

society” (pp. 5, 158, 171). Evidence from probate inventories or tax lists for selected localities might be employed to clarify the extent of slaveownership and hence of the groups with the greatest incentives for supporting slavery.

Overall *Brethren by Nature* is an important contribution to the economic history of colonial and early national New England. By underscoring the region’s connections to the forms of slavery developing elsewhere, and the similar violent means by which all colonial elites addressed chronic labor shortages, it contributes as well to studies of slavery throughout the early modern Atlantic.

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*The British Gentry, The Southern Planter, and the Northern Family Farmer: Agriculture and Sectional Antagonism in North America.* By James L. Huston. Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2015. Pp. Xvii, 345. \$35.00, cloth.  
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In *The British Gentry, The Southern Planter, and the Northern Family Farmer: Agriculture and Sectional Antagonism in North America*, James L. Huston explores and then debunks three widely-held views of U.S. economic history. Huston argues that (1) the traditional academic interpretation of the expression “free labor ideology” is incorrect; (2) the U.S. Civil War was not, as it has often been portrayed, a battle between northern capitalism and a southern agrarian patriarchy; and (3) the war was also not a battle between the “industrial” north and the “agrarian” south. Rather he argues the debate over free labor was a debate about the meaning of liberty, and the Civil War was a clash between two polities driven by mutually antagonistic visions of liberty.

Taken together, one might reasonably characterize Huston’s views on these issues as revisionist. However, earlier generations of cliometricians have explored the complementarities between the supposed capitalist/industrial north and the semi-feudal/agrarian south (items (2) and (3) on the list above). Even if they approached the issue from a slightly different direction than Huston does, volumes such as Gavin Wright’s *Political Economy of the Cotton South* (1978) and Roger Ransom’s *Conflict and Compromise* (1989), to cite two long-time elements of the canon, lead one to the same conclusions drawn by Huston. Northern capitalists did not go to war to stop or otherwise impede the flow of the cheap, slave-subsidized cotton they processed; nor did northern wage earners clamor to compete in the labor market with newly freed African Americans. Thus, Huston’s interpretation of free labor ideology (item (1), above), and his critique of earlier work on the subject, serves as the volume’s most original contribution.

A clear thinker and expositor, Huston argues that to understand the political economy of the dispute between the United States of America and the Confederate States of America one must understand the difference in the meaning of liberty as viewed by politically powerful groups in those two states. Huston’s account recognizes that political units make war; points on a compass, such as “north” and “south” do not, nor do socio-economic abstractions like capitalism or agrarianism. States also make laws, which tend to reflect the ideology of those who control the legislative process, and here is where the diverging concept of liberty appears.

In Huston's view, the free labor ideology, as held by those who actually lived it in the nineteenth century, was literally an ideology of freedom, "freedom from the domination of landlords, freedom from tenancy, and freedom from a life as a minor wage-earning farm laborer" (p. 17). As such it had at least three distinct characteristics: It was a conscious reaction to the British agricultural system; it was distinctly rural and tied to notions of land ownership; and it was inclusive, that is, its perpetuation was enhanced by the breadth of its embrace; the more voters who signed on, the greater would be its political manifestations. Among its practitioners and advocates, who were disproportionately found on yeoman farms in the northern states, this freedom became entwined with the rhetoric of liberty, which in turn contrasted with both the ideology and rhetoric of southern slave owners.

According to Huston, the southern view of liberty was constructed to reinforce the social, economic, and political control exercised by the few over the many. As such, it "was an elite rhetorical device of class domination. It never meant 'equal liberty for all.'" Indeed, among the members of this group, liberty became "a synonym for 'tyranny'" (p. 180), the perpetuation of which required an ever-growing "engrossment" of agricultural land. Here then was the central conflict that led to war. The battle over the extension of slavery in the territories became a battle of two contrasting, yet both largely agricultural, views of liberty. In this telling it was the resistance of northern yeomen to the spread of enslaving southern elites that led to Fort Sumter.

This sounds logical enough, but Huston's narrative of antebellum history, and thus his explanation of the root cause of the war, collides with the interpretation of that history by recent generations of U.S. historians. Beginning in the 1970s (though the intellectual roots can be found in the '60s), the expression "free labor ideology" became an instrument employed to analyze the class struggle waged by nineteenth-century industrial labor. In Huston's view, modern U.S. historians appropriated the concept for their own professional and ideological objectives. At least two generations of historians interpreted "free labor" as a justification of "wage labor in factories" in contrast to slave labor, a logic which led to "free labor ideals that justified capitalism" (p. 187). In other words, free labor ideology was not primarily a view held by northern farmers, as Huston argues, but an ethos espoused by various defenders of nineteenth-century capitalism and thus an intellectual idea founded on class consciousness, as interpreted by subsequent generations of U.S. historians. Huston summarizes: "For the past fifty years, antebellum historians have built an interpretation of sectional antagonism that uses free labor as a device to show the aggressions of industrial capitalism. This effort has been almost wholly misguided" (p. 188).

Huston's methodological approach in building his case follows more closely that of a forensic accountant than a cliometrician. Data are presented and analyzed, but little in the way of formal hypothesis testing is asked of them, and it is difficult for me to conclude that a majority of this JOURNAL's readers would recognize one of their dogs in Huston's ideological fight. The arguments Huston addresses come from a rhetorical approach abandoned long ago by historians formally trained in economics. To put it another way, this is an interesting book on ideology and its impact on economic history, but if you're reading this review in this JOURNAL, it's probably not your economic history.

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