


Book Review: The Great Melding: War, the Dixiecrat Rebellion, and the Southern Model for America's New Conservatism by Glenn Feldman

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Feldman, Glenn. *The Great Melding: War, the Dixiecrat Rebellion, and the Southern Model for America's New Conservatism*. Tuscaloosa: The University of Alabama Press, 2015. xii + 388 pages. Hardcover, \$59.95.

Many of Glenn Feldman's followers were fascinated with the history professor's book *The Irony of the Solid South: Democrats, Republicans, and Race, 1865-1944*. The 2013 book introduced Feldman's readers to racism in the southern United States with a central focus on Alabama. *The Great Melding: War, the Dixiecrat Rebellion, and the Southern Model for America's New Conservatism* is the finale of Feldman's description of Alabama as the bastion of racism in America and the rise of Conservatism. Feldman's writing is bold and audacious, and he has a gift for penning gripping narratives which are buttressed by multiple resources from interviews and historical documents to effectively argue his point.

The central thesis of *The Great Melding: War, the Dixiecrat Rebellion, and the Southern Model for America's New Conservatism* can be summarized as follows: The transitional years following World War II, as well as the changing policies of the Democratic Party, altered America's political landscape in a significant way. These factors are the basis of modern day Conservatism in the southern United States.

In the book, Feldman carefully examines how the South eventually broke away from the rest of the country by becoming dominated by Republicans. He explores the issues of race and white supremacy, patriotism, and the disenfranchisement of African-Americans by the introduction of the Jim Crow Laws in the late nineteenth century. Feldman argues that the racial inclusiveness of the Democratic Party in the Federal program of Franklin D. Roosevelt in 1930 derailed many decades of party loyalty in the South. The book details the origin of the 1948 Dixiecrat movement as a forerunner to the dominance of the Republican Party in the South.

In order to drive his point home, the author describes the Dixiecrats' disenchantment caused by the South's defeat in the Civil War, their belief in white supremacy, and the role of southern culture, as well as economic and political identity, as the engines that fueled the Dixiecrat movement. Feldman offers his interpretation that the central cause of the Dixiecrats' rebellion was based on a 'Reconstruction Syndrome,' a deep suspicion of outsiders such as African-Americans and immigrants. He argues that race became the essential element because the majority of white people were determined to protect what they deemed as 'the southern way of life.'

The Great Melding: War, the Dixiecrat Rebellion, and the Southern Model for America's New Conservatism is worth reading because it makes a great contribution to the understanding of Southern political history and the role of race and politics. The strength of the book is that Feldman offers us a strong, hypothetical reconstruction of the South that helps readers to understand the role of the Dixiecrats in the South's switch from the Democratic to the

Republican Party. It is a comprehensive book which not only offers us answers to questions that have eluded us for years, but also offers us a history of black America whose own history had been erased—a history that white Americans may come to realize as their own history as well.

The book is highly recommended for undergraduate and graduate students of American politics and for those who want to understand the history of the South. The book elucidates how racial politics began to unravel in Alabama, thereby leading to the dominance of the Republican Party in the South, a stronghold of Republican politicians to this day.

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