



When in the Course of Human Events: Arguing the Case for Southern Secession

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Using primary documents from both foreign and domestic observers, prominent scholar Charles Adams makes a powerful and convincing case that the Southern states were legitimately exercising their political rights as expressed in the Declaration of Independence when they seceded from the United States. Although conventional histories have taught generations of Americans that this was a war fought for lofty moral principles, Adams' eloquent history transcends simple Southern partisanship to show how the American Civil War was primarily a battle over competing commercial interests, opposing interpretations of constitutional rights, and what English novelist Charles Dickens described as a fiscal quarrel.

When in the Course of Human Events: Arguing the Case for Southern Secession Details

Date : Published December 29th 1999 by Rowman & Littlefield Publishers

ISBN : 9780847697229

Author : Charles Adams

Format : Hardcover 280 pages

Genre : History, Military History, Civil War, Nonfiction, Politics, North American Hi..., American History, American Civil War, Civil War History



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From Reader Review When in the Course of Human Events: Arguing the Case for Southern Secession for online ebook

Adam Spivey says

Adams argues the role trade tariff in causing the South to secede. South Carolina almost seceded under Jackson thirty years earlier over the tariff. Northern businessman wanted a high tariff to price gouge the South and to eliminate foreign competition and Lincoln was their man. Adams gives a fresh perspective to the Civil War. I highly recommend this book.

Cori says

This was a very interesting book, a version of history of which I've not heard. However, the research is well-documented. I especially liked seeing a different side of Abraham Lincoln. People, especially some naive sects like to deify people in history. This view of Lincoln was more realistic, honest.

Spencer says

This book helped give me a better understanding of states rights. It also explains how we've come to lose many of our constitutional freedoms. My only problem is that I don't know Lincoln's intent. We can discuss his actions and agree that his actions weren't constitutional but part of me can't help feel that possibly his intentions were good. This is not to dismiss his mistakes, and who knows, maybe he did have mal-intent. But without knowing his true intent I feel we can't write off the man as being completely terrible. Maybe he was blinded by the craftiness of men around him and when he came to his senses they tried to silence him by his death...who knows.

John says

The victors write history. Here's an interesting perspective of secession from the southern perspective. I don't know the accuracy, but it does provide possible explanations why secession and the civil war was about more than just slavery.

T. Aidan McGuire says

Lincoln's full impact on America needs to be brought to light as we reassess history. I agree with him in that we should no longer stand for whitewashing our history. Good book, generally good arguments, and you can tell he did his research. But at some points he gets repetitive, and some of his arguments are kind of sloppy.

Ethan says

Adams contends that it was economic self-preservation that forced the South into secession. As a libertarian economist Adams believes that the North wanted union so that it might continue its oppressive and unjust taxation of the South by means of the tariff. To prove his point Adams insists that the industrialists and bankers who financed the war machine had no interest in fighting secession until they realized that secession would open a virtual free trade zone immediately to their south (63). Lincoln is castigated for his obsessive concern for taxes and his hypocritical manipulation of the slavery issue to obtain victory. Furthermore, Adams claims, Lincoln could scarcely have cared about freedom since he illegally suspended habeas corpus, threatened to imprison Justice Taney, and shut down Maryland's state government among many other vile deeds. Unfortunately for his arguments, Adams' passion clouds his case with emotion. Adams also makes broad generalizations, assuming the worst motives for Northerners and the best for Southerners while presenting flawed historical analogies to prove his points (163). His key proof that the South was not fighting to preserve slavery is that secession was unnecessary and illogical to preserve slavery (1-2).

Charles says

This book has a not-new thesis, beloved by Marxists and Charles Beard: that economic reasons were the real driver behind the Civil War. Actually, Charles Adams tells us that only one economic reason was the sole driver—increased tariffs dictated by the North. As with all ideologically driven analysis, this ignores that all complex happenings have complex causes. Compounded with Adams' numerous gross falsehoods, obvious ignorance, and bad writing, the result is Not Fresh.

I cannot speak with any authority to how much economic reasons had to do with the Civil War, although I can say with certainty that was only part of the reason the Civil War erupted. I suspect few rational people would argue that economic reasons were irrelevant. But I can speak with authority on legal matters and the structure of the American legal system, an analysis of which Adams heavily relies on to support his thesis, and in that regard Adams is comprehensively ignorant in a dishonest way.

