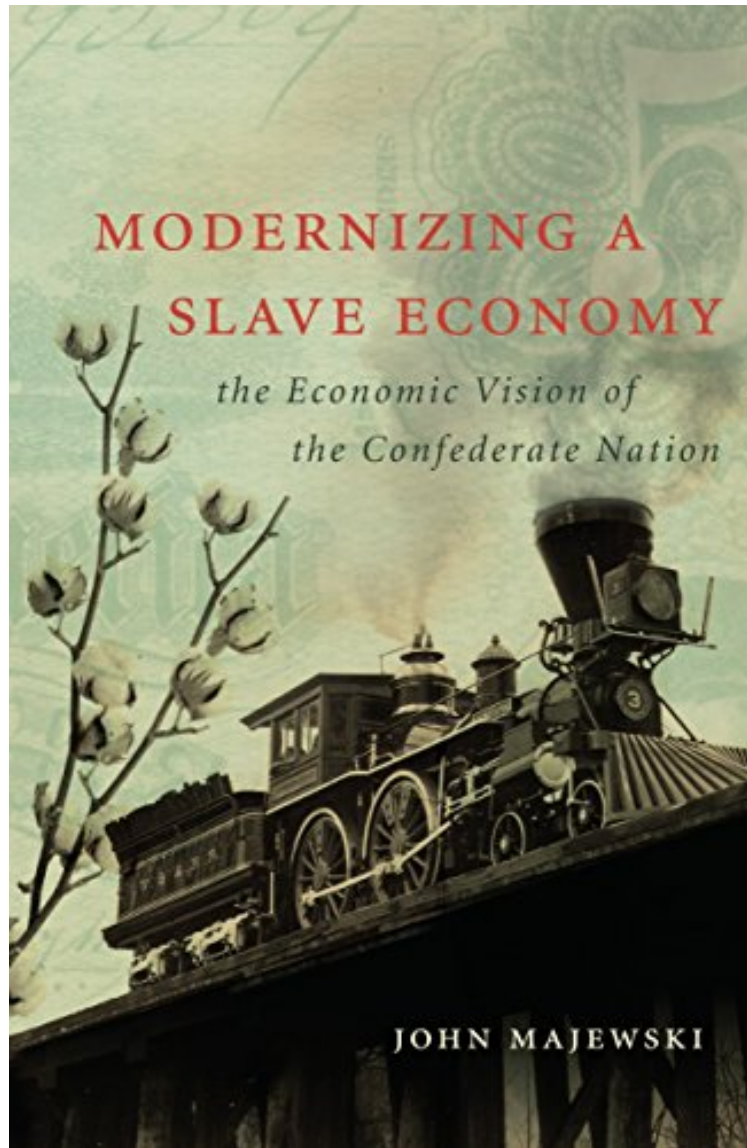


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Modernizing a Slave Economy: The Economic Vision of the Confederate Nation (Civil War America)

John Majewski

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John Majewski : Modernizing a Slave Economy: The Economic Vision of the Confederate Nation (Civil War America) before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Modernizing a Slave Economy: The Economic Vision of the Confederate Nation (Civil War America):

0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. This book is a nice addition to the scholarship on the causes of the

...By LOSA provocative, yet compelling argument. This book is a nice addition to the scholarship on the causes of the Civil War. By evaluating environmental factors, Majewski presents a narrative that is a bit more nuanced than what is generally understood about the South heading into the Civil War. The use of multivariate regression analysis is intriguing for a historian, but it works within the context of his argument. Largely only using South Carolina and Virginia as examples, I wonder if we can truly expand his claim to include the entire Confederacy. His use of source material to show the glaring discrepancies between the Confederate argument for secession and the realities of such were particularly interesting. To this point, the insistence of Confederate leaders that all would go according to plan, while failing to understand that the many actors: yeoman farmers, up country elites, down country elites, slaves, etc. had their own agency and may not behave as expected. Hoping to see more scholarship on this subject in the future.

