Old Dominion, Industrial Commonwealth: Coal, Politics, and Economy in Antebellum America. *By Sean Patrick Adams.* Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2004. xiv + 305 pp. Figures, maps, tables, notes, index. Cloth, $45.00. ISBN: 0-801-87968-X.

Reviewed by James Sanders Day

Sean Patrick Adams identifies the coal industry of the early nineteenth century as a microcosm of industrial development in the United States. Consequently, he uses coal as a case study for examining regional development and divergence within the context of the Industrial Revolution. In *Old Dominion, Industrial Commonwealth*, Adams considers Virginia's failure to realize its industrial potential in contrast to Pennsylvania's emergence as the nation's predominant producer of coal. He argues that political leaders in Pennsylvania promoted dynamic industrial development, whereas Virginia's public policy supported traditional, slave-based agrarian interests that hampered economic change. Therefore, coal cannot be separated from its political context.

As Adams states, "[T]his study compares the development of the coal industry in Virginia and Pennsylvania to contrast the ways that each state developed its mineral resources from the early nineteenth century through the emergence of industrial markets and the concurrent rise of laissez-faire doctrine in the 1850s and 1860s" (p. 5). He establishes Virginia as the dominant coal-trading state in the early decades of the nation's history. The Appalachian Mountains separated the James River Valley and the Richmond coal basin in the east from western coal deposits located in the Kanawha River Valley. Population distribution and local politics allowed slaveholding elites of the tidewater to control all three branches of government. In addition, eastern emphasis on agriculture resulted in irregular slave labor, poor transportation networks, and a lack of technology for western colliers. High prices and poor quality plagued coal operators when faced with a state infrastructure that inhibited economic expansion. Even though the War of 1812 eliminated British

coal as a viable competitor, Virginia's coal industry remained stagnant, the victim of "arrested industrialization" (p. 5).

The War of 1812 also opened the way for Pennsylvania anthracite to eclipse Virginia's bituminous markets. Initially, in spite of support from the state legislature, the Franklin Institute, and other organizations, Pennsylvanians resisted conversion to "stone coal." Apparently, anthracite's advantages—lower cost, increased safety, better heat quality, fewer unpleasant by-products, reliable shipments—paled when compared with two distinct and practical disadvantages. Because of its high carbon content, stone coal was difficult to ignite, and a grate was required to keep ashes separated from the burning coal. Nevertheless, boosters promoted the use of anthracite as a vital aspect of overall prosperity. Highlighting the "link between commonwealth and coal," proponents encouraged state-level institutions to underwrite private industrial development (p. 74). Recognizing the benefits of anthracite for the iron industry, officials "took an active role in promoting anthracite-smelted iron without directly funding technological innovation" (p. 78). As a result, Pennsylvania dominated U.S. iron production from the 1830s to the 1870s.

Adams develops his thesis by examining three state-level programs: internal improvements, geological surveys, and corporate chartering policies. Pennsylvania's dynamic growth stemmed from a balanced view within the legislature of intrastate regional interests. A statewide public-works program linked coalfields with urban markets, increased overall coal traffic, and complemented the canal and railroad network of eastern Pennsylvania. Although struggling to resolve the inherent conflict between political expediency and financial solvency, the State Works facilitated the growth of Pittsburgh as the trade center for coal markets along the Mississippi and Ohio Rivers. Later, transportation networks evolved from the State Works of the 1830s to the privately owned railroads of the 1850s and 1860s. With overall control centered in Harrisburg, legislators granted general and special charters to corporations in order to open new coalfields for development and to reduce political conflict. In contrast, Virginia's James River and Kanawha Canal remained in competition with the railroads, and decentralized political and

chartering authority exacerbated rivalries between eastern and western economic interests.

Finally, Adams posits that the Civil War charted new paths of development for both Pennsylvania and Virginia. In Pennsylvania, coal mining expanded under corporate domination, and the marriage of mining and transportation interests generated significant tax revenues. However, "the wartime economy [rewarded] increased production and efficient transportation over the preservation of individual proprietorships in the coal regions" (p. 203). Such large-scale production stemmed from increased demand, but economies of scale also produced a larger and more dissatisfied workforce. Consequently, the government's role shifted toward corporate regulation and mediation between capital and labor, and away from the protection of independent colliers. The war also revived demand for bituminous coal from the Richmond basin, but the formation of West Virginia settled long-standing issues relating to eastern and western interests. Western officials attempted to model their political and economic infrastructure on that of their northern neighbors, but their reliance on railroads and other corporate interests compromised those efforts. Ultimately, the Baltimore & Ohio and Chesapeake & Ohio Railroads—key elements of the West Virginia coal economy—siphoned resources away from the state. As a result, political leaders moved the capital from Wheeling to Charleston, and West Virginia reverted to the more conservative traditions of the Old Dominion.

Adams combines economic, political, organizational, and technological methodologies to create a comparative framework that offers a viable and effective paradigm for examining industrial development. Establishing government's central role in that process, he focuses on state-level policies that promote or inhibit economic expansion. His use of primary sources is commendable, the notes are informative and helpful, and the bibliographic essay provides sufficient historical context. Pennsylvania's anthracite and bituminous coal industries form the crux of the study, and abundant resources support their historical development. Sources on Virginia's development seem more obscure, and the antithesis sometimes appears less definitive. Changes spawned by the Civil War provide a fitting conclusion to

an examination of "Coal, Politics, and Economy in Antebellum America," but, as the subtitle suggests, projections beyond the stated scope seem forced. Nonetheless, Adams offers a remarkable study of the antebellum coal industry, and his comparative approach constitutes a viable technique for evaluating differing state and regional responses to industrial development.

James Sanders Day is assistant professor of history at the University of Montevallo. His doctoral dissertation, "'Diamonds in the Rough': A History of Alabama's Cahaba Coal Field," combines social and technological history to relate the story of the state's second-largest coal deposit. At present, he is working toward publication of that work and several related articles.