



# The Causes of the Civil War

*Kenneth M. Stampp (Editor)*

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## **The Causes of the Civil War** Kenneth M. Stampp (Editor)

Was the Civil War inevitable? What really caused it? Drawing on original sources--from Jefferson Davis to Frederick Douglass--and interpretive essays by today's most influential historians, this collection of essays gives a vivid sense of the political, economic, and cultural currents that swept the nation to war.

## **The Causes of the Civil War Details**

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Author : Kenneth M. Stampp (Editor)

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## From Reader Review The Causes of the Civil War for online ebook

### Patrick says

This is a collection of abridgements of source documents and later periodical and magazine articles, all concerning the, duh, causes of the Civil War. Stampff seemed to be focused primarily on the most provocative writings from both "sides," antebellum and postbellum. Thus there's scarcely a mention of, say, Stephen Douglas, but we are blessed (ahem) with a screamingly funny discussion of the Southerner as an emerging being, the "Tropic Nordic," alas whose full flowering was never reached, cut down by the War.

There is virtually nothing in this text to suggest that any sort of compromise was possible, and that as time went on more and more people on both sides of the divide lost any interest they might have otherwise had in reaching such a compromise anyway. To read this book and no others is to take the War coming as inevitable as the sun rising or the tide changing. And perhaps it was

To keep strictly to the text, I would say that on balance the "pro-" [Southern, Confederate, etc.] contingent comes off the worst, both in their attempts at reasoning through positions and reconciling them to something approaching rational thought, but that that was a race "won" by the South by the narrowest of margins. In fact, the invective employed by both sides against the other rather startled me...and I cannot escape thinking that though these sources are interesting, they do not represent the full spectrum of political thought, either North or South.

Though of particular interest is how the text catches Alexander H. Stephens with his hand firmly in the cookie jar. Naughty Alex made his "cornerstone" speech shortly after secession, but then turned around and wrote a book defending secession almost completely from a "State's Rights" perspective. Another round of chuckles, and another notch in the belt of Southern hypocrisy. If any Northerners are guilty of a similar set of sins they are not mentioned here.

As noted, we get "provocative" sources, but said sources do echo a curious diversity of opinion by themselves. There is writing from doctrinaire Marxists, pro-Confederate historians who are actually willing to discuss -- in serious terms -- a "plantation ideal," whereby a peaceful localism ruled the day, and all was, well, at least pretty good if not precisely a Utopia.

Certainly an interesting reading, and to take the term doubtless to the point of cliché, for the umpty-umpty time in a short review again resort to the term "provocative."

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Testing, testing, 1-2-3 - Extraneous hoo-haas added 2:55 PM 12/31/2012

Just trying to see if I can get a review to post to my blog. Yes, it is a WordPress.com blog, but, no, it is not my "main" blog. Which may or may not be the reason my last 3,479 attempts have all failed. Or perhaps I'm doing something so painfully and obviously wrong that only a knucklehead such as myself could have missed [fill in the blank] as the reason for my failures. Ah, well. Helps pass the time and all that.

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### Tom Darrow says

A decent collection of primary and secondary sources about the causes of the war. I would view this book more as a reference book than a sit down and read cover to cover book because 87 collected essays, many of them repeat the arguments of other authors in this same book.

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### **Jacob Bains says**

Absolutely required reading for any student of the Civil War. his collection of essays takes on a group of categories that help to explain the cadre of social, political, and economic causes leading up to the Firing on Fort Sumter. This also demonstrates 150+ years later, why the The American Civil War is ...complicated in its causes and effects. I particularly appreciate Stamp's argument alleviating the Southern states of full blame. The Slavocracy South was NOT the sole blame, and the North was not the innocent abolitionist it has been made out to be (generally speaking). BOTH North and South are co-equal in blame.

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### **Nathaniel says**

An interesting collection of excerpts from primary and secondary sources related to the titular topic, organized by "category" of cause (slavery, economic sectionalism, etc.) - a sort of historical sampler, if you will. This is very much a scholarly resource, but can be difficult to read from start to finish even for educational purposes thanks to the somewhat repetitive nature of the excerpts in each "category". Additionally, the paperback edition is printed on very cheap acidic paper, which guarantees that this is one book with a very short "shelf life". However, for those who seriously want to examine the root trends at this point in American history, there's a lot of good information here. All excerpts are fully credited, so anything particularly interesting to the reader can then be cross-referenced and acquired separately. Quoted sources also include selected editorials from newspapers and the like, as well, which can be hard to track down otherwise, so it's not just books. In all, this is a useful resource for scholars of the period. Just watch out for the crappy paper it's printed on, especially if you have a dust allergy.