17 of 19 people found the following review helpful. Confederate Leaders Often Favored Big State Governments

By Kindle Customer

Given slavery's worldwide extinction, the topic of modernizing a slave economy seems irrelevant. Nevertheless, in his new book MODERNIZING A SLAVE ECONOMY, John Majewski answers some important questions, such as: Why did the Southern states secede, and why did the Confederacy fail? He presents a picture of some antebellum Southerners that many readers will find surprising. Although I have done a great deal of research on antebellum slavery and the Civil War, Majewski's book illuminates some key questions for me. The key to the book's value is its portrayal of secessionists not as a group of free-trade, states' rights libertarians, but rather as leaders who often had conditional views about free trade and states' rights. Many, for example, did not want free trade; they wanted lower tariff rates in order to build Southern industry. To make matters even worse, some even wanted the tariff revenues to pay for publicworks projects, such as railroads. They did support states' rights, but they also wanted a fugitive slave law in order to have the federal government capture runaway slaves. The South's ideology was therefore much more Hamiltonian, as opposed to Jeffersonian, than I had previously thought. Thomas Jefferson himself promoted building a state university, made the Louisiana Purchase, and imposed a comprehensive embargo on the economy. The secessionists that Majewski focuses on would have cheered all of these nonlibertarian actions. He examines select secessionist leaders from South Carolina and Virginia. This sample may be biased because these two states supposedly had much to gain in an independent Confederacy. Virginia was poised to become the Confederacy's industrial base, and Charleston, South Carolina, aspired to become the leading port for European trade....Majewski explains that many states' rights extremists were actually for big government within their own states. This situation is illustrated by the railroad construction boom in the 1850s. State and local subsidies provided half the capital for Southern railroads, or about 200 percent more per capita than in the North. This "build it and they will come" strategy generally failed. During the 1850s, state governments provided backing for railroad bonds and created a railroad boom. Mark Yanochik, Mark Thornton, and Bradley Ewing have found that this boom helped to keep slavery profitable and slave prices high when the price of cotton was relatively flat ("Railroad Construction and Antebellum Slave Prices," *Social Science Quarterly* 84, no. 3 [September 2003]: 723-37). The free-trade tradition in the South rested on the ideas that tariffs reduced Southern exports of cotton and increased the prices of the goods Southerners imported and that the bulk of tariff revenues was spent in the North. However, many Southern extremists were not true free traders in the same sense as Bastiat and Cobden. They had a King Cotton strategy of coercing Europe to aid the Confederacy by starving Europe of cotton. They also adopted a variety of protectionist measures during the war. In my own research on trade policy in the Confederacy, I originally attributed these counterproductive measures to hard-pressed decisions under emergency wartime conditions (see Robert B. Ekelund Jr., John D. Jackson, and Mark Thornton, "Desperation Votes and Private Interests: An Analysis of Confederate Trade Legislation," *Public Choice* [forthcoming]). However, Majewski shows that the extremists were never true free traders and that they planned to use protectionism to foster economic development, first by protecting local industry and second by using tariff revenues to pay for public-works projects, such as railroads. I have long been curious about the growth of government in the Confederacy, and I have even argued that the big-government approach was the central cause of the Confederacy's defeat. After reading Majewski's book, I now see how easy it was for slave plantation owners to develop an outlook of the "man of system" central planner who believes he can produce results by moving people around as if they were pawns on a chessboard. On a slave plantation, the owner makes decisions and issues orders, and definite things happen as a result. This outlook is yet another fatal flaw of slavery. Majewski has convinced me that there were enough of these central-planning extremists to advocate and implement state-level fascist policies prior to the war and Confederate-level fascist policies during the Civil War.

From a review by Mark Thornton (*The Independent Review*, Summer 2010)

9 of 10 people found the following review helpful. Soil and Slavery in the South

By Stephen M. St Onge

John Majewski believes almost all historians have gotten a major piece of Southern economic history wrong. Historians have long noted that Southern agriculture resulted in worn-out soil, and frequent moves to new land. This has been attributed to slavery, directly and indirectly. Majewski argues that this idea is false. He gives a lot of evidence that the problem was geographic: the South was cursed with nutrient poor, acidic soil, a climate that caused legumes then known to grow poorly, livestock diseases, and rain patterns that led to erosion. These things combined to make slash-and-burn agriculture the only real economic option for most of the South (the practice continued well into the 20th Century). The fact that there was little good soil, and that badly located, led in turn to low populations

densities. As a result, roads and railroads were more expensive (fewer customers per mile), and manufacturers had fewer local customers. These factors in turn influenced the whole of Southern economic development. Majewski sees slavery as having harmful economic effects, but principally from the fact that slaves, with little or no cash, couldn't buy much of anything. Lack of demand further depressed the Southern economy, he thinks. There's also interesting material on various attempts to invigorate the pre-war economy, why they failed, and the part played by those failures in making secession seem more attractive. Altogether, a very thought-provoking little book. Recommended for all Civil War buffs.

