I am delighted to have this opportunity to respond to Marc Egnal's reply to my review of his book *Clash of Extremes*. In this response I shall look at the more important of the points he makes and then add some additional remarks about the book.

Clash of Extremes is a very unusual, but very interesting, volume. And the most unusual and interesting thing about it proceeds from the author's understanding of the historiography of the subject. One of the core problems, as I observed in my review, is that Egnal thinks that a "slavery" interpretation is a "morality of slavery" interpretation, that "antislavery" can only be morally inspired, and that the dominant interpretation of the origins of the Civil War, against which he is reacting, sees it as a struggle over the morality of slavery (rather than over slavery with all its political, economic and moral ramifications). All these claims are invalid but it is important to identify them. Otherwise there is no way to make sense of an otherwise bewildering assertion like the following: "most Republicans viewed free soil more as an economicthan an antislavery policy" (p.255). (Every other historian, of course, believes that free soil was an antislavery policy motivated by a variety of considerations, one of which was that slavery was thought to be economically malign.)

Why does Egnal claim that historians generally believe that the moral issue of slavery was predominant? Even more interestingly, why does he dismiss as a "stew pot" an approach which recognises that antislavery could be moral, economic, political, or some combination of them, in its orientation? [1] The standard work on Republican ideology, now forty years old, written by Eric Foner, (and cited by Egnal), though reaching a general conclusion that was so stewpotish that it must have aroused Egnal's ire, placed great emphasis upon the economic case against slavery.[2] Since then historians have questioned the mix in this "stew:" whether Republicans' politically inspired concerns for the Slave Power should be given more prominence than Foner gave them, or whether ethnoculturalfactors should be emphasised more heavily. I have myself discussed these questions at some length elsewhere.[3] The key point is that there is currently no consensus to the effect that the morality of slavery was the vital issue. So when Egnal shows that economic factors, and especially what we might term "economics of slavery" factors, were extremely important, he is not at all challenging, but rather confirming, the established view.

Instead, to justify his claim that the dominant interpretation is a "morality of slavery" interpretation, he cites James McPherson who argues that southerners were stung into secession especially by those northerners who condemned slavery on moral grounds. Secessionists concluded that they could not hope to compromise with, or reverse this tide of moral "fanaticism." But McPherson, (and virtually everyone else) notes that southerners seceded to defend slavery, which they identified not only with their moral code, but also with their way of life and, of course, their economic well being. In other words, McPherson is not offering a "slavery" or a "morality of slavery" interpretation, as opposed to an "economic" one, because like almost everyone else he gives full attention to slavery as an economic entity. His point here is a different, and I believe, an entirely valid one: those who opposed slavery on moral grounds, though not necessarily dominant within the

Republican party, let alone within the North as a whole, had a disproportionate effect in precipitating the South towards secession. [4] Now the vital point is that nothing in Egnal's analysis contradicts this claim. But the reference to McPherson enables him to complete the second of two intellectual exercises. In order to destroy a "slavery" argument and replace it with an "economics" one, he first reduces it to a "morality of slavery" interpretation. Then to claim that this is the "dominant interpretation" he cites a single example of a historian who refers to the disproportionate impact of those who did emphasise moral concerns. He does nothing to challenge this point but then takes this as a license to claim that every time he finds issues which are "economic" including, and especially, those that have to do with the economics of slavery, he is advancing an "economic" interpretation which constitutes a radical and powerful attack upon those who have erroneously argued for a "slavery" interpretation. Of course, he does not know he is doing this; I would on no account accuse Egnal of any deliberate sleight of hand.
But this logical slippage is almost certainly the reason for the extraordinary contradictions in the book. They probably account for Egnal telling us that in the election of 1860 the tariff was "the most important economic issue," (p.239) and then telling us that in this campaign although the Republicans "elaborated both their antislavery and economic policies, the economic agenda was more important" (p.253). An even moderately alert reader might then conclude that the tariff was more important than antislavery in 1860. He would be wrong, however, because "in the 1860 campaign Republican orators were far more likely to emphasize free soil than the tariff, which was the leading issue only in Pennsylvania, New Jersey and scattered districts in the Midwest" (p.253).

Even more remarkable is a contradiction concerning the very nature of the book. Egnal states that "if the prevailing explanation can be summarized in one word, 'slavery', the argument in my book comes down to "economics." Slavery "just didn't explain why the sections clashed" and a "slavery" explanation is thus "fraught with problems" (p.7). Then he later fully endorses Lincoln's remark to the effect that slavery was "somehow the cause of the war" (p286), and argues both that the South seceded to protect slavery and that this was an entirely rational act given Republican aims (p.262). By this stage the reader is likely to be fully as confused as the author.

