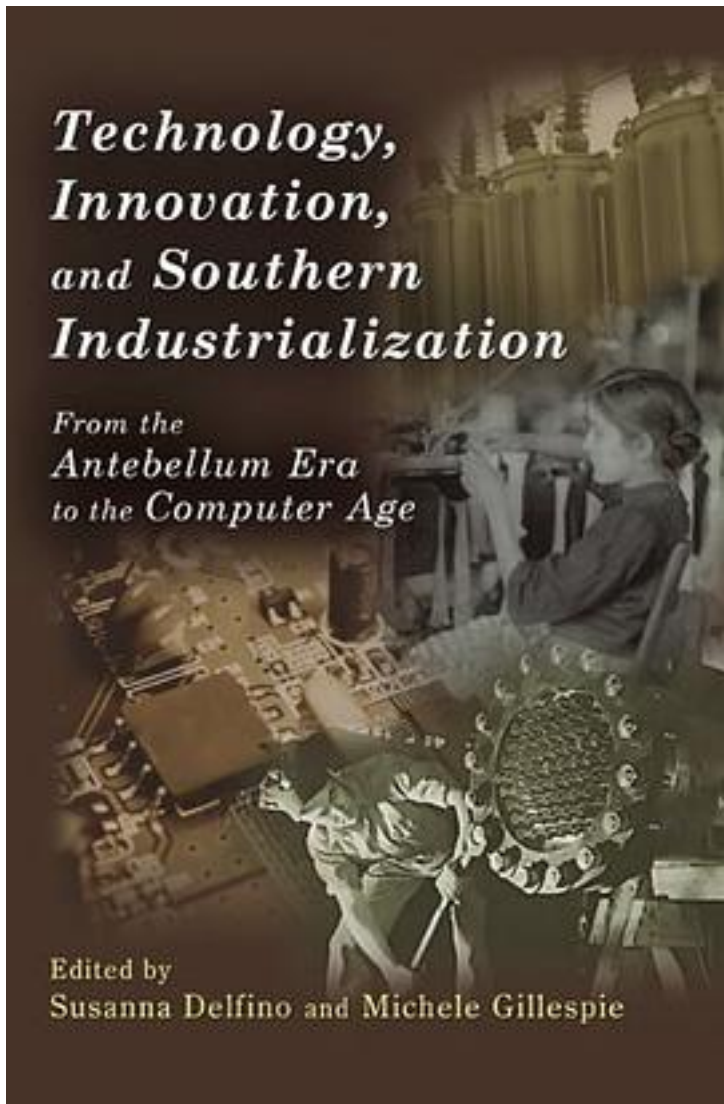


# Technology, Innovation, and Southern Industrialization



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Because of its strong agrarian roots, the South has typically been viewed as a region not favorably disposed to innovation and technology. Yet innovation was never absent from industrialization in this part of the United States. From the early nineteenth century onward, southerners were as eager as other Americans to embrace technology as a path to modernity. This second volume in the series *New Currents in the History of Southern Economy and Society* features seven essays that range widely across the region and its history, from the antebellum era to the present, to assess the role of innovations presumed lacking by most historians. Offering a challenging interpretation of industrialization in the South, these writings show that the benefits of innovations had to be carefully weighed against the costs to both industry and society. The essays consider a wide range of innovative technologies. Some examine specific industries in subregions: steamboats in the lower Mississippi valley, textile manufacturing in Georgia and Arkansas, coal mining in Virginia, and sugar planting and processing in Louisiana. Others consider the role of technology in South Carolina textile mills around the turn of the twentieth century, the electrification of the Tennessee valley, and telemedicine in contemporary Arizona--marking the expansion of the region into the southwestern Sunbelt. Together, these articles show that southerners set significant limitations on what technological innovations they were willing to adopt, particularly in a milieu where slaveholding agriculture had shaped the allocation of resources. They also reveal how scarcity of capital and continued reliance on agriculture influenced that allocation into the twentieth century, relieved eventually by federal spending during the Depression and its aftermath that sparked the Sunbelt South's economic boom. *Technology, Innovation, and Southern Industrialization* clearly demonstrates that the South's embrace of technological innovation in the modern era doesn't mark a radical change from the past but rather signals that such pursuits were always part of the region's economy. It deflates the myth of southern agrarianism while expanding the scope of antebellum American industrialization beyond the Northeast and offers new insights into the relationship of southern economic history to the region's society and politics.

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