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Slavery and the American West: The Eclipse of Manifest Destiny and the Coming of the Civil War

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Slavery and the American West: The Eclipse of Manifest Destiny and the Coming of the Civil War

Michael A. Morrison, 1997. *Slavery and the American West: The Eclipse of Manifest Destiny and the Coming of the Civil War*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press. xii + 396 pp. Notes, bibliography, index. \$49.95(cloth).

In the author's words, this book "examines the relationship between the territorial issue and the origins of the American Civil War." Combining "political, diplomatic, and intellectual history, it explores the origin, force, and effect of expansion and western settlement on national politics in the 1840s and 1850s" (p. 4). Morrison argues that this period should be viewed in its own terms rather than simply as part of an inevitable progression toward civil war.

Morrison tries to present both public and private discourses of antebellum Americans as they evaluated slavery, popular sovereignty, the Kansas-Nebraska Act, and the constituent elements of republicanism. In each chapter Morrison briefly sketches a major aspect of western expansion during the antebellum years and provides the justifications offered by policy advocates and the counter arguments of opponents. Throughout, individuals, rather than faceless ideologies, are placed in the foreground of the narrative.

The volume offers a sophisticated analysis of the process by which Americans transformed the ideology of republicanism from one that accommodated the needs of two national political parties in the Jackson years to regionally divergent understandings of the place and justification of slavery. In time, these divisions were carried to the point of war, with each region convinced that the other was infringing the principles of liberty and equality proclaimed at the beginning of the republic.