Slavery and American Economic Development (review)

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at odds in their competition for adherents; that identities differ across American regions; that the black-white racial dichotomy does not fit the historical facts of the American West; and that the West unsettles conventional understandings about American history. Yet it would be unfair to say that there is nothing new in these pages. Perhaps what makes this book especially relevant is that these points must still be made for readers and for historians alike.

University of Pennsylvania BRIAN ISAAC DANIELS

Slavery and American Economic Development. By Gavin Wright. (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2006. Pp. 152. Charts, tables, maps, notes, appendix, works cited, index. ISBN 0807131830. $25.00, cloth.)

Every slave in the antebellum United States shared a common quality—he or she had the legal status of movable chattel, a piece of personal property belonging to a particular owner. This quality, according to the distinguished economic historian Gavin Wright, is the key to the role of slavery in American economic development. Originally delivered as the 1997 Fleming Lectures at Louisiana State University, these three essays make a very convincing case that property rights in slaves, rather than productivity resulting from work organization or physical efficiency, created an early advantage for southern slaveholders in developing the best farmland and producing cash crops. To state the case in a way that perhaps oversimplifies but makes the point: Slaves, because they were property, could be treated by their owners in ways that free labor would never have accepted from someone who hired them, especially not in a country as land-rich and labor-poor as the United States before 1865.

Wright highlights three features of property rights in slaves that benefited the masters. First, owners could move their labor to any part of the South, however distant or undesirable as a place to live, and put them to work immediately clearing land and establishing a plantation. This allowed larger slaveholders to gain control of much of the region's best farmland. Second, owners could disregard any preferences on the part of their slaves and assign all members of slave families to any kind of work at any time during the year. This meant that they could constantly work at whatever was most likely to return a profit. Third, owners did not have to concern themselves with having too little labor at peak planting and harvesting times; a captive labor force had to remain with the owner and do all the work he required.

Wright's arguments on the key importance of property rights in slaves are persuasive for the South as a whole, and they are especially convincing for Texas. The Lone Star state had huge amounts of very cheap land but very little free labor. It is difficult to imagine how large plantations, the most productive units in terms of cash crops, could have been established in Texas with free labor. How long would men have worked someone else's land for wages (let alone work it the way slaves had to work) when they could acquire their own for so little? Small wonder that when good cotton land sold for less than ten dollars an acre, prime male field hands sold for more than a thousand dollars each.

Wright focuses on how slavery contributed to the development of the South's agricultural economy, but he also describes an economic cold war between the

North and South that followed the elimination (or the beginning of elimination) of slavery north of the Mason/Dixon Line and Ohio River during the era of the American Revolution. The North won this war, pulling ahead of the South, as Wright points out, in population, infrastructure, and technology. Wright indicates the ways in which slavery contributed to these failings in southern economic development, but, probably as a result of the time/space constraints of the lecture format, he pays little attention to other explanations. For example, he deals briefly with the role of geography as it affected certain aspects of the South's economy, but he does not consider how geography probably retarded the growth of industry. Steeply falling rivers in the New England states offered abundant waterpower for factories. Texas, where the rivers flow sluggishly to the Gulf, had no comparable source of energy for industry.

Nitpicking aside, Wright's book forcefully reminds us of how slavery affected economic development in the United States. Slaves, as property, were forced to work in ways that wage laborers would not work. This gave the South an early advantage in developing its agricultural economy, but it contributed to a lack of economic development in other ways and to a less dynamic society then and in the future.

University of North Texas RANDOLPH B. CAMPBELL

The Robertsons, the Sutherlands, and the Making of Texas. By Anne H. Sutherland. (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 2006. Pp. 222. Preface, acknowledgments, illustrations, notes, bibliography, index. ISBN 1585445207. $29.95, cloth.)

Combining memoirs, family history, and an impressionistic essay, anthropologist Anne H. Sutherland describes her forebears' experiences in Texas and examines the Texan group identity they developed during the Republic era and sustained through six generations. In so doing, she stresses two themes: the significance of families and religion in the settlement and development of Texas and the paramount importance of the Texas Revolution in forming a Texas identity. She develops those themes by looking at, and writing from the perspectives of the families of two of her great-great-great-grandfathers: George Sutherland, a leader of the Alabama settlement in Austin's colony, and Sterling Clack Robertson, empresario of Robertson's colony. By avoiding moral judgments and placing her family's experiences in the broader context of America's westward movement, she fashions a generally unbiased, interesting combination of well-known Texas events and more obscure occurrences.

Almost all of the author's focus on a Texas identity comes in the first twelve of her book's twenty-two chapters. In the first four chapters, she explains her own acquisition of a Texas persona, discusses a variety of historical writings, and introduces two sets of primary sources on which she strongly relies. Those sources consist of her private collection of the Sutherland family's letters, manuscripts, and other writings; and the published, nineteen-volume *Papers Concerning Robertson's Colony in Texas.* The next seven chapters chronologically cover the roles of the Robertsons and Sutherlands in the American colonization of Mexican Texas and emphasize