Northern Naval Superiority and the Economics of the American Civil War

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Description
Addressing an aspect of the Civil War that has long been a source of controversy among historians, David G. Surdam offers an unconventional analysis of the Union's naval blockade. He questions common methods of evaluating the strength of the 3,500-mile siege line, disputes widely held interpretations of its impact, and explores previously unexamined aspects of the blockade as he presents a case for the effectiveness of the Union naval effort. Surdam seeks to explain the failure of the Confederacy to wage war and sustain independence despite an apparently sufficient supply of raw cotton to trade with Europe and Canada for war materiel and enough beef and corn to feed its troops. To do so he expands the traditional approach to the blockade, finding that a focus on the number of goods that slipped past Union ships overlooks two of the blockade's most important achievements: disrupting intraregional trade and denying the Confederacy badly needed revenue from the export of raw cotton and other staple products. Explicating the blockade's indirect yet devastating results, Surdam examines the degradation of railroad lines, collapse of specific internal markets, and effect on the exportation of cotton. He also explores how the blockade affected the cross-country movement of crops to hungry soldiers and civilians and how costs associated with the blockade consumed most of the higher prices that Europeans paid for Southern cotton. – Provided by publisher

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David Surdam, a visiting assistant professor of economics at the Graduate School of Business of the University of Chicago and at the University of Oregon, presents a new interpretation of the effect of the Union blockade on the outcome of the Civil War. Because he recognizes the incredible complexity of not only his economic topic but also the inevitable interaction of economic with political, diplomatic, and military factors, Dr. Surdam's conclusions are fairly modest. He claims only that the blockade was worth the expense--that is, the resources allocated to blockading the Southern coasts. Addressing an aspect of the Civil War that has long been a source of controversy among historians, David G. Surdam offers an unconventional analysis in this study of the Union's naval blockade. He questions common methods of evaluating the strength of the 3,500-mile siege line, disputes widely held interpretations of its impact, and explores previously unexamined aspects of the blockade as he presents a case for the effectiveness of the Union naval effort. This book will be of great interest to anyone studying the American Civil War or war in general as it puts into proper perspective the direct connection between the Confederacy's economy and the nation's ability to wage war. "This is a pathbreaking study of the economics of the Civil War."