What has caused this confusion? Egnal's (unacknowledged and perhaps even unrecognised) reduction of "slavery" to an entirely moral question allows him at certain points in the book to make grand claims about the scope of the volume (it will argue for "economics" not "slavery") and the extent of its challenge to orthodoxy (which argues for "slavery" not "economics"). But when he looks at specifics (secession or the issues in the campaign of 1860) he sees that slavery is indeed vital and that the reduction makes no sense. So he ends by contradicting the central thesis of the book. [5]

Egnal complains that in my review I ignore the many descriptions of individuals that he offers. Yet, he tells us, "a focus on individuals is basic to the book's methodology," since "any broader developments must work on the personal level." But the reason I ignored these vignettes is that I saw nothing in the vast majority of them that strengthened, or in many cases even related to, Egnal's thesis, which has to do with changing patterns of trade, the rise of the Great Lakes economy etc. Let us take the portrayal of Thaddeus

Stevens. Egnal tells us about his boyhood, his ironworks, his red wig, his commitment to antislavery, together with sundry other facts. These details are perfectly acceptable but they neither confirm nor refute the central claims of the book. Other vignettes relate to individuals who were involved in building the Great Lakes economy, for example, but once again, their biographical details merely illustrate points that are uncontroversial. There is no methodological innovation or breakthrough here. An academic reader would probably assume that they were put in as "sweeteners," not adding anything to the argument, but inserted to make the book more "colourful" and easier for the non-specialist.

The question of slave resistance, however, is, or should be, of an entirely different magnitude. As historian William W. Freehling, the leading student of the politics of the Old South and of the southern road to secession observes, "blacks' impact remains the most overlooked cause of the Civil War." [6] As far as the slaves are concerned their acts and potential acts were important in many ways. Egnal notes that southerners feared the potential for unrest among their slaves if slavery were not to be allowed to expand. However, these same southerners certainly did not believe that this illustrated the basic propositions that slaves did not want to be slaves, that they resisted enslavement and above all, that this resistance was a principal cause of the American Civil War. It is not enough to say that there was a fear of rebellion under a specific set of circumstances. Until well into the twentieth century, historians believed with Ulrich B. Phillips that blacks were well suited to slavery. Thus, like the slaveholders themselves, these scholars would have found absurd the idea that slaves resisted enslavement in any meaningful sense, still less would they have understood that this resistance played a role in bringing on the Civil War. Since at least the 1960s, however, we have known that slaves did long for their freedom. But only comparatively recently has this knowledge filtered through to, and influenced, works which relate to the origins of the Civil War. It would appear not yet to have impinged on Egnal's consciousness.

Let me briefly explain some of the processes by which slave resistance became a major cause of the War. There are many, one of which is the fear of rebellion. But this was not merely a fear of slave rebellion if slavery were constricted and not allowed to spread into the West (the one process of which Egnal is aware). If this were all, then slave resistance would be a minor factor indeed. But infinitely more was involved than this. Rebellion and flight were both symptoms of black resistance. The fear of both was what prompted Missourians to flock into Kansas, vote fraudulently there and thus stir up the enormous controversy that shook the political system between 1854 and 1858. "Bleeding Kansas" and as a direct result of "Bleeding Kansas," "Bleeding Sumner" were the consequences. This controversy was what gave the Republicans their extraordinarily strong showing in 1856 and which allowed them to become the main anti-Democratic party in the North. In other words the fear of flight and rebellion precipitated the upheavals in Kansas, which as all historians know, in turn pushed the nation strongly toward the break-up of 1860-1861. It also, incidentally, did an enormous amount to confirm the Republican fear of the "Slave Power" in the South, another hugely important subject (though absent from Egnal's analysis).

There were other processes too. The entire Fugitive Slave controversy, so damaging

to North-South relations, proceeded from the fact of, and potential for, slave resistance. The slaveholders' fear of free speech on the subject of slavery both in the South and in Washington D.C., again activated in good part by fear of slave unrest, again stoked up antislavery sentiment in the North and again played to fears of a Slave Power. More generally the slaveholders' fears of potentially rebellious non-slaveholding whites in the South, derived much of their force from the possibility that these whites would make common cause with, or at least refuse to put down, rebellious slaves. Finally, it might be argued that the potential for slave resistance actually constrained southern economic development (helping to inhibit the growth of towns, cities, and manufacturing in the region, making southerners fearful of the presence of large numbers of immigrants in their midst). And this lack of economic development in the South in turn fed into the economic critique of slavery, which as all historians (apart from possibly Marc Egnal) know to have been a major constituent of Republican antislavery. (It was also present, though less prominent, in the abolitionists' critique of the South,) This prompts a key question. Would there have been a sectional conflict and a Civil War if these processes had not been present, if, that is to say, the slaves had been content (as contemporary southerners and historians used to believe) under slavery? It would seem not.[7] It is perfectly obvious that Egnal has never even considered these possibilities.

