

*WHEN IN THE COURSE OF HUMAN EVENTS: ARGUING THE CASE FOR SOUTHERN SECESSION.* BY CHARLES ADAMS. LANHAM, MARYLAND: ROWMAN AND LITTLEFIELD, 2000.

**E**arlier this year, the *Wall Street Journal* reported the breaking of new scientific ground in the study of civil wars. Economists at Oxford had proven beyond a statistical doubt that civil wars have economic causes and are fought for economic reasons. Ludwig von Mises made this all-important insight more than fifty years ago.

In the current ideological war, American intellectuals and their minions in the media and arts try to paint the founding fathers, especially Thomas Jefferson and George Washington, as racist slave owners out to establish a new American hegemony based on black slavery. The whole republican period is portrayed as a pure free-market economy that wrought unprecedented capitalistic exploitation, especially of minorities and labor. From this ideological vantage point, the war between Union and Confederate governments becomes the true battle for freedom, with democracy in the vanguard, the slave system vanquished, and Lincoln established as the messiah.

Most Americans are taught that slave owners started the war to protect their power and position while the people of free states to the north rose up to emancipate their oppressed black brothers and sisters. The economic view of war contradicts the idea that the South and North fought to preserve or destroy slavery. The true catalyst of this or any other war is not racial, religious, or tribal, it holds, but economic.

The great value of Charles Adams's book, *When in the Course of Human Events: Arguing the Case for Southern Secession*, is that it shows in careful historical detail that slavery did not cause this great tragedy. In short, the Southern states formed a new republic to avoid paying tariffs that benefitted northern industry and paid for the construction and operations of federal government facilities and other "public works," most of which were located in Northern states.

With secession, trade and tariff revenues were diverted to the South. This led the "money interests" in the northeast to force Lincoln to start a war with the Confederacy in much the same way Roosevelt dragged America into

World War II. We now know conclusively that Roosevelt knew the Japanese would attack Pearl Harbor, and that he deliberately incited and provoked them with acts of war (Stinnett 1999). Adams builds a sound factual case that finds Lincoln deliberately starting war with the Confederate states in a similar manner.

Among the hundreds of books on the American Civil War, Adams provides the most accurate and detailed account of what caused that war. His logical analysis provides for an insightful perspective on the consequences of the war that led to one of the worst slave emancipations in history, as well as to the horrors of Reconstruction, which Adams rightly considers the fount of many of our current race-related problems. His retelling of the “trial of the century” should crack even the most ardent Union apologist into a more honest viewpoint of these *human events*. Adams is an impartial historian who writes with a clear and engaging style. This is a great book that everybody should read.

One criticism, however, is that Adams considers the war to have been a hopeless venture for the Confederacy because the North had vastly superior armies. The economic approach to war emphasizes how each nation deploys its resources rather than the absolute size of its armies or resources. The author’s view is therefore curious, especially given that the Confederacy came so close to winning its independence, and is even more puzzling given the author’s own conclusion that the South beat the North’s massive army of occupation during Reconstruction with an ill-equipped and unorganized guerrilla army whose operations were carried out under the guise of the Ku Klux Klan. This, however, is a minor criticism of a point unrelated to the main topic and contributions of an otherwise outstanding book.

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#### REFERENCE

Stinnett, Robert B. 1999. *Day of Deceit: The Truth about FDR and Pearl Harbor*. New York: Free Press.