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## The Irony of the Solid South: Democrats, Republicans, and Race, 1865-1944 by Glen Feldman

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**Feldman, Glenn. *The Irony of the Solid South: Democrats, Republicans, and Race, 1865-1944*. Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2013. xix + 459 pages. Cloth, \$49.95.**

In this work, historian Glenn Feldman highlights the political realignment in the South between 1865 and 1944 by emphasizing the many differences in culture, race, and values. Rather than taking the traditional approach to the topic and claiming that the political realignment occurred because white Southerners became Republicans and abandoned the ideals and values of the Democratic Party, the author examines the region in a comprehensive manner. He asserts that political realignments were not merely caused by racial, economic, or social divisions throughout the South, but also entailed a so-called Reconstruction Syndrome, which implicates a set of beliefs that left a strain on the region economically, racially, and politically. Feldman argues that Reconstruction Syndrome was a primary factor in a shift of attitudes in which blacks, the federal government, liberals, and outsiders (foreigners and Yankees) were viewed negatively, and where traits of a traditional political culture, or conservatism, were prevalent. Feldman brings relevance to his work by illustrating the ways in which the Democratic Party's attitudes toward such national policies as anti-lynching, anti-poll tax, and anti-segregation legislation solidified the demise of the Democrat rule in the South. By incorporating many stories of elected officials facing struggles in legislating within state politics, he is able to show that realignment was hardly a surprise to anyone.

The irony of the South being considered "solid" is clearly noted by Feldman, as he paints a picture of southern culture that was clearly marked with rigid challenges to the acceptance of civil rights, which is necessary to one's understanding of political shifts. Feldman uses numerous resources to recount violence throughout the South, while focusing primarily on incidents in Alabama. For example, Feldman draws on newspaper archives, letters, and diary entries to trace violent incidents committed by the Ku Klux Klan in the state. Feldman masterfully details the story of a violent KKK execution of a preacher in north Alabama and includes a letter the preacher wrote to his wife minutes before his death. By providing such vivid imagery of hatred and violence, the author clearly acknowledges the racial divisions and quest for civil rights present during this time, which he seamlessly applies to economic inequalities that further solidified the lack of southern unity.

Feldman flawlessly blends his knowledge of economics and history to illustrate how the Progressive Movement failed to reach the South at a time when the region was becoming even more divided and solidifying itself as a unique region within the United States. He notes, "labor insurgency was crushed; women were kept 'in their place'; barbaric and exploitative systems of profit making at the expense of human life and almost inconceivable levels of misery were protected (indeed expanded); whole populations were legally disfranchised and excluded from meaningful participation" (p. 41). By acknowledging that social, economic, racial, and gender inequalities and differences were present, there is an indication of oppression, which contributed to the illusion of a "solid South."

In conclusion, Feldman's work is applicable to scholars in many fields of the social sciences and humanities. While the text emphasizes historical perspectives and economic conditions of the South, the author examines human behaviors as well as institutional dynamics that often drive political and regional cultural demographics. While portions of the book may be interesting to those hoping to gather a deeper understanding of southern culture and politics, there are substantial components of the work that require a fundamental understanding of the relationship between economics, society, and politics. This well-researched work offers a

historical perspective that explains the South's realignment, while also exhibiting relevance to contemporary political beliefs. Feldman wisely uses the preface and epilogue to connect with readers by explaining that Dixie's shift to conservatism is "the blueprint, the roadmap, the model" for conservative movements we have witnessed and continue to witness in American politics (p. xiii).

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