

Review by *Choice*, December 2009.

Egnal (history, York Univ.) argues that the recent emphasis on slavery as the Civil War's cause is fraught with problems because it does not clarify the sequence of events, divisions within regions, or the Republican Party's policies and actions. Instead, he argues that economic changes within both regions were paramount in unbinding what had been a fairly stable union. Egnal examines an impressive array of primary and secondary sources and is especially good at documenting spatial patterns of political alignments and realignments, with careful attention paid to events in each state, leading political actors, the role of tariffs, and Pennsylvania in the Republicans' 1860 victory. The key economic changes he identifies are the reorientation of commercial ties in the North along an east-west axis and the rise of the Great Lakes' economy, and Southerners' rising frustration about the inability to move slavery to fresh lands and pessimism about the exhaustion of the region's soil. The soil exhaustion argument needs additional support, and Southerners' pessimism is belied by the fact that slave prices rose strongly during the 1850s, something Egnal ignores. Despite this weakness, the book deserves a wide audience. Summing Up: Highly recommended. All readership levels. R. M. Whaples Wake Forest University