

**Historical Imagination
and
Economic Reality:
Counterfactual History
and
the American Civil War**

Background Notes



The Author in 1955

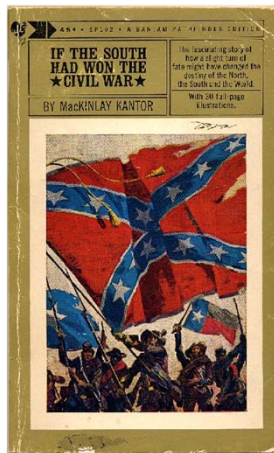
How Did I Get Involved with
A Counterfactual History of
The Civil War?

In 1954 I Read A Novel
Set In A World Where
The South Won The Civil War

Bring the Jubilee
By Ward Moore
[1953]

Background Notes

1959: The Editors of *Look Magazine*
Ask **Mckinlay Kantor** To Write
An Article About The Civil War



If the South Had Won The Civil War

Bantam Books, 1960

What *IS* Counterfactual History?

Historians: An Exercise In *Imagination*

Interesting Questions –
But You Don't Take them Seriously

Economists: An Exercise In *Economic Theory*

Use An Economic Model To Generate
Endless Possible Outcomes

Can We Blend These Two Approaches?

A “Recipe” for Counterfactual History

Two Parts *Historical Reality*

One Part *Imagination*

One Part *Common Sense*

Economists?



Mix Ingredients and Pour Into a **Historical Mold**

Serve With A Healthy Dose of *Skepticism*

Bon Appetit!

Counterfactual History Is A Hard Sell

1998: I Circulated A Paper About
A Counterfactual Civil War

It Got Mixed Reviews

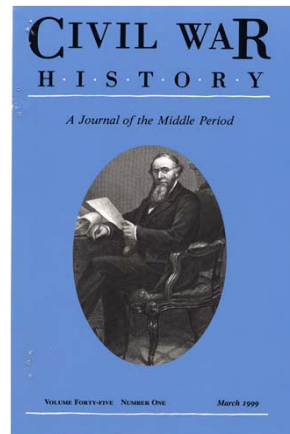
Economists:

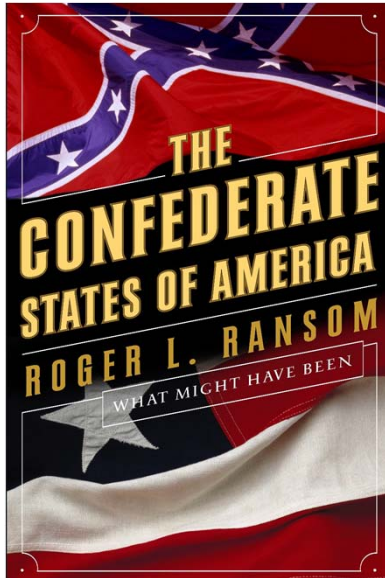
Skip The First Half Of The Paper

Historians:

Second Half Is Too Dull –
And It’s Not History

Finally I Sent It To *Civil War History*
It Was Accepted!





So I Decide to Write a Book

Spring 2005:

*The Confederate States
of America: What Might
Have Been*

**Each Chapter of the Book
Asks a Counterfactual Question**



**Chapter 1:
Was This War Inevitable?**

**Chapter 2:
Could the South Win?**

**Chapter 3:
HOW Could the South Win?**



**Chapter 4:
What Was the Future for the Confederacy?**



**Chapter 5:
What Was the Future for Everyone Else?**

Was This War Inevitable?

To Economists Wars Are Never *"Inevitable"*
-- They Are *"Irrational"*

Not Only Are Wars *Expensive*
-- They Are *Unpredictable*

Economic Theory Says There Must Be a
Cheaper and More Certain Solution

Yet Wars *"Happen"* all the time
And Historians Often Find *Economic Causes*

Especially in the Case of the *Civil War*

Pre 1960s – Charles Beard:

The War Was An *Irrepressible Conflict*

➡ *A Second American Revolution*

Post 1960s – Enter *Counterfactual History*:

The Civil War Was *NOT A Revolution*

-- *Without the War Industrial Growth
Would Be Even Faster*

2005: Maybe The Beards Were Right !

A Counterfactual Scenario With *No War*
Was Not A Realistic Option

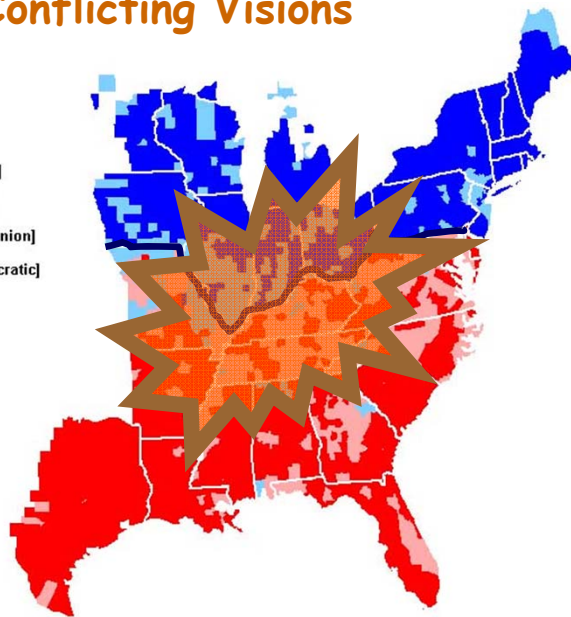
Conflicting Visions

- Candidates
- Lincoln [Republican]
 - Douglas [Democrat]
 - Bell [Constitutional Union]
 - Breckinridge [Democratic]



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Cliometrics And The Antebellum South

South Is Prospering

Slavery Is Very Profitable

50% Personal Estate is Slaves

BUT...

Northern States Are Gaining

Political & Economic Dominance

Southerners Want To Escape

Northern Dominance ...

... If There Is No War

Northern Agenda Prevails!

So The South Secedes From The Union

Even Though That Means WAR

WHAT WOULD HAPPEN IF THE SOUTH

The Future Of The Confederacy?

Southerners *Imagined* A Bright Future

→ Cotton, Slaves And Endless Prosperity

Reality Was That The Cotton Boom Was Over

→ Cotton, Slaves And Endless Poverty

And What About Slavery?

Slavery And The Confederacy?

Southerners *Imagined* They Were Protecting
Slavery From The Northern Abolitionists

Reality Was A Falling Demand For Cotton

→ Falling Prices Of Slaves

→ Capital Losses To Slaveholders

Slavery And The Confederacy?

Reality Was That Emancipation
Would Look Appealing To Slaveholders

By The Mid-1880s The CSA Would Have
Enacted Compensated Emancipation

But The Confederate Economy Would
Still Lag Well Behind The United States

The Confederacy In 1900?

The Reality of the CSA in 1900 Looks a Lot Like
The Post-bellum South of OKOF ...

... And That Seems Rather Unimaginative

Where is the Excitement ?

It is Time to Add some Imagination To Our Story

What's Happening Everywhere Else?

The United States In 1900?

Reality In 1900 For The U.S. Is Harder To Predict

Impact Of Losing the War Would Include:

Loss of Territory & Population

A Powerful Slave Neighbor

Political Instability

→ Uncertain Economic Agenda

→ Immigration Policy

The Rest of the World In 1900?

**Economic/Political Power of The United States
Would be Significantly Reduced**

**Both The United States And The Confederacy
Would Seek Allies:**

Confederacy → Britain and France

United States → Imperial Germany