What would separate Union and Confederate countries look like if the South had won the Civil War? In fact, this was something that southern secessionists actively debated. Imagining themselves as nation builders, they understood the importance of a plan for the economic structure of the Confederacy. The traditional view assumes that Confederate slave-based agrarianism went hand in hand with a natural hostility toward industry and commerce. Turning conventional wisdom on its head, John Majewski's analysis finds that secessionists strongly believed in industrial development and state-led modernization. They blamed the South's lack of development on Union policies of discriminatory taxes on southern commerce and unfair subsidies for northern industry. Majewski argues that Confederates' opposition to a strong central government was politically tied to their struggle against northern legislative dominance. Once the Confederacy was formed, those who had advocated states' rights in the national legislature in order to defend against northern political dominance quickly came to support centralized power and a strong executive for war making and nation building.

Interesting, well written, and well organized. . . . Recommended.--ChoiceHas much to offer scholars of the Old South. . . . An important marker in the recent shift in southern scholarship. . . . Will prompt historians to rethink many of the commonly held assumptions about states' rights and secession.--Civil War HistoryWill generate a lot of new discussions around the economics of the antebellum South and the Confederacy. For that his work has to be welcomed and read by all of those interested in the region and the origins of its 'nation.'--American Nineteenth Century History[A] bracing, sophisticated, and persuasive revisionist account. . . . Will be read with enormous profit by scholars of the Civil War and the Old South.--American Historical [Majewski] is particularly skilled at bringing statistical analysis to bear on the subject, and the book includes a statistical appendix, happily written in plain English for the uninitiated. . . . Should be of interest to all students of the nineteenth-century American economy.--Georgia Historical QuarterlyMajewski makes a compelling case that secession and the creation of the Confederacy gave Southerners an opportunity to initiate statist policies that had been germinating well before the war. . . . Brings a fresh approach, particularly in his statistical analysis of agricultural data, to several nagging historical questions.--The Journal of American HistoryMajewski's book asks important questions about the rise and fall of Confederate economic nationalism and sounds a clarion call for future state studies.--Louisiana History[Majewski's] analysis [is] well articulated and sophisticated at every turnhellip;.[He] opens important directions in historical investigation and sets a new standard in the scholarly debate.--EH.Net[Majewski] uses an impressive blend of quantitative and qualitative analysis to shed light on Americans' efforts during the antebellum era to achieve regional economic growth. . . . [Makes] many valuable contributions."A refreshingly well-written, concise treatment of a complex subject that helps us better define southern nationalism.--The Alabama Compelling. . . . Majewski makes a stimulating argument that calls into question many comfortable assumptions about the development of secessionist thought. . . . Makes exciting contributions to the history of political economy of the United States before the Civil War.--H-Net sThe key to this book's value is its portrayal of secessionists not as a group of free-trade, states' rights libertarians, but rather as leaders who often had conditional views about free trade and states' rights.--The Independent A tightly knit, well-written and cogently argued narrative. . . . Offers an outstanding example of how modern political economy can be interdisciplinary, empirically rigorous, and accessible.--H-Net s[An] impressively argued book. . . . Builds a bridge between the Old South and the New South and adds to the findings of scholars interested in the construction of mythic Souths both Old and New.--AlpataA stimulating and original analysis.--Enterprise Society[A] finely written and astutely argued book. . . . The book's strong interdisciplinary focus will appeal to all historians of the Civil War and the south. . . . This book should have an impact not only on debates about slavery and economic development but also on the coming of secession and southern political ideology.--Journal of Interdisciplinary History[A] compelling and surprising perspective on the motives of the secessionists.--Journal of Regional ScienceModernizing a Slave Economy offers a lively and insightful summation of southern economic thought in the antebellum decades, as well as of the difficulties encountered when reformers' visions confronted economic realities.--Register of the Kentucky Historical SocietyMajewski presents a bold, revisionist argument that should inspire continued study and debate.--The Alabama A well-crafted and insightful analysis of the arguments favoring economic development in the antebellum South and their connection to the creation of a southern nation. Writing with clarity and grace about important economic questions, Majewski offers a fresh approach to the old problem of assessing the strengths and weaknesses of Confederate nationalism.--George C. Rable, Charles Summersell Chair in Southern History, University of Alabama,

author of *Fredericksburg! Fredericksburg!* Majewski makes an argument that is quite novel for antebellum history in its consideration of the possible economic role to be played by government in the South. Well researched and clearly presented, Majewski's analysis merits attention and discussion.--Stanley Engerman, University of Rochester

About the Author John Majewski is professor of history at the University of California, Santa Barbara. He is author of *A House Dividing: Economic Development in Pennsylvania and Virginia before the Civil War*.