

Booklist

Clash of Extremes: The Economic Origins of the Civil War. Egnal, Marc (Author)
Jan 2009. 432 p. Hill & Wang, hardcover, \$27.00. (9780809095360). 973.7.

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the strong economic bonds that united New England and the South in the first part of the nineteenth century had been superseded by an east-west axis as the economy of the Great Lakes region developed.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 stoked the fires of sectional hostility. Nevertheless, this is a serious work that may well re-ignite a historical debate.

— *Jay Freeman*