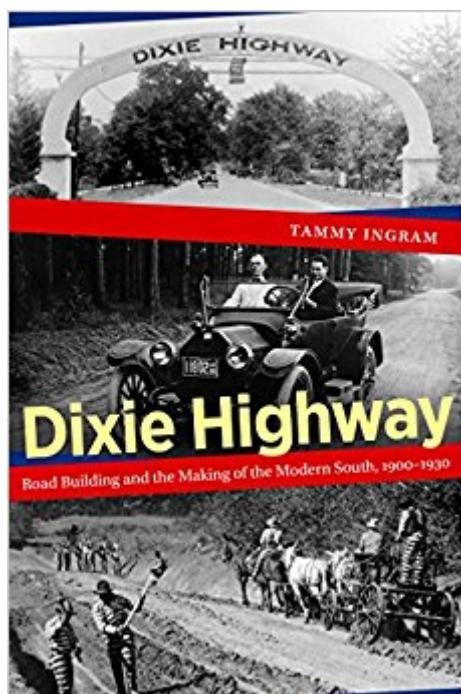


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# Dixie Highway: Road Building And The Making Of The Modern South, 1900-1930



## Synopsis

At the turn of the twentieth century, good highways eluded most Americans and nearly all southerners. In their place, a jumble of dirt roads covered the region like a bed of briars. Introduced in 1915, the Dixie Highway changed all that by merging hundreds of short roads into dual interstate routes that looped from Michigan to Miami and back. In connecting the North and the South, the Dixie Highway helped end regional isolation and served as a model for future interstates. In this book, Tammy Ingram offers the first comprehensive study of the nation's earliest attempt to build a highway network, revealing how the modern U.S. transportation system evolved out of the hard-fought political, economic, and cultural contests that surrounded the Dixie's creation. The most visible success of the Progressive Era Good Roads Movement, the Dixie Highway also became its biggest casualty. It sparked a national dialogue about the power of federal and state agencies, the role of local government, and the influence of ordinary citizens. In the South, it caused a backlash against highway bureaucracy that stymied road building for decades. Yet Ingram shows that after the Dixie Highway, the region was never the same.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

Complex and fascinating. From accurate highway signage to the emergence of maps, she shows how people imagined, financed, and built roads in the American South. In her hands, the story of infrastructure development weaves in and out of stories of southern politics, race relations, and economic development, clearly showing, as she says, that 'road building was a crucial linchpin in

the transition to the modern South." --Journal of Southern History A solid and well-written discussion of the myriad aspects of road building in the Progressive-Era South. --H-SHGAPE Its examples are telling and illustrate effectively the complicated history of federally funded and managed Southern highway construction, raising issues that remain relevant in current debates on funding highway repair. Recommended for all readers interested in American politics and transportation. --Library Journal By skillfully combining national, regional, and state perspectives, Ingram offers a refreshing, informative, and a welcome addition to transportation history. --Journal of American History Ingram provides an interesting discussion of the impact of World War I on roads, a topic often lacking in highway histories. --AAG Review of Books [This] well-written and accessible account of the Dixie Highway [shows that] road building is so much more than dirt and engineering. --Register of the Kentucky Historical Society Ingram provides a template for future work in this area that others would do well to follow, and that students will benefit from in a variety of courses. A welcome addition to the literature on transportation in the U.S. Recommended. All levels/libraries. --Choice

Ingram shows how the struggles to create, first, the Dixie Highway, and later, a federal highway system, ignited debates about federal power and local control. She examines the roles of the various stakeholders--automobile manufacturers, farmers, prison commissioners, etc.--and of the various forces (increasing automobility, World War I, desire for racial control) affecting road building. The book is well conceptualized, well organized, and nicely written. --Kari Frederickson, University of Alabama Although historians have previously examined the Good Roads Movement, scholars of the early twentieth-century South have long awaited a fully contextualized study of road building. Dixie Highway provides the most comprehensive study that we have today of the Good Roads Movement and its consequences. This will be essential reading for students of the modern South. --William A. Link, author of *Atlanta, Cradle of the New South: Race and Remembering in the Civil War's Aftermath*

