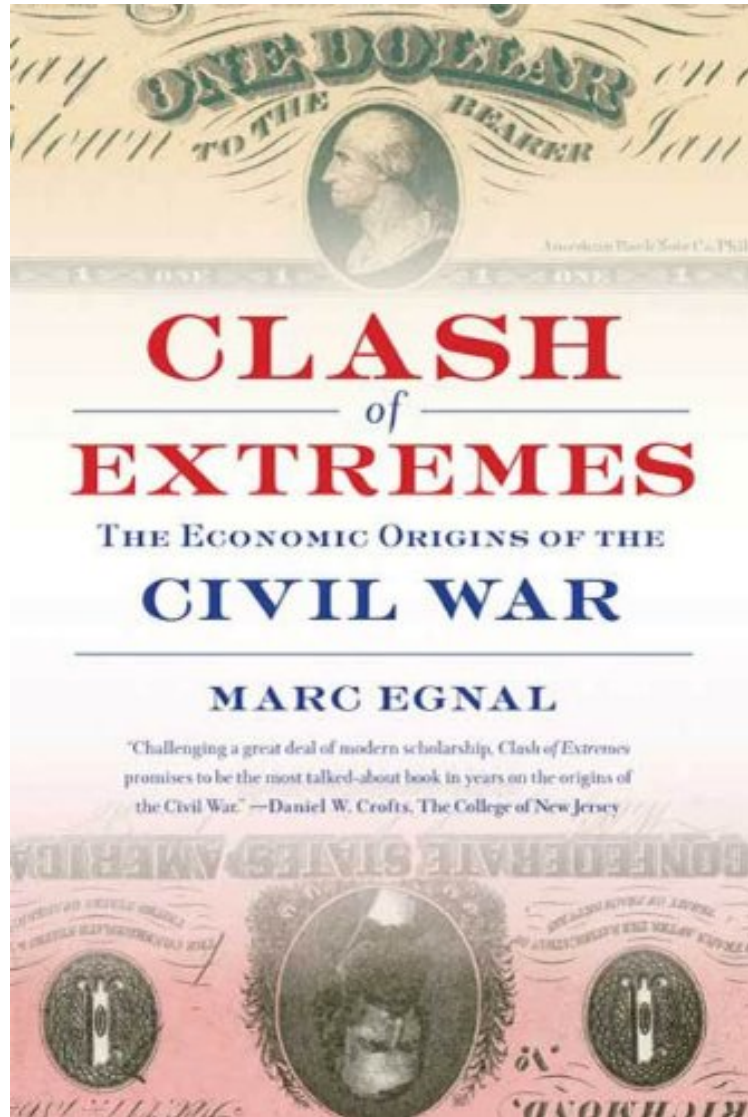


Clash of Extremes: The Economic Origins of the Civil War

Marc Egnal

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Marc Egnal : Clash of Extremes: The Economic Origins of the Civil War before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Clash of Extremes: The Economic Origins of the Civil War:

0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. Best book I've found on the Civil WarBy Louise's granddaughterI've been looking for years for a book with this type of analysis: the US Civil War wasn't due to Northern abolitionists realizing slavery was morally wrong. Rather, it was due to economic change that caused the North to want different government policies and investments than the South did. The new manufacturing/industrial economy's needs were different than they had been in the earlier colonial period, when Northern financial, shipping (=slave ships and other trade that supported slavery in the South and the Caribbean), and voracious need for cotton for manufacturing, were

well integrated with the slave states. 0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. A non-American introduced to the history of the US Civil War's By Shane Atkinson This is a review from a non-American with little prior exposure to the history of the US Civil War. The book gives a very well researched and closely described view of the interaction of political and economic factors interacting in the United States prior to, during and subsequent to the Civil War. There is a slightly quaint and unfamiliar touch in the potted descriptions of the physical characteristics of some of the key actors. I suspect this is a hangover from the traditional way of teaching history is driven by the wishes and needs of the key actors of the day. That aside, I found the book insightful and enlightening and well worth reading. 0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. Civil War By Customer This book gives a great perspective of what cause the Civil War, even though I don't agree with the author's argument it is still a very interesting read.

Clash of Extremes takes on the reigning orthodoxy that the American Civil War was waged over high moral principles. Marc Egnal contends that economics, more than any other factor, moved the country to war in 1861. Drawing on a wealth of primary and secondary sources, Egnal shows that between 1820 and 1850, patterns of trade and production drew the North and South together and allowed sectional leaders to broker a series of compromises. After midcentury, however, all that changed as the rise of the Great Lakes economy reoriented Northern trade along east-west lines. Meanwhile, in the South, soil exhaustion, concerns about the country's westward expansion, and growing ties between the Upper South and the free states led many cotton planters to contemplate secession. The war that ensued was truly a "clash of extremes." Sweeping from the 1820s through Reconstruction and filled with colorful portraits of leading individuals, Clash of Extremes emphasizes economics while giving careful consideration to social conflicts, ideology, and the rise of the antislavery movement. The result is a bold reinterpretation that will challenge the way we think about the Civil War.

From Publishers Weekly This incisive, if overstated, study locates economic interests rather than clashing ideologies and social systems at the roots of the Civil War. British historian Egnal (*A Mighty Empire: The Origins of the American Revolution*) traces America's polarization in the 1850s to antagonistic sectional economies. In the North, he contends, the Republican Party, beholden to a burgeoning Great Lakes economy and focused on promoting industrial growth, conceived its effort to ban slavery in America's Western territories—the issue that precipitated the war—in terms of the economic interests of Northern settlers. Conversely, he argues, Southern planters, their soils depleted, saw expansion of slave agriculture onto the fresh soils of those territories as a dire economic necessity; for them, secession was a rational act. Egnal's perceptive, fine-grained analysis of fragmentation within the North and South around local patterns of trade, agriculture and manufacturing is especially revealing. Still, economic motives alone don't seem powerful enough to have started a war without the atavistic forces of racism and nationalism energizing them. While not a sufficient account, Egnal's is an illuminating contribution to our understanding of the Civil War's causes. 11 maps. (Jan.) Copyright copy; Reed Business Information, a division of Reed Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved. From Booklist The assertion that sectional economic interests rather than the slavery controversy provoked the Civil War goes back at least as far as Charles Beard, and even postwar Southern apologists (including Jefferson Davis) raged over Northern exploitation of the South; so Egnal is hardly reinventing the wheel. Still, he does offer some interesting, even original, perspectives that are well supported by data. In particular, Egnal shows how the strong economic bonds that united New England and the South in the first part of the nineteenth century had been superseded by an east-west axis as the economy of the Great Lakes region developed. He stresses the economic divide between Northern and Southern interests but fails to acknowledge that Southern reliance on slave labor (and, thus, overreliance on cotton) was at the heart of that divide. He also de-emphasizes the emotional flashpoint that slavery provided, despite the massive evidence available from both Northern and Southern newspapers and journals stoking the fires of sectional hostility. Nevertheless, this is a serious work that may well reignite a historical debate. --Jay Freeman "Challenging a great deal of modern scholarship, Clash of Extremes promises to be the most talked-about book in years on the origins of the Civil War." —Daniel W. Crofts, The College of New Jersey