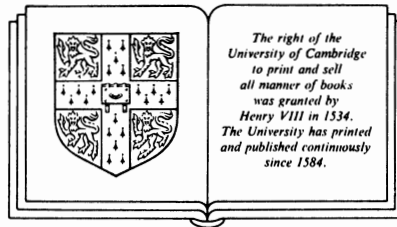
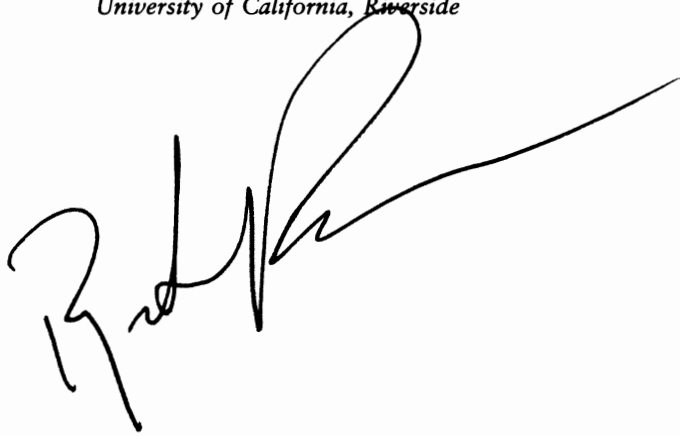


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# Conflict and Compromise

The Political Economy of  
Slavery, Emancipation, and  
the American Civil War

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CAMBRIDGE UNIVERSITY PRESS

*Cambridge*

*New York Port Chester Melbourne Sydney*

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# *Preface*

It is commonplace for authors introducing a book on the American Civil War to remind their readers that the war was the bloodiest in American history; that no event had a more profound impact on the course of American history; and that the scars of that war can still be found more than a century after the famous meeting of Robert E. Lee and Ulysses S. Grant at the Appomattox Courthouse, Virginia. Because the war was all of this and much more, it has continued to fascinate historians from that day to the present. That fascination has produced a huge outpouring of books – at least fifty thousand volumes according to one estimate – on the subject of the war. Why have I decided to add to that total? To answer that question, let me explain just how I became a “Civil War historian.”

It was early September 1983. I was at that time a professor in the economics department at the University of California at Riverside. Carlos Cortes, chair of the history department at Riverside, and I were sitting in my office discussing what he had earlier described as an “interesting possibility.” Owing to an unexpected resignation, Carlos explained, the history department had an opening for a historian of nineteenth-century America. The department had voted to explore the possibility of offering me the position. Was I interested? Taken somewhat by surprise, I replied that it seemed like an intriguing idea, and we left it at that.

Although I was surprised by the offer, the idea of having at least a part-time appointment in a department of history had crossed my mind in the past. After twenty years of living in the carefully structured theoretical world of economists, the almost limitless range of opportunities available in the world of historians seemed more and more appealing. I decided that life in the history department would be a very pleasant change in my academic environment.

So it was that in September 1984 I was sitting in a different office, contemplating my future as a historian. The move from economics to history had been very straightforward except for one minor problem: What would I teach? There is, after all, a limit to the number of economic history courses that a history department can offer. While exploring

various possibilities, I mentioned that I had a modest degree of expertise and a great deal of interest in Civil War history. The offer was quickly accepted and with a stroke of a pen, I became the department's Civil War historian.

That, very briefly, is how the idea for this book was born. Coming from a different perspective than most students of the Civil War, I found myself continually reinterpreting the historical literature so that it "made sense" to someone whose background was in economics, rather than history. This book is, quite simply, the product of that effort: an economic historian's attempt to analyze and "make sense of" the economic and political factors that produced the conflict we call the Civil War.

There is more to this than explaining events that happened long ago. At a time when Americans are constantly reading and hearing reports of violent confrontations between contending parties in far-off places such as Ireland or South Africa or Nicaragua or the Middle East, it is useful, I think, to reflect upon the fact that we Americans once faced an equally bitter and intractable division. The moral and political impasse over the spread of slavery short-circuited a political system that had been designed to accommodate diversity and to seek compromise. Conflict, not compromise, prevailed in 1860. Equally sobering is the realization that the bloodiest war in American history produced only a halfhearted solution to the problem of slavery and the racism that lay beneath its surface. American blacks would have to wait more than a century before the freedoms supposedly guaranteed by the Thirteenth and Fourteenth Amendments would actually be realized. The failure of Reconstruction offers us an unpleasant lesson from the Civil War era: "Progress" on even the most basic issues – such as civil liberties for black Americans – has been painfully slow.

I am not, of course, the first person to examine the political economy of the Civil War. Almost as soon as the war broke out, the British political economist J. E. Cairnes published a treatise subtitled "An Attempt to Explain the Real Issues Involved in the American Contest." Cairnes is one of many scholars whose research efforts have provided a foundation for my own research. Whereas I trust that I have adequately acknowledged the ideas of others through the citations to their published works, a few people deserve special recognition for their generous and insightful comments on all or part of the manuscript. William Gienapp provided critical judgements and suggestions for improvements from the outset of the project to its completion, and the final draft was a far better product thanks to his efforts. Kenneth Winkle offered valuable suggestions on the penultimate draft. Louis Johnston and Debbie O'Neal each offered help-

ful comments and proofread the entire manuscript during final preparation. Others noteworthy for their comments and encouragement at various stages of my project include Jeremy Atack, Fred Bateman, Sue Headlee, Bruce Levine, Bob McGuire, Louis Mazur, Don Schaefer, Tom Weiss, Chuck Wetherell, and Mary Yeager. Finally, many of the insights offered in this book are the product of my long-standing collaboration with Richard Sutch. The findings reported in our book, *One Kind of Freedom*, and several of our subsequent papers provide a major part of the “economic” factor of the political economy of slavery and emancipation in the pages that follow.

In addition to this substantial intellectual support, my research efforts have benefited from two sources of financial support. The John Simon Guggenheim Foundation provided a fellowship during the 1987–8 academic year that allowed me the time to work on this project. The University of California provided sabbatical leave in the spring of 1988, and support monies for the past several years.

The editorial encouragement of Frank Smith at Cambridge University Press has been extremely valuable, and his patience in waiting for the final manuscript went well beyond the bounds of tolerance normally extended to delinquent authors. Sophia Prybylski supervised the preparation of the manuscript into final form. As one who most certainly does not have a penchant for detail, I found her willingness to look after the myriad of details associated with the organization of the manuscript into publishable form invaluable. My brother, David Ransom, provided both advice and major elements of the software and other computer operations that are now an essential part of manuscript preparation.

My largest debt, by far, is to my wife Connie. For almost three decades she has given me the most important support of all: the love of someone who cares.