

MARC EGNAL. *Clash of Extremes: The Economic Origins of the Civil War*. New York: Hill and Wang. 2009. Pp. xii, 416. \$30.00.

In this book Marc Egnal sets forth an economic interpretation of the U.S. Civil War. His study, however, is hardly the type of work scholars will find in the *Journal of Economic History* or other venues for quantitative research. Egnal instead has written a long, sweeping narrative that focuses on the interaction of economic and political change. He weaves stories of particular individuals (especially important politicians) into the story, resulting in a clearly written, fast-moving account of economic development and the coming of the Civil War.

The bulk of the book is devoted to explaining the process of economic change, the rise of the Republican Party, and the secession crisis. In Egnal's narrative, economic concerns primarily (but by no means exclusively) motivated political actors. The Republican Party, for example, had clear antislavery roots, but Egnal maintains that the party's economic agenda of free western land, national internal improvements, and high protective tariffs "was more important in securing a broad base of support and in setting the future course of the party" (p. 227). Many southerners, fearing that the North's modernizing agenda would mean the end of slavery, supported secession after Abraham Lincoln's 1860 election. In Egnal's account, "Secession was a rational act by a group that clearly perceived its long-term self-interest" (p. 263).

Because it is a synthesis, much of the material in this book will be familiar to Civil War specialists. Still, scholars will learn much from Egnal's analysis, especially his emphasis on the Midwest's shift from a decidedly southern orientation to a strong northern one. Egnal's analytical narrative does not simply assume a "North" and a "South" but rather shows the interactions of politics and economics created between these two regions. Indeed, Egnal rightly undermines the notion of a unitary "market revolution" and instead emphasizes that economic change in the first third of the nineteenth century contributed to the growth of nationalism (especially as midwesterners sent their goods down the Mississippi River system), while economic change in the second third of the nineteenth century created a greater sense of regionalism. Egnal usefully analyzes the "Rise of the Lake Economy" to describe the growing connections between northeastern states and the Midwest. Southern politicians who opposed national subsidies to midwestern internal improvements symbolized the growing regional rifts of the 1840s and 1850s.

While there is much to praise here, there is also much to criticize. Egnal's historiographic arguments often attack straw men. For example, he criticizes James McPherson for putting forth an "idealistic explanation" of the Civil War that in Egnal's view focuses too much on slavery. One of McPherson's key arguments, though, is that slavery hampered modernization in the South and hence created important different regional differences over issues such as tariffs, manufacturing development, and education policy. One gets the feeling that to distinguish his analysis from the "conventional" view, Egnal sometimes exaggerates his argument. Egnal's assertion that Lincoln and Stephen Douglas shared "remarkably similar" views on the extension of slavery needs far more evidence and analysis to be persuasive (p. 237).

More generally, Egnal's dichotomy between "economic issues" and "moral issues" assumes a neat and tidy separation of these two categories. The problem is that antebellum Americans frequently connected economic issues to moral ones. Proslavery ideologues bitterly critiqued the moral underpinnings of northern wage slavery, while northerners often pointed to the South's stunted development when making the moral case against slavery. When Egnal writes that "the evolution of the Northern and Southern economies explains the Civil War." I was left scratching my head (p. 8). Was not slavery (especially in the eyes of many northerners) responsible for many of the economic differences between North and South? Egnal's misleading dichotomies will annoy many academic readers despite the merits of this eminently readable synthesis.

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