University of Groningen

Review of: The Three Governors Controversy: Skullduggery, Machinations, and the Decline of Georgia's Progressive Politics

Zwiers, Maarten

Published in:
Journal of Southern History

DOI:
[10.1353/soh.2016.0305](https://doi.org/10.1353/soh.2016.0305)

IMPORTANT NOTE: You are advised to consult the publisher's version (publisher's PDF) if you wish to cite from it. Please check the document version below.

Document Version
Publisher's PDF, also known as Version of record

Publication date:
2016

[Link to publication in University of Groningen/UMCG research database](#)

Citation for published version (APA):

Zwiers, M. (2016). Review of: The Three Governors Controversy: Skullduggery, Machinations, and the Decline of Georgia's Progressive Politics. *Journal of Southern History*, LXXXII(4), 975-976.
<https://doi.org/10.1353/soh.2016.0305>

Copyright

Other than for strictly personal use, it is not permitted to download or to forward/distribute the text or part of it without the consent of the author(s) and/or copyright holder(s), unless the work is under an open content license (like Creative Commons).

The publication may also be distributed here under the terms of Article 25fa of the Dutch Copyright Act, indicated by the "Taverne" license. More information can be found on the University of Groningen website: <https://www.rug.nl/library/open-access/self-archiving-pure/taverne-amendment>.

Take-down policy

If you believe that this document breaches copyright please contact us providing details, and we will remove access to the work immediately and investigate your claim.

Downloaded from the University of Groningen/UMCG research database (Pure): <http://www.rug.nl/research/portal>. For technical reasons the number of authors shown on this cover page is limited to 10 maximum.

prevailing ideas about the reluctance with which white moderates embraced the race-baiting rhetoric that came to characterize post-1948 political strategies. Instead, Feldman urges another interpretation that distances moderates from resigned pragmatism and suggests that they played an active and even enthusiastic role in prioritizing white supremacy as the earliest and most frequent tool of political defiance. Historians, he chastens, have been unduly distracted by the loyalist-Dixiecrat divide that the 1948 Democratic National Convention initiated. Taking a longer arc, Feldman sees a shared commitment between the two factions to white supremacy and describes their split as tactical, not ideological. His attention to Alabama's Lister Hill and John J. Sparkman, with their embrace of racist fearmongering despite their history of progressive politics in their home state and in Washington, D.C., is a linchpin of this suggestion.

Feldman's work challenges scholars of southern politics to delve into the contours of white supremacy and its allies to reconsider the order in which they understand trends of white flight, anti-labor organizing, states' rights, and religious fundamentalism. Within each of these strands of modern conservatism racial solidarity was intentional. As the conservative coalition became more diverse, it became more powerful and less recognizable as a race-driven entity. *The Great Melding* warns historians away from accepting the appearance of color-blind conservatism as fact. In truth, he argues, race was not only a motivating factor; "It was at top, center, and bottom" (p. 255).

Millsaps College

STEPHANIE ROLPH

The Three Governors Controversy: Skullduggery, Machinations, and the Decline of Georgia's Progressive Politics. By Charles S. Bullock III, Scott E. Buchanan, and Ronald Keith Gaddie. (Athens, Ga., and London: University of Georgia Press, 2015. Pp. xiv, 292. \$32.95, ISBN 978-0-8203-4734-9.)

For a short time in early 1947, Georgia had three men claiming to be governor. *The Three Governors Controversy: Skullduggery, Machinations, and the Decline of Georgia's Progressive Politics* describes the events leading up to this unusual circumstance in great detail. Written by three political scientists, the book not only offers many anecdotes on Georgia politics in the 1930s and 1940s but also provides statistical data about election returns and voting behavior in the state legislature. Eugene Talmadge, "the legendary Wild Man from Sugar Creek," plays a central role in the narrative (p. 1). His untimely death in December 1946, right after he had won election as chief executive of the state, caused the gubernatorial crisis in Georgia.

In six chronological chapters, *The Three Governors Controversy* explores the background and consequences of the 1946 campaign for the governorship. In the first chapter, the authors describe the political culture of Georgia during the Great Depression. They devote specific attention to the county unit system, which explains why a rural demagogue like Eugene Talmadge could win elections in a state with sizable cities, most notably Atlanta. Because the county unit structure gave disproportionate electoral power to rural counties, Talmadge did not need to win the more densely populated (and more progressive) urban regions. The conflict between Talmadge's "rustic" forces and the progressives

intensified during and right after World War II, as industrialization and urbanization accelerated in Georgia and as African Americans became more vocal in their opposition to the Jim Crow laws Talmadge passionately defended (p. 46).

After setting the stage the authors delve into the 1946 primary and general elections and the aftermath of these campaigns. The book's subtitle promises stories about skullduggery and machinations, and there is plenty of both in this segment of the narrative. The sixty-four-page chapter on the 1946 Democratic primary summarizes the platforms of the three candidates who participated in the race, describes the attempts of the Talmadge forces to purge black voters, and ends with a statistical analysis of the election results. The final part of the book recounts the events after Eugene Talmadge's death, when sitting governor Ellis G. Arnall refused to give up his post. While Talmadge's name was the only one to appear on ballots, his son Herman E. Talmadge claimed the governorship after finishing the general election with the largest number of write-in votes. Yet newly elected lieutenant governor Melvin E. Thompson maintained he was now the legitimate successor to Arnall. Although the state legislature voted in favor of Herman Talmadge, the Georgia Supreme Court decided in March 1947 that Thompson was the rightful new governor until special elections for the office could be held. Herman Talmadge quietly withdrew from the scene but took power in November 1948 after defeating Thompson in the special election. The authors argue the victory of the younger Talmadge in the 1948 special election signaled the decline of progressive politics in Georgia.

The last part of the subtitle—the decline of Georgia's progressive politics—receives much less attention than the skullduggery and machinations surrounding the governors controversy. This is a shame, because it would have enhanced the significance of the book. There is in-depth coverage of various political shenanigans, but the great amount of facts often blurs the more interesting storyline of the work: the downfall of progressivism in the state. The book thus misses an obvious opportunity to clarify how this decline fits into the wider story of the failure of progressive reform in the South after World War II. The epilogue asks, what if the Talmadge forces had not prevailed? But this peculiar segment of what-if history does not explain a great deal. After all, it is hard to tell whether progressive southern politicians (even in Georgia) would have been able to withstand the greater social forces that eventually led to the rise of massive resistance against racial integration in the 1950s.

University of Groningen

MAARTEN ZWIERS

John Kasper and Ezra Pound: Saving the Republic. By Alec Marsh. Historicizing Modernism. (London and other cities: Bloomsbury Academic, 2015. Pp. xvi, 301. \$104.00, ISBN 978-1-4725-0886-7.)

Having published two earlier books on Ezra Pound, *Money and Modernity: Pound, Williams, and the Spirit of Jefferson* (Tuscaloosa, 1998) and *Ezra Pound* (London, 2011), Alec Marsh now explores the relationship between the controversial poet and the Far Right activist John Kasper. From the time that twenty-one-year-old Kasper first wrote to the sixty-four-year-old Pound in June 1950 until their communication ceased in the early 1960s, the

Copyright of Journal of Southern History is the property of Southern Historical Association and its content may not be copied or emailed to multiple sites or posted to a listserv without the copyright holder's express written permission. However, users may print, download, or email articles for individual use.