

politicians who first joined the unpopular abolitionist Liberty Party, later migrated into the merely restrictionist Free Soil party in order to gain votes. His subjects may not have compromised their commitments to politics, but they certainly compromised their commitments to antislavery. Blue compounds this impression throughout by qualifying his subjects' politics with words such as "radical," "moderate," and "conservative." Because of the prosopographic form of his narrative, perhaps, Blue chooses not to pursue a more complete redefinition of these terms—a redefinition that might have shown Free Soilers and pre-Civil War Republicans in a less-compromised light.

Prosopography also offers its advantages. *No Taint of Compromise* is a pleasure to read. Blue brings decades of experience to the subject and the genre; he is the author of an award-winning biography of the anti-

slavery political leader Salmon P. Chase, as well as of another biography of the Conscience Whig, Charles Sumner, and a history of the Free Soil Party. The brief biographies he offers in *No Taint of Compromise* are humane, compelling, and enlightening. This text should work well for an undergraduate course on the antebellum era. By bringing to light the stories of his eleven intriguing political antislavery leaders, Blue has enriched our understanding of that very diverse movement, and persuasively demonstrated that it cannot be simply characterized.

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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. Tables, illustrations, appendices, notes, sources, index. \$45.00.)

James L. Huston has written a smart book explaining why the Civil War could not be avoided. Looking closely at speeches (especially in congressional debates) and at correspondence, Huston works with the actual words of the southern leaders who finally calculated that the union was less valuable to them than their

slaves, and who, fearing that the union would someday in some way cost them their slaves, then assailed it in a war that cost them those slaves.

Southern slaveowners, Huston argues, always understood property differently from northerners and westerners; he redundantly demonstrates from the very words of political lead-

ers, academics, ministers and other clerical leaders, and other articulate members of the antebellum elite that such property always included the right to own other humans. His apt title comes from the words of one among this group, Thomas L. Cooper, once president of the South Carolina College. This Jeffersonian could speak eloquently about liberty, but only for white people, and only in a sense that ensured their right to hold human property. For Cooper, and for others like him, the union's value could be calculated in terms of its support for this specific sense of liberty.

Huston says early that "property rights in slaves generated the sectional conflict. . ." (p. xiv). Underneath that cause, he explains, lay the fact that "the concentration of valuable property in one region thwarted any attempt at compromise and undermined the genius of democratic process" (p. xiv). Yet Huston takes pains to distance himself and his thesis from any claims of principled abolitionism "at the North." Instead, he carefully looks at northern political speeches, ministerial pronouncements, and correspondence to show that it was the perceived "unfairness" of slave labor that pushed non-slave-owning farmers off of southern land and into the border states. Without showing much regard for the humanness of the afflicted human property, these once-displaced farmers became

"paranoid" that slaveowners would cross the old compromise border lines into midwestern territory, bringing with them the same system of "unfair" and unfree labor (p. 66).

Indeed the only complaint this reviewer makes about the book is the incongruous labeling of northern attitudes as "paranoid" and slaveowner attitudes as "hysterical" after many carefully arranged tables and much carefully grounded logic to show the solid economic interests underlying their opposing systems. Perhaps Huston is being doubly ironic and having fun with the many historians who use such terms. My own mind runs to Avery Odelle Craven's concept of "emotionalism" as a cause for the breakdown of the national institutions—political, religious, and civic—that once brokered heated but nonviolent discussions of the conflicts between slaveowners and free labor advocates. For all that, my fondness for the "repressible conflict" concepts of Craven, James Garfield Randall, and David Herbert Donald no longer seems logical after having read Huston's brilliantly wrought argument. The tables and some of the side discussions of the issues alone are worth the price of admission. The volume belongs in your school's library and in your own.

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