



Struggle for the Soul of the Postwar South: White Evangelical Protestants and Operation Dixie (The Working Class in American History)

Elizabeth Fones-Wolf, Ken Fones-Wolf

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In 1946, the Congress of Industrial Organizations (CIO) undertook Operation Dixie, an initiative to recruit industrial workers in the American South. Elizabeth and Ken Fones-Wolf plumb rarely used archival sources and rich oral histories to explore the CIO's fraught encounter with the evangelical Protestantism and religious culture of southern whites.

The authors' nuanced look at working class religion reveals how laborers across the surprisingly wide evangelical spectrum interpreted their lives through their faith. Factors like conscience, community need, and lived experience led individual preachers to become union activists and mill villagers to defy the foreman and minister alike to listen to organizers. As the authors show, however, all sides enlisted belief in the battle. In the end, the inability of northern organizers to overcome the suspicion with which many evangelicals viewed modernity played a key role in Operation Dixie's failure, with repercussions for labor and liberalism that are still being felt today.

Identifying the role of the sacred in the struggle for southern economic justice, and placing class as a central aspect in southern religion, *Struggle for the Soul of the Postwar South* provides new understandings of how whites in the region wrestled with the options available to them during a crucial period of change and possibility.

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