Adams, at the beginning of the book, spends a lot of time establishing the supposed illegitimacy of Lincoln's behavior, unoriginally casting Lincoln as a Julius Caesar-type dictator. Adams puts great weight, 10% of the entire book, on a discussion of *Ex Parte Merryman*. This was an 1861 case in which the Chief Justice of the Supreme Court, Roger Taney, acting as a circuit judge (i.e., explicitly not in his Supreme Court role), granted a writ of habeas corpus to a man imprisoned in Maryland by the military for sedition. The military, and Lincoln, refused to comply, with Lincoln explaining the legal basis for his reasons to Congress a month later.

Adams repeatedly and shrilly claims that Lincoln's failure to obey Taney's writ meant that Lincoln was undermining the entire system of American constitutional government by "refusing to obey a decision of the Supreme Court." For many pages, Adams goes on in this vein, comparing Lincoln to Caesar crossing the Rubicon at least ten times and never acknowledging that there could be any doubt about the legal conclusion involved. But *Ex Parte Merryman* was NOT A SUPREME COURT DECISION. It was the act of a lower court judge acting "ex parte"—that is, without hearing from the parties involved. This is typical for a writ of habeas corpus, but an ex parte opinion from the Supreme Court itself has limited precedence, and the opinion of one justice of several, not even acting as a Supreme Court justice, has no Supreme Court precedential value at all.

But Adams flatly denies all this, or does not understand it, and even bizarrely claims “Today, Taney’s opinion is studied in law school as one of the great decisions on constitutional law, with no dissenters.” Nothing could be farther from the truth—in fact, the core legal question involved (whether it is Congress, the President, or some combination of the two can suspend the writ of habeas corpus, which suspension is explicitly allowed in the Constitution) has never been settled by the Supreme Court. Lincoln, unsurprisingly, took the position that the President had that authority, which was not and is not an illegitimate position. Then Adams tells us that Lincoln’s response was to order the arrest of Taney, who only was not arrested because of the discretion of the arresting officer. But this is a conjecture supported by no historians at all; there is no evidence such a thing ever happened except the word of one man years later. It is the Civil War equivalent of claiming that the government is warehousing aliens at Area 51. Adams doesn’t say that—he treats the supposed arrest warrant as an acknowledged fact, though from his defensiveness you can tell that there is something wrong. In sum, the atrociousness of the facts and analysis in this chapter cannot be overstated.

The rest of the book has some interesting sections—for example, on the British press’s reaction to the Civil War. But given the total falsehoods and biased selection of evidence related to Lincoln’s suspension of habeas corpus, there is no way for a non-expert to tell whether the rest of the book is similarly filled with falsehoods and cherry picking. But the rest of the book is undoubtedly filled with tendentious writing, constant propagandistic phrasing favoring the South, unbalanced analysis, and vitriol unbecoming in a supposed historian.

For supposed historian is what Charles Adams is. He self-describes himself on the blurb of his book as a “the world’s leading historian of taxation.” I am not a slave to academic qualifications, but Adams appears to have none. It is hard to find information on him, but according to a 1993 newspaper article, he is “a former California lawyer who is a research historian at the University of Toronto,” and before that “taught history at the International College of the Cayman Islands.” The book prominently notes that it is the “Winner of the 2000 Paradigm Book Award.” I can find no reference to such an award except in connection with this book. The back cover has positive blurb quotes from four people from Emory, Auburn, USC and Florida Atlantic University. The first two are not from historians, but from a philosopher and a trustee who is not a teacher at all. The third is from an elderly historian who is a founder of the League of the South, a neo-confederate organization. The fourth, a short and anodyne quote, is from a historian about whom I can find little information. But none of this increases my trust in this book. I’m sure there’s a case to be made for some of Adams’s opinions, but he does himself and his positions no favors with this book.

Jason Carter says

This is the single best book on the politics surrounding the War of Northern Aggression. This is one of the ten books that every American should read.