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### **Micah says**

Feel like I just took an entire undergraduate survey course on the various theories of the causes of the Civil War in two days. Stamp was a great editor.

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### **Bob Croft says**

Both original source material and historian commentary. Had not realized the pernicious effect of party, the Southern code of honor, and the effects of other Northern economic policies, not just the tariff and internal improvements (paid for by all but tending to benefit manufactures and shippers), but a variety of subsidies to particular industries (starting with New England fisheries in the very early national period).

One caveat: not noted at all was the heavily Celtic ancestry of the South, as brought out by David Hackett Fisher, Forrest MacDonald, and others (not just the Scotch-Irish but huge numbers from the Celtic fringe of the British Isles). The feudal south of England genesis of plantation society is noted, and given as the foundation of southern "honor"; a better foundation (for the larger society) would be the Celtic propensity for

violence, even over petty slights, suggested by MacDonald (See "Cracker Culture") as a outgrowth of a pastoral, rather than agricultural, lifestyle.

Another issue: the only explanation offered for the centrality of salve culture, given the relatively few slave owners among the general population, is, again, "honor"; to be considered honorable, one needs someone less honorable than oneself. Hence the handiness of a whole class of lesser beings. One might better look at all those who benefited from slavery without owning slaves. The poorer farmer might, at harvest time, borrow a slave from a wealthier relative or neighbor, of rent same; slaves were often leased long term (a widow's retirement, when her plantation-owner husband passed and the plantation was sold for its debts, was a couple of slaves that she would lease (an early sort of IRA).

But these are quibbles. Overall, very good material. and much food for thought.

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### **Jason says**

I love all the primary source material in this book. I also appreciated that opposing positions were treated fairly. The book definitively broadened my understanding of the underlying causes of the Civil War.

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### **John Petersen says**

If you're looking for an answer to what caused the American Civil War, you won't find it here. And that's what makes this book so powerful and important. Instead, it gives a plethora of diverse interpretations and viewpoints on the subject, some of them contemporary, some of them current, some of them primary sources/speeches by politicians of the day, some of them historians' insights. The point: the American Civil War is such a complex issue that so many factors contributed to its buildup and outbreak and none are the single/only cause. Slavery, states' rights, morality, sectionalism, difference of cultures, Constitutional interpretation, economics, "irresponsible agitators": Stamp has them all represented in this volume and given equal voice. This is the hallmark of top-notch historical analysis, and it's the hallmark of this excellent book, first published in 1959 and since having gone through subsequent re-publishings with new material added each time. Highly recommended.

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### **Oregon Expat says**

A top flight survey of the highest order regarding the causes of the American Civil War, and of the era in which that terrible conflict occurred. Both based upon historical sources, and modern research.

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### **Robert says**

This is an interesting look at the causes of the American Civil War. It is a collection of of essays, articles, speeches and so on from historians, political and historical figures. They offer a variety of viewpoints on the causes of our most costly war with ourselves. It goes a little deeper than just the obvious cause , slavery, but probably not as radical as some "lost cause' fanatics scream in denial. The book even attempts to explain the denial held by many. It is a thought provoking book and a handy reference book on the war itself. The only

detraction is that by nature some of the reading can be tough due to different writing styles which isn't the authors fault. Otherwise it was an excellent book.

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### **Christian says**

This was not a history of the Civil War, but a collection of essays, articles, letters and other documents that range from personal communications written by Jefferson Davis and Abe Lincoln, to excerpts from historical works written as late as the 1970s. While the book is fairly balanced, I did have to read it in pieces, as one can only stomach so many 1860s speeches justifying slavery and negro subversion in one sitting. Mostly though, this collection just serves to reinforce the idea that the war was fought over slavery as a moral issue, not an economic one, and that the Civil War was somehow something other than a rich man's war and a poor man's fight, just like every war since. It is fair to suggest that you get any more authoritative than to document the leading political voices of that time, but in that regard, the book just makes clear that politicians of any era will say anything to get reelected, and secure personal power. This is better than the last book I read on the Confederacy, which had no citation, no bibliography, and a little too much pro-Confederate bias, but you can't beat David Williams' A Peoples' History of the Civil War (yes, edited by Howard Zinn).

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### **Doug Reith says**

Interesting. Trying to learn as much as I can about the Civil War.

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