

INTRODUCTION TO THE SYMPOSIUM: AMERICAN POLITICAL ECONOMY FROM THE AGE OF JACKSON TO THE CIVIL WAR

BY
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This year, the sesquicentennial of the end of the U.S. Civil War, culminates four years of events commemorating that pivotal period in American history. The National Park Service rang bells at Appomattox on April 9, marking the meeting of Generals Grant and Lee on the same day in 1865 to arrange the surrender of the Army of Northern Virginia. Civil War museum lectures, battlefield reenactments, newspaper op-eds, and blog posts, hardly scarce in any year, have been legion.

Scholarly research has contributed to the public commemorations and drawn inspiration from them. The scholarly fields of American history and American political development are the sources of most academic reflection on the Civil War's causes, legacy, and meaning. Not so much the field of the history of economic thought—a state of affairs that, considering the centrality of economic debates to the political discord preceding the war, is unfortunate for scholars all around. This symposium issue of the *Journal of the History of the Economic Thought*, entitled “American Political Economy from the Age of Jackson to the Civil War,” is intended partly as a commemorative academic work like others produced during this sesquicentennial. Unlike them, and more importantly, it is intended to stimulate discussion among scholars with diverse disciplinary backgrounds yet common interests in the history of economics of the era.

The symposium grew out of an exchange of ideas between the present editor and William S. Belko, a historian of the early United States, chronicler of a remarkable free-trade convention in Philadelphia in 1831, and contributor of one of the articles herein. That exchange instigated our efforts to enlarge the discussion about the origins and aims of economic thought in antebellum America. The result was a two-day conference held at Bowdoin College in Brunswick, Maine, on October 19–20, 2013.

Bowdoin and Brunswick have an honored place in the history of the Civil War and its antecedents. The college and town were Harriet Beecher Stowe's environs when she wrote *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, also Joshua Lawrence Chamberlain's during his

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professorship of modern languages, before he resigned that position to enlist in the Union army. Later, after Chamberlain famously repelled the assault against the Union flank at Little Round Top, received the Confederate troops' formal surrender at Appomattox Court House, and served four terms as Governor of Maine, he returned to Bowdoin College as its president.

The college's place in the history of economics is less honored but also notable. One of its earlier professors, Samuel P. Newman, was, in 1824, perhaps the first in the country to occupy a position expressly devoted to the field of "political economy." Owing to his treatise on it, he has the added distinction of being expressly disparaged in all three volumes of Karl Marx's *Capital*.

The timespan from Newman's new professorial field to Chamberlain's departure for the battlefield, 1824 to 1861, corresponds precisely to the years "from the Age of Jackson to the Civil War." The rancorous election of 1824—in which Andrew Jackson won a plurality of votes but lost the presidency, redoubling his and his partisans' determination to win it the next time—set the tone for the political debates of the rest of those years. It also foreshadowed the feeling of urgency in the economic ideas that already circulated in the country or would soon be developed.

The symposium articles that are included here, after peer review and revision, investigate various economic ideas from those years with various purposes in view. The general discussant, Steven G. Medema, provides an overview of the articles and remarks on their relevance to the history of economics. His work needs no duplication here. What remains to be done is to thank several people for their contributions to the symposium's staging and publication.

The previous co-editors of *JHET*, Marcel Boumans and Evelyn Forget, approved the idea of the special issue in 2012. Their cooperation was indispensable to getting the project off the ground. Bowdoin College's Dean for Academic Affairs, Cristle Collins Judd, gave generous funding for the symposium as part of a larger initiative to enlarge the scope of collaborative research between Bowdoin faculty members and other scholars in the United States and abroad. She also took an interest in the symposium's potential to highlight Bowdoin's unique connections to the Civil War during its sesquicentennial. The Economics Department coordinator, Elizabeth Weston, assisted with all aspects of promotion and logistics. Two talented Bowdoin undergraduates with a keen interest in the history of economics, Evan Eklund and Noah Finberg, compiled a transcript of the lively discussions of symposium presentations. Their efforts facilitated the authors' revisions in the months that followed. Last but not least, two good friends and Bowdoin faculty colleagues—Patrick Rael, Professor of History, and Jeffrey Selinger, Assistant Professor of Government and Legal Studies—played superbly their roles as paper discussants and symposium gadflies. Their expansive knowledge of American history and politics, interest in interdisciplinary collaboration and debate, and congeniality reflect the aspirations of this project from the start.