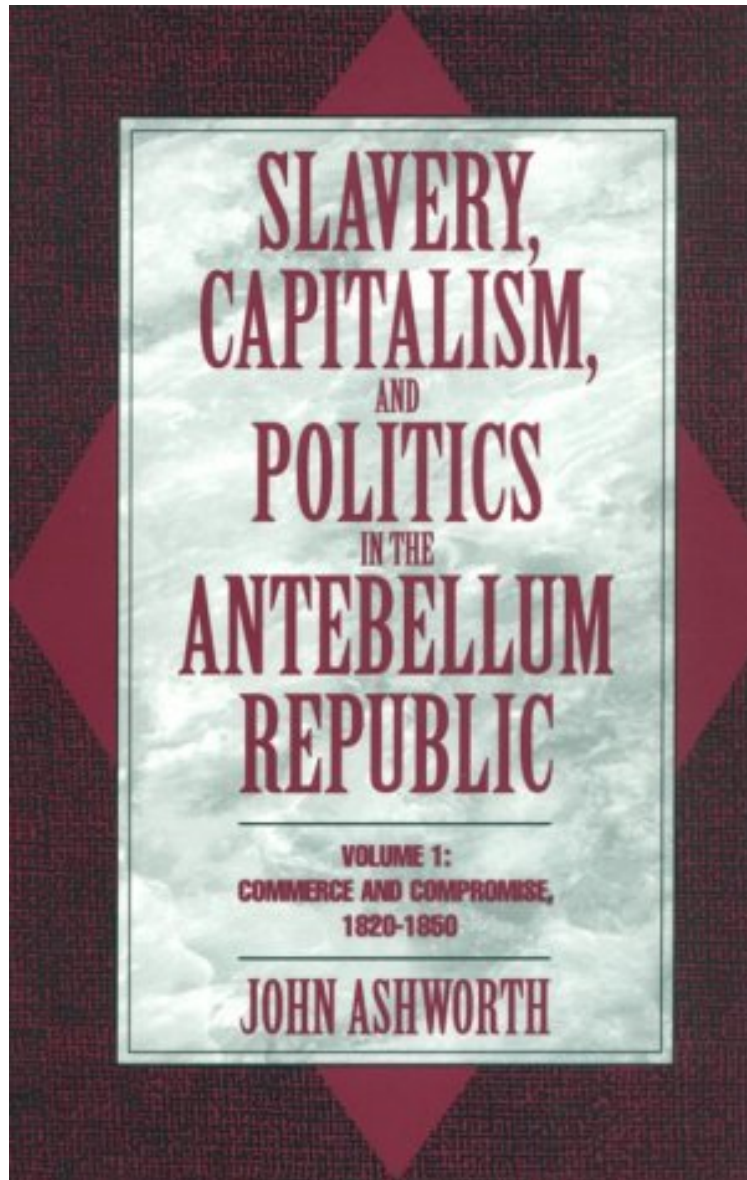


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Slavery, Capitalism, and Politics in the Antebellum Republic: Volume 1, Commerce and Compromise, 1820-1850

John Ashworth

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20 of 21 people found the following review helpful. balanced study of the conflicts within the slave SouthBy A CustomerThe emphasis here is upon the "class" tensions within the slave South and between the North with its "wage labor" and the South with its slave labor. Far too many historians in recent years have been afraid to use the concepts of "class" and "capitalism" for fear of being tainted with the brush of Marxism. But these are clearly terms and concepts the abolitionists and the pro-slavery thinkers themselves used in their attempts to make sense of their world. Ashworth does an admirable job of employing these concepts while avoiding the pitfalls of dogmatism and economic reductionism. He draws inspiration from Antonio Gramsci's concept of "hegemony" to provide his class and material analysis with a balance that emphasizes the complexities of human motivation. The author clearly reveals the points at which the slave system was in inner conflict and shows how the southern attempts to provide an intellectual defense of slavery were doomed to fail because of the conflicts and tensions within the southern class system. He goes on to detail the ideology and the foundations of the Jacksonian Democrats, the Whig Party, and the Republican Party and in the process gives the reader a balanced perspective on the forces that led to the Civil War. This is a book that should be read by anyone interested in why the two sections of the country were so different and came to think of themselves as different peoples.

This is the first of a two-volume treatment of slavery, capitalism and politics in the forty years before the Civil War. It is both a novel reinterpretation, from a Marxist perspective, of American political and economic development and a synthesis of existing scholarship on the economics of slavery, the origins of abolitionism, the proslavery argument and the second party system. With its sequel, this book will locate the political struggles of the antebellum period in the international context of the dismantling of unfree labor systems. It will also show that the Civil War should be seen as America's "bourgeois revolution."

"...a different and exciting insight into the crucial role of enslaved African Americans as active participants in historical change. This study is highly recommended reading for Old South and African American scholars seeking to understand the relationship between American slave resistance, northern wage labor ideology, and the development of nineteenth-century capitalism." The North Carolina Historical "To undertake a new study of the causes of the American Civil War is audacious, but John Ashworth has brought off a truly impressive achievement. Whether discussing the ideology of abolitionism, the impact of capitalism on social life, or the social origins of the slavery controversy, Ashworth offers original insights in a field already plowed by many historians." Eric Foner, Columbia University "...an ambitious and imaginative model of Civil war causality...make[s] a compelling case for Ashworth's Marxist style of cultural history, as well as for a more complex understanding of why the Union fell apart with Lincoln's election." Seth Rockman, Maryland Historical Magazine "...historical narratives flow well because of Professor Ashworth's competent writing style." Civil War History "Ashworth's ^Slavery, Capitalism, and Politics is a major contribution to American antebellum historiography." Robert E. Wright, Southern Historian "John Ashworth's ^Slavery, Capitalism, and Politics in the Antebellum Republic is an attractive mixture of old-fashioned history with new scholarly trends....In addition to his skillful summaries of a wide range of literature, Ashworth has added to his own impressive work on Jacksonian ideology by linking the controversies of earlier decades to the crisis that exploded in civil war. When the second volume of this work is completed Slavery, Capitalism, and Politics will stand as the most comprehensive work to have traced the ideological flowerings of the 1850's to their Jeffersonian roots." Bill Cecil-Fronsman, H-Net s "...Slavery, Capitalism, and Politics is an engaging work that should force a re-examination of antebellum political history. Even those who disagree with elements of Ashworth's analysis or with his premises will find the volume a useful statement of a contradictory position. It is a major work with which all historians in the field will have to reckon." Bill Cecil-Fronsman, H-Net s "...the broad outlines of Ashworth's work are consistent with the bulk of modern scholarship and resonate well with the contemporary evidence. His concluding volume will be eagerly awaited." Harry L. Watson, Georgia Historical Quarterly About the Author John Ashworth was born in Lancashire, England, and studied at the Universities of Lancaster and Oxford. He is currently Professor of American History in the School of American and Canadian Studies at the University of Nottingham. Professor Ashworth is the author of 'Agrarians' and 'Aristocrats': Party Political Ideology in the United States, 1837-1846, of Slavery, Capitalism and Politics in the Antebellum Republic: Volume 1: Commerce and Compromise, 1820-1850 (both of which were published by Cambridge University Press), and of numerous articles and reviews in learned journals.