

I very much enjoyed this book, and in summary it solidified my point of view towards causes of the Civil War, that it was mostly the socio-economical factors and trends, and long-standing geographical and cultural factors growing apart slowly over time since the periods of initial settlement, that pushed the two different societies to conflict, and of course not only slavery. And that slavery, definitely an important pillar of the Southern economy, rose in consideration as a social factor, only towards the end of the war, and even more so, after the war and by future generations. It was an important factor, but not the primary one at that time, which were differences in opinion and plans on how to settle and then economically develop the western half of the country and continent.

I wished the book hadn't spent so much time discussing the history, merging, splitting and evolution of the political parties, and had spent more time going into some of the characters and specific drivers on the commerce side of things, a realm I have yet to find a good book on. The concept of the Great Lakes Economy, and how it influenced the times and the voting of the 1850's, and eventually the transformation of American political parties, is a concept entirely new to me and that I hadn't encountered before.

However, though aware that economics and politics are long time bedmates (if not actually more like twins separated at birth), this books' detailed focus on the politics of the day, maybe even more intertwined with economics back then than today, did make me "re-understand" and appreciate that relationship a bit more. And it was nice to see that happen in a topic and era I find so fascinating.

I especially liked the fact that this book mixed in accounts and "mini-bios" of some of the lesser known, but still important and also interesting "players" in the Civil War dramas, like Rhett, John Sherman, Cass and Giddings. This book's handling of these "second tier" participants tempts me to read further into the lives of these men, as possible "behind the scenes" figures, though I'm pretty sure I don't have time to do so.

Lastly, I really appreciate this book because it blended the use of statistics and maps within and supporting the prose, combining the two other sciences (some say artforms as well) with which I'm fascinated as well. But he doesn't overdo it, like a more purely academic book would do I think.

A highly recommended read, especially for someone just starting off reading on Civil War or Antebellum periodic subjects, as I have been the last several years.