There is perhaps no phenomena so perplexing as that of flag-waving, my-country-right-or-wrong Americans who speak reverently of both Abraham Lincoln and the "Founding Fathers" in the same breath. For Lincoln was opposed to nearly every principle that guided the establishment of our republic. In reality, there is a "second founding" that completely usurped the principles of the first, and it happened from 1861-1877, when nationalism triumphed over republicanism, power trumped liberty, and egalitarianism displaced the rugged meritocracy of our first four score and seven years.

There are more books on the so-called Civil War than perhaps any other subject in our history. Nevertheless, I know of none that captures the heart of the matter as succinctly as this one under review. Adams does an

excellent job covering just about every aspect of the era that you were never taught in your gummint school history class. Not only are his arguments convincing, but they are well supported by citations from primary sources.

Especially revealing are his quotations of "unfriendly sources" who opposed the Southern cause, but were blissfully unaware of their duty to posterity to toe the party line that would be used to propagandize the generations of Americans to come. Adams demonstrates conclusively that the simplistic view that the War for Southern Independence was a Holy Crusade on the part of righteous Yankees to punish the racist Southerners is a canard. In fact, the typical Northerner was every bit as racist as his Southern counterpart (nearly the whole country, including Lincoln Himself, viewed blacks as inferior in that era) and the principal issues driving the war party in the North were commercial interests.

Space is too limited to rehash Adams' arguments in toto. Suffice it to say that this book is one of those books that no American should miss reading. I have lent it out many times, and it always comes back with an enlightened friend.

Steve Hemmeke says

When in the Course of Human Events – Charles Adams

Every now and then I'll pick up a pro-Confederate book and sample the argument one more time. As a northerner by birth now living in the South, I try to understand the strong sentiment that the South was right and that it will (or should) rise again.

Charles Adams' take is an extremely one-sided picture of the war. He jumps right in, asserting in the preface that abolitionists were terrorists. This is like calling pro-lifers terrorists. Some extremists shoot abortion doctors, but most reject such violence while advocating for a legal end to abortion. You can't blame the radical abolitionists for the South's refusal to free the slaves. Our author actually attempts to assert this. He holds the North's oppression of the South after the war responsible for the rise of the Ku Klux Klan. These kinds of wild claims made it hard for me to take the book seriously and finish it.

A key thesis that I acknowledge is that there were economic factors at work, dividing the North and the South, apart from slavery. Adams wants to make that the only motive for secession, while many today believe slavery was the only motive for the war. Neither are right.

Slavery was doomed in the 1860s he says and would go away inevitably.

If so isn't the South still to blame for resisting the pressure in the North to emancipate? They would rather secede than give in to the inevitable emancipation, making it seem much less inevitable. Lincoln's "extreme position" only went as far as to not let slavery expand, and this was all it took for the South to secede.

Adams asserts that the issue of slavery was a pretext to unify Southerners to fight. Slavery wasn't in jeopardy, so it wasn't the reason to secede, he argues. But slavery WAS in jeopardy in territories headed for future statehood. He doesn't mention this at all. Southerners viewed the abolition of slavery in territories becoming states as the forerunner to abolition in their states.

Adams tries to make parallels in chapter one to secessions from empires throughout history. The difference is that few of these voluntarily joined as one nation originally; they were annexed forcibly to

start with. These United States of America were not a conglomeration of disparate nations, but arose from a unified English culture, more or less.

Adams relies heavily on English opinion of the war, which favored the South. He colors them as unbiased outside observers, but their opinion had economic reasons. Britain was an economic competitor with the North and traded more with the South. It is a mark of Adams' extreme bias, to the point of dishonesty, that he argues so strongly the North's economic motive to keep the union, while muting England's economic motive FOR secession, in siding with the South in their papers. To Adams, the South's cause was noble; the North's was malicious.

Why was secession so intolerable for the North? Why not just let the states go? Adams poses this as a rhetorical question, but there is a real answer. Secession produced a double evil: the division of a nation and the continuance of slavery. Political union makes us responsible for each other.

How could it threaten liberty to let the South secede? the author asks. Wouldn't it advance liberty to give the states the self-determination they should rightly have? Well, to let the South secede would show that America could not bring about liberty for its citizens, the slaves.

Now, I know the North wasn't pure as the driven snow, either. There was plenty of racism there, too. Adams makes a good case that there was little support for emancipation in the North.

