

1-1-2005

Calculating the Value of the Union: Slavery, Property Rights, and the Economic Origins of the Civil War.

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Recommended Citation

Gutzman, Kevin, "Calculating the Value of the Union: Slavery, Property Rights, and the Economic Origins of the Civil War." (2005).
History Faculty Papers. Paper 4.
<http://repository.wcsu.edu/historypaper/4>

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ography” in the wake of the Civil War reveals how this form of playing Indian fulfilled the needs of whites “struggling with the conspiracy of Darwinian theory and the political reality of emancipation that thrust the issues of union with nonwhites to center stage” (191).

Body and Soul is at its best when it situates Spiritualism amidst the history of emotions, explores the role of exchange in Spiritualist praxis, charts the diversity of Spiritualism, and analyzes how regional and racial divisions helped to produce the eventual dissolution of the movement following the Civil War. Despite offering the promise of a unifying “social physiology” where mind was integrated into body and body into society, Spiritualism ultimately foundered on both its own and the nation’s factionalism. Robert S. Cox’s simultaneous attention to the broader frameworks for Spiritualism and his detailed and captivating stories of both familiar and unfamiliar participants in this religious movement accordingly make a unique and compelling contribution to the study of Spiritualism and nineteenth-century American history.

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Calculating the Value of the Union: Slavery, Property Rights, and the Economic Origins of the Civil War. By James L. Huston. (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2003. Pp. xvii, 394. Illustrations. Cloth, \$45.00.)

James L. Huston’s new study of the coming of the Civil War is intended to demonstrate

that property rights in slaves generated the sectional conflict, that the concentration of valuable property rights in one region thwarted any attempt at compromise and undermined the genius of the democratic process. Southern slaveholders searched for a sanctuary founded on the absolute guarantee that all members of the Union would view slaves as property and agree that no law at any level of government anywhere within the Union could directly or indirectly harm the value or ownership of that property—the absolute sanctity of property rights in slaves. Northern resis-

tance to southern demands about property rights in African Americans stemmed from a number of sources, but the crucial one was economic.

Northerners, he concludes, came to oppose slavery because they “saw the growing slavery system as a ruinous competitor to their system of free village labor” (xiv).

A casual reader of this thesis statement might wonder what, exactly, is original in it. The short answer is, not much. One finds here an account of the 1840s and 1850s with much more in common with those of David Potter and Hermann von Holst than with the more recent ethnocultural school. At least since Abraham Lincoln, and arguably since James Madison, conflict within the federal system has been traced to the distinction between slave states and free. Huston is aware of this, as his reliance on Potter and rejection of Holt show. So what does he believe to be the historiographical contribution of his jaunt through the fractious events beginning with the Wilmot Proviso and ending in southern secession?

Instead of referring to “slavery” as the nub of the sectional crisis, Huston points to “the right to own slave property.” To my mind, this distinction does little to further understanding. What does one glean, for example, from learning that John Brown’s raid prompted many southerners’ concern for the future of their property rights in slaves under a Republican government instead of, as he might have thought, concern for the future of slavery under a Republican government? Very little, it seems to me.

In one characteristic paragraph, Huston states that the Kansas-Nebraska debate highlighted “property rights in slaves.” He then quotes an Alabama senator’s reference, in the course of arguing for the legality of slavery in the territories, to the constitutional protections of property rights. I take this reference to be a circumlocution akin to those in the Constitution’s slavery-related provisions, not a tell-tale phrase exposing southerners’ previously misapprehended argument. They stood for the right to own slaves, which they often denominated a property right. Referring to property rights was a common way of referring to the right to own slaves; see South Carolina fire-eater Lawrence Keitt, later in the same paragraph: “You deny that there is property in the slave. Your denial shakes the very foundation of property” (202). Keitt and others believed that if a legislature could negate a property right, all property rights were provisional. That is all.

For Huston, however, this is an ominous deduction. Several times, Huston joins antebellum radicals in distinguishing between “human rights” and “property rights,” as if property rights were not human rights. The conundrum that moderately antislavery figures believed that they faced in the period under consideration, as in the prior seven decades, was that different groups’ property rights seemed to be in conflict; the slave had a claim to his liberty (a form of Lockean property), but, they held, his owner had a claim to his labor. That helps explain why states like New York had emancipated their slaves gradually, not abruptly; it also puts the lie to Huston’s claim that none of the ideology of the American Revolution supported the continued existence of slavery (110). By omitting those who argued against immediate emancipation from his chapter on antislavery, Huston misses the mark.

None of this is to deny that Huston’s book includes some pertinent insights. It is true, for example, that antebellum southerners tended to use constitutionalism to veto any policy they disliked. Yet there was nothing new in this tendency of American minorities under our current constitution, which first surfaced in George Washington’s first term. Too, Huston is perhaps right that the Constitutional Unionists might have fared better had they made extension of the Missouri Compromise line their main proposal before the election of 1860 instead of after. Yet on the whole, the provocative insights in this work are few, the rehash abundant. Cloaking the most familiar account of the sectional crisis in new jargon does little to change its substance.

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