Let me end [8] by offering Egnal some advice. I suspect his key concern is to demonstrate that "economics" not "morality" played the greater part in bringing on the Civil War. But unfortunately he has adopted as his mentor Charles Beard. Beard's work was in effect that of a vulgar Marxist who thought that to establish a claim for the primacy of the economy, he had to downplay the slavery issue. This was a profound error. There is no dichotomy between "slavery" and "the economy," most obviously because those who attacked or defended slavery did so for a variety of reasons, among which the economic were usually present and often paramount. There is not even a dichotomy between "the morality of slavery" and the economy because one can argue that the moral critique of slavery was itself in large part generated by changes in the northern economy (though not the changing patterns of trade that Egnal, following Beard, emphasises.) Beard himself operated with a crude model of the relationship between economics and morality and thus of the relationship (or non-relationship as he saw it) between "economics" and "slavery." Egnal has absorbed all too much of this. As a result he has written a book that is profoundly self-contradictory. And it is a book in which there is apparently room to tell us about Thaddeus Stevens' wig but not about the role played by almost four million blacks in the outbreak of the American Civil War and thus in their own liberation.

John Ashworth

NOTES

[1] Thus David Wilmot was an antislavery Democrat who believed slavery should not spread, who looked forward to its abolition throughout the nation as a result of this restriction, but who avowed himself indifferent to the moral question of slaveholding. Egnal is perhaps the only historian writing today whose definition of "antislavery" would

prevent him applying the label to someone like Wilmot, author of course of the explosively antislavery proviso, in response to whose passage southerners threatened to leave the Union in defence of slavery. It is an odd use of language that denies the term "antislavery" to this.

It is true, as I observed, that while almost all northerners were agreed on not having slavery in their midst; the term "antislavery" means more than this. Thus James Buchanan, Franklin Pierce and probably Stephen A. Douglas, cannot be described meaningfully as "antislavery;" David Wilmot and all those who were adamantly (not those willing quickly to back down on the question) opposed to slavery's spread westward, for economic, moral, or political reasons (or some combination thereof) are appropriately classed as "antislavery." This is not my but rather the standard approach.

[2] Eric Foner, *Free Soil, Free Labor, Free Men* (New York, 1970). This was Foner's conclusion: "Resentment of southern political power, devotion to the Union, anti-slavery based upon the free labor argument, moral revulsion to the peculiar institution, racial prejudice, a commitment to the northern social order and its development and expansion - all these elements were intertwined in the Republican world view." Egnal needs to understand that each and every one of them promoted antislavery. As Foner also observes (p. 304), "anti-slavery was one of the few policies that united all Republican factions;" he also rightly notes that for some Republicans moral opposition to slavery was entirely absent.

[3] Egnal announces that I "seemingly" think all the elements in this antislavery mix were present in equal proportions. There is not the slightest reason for this claim. I discuss Republican ideology at some length in *Slavery, Capitalism and Politics,* vol 2: *The Coming of the Civil War* (New York, 2007), pp. 173-336, and this particular question on pp. 330-334.

[4] I have made the same point myself in Slavery, Capitalism and Politics II p. 332-333. For McPherson's view, emphasisingthe importance of slavery as an economic as well as a moral question, see the interview cited by Egnal.

[5]Thus on p.264 he announces that to suggest that "the South seceded to protect slavery" is to propose an "idealistic" interpretation, presumably in contradistinction to one that is materialist or "economic." I know of no historian who doubts that the gigantic economic stake in slavery was, at the minimum, one of the key factors motivating southerners.

[6] William W. Freehling, *The Road to Disunion: Secessionists Triumphant* (New York, 2007), p.67.

[7] Let me be quite clear here. I am not of course suggesting that Egnal is unaware of the fugitive slave controversy, of the strife in Kansas, or of the lack of development of the

southern economy. What I am pointing out is that he fails to see the link between these factors and slave resistance and is thus entirely unable to assess the role and overall impact of that resistance. This is one of the main themes of my two-volume study, *Slavery, Capitialism and Politics*.

[8] Lack of space prevents me from devoting much time to Egnal's remark about antislavery and the "untethered balloon." There are several points. a) The economic case against slavery drew attention to the lack of economic development in the South. Northern economic growth and diversification, decade on decade, especially from 1830 onwards, accentuated this contrast and thus strengthened antislavery. b) Southern attempts at controlling the Republic also became increasingly extreme decade on decade, again especially from 1830, and this fuelled the political case against slavery. c) Similarly accelerating economic changes in the North helped fuel the moral case against slavery. d) The 1852 election was not a referendum on slavery's existence either in the South or in territories yet to be organised in the West. e) When southern actions in the 1850s did provoke a backlash in the North, it was more severe than in any previous decade, reflecting the greater depth of antislavery sentiment there by that time.