Adams may be right that there was no huge political will in North or South for freedom and equal rights for blacks/slaves. So what was Lincoln to do? This fuller picture is indeed missing from the standard version of the history.

Was it an injustice to free the slaves without some provision of education or training for them? Yes. But it would have been a greater injustice to leave them in slavery in a new nation, the Confederate States of America.

The lesson to learn from the war is not, as Adams contends, to let the South secede – to let political liberty trump social evils. It is to have the right reasons for any law or war, imposing government will on a people. His charges against how Lincoln conducted the war legally were new to me. If true (don't know if I can trust Adams' historical verity), this is a lesson to learn and not repeat.

In the end, both sides can look back and say, this should have gone differently. But they continue blaming each other. North to South: you should have freed your slaves willingly. South to North: this book. You shouldn't have forced us to stay for your own economic reasons.

Here is a review from Amazon that summarizes the book and my perspective quite nicely.

"In case anyone doubted Garry Wills' argument in *A Necessary Evil* that the peculiar myths and distortions surrounding the nature, formation, and meaning of the U.S. regularly stir movements committed to myth rather than reality, Adams, a historian of taxation, delivers a polemic that proves it. The Civil War, Adams argues, was not about slavery or the Union; it was about tariffs! The Southern states had a right to secede. Slavery would have ended at some point, but Lincoln did not particularly threaten it. It was, Adams maintains, the "dueling tariffs" of the Union and the Confederacy that caused the war. Within his states' rights argument, Adams maintains secession's legality should have been determined by the courts, and slaveholders should have been compensated for the property they lost through emancipation. Adams relies heavily on the European press; he asserts, but does not prove, that U.S. abolitionists were a fanatical lunatic

fringe. The author clearly anticipates controversy; it should not be long in coming.” Mary Carroll

Marilynne Robinson, *Givenness of Things*. Pgs. 96-97

“I know causes of the Civil War are widely disputed, but I have been reading the speeches and papers of leaders of the Confederacy, and for them the point at issue was slavery. Slavery plain and simple. They drew up a constitution very like the national Constitution, except in its explicit protections of slavery. Their defense of their sacred institutions means the defense of slavery. Their definition of state’s rights means their insistence on their right to bring this ‘species of property’ into states that did not acknowledge it, and to make these states enforce their claims on such ‘property’ without reference to their traditions, to their own laws, or to their right to protect their own citizens.”

Elizabeth Rogers says

This was the first book that really opened my eyes to the fact that a story can be told and interpreted many different ways. Until this time, I hadn't viewed history as a story, but fact. This is an interesting read that paints a not-as-heroic portrait of Lincoln and the North at the beginning and throughout the American Civil War. Whether you agree with this side of the story or not, reading this will help question and complicate your own understanding of these events.

Clay says

“When in the Course of human events, it becomes necessary for one people to dissolve the political bands which have connected them with one another; and to assume among the Powers of the earth, the separate and equal station to which the Laws of Nature and of Nature’s God entitle them, a decent respect of the opinions of mankind requires that they should declare the causes which impel them to the separation.

*“We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness. - That to secure these rights, Governments are instituted among Men, **deriving their just powers from the consent of the governed**, - That whenever any Form of Government becomes destructive of these ends, it is the Right of the People to alter or to abolish It ...”* [bold emphasis added] - Excerpt from the Declaration of Independence of the United States of America, 1776

As Americans, we pride ourselves on our love of a good rebel. Whether it's John Hancock signing his name to the above cited document in a large and sweeping hand “So that John Bull could read it without his glasses”, Geronimo’s infamous leadership of the Chiricahua in open defiance of the US Army or even James Dean’s effortless portrayal of his iconic Rebel Without a Cause; we love ‘em all. Well ... that’s not entirely true ... we don’t much care for the Confederacy of the Southern States of America in the latter half of the 19th century. And why not? What is it that makes their rebellion so different from our other beloved rebels’? I guess I’m not really sure anymore.

