Agricultural History

Winter

to “encircle” Washington (86); he confuses the commanders of various armies in 1863 (140); and he erroneously asserts that the Confederates lost the battle of Chickamauga (187). While it does not advance any radical new interpretations, this work will be useful and informative for those not familiar with the important agricultural dimensions of the Civil War in the South.

Judkin Browning
Appalachian State University


Bartow J. Elmore has written a new, sometimes brilliant, occasionally frustrating, business and environmental history of Coca-Cola. This is not a Whiggish account of the soft drink company’s global conquest. Nor is it a straightforward story of imperial plunder. It is not an updated account of Coke’s branding savvy either. Elmore does not even try to decode the secret formula. Instead, he tells a story of Coke as a model of post-Fordist capitalism, where firms stayed light and nimble and outsourced as much of their costs and operations as possible.

Coke, according to Elmore, was, then, the precursor by almost six decades of current global titans Nike and Apple. Unlike its contemporaries US Steel or General Motors, the Atlanta syrup maker did not pour money into material processing, transportation facilities, or even hulking factories. It lived lean, with a smallish workforce and limited capital investment. Early Coke generated its spectacular profits by externalizing as much of its operations as possible, leaving the government and local communities to pick up the tab for expanding markets overseas; providing vast qualities of cheap, clean water; disposing of piles of empty glass, plastic, and aluminum containers; taking care of recycling; and dealing with the complex health and social costs associated with liquid and sugar-enhanced obesity.

Elmore’s inquiry is built on an imaginative, but sometimes bulky, narrative structure. Each chapter looks at a critical ingredient found in the drink and the social, political, and environmental costs of extraction. Beginning with water, the book investigates the far-flung commodity chains Coke constructed for coca leaves, caffeine, coffee beans, sugar, and high fructose corn syrup. But there is another element to the book’s structure. As he moves through the ingredients, Elmore also tells a chronological story of the company, tracing Coke’s sweeping
history from its invention in 1886 to the cocaine scares of the Progressive Era to its World War II triumph to its iconic postwar status as an imagined unifying force to its current environmental and social challenges. Sometimes the plot lines become tangled up in this complex structure, as ideas and characters are picked up and dropped before they have enough time to emerge in full form. Even the concept behind the book’s suggestive and smart title, Citizen Coke, is not fully explained. The ideas of Coke and sovereignty are mentioned in the introduction, but they are not folded into the analysis in a consistent way until the last third of the book. Occasionally, there is just too much going on here.

Still, Elmore has written an important book, one that will become an essential addition to the growing literature on the history of capitalism in the United States. By following the money, Elmore exposes the global inter-workings of this latest iteration of capitalism. This moneymaking impulse seeks everything on the cheap. It risks little and takes as much as it can from the people who make the products, consume them, and have to live with the consequences. By doing this for Coke, Elmore also suggests new avenues of inquiry for the history of capitalism. He highlights the protean nature of American capitalism and the different forms it takes. Capitalism, in the end, is not one thing. It is many things with many implications. Why one strategy of profitmaking works when and where it does is worth studying because this tells us just about everything we need to know about people and profits, nature and artifice, society and culture, power and agency.

Bryant Simon
Temple University


David Mills’s Cold War in a Cold Land: Fighting Communism on the Northern Plains provides a revisionist analysis of the people of the Northern Great Plains during the Cold War. Mills focuses on Montana, North Dakota, and South Dakota. Among the things these people held in common was that they hosted Minuteman missile bases. Conventional wisdom holds that this brought a level of fear to a public that was otherwise courageous in its battles against the elements of the Northern Great Plains.

Mills’s research is broad and includes several archival collections. He has