This book may be about a road, but it is really about much more. It is a book about the political backstory to road building and, as such, highlights something we all take for granted in our modern age. Who ever thinks to question the presence or persistence of roads? They are such an organic part of our daily lives, but few stop to think about how roads became part of our culture, our politics, and our daily lives. Dixie Highway explains the fraught and complicated processes by which modern roads and modern road building became a constant and lasting part of our political discourse. Perhaps most illuminating about Dixie Highway is the fact that road building was not

always seen as a natural and positive good. While most recognized the essential role that roads would play in the dawning automobile age, the funding, construction, routing, and control of such roads inspired some of the most deeply contentious domestic debates in early twentieth-century politics. As entrepreneurs, businessmen, politicians, and local people conceived of and planned modern highways during the Progressive Era, road-building projects created deep and long-lasting political tensions over local, state, and federal power. Supporters of modern highways recognized that roads required massive bureaucracies, modern technologies, and federal dollars to work. Tensions quickly emerged, however, as some in the rural South feared losing local control to distant bureaucracies and insisted on preserving inefficient, but racially exploitative forms of labor to maintain roads within their local communities. In the case of the Dixie Highway, it seemed that everybody wanted modern roads, but nobody could agree on how to pay for them, build them, and manage them. As such, *Dixie Highway* provides essential perspective on our modern infrastructure crisis. Today, we still live with the political legacies of debates shaped by early projects like the Dixie Highway. Today, we all want - indeed, need - modern roads, but continue to be paralyzed by questions of cost and control. If anybody hopes to gain essential historical perspective on our modern infrastructure problems today, this is a fantastic point of entry. Easy to read, clearly organized, powerfully argued, and beautifully written, *Dixie Highway* should be on everybody's shelf. Anybody with an interest in political history, infrastructure politics, southern history, the Progressive Era, or race and labor will find much to think about here.

great read

*Dixie Highway* looks at the South's role in building a new American state, literally from the ground up. An incisive examination of the interplay between federal power and local control, the book doesn't just tell us how roads got built across the South: it provides a prehistory of Sunbelt politics. A smart book and a good read.

Wonderfully researched and well written. It is a good summer read.

Great service

Tammy Ingram's "Dixie Highway: Road Building and the Making of the Modern South, 1900-1930," is everything a good academic history should be. It

takes a topic — in this case, the building of the Dixie Highway in the 1910s and 1920s — and explains it in terms of the surrounding cultural and political events. This is not a road trip narrative or a nostalgic look back at a bygone era of dirt-road travel. It is a serious examination of the politics of road building at the dawn of the automobile age, and how this new force shaped the politics of race, the economics of the rural South and the natural inclination of voters to grow less trusting of politicians and bureaucrats the further away they are from the county seat. The Dixie Highway was not, like Route 66 or the Lincoln Highway, a single road spanning from sea to shining sea. It was a collection of routes running from the upper Midwest into the South. The brainchild of Carl Graham Fisher, a real estate magnate, auto entrepreneur and a founder of the Indianapolis Motor Speedway, the road was promoted and paid for first by private interests under the aegis of the Dixie Highway Association. These businessmen promoted the road building, understanding early on that more cars meant more business, faster delivery of products and a way to develop a tourism industry. Ingram expertly delineates the competing interests. "By 1921 the politics of highway construction proved to be about far more than just roads," she writes. "They encapsulated the political growing pains of a nation conflicted over the role of government in a modernizing world. Those pains continue to resonate almost a hundred years later. Rural southerners needed better roads, to get their products to market or simply to be able to get into town. But the political and financial intervention of others — in the form of federal aid and state bureaucrats making decisions about how to spend it — cast the project in a different light for many in the still-segregated South, where most of the roadwork was done by prison chain gangs, which were overwhelmingly black. If getting better roads meant losing local decision-making and losing control over the existing structure of Jim Crow then it was thanks, but no thanks. "The growing power of state and federal highway agencies caused many southerners to reexamine their commitment to the Good Roads Movement," Ingram writes. "Southern voters began to equate that consolidation of power with erosion of local control. Georgians rejected such consolidation completely when they elected in a 1926 landslide a governor opposed to using state bond issues to pay for highway expansion, which meant slowing the progress of the road building project just as the Dixie Highway was bearing the fruit its planners had intended. "In many ways, Ingram writes, "the race between [Lamartine] Hardman and [John] Holder placed the massive success of the Dixie Highway

campaign up for a vote, and it lost. It was not that Georgians didn't like roads. They simply didn't want state or federal bureaucrats making local decisions, and feared that such decision-making would spiral into other areas if control of road building was handed over. Turns out they were right to have such worries. Eventually the road building came, and along with it came a massive transfer of authority over many other aspects of life. Some of those changes, like the overthrow of Jim Crow, were unalloyed goods. Others were less clear cut, and we're still living with the consequences today. Ingram, a professor of history at the College of Charleston, grew up in rural Georgia and uses her home state to illustrate the broader story. It's a device that works well and probably avoids considerable duplication, but more of a nod to other jurisdictions might have provided a bit of flavor. In any case, "Dixie Highway" provides a thorough illustration of a transitional moment in Southern and American history.

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