According to Charles Adams in his book *When In the Course of Human Events*, the South was well within their rights to secede from the union of independent states one century, two score and one decade ago. And he is not alone. At least not alone when it comes to 19th century thought. Many prominent 19th century

Americans, and Europeans as well, believed in a states right to secession – especially in an independent union of sovereign states. Keep in mind, America was (at that point in its history) neither an empire nor a commonwealth. The sovereign states ultimately owed no allegiance to any nation, king or monarch. The Federal Government, according to the Declaration of Independence, derived its just powers “from the consent of the governed”. But what happens, as did in 1861, when citizens of those sovereign states no longer granted the Federal Government their consent? Well . . . according to Abraham Lincoln, they were to be imprisoned without trial, they were to have their property unceremoniously seized and/or destroyed and ultimately, they were to be killed as traitors. I would hardly call that “Government of the people, by the people and for the people” as Lincoln so ironically spouted in his sophistic yet revered Gettysburg Address.

Mr. Adams, throughout his book, makes an extremely strong case for the right of southern secession. What's more, he makes his case based on the founding documents of the United States of America, the laws of the land and even by the words of Abraham Lincoln himself – along with the likes of Thomas Jefferson, James Madison, Chief Justice Chase, Chief Justice Taney and on and on and on. So what went wrong? If secession was an obvious state's right, why did the War Between the States even take place? Adams has an answer. And it's not the answer that many may expect. Why did the Civil War take place? Simply put: “The Love of Money” butting heads with a generation “enamored of war”.

Adams' well researched answer to that often asked question echoes the thoughts of many including respected British writer and thinker Charles Dickens who took an interest in America's troubles and noted that The American Civil War was, at its heart, “a fiscal quarrel.” It all came down to taxes and tariffs. Sound familiar? It should. Virtually every war in the history of the world can be traced back to disputes over little more than money or property. Why should the Civil War be any different? By 1861, the US government had raised the import tariff to an astoundingly harsh average of 47% (and with commodities such as iron, the tariff rose above 50%) with the passage of the Morrill Tariff. Due to Southern dependence on imported goods, this was effectively a non-uniform tax placed solely upon the South which ran counter to the Constitution itself.

Analysis of the compromise tariffs of the 1830s and 1840s reveal that the total revenues to the Federal Government were approximately \$107.5 million. Of that \$107.5 million, the South paid approximately \$90 million in duties, taxes and fees (over 83%) while the North only paid \$17.5 million (17%) per annum. To make matters between the states even more strained, the North received the lion's share of all Federal subsidies and benefit dollars - In effect, receiving the most while paying the least. That was why Fort Sumter (a tariff collection post) was the first battleground of the War Against Southern Independence. And it was also no coincidence that the businessmen on Wall Street and the wealthy Northern industrial tycoons were the money-men behind Lincoln's invasion of the South. Southern secession would effectively put a stop to their illicit profiteering off the backs of Southerners. It's also no wonder that a common saying in the Southern States became, “It's the rich man's war, and the poor man's fight.”

Throughout the pages of *When In the Course of Human Events*, Adams clearly and concisely makes the case for each and every one of his arguments. He even takes on many counter opinions and provides enough evidence to bring those opinions into serious question. The arguments are all well reasoned and amply discussed. And maybe the most interesting part of Adams' work centers on the European views of the American Civil War. As outsiders, the Europeans provided an interesting third party view of the events without being blinded by the baggage that Americans brought with them regardless of what side they found themselves on. Many, if not most, Europeans viewed Lincoln in a harsher light than they did Napoleon himself. Each chapter of the book deals with another aspect of the war era whether it was before, during or after the action. And each chapter, while sometimes becoming a bit repetitive, still manages to provide interesting new evidence and fascinating writing pulled directly from the period by which to judge the ultimate reasons behind the penning of that horrible page in America's still quite short history book.

Adams' writing is clear, crisp and simple. Having a tax writing background, he comes across as more than comfortable when dealing with the financial aspects of the causes behind the war while handling the history with a modicum of respect, and occasionally, with a touch of well deserved yet bitter sarcasm. It becomes obvious rather quickly that Charles Adams is not a fan of war – any war. That is to be admired. But, seriously, who is? Yet it's refreshing to hear from a voice who seeks out the truth of things rather than simply swallowing the history as it was written by the victors of the struggle. Adams' citing of opinion writing of the day, his inclusion of period newspaper articles and political cartoons and quotes from a multitude of key players and participants allows his audience the unique chance to slip inside the heads of those Americans who lived through that dark period and to understand their mindsets and motives as they witnessed the senseless destruction of the lives of some 630,000 of their young countrymen. I came away from this book with a new and interesting perspective on one of the most violent and devastating events our country has ever had the misfortune of suffering and I doubt I'll ever view the events of that era in the same light again.

