local leaders in drawing mass manufacturing to Dallas and responding to the community’s resulting needs.

In twenty-two chronological chapters, Furgerson traces the plant’s development from its conception amid signs of a coming conflict to its demobilization once the emergency passed. He credits President Franklin D. Roosevelt with the foresight to lay the groundwork for a military buildup and the political acumen to tune his calls for a severalfold increase in the country’s air forces to keep the public and Congress from balk ing. Preparing an aerial fighting force required training sufficient pilots, and acquiring large numbers of trainer aircraft was a crucial early step in the mobilization. The federal government's need to expand aircraft production presented an opportunity for the Dallas Chamber of Commerce, which had been maneuvering to entice the aviation industry to their city since the 1920s. When mobilization accelerated after September 1939, the federal government decided to finance a plant in Dallas to be designed, equipped, and operated by NAA, which could quickly expand production of its AT-6, a trainer already in use in several countries.

NAA’s Dallas plant began delivering planes in April 1941—ahead of schedule. Getting planes in the air required not only constructing buildings and acquiring tools but also building a workforce. Manufacturing was not then a major component
of Dallas’s economy, and readying the necessary workforce required both training Dallas inhabitants and recruiting workers from elsewhere. Furgerson details how communities, governments, and NAA responded to the challenges posed by the dramatic population growth. To accommodate newcomers, private developers and New Deal agencies erected housing, and Dallas and surrounding municipalities amplified their infrastructure and services. Commuter transportation also presented challenges, especially once the war led to tire and gas rationing. Bus service increased, and NAA assisted its employees in securing housing, acquiring tires, and organizing car pools.

Production accelerated throughout the rest of 1941 as workers gained experience. Following the US entry into the war, NAA built a second facility at the Dallas plant to produce B-24 Liberators. Then, at the end of 1942, NAA president James “Dutch” Kindelberger announced that the first facility would build P-51 Mustangs alongside AT-6s. The NAA workers in Dallas increased their output throughout 1942 and earned the Army-Navy “E” award for excellence in production, which they would go on to receive four times. However, production fell behind schedule as the company transitioned to manufacturing three types of aircraft. The combination of NAA projecting increased labor needs and the lack of housing led the War Manpower Commission to designate Dallas a Group One labor market, preventing it from receiving new war contracts and expanding the commission’s control over the local economy. That designation prompted an investigation by the Truman Committee into rumors that NAA was making inefficient use of its workforce. The investigation also uncovered accusations of mismanagement, sexual misconduct, and profiteering. Kindelberger and others explained that production had fallen behind schedule due to a lack of materials and the complexity of establishing new production lines. Nonetheless, Kindelberger acknowledged the value of the committee’s findings, and NAA reformed the plant’s management. Improved efficiency shrunk the plant’s expected labor needs, B-24 production accelerated, and the Dallas plant ultimately delivered a larger number of aircraft than any other US plant during the war. In what proved to be the war’s last year, the government began canceling war contracts and layoffs began. NAA’s time in Dallas ended after the war, and the government leased the facilities first to the Texas Engineering and Manufacturing Corporation and then Chance Vought Aircraft.

Furgerson reconstructs the story of the NAA plant in Dallas primarily from NAA documents scattered across various archives; newspapers, notably, the Dallas Morning News and Take Off (the plant newspaper); and government documents. The stories that emerge in his book are enlivened at points by his sources but also filtered through the government’s interests and editors’ determinations about what to print. Furgerson most vividly transmits historical actors’ voices when describing events like the plant’s opening ceremony, captured in previously forgotten recordings of radio broadcasts, or witness testimony preserved in committee hearing transcripts. Where lacunae and agendas emerge, he addresses them directly and measures his conclusions accordingly. He dissects the likely public relations machinations behind Fayron L. Croom, a former ranch foreman who quickly advanced as a machinist at NAA and thus evinced its intention to hire locally and the opportunity to transition from agriculture to a rising industry, appearing in both the Daily Times Herald and the opening day broadcast. Furgerson also notes the dearth of media coverage on NAA’s Black employees, particularly those at a segregated satellite facility established to hire more Black workers without exacerbating racial tensions at the main plant. Racial tensions and sexual harassment were both issues raised with the Truman Committee but seemingly neglected amid concerns over efficiency. Perhaps future research will uncover more about the roles
and experiences of women and people of color as parts of the war machine.

As it stands, Furgerson has illuminated various moving parts of a vast undertaking while providing avenues to explore further. His telling of the Dallas story is accessible to general audiences and of particular interest to those wanting to learn more about industrial organization and the massive, collaborative efforts to produce weapons and workers for World War II and beyond.

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