In the interest of fairness, I must say there were a few times throughout this read where I found small issues with which I disagreed with Adams' conclusions - though most of my disagreements stemmed from his moments of personal reflection rather than from his grasp of the history. And overall, I found his work to be a refreshingly honest look at the circumstances surrounding the war and the motives of all the parties involved. His unflinching look into the taboo issues of slavery and US race relations as a result of the Civil War and eventual Reconstruction were both fascinating and troubling – especially given today's heightened politically correct climate. I won't pretend to be a big fan of Adams' prose, but the sheer amount of information, data and history he managed to put forth in this endeavor is, simply put, impressive despite his book's diminutive size (some mere 230 pages).

So, in conclusion, will this book convince you to ignore what your third grade history teacher taught you about Abraham Lincoln, William Seward, Salmon Chase, Daniel Webster and Union generals Grant, Sherman and Sheridan? Will you find yourself looking at Lincoln as less of a deified benevolent statesman seeking the preservation of democracy at any cost and more of a tyrant trampling the Bill of Rights in a breathtakingly bloodthirsty pursuit of slaughter against the South? Maybe. Maybe not. But I'll tell you one thing: after reading *When In the Course of Human Events*, I find it more than just a little fitting that Mr. Lincoln has been memorialized as a larger than life god-king in a Greco-Roman temple of worship, seated high upon his royal throne, looking down his crooked nose upon his lowly American Subjects...

Isidore says

Adams doesn't always maintain a balance between careful scholarship and sloppy neoconfederate polemic, but his book is generally interesting and sometimes convincing.

Given his background as a tax lawyer, it's not altogether surprising that Adams sees taxation as the fundamental source of antebellum sectional conflict. His treatment of the subject is anything but technical, and these essays were clearly intended for the layman.

Adams is primarily interested in critiquing Lincoln's authoritarian tendencies, and he includes a great deal of fascinating commentary from the contemporary British press, which was largely contemptuous of the North's rationale for conflict; it's particularly nice to have a number of scathing *Punch* cartoons by John Tenniel, no less.

Adams's deconstruction of the Gettysburg Address is a good idea which isn't fully developed: an essay about Northern "negrophobia" is interesting, but more careful and thorough work on this subject has surely been done by professional historians.

So, it's an enjoyable, sometimes insightful, rabble-rousing read, but not a first choice for the reader undertaking serious research on the subject. Those seeking a similar, non-mainstream approach are directed to Hummel's brilliant *Emancipating Slaves, Enslaving Free Men*.

David Robins says

Great coverage of the Southern War for Independence. As usual in those times, the motive was (as in the Revolutionary War) power, territory, and taxes (slavery was introduced as a motive two years into the war; until then Lincoln had no intention of freeing any slaves). The South paid the bulk of the taxes due to unequal tariffs; Confederate independence would have meant a drastic loss in revenue. As Dickens observed, the "love of money" was the root of the war. Lincoln was simply a dictator, a thug, and a war criminal, ignoring the constitution and jailing or hanging dissenters (including elected legislators and judges), and shutting down newspapers. The Union armies' atrocities and destruction of civilian property during the war also constituted war crimes. Reconstruction made the Ku Klux Klan fight a necessary guerilla war to restore sovereignty to southern states.

Brian says

This book will by no means settle in the minds of its readers a complete understanding of the civil war but I think it makes the case that Lincoln was a dictator who ignored the constitution and people around him who disagreed with him.

Lincoln is a national hero but after reading this you may begin to think differently about this. Adams goes over, for most of the book, the problems with the reasons offered for war between the states by mainstream historians.

The love of money is the root of all evil and I seriously doubt its anything different with the Civil War. I would give this a 4 or 5 star review if it was more heavily foot noted on many of the quotes and statements.

Matt says

This is an excellent book that gives a differnt point of view than the one we all learned about in high school. It shows the Ceasarian view of Lincoln and its basic premise is the South did nothing that the colonists had not done when severing ties with England.
