Michael Simpson

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To what extent have economic forces been the determinants of history? While this question has been the subject of a long and unresolved debate, the quality of the discussion is greatly enhanced when its participants have a solid grasp of economic precepts. The special section in this issue on Teaching Economics in U.S. History, whose guest editors are Mark C. Schug and Richard D. Western, seeks to provide students a better understanding of the role of economics in American history.

In the opening article, Tawni Hunt Ferrarini and Mark C. Schug maintain that the U.S. Constitution made a vital contribution to the future development of the United States by establishing "a framework for the efficient conduct of economic affairs." (59) They point out that the year 1776, famous for the Declaration of Independence, also witnessed the publication of a seminal economic work that had an enormous influence on U.S. history—Adam Smith's *Wealth of Nations*. Smith argued that free markets and competition were essential for a productive economy. The Constitution reflected these ideas in its strong protection of property rights and the enforcement of contracts, which created the conditions for the development of free and stable markets.

In an article examining the struggle for U.S. independence, Mark C. Schug poses the provocative question: why did the colonists fight for independence from Britain when they were relatively safe, prosperous and free under British rule? His answer is straightforward: "at some point, the colonists decided that the benefits of fighting would outweigh the costs."(63) Although Schug points out that not every incentive to rebel was monetary, he notes that British encroachments on trade and restrictions on land available for settlement created a situation in which American colonists considered their future property rights and opportunities for prosperity to be at stake. The colonists "chose revolution, …seeking to secure prosperity and self-governance in their own time and for the future." (65)

Gerald Gunderson analyzes the contribution of entrepreneurs to the extraordinary historical growth of the U.S. economy. While economists have commonly interpreted the success of entrepreneurs as their reward for taking risks, Gunderson highlights another factor: human creativity. The role of entrepreneurs has been to "develop new knowledge that enables them to produce new goods and services" (68); as for the risks they take, he maintains that "most entrepreneurs assume no more risk in launching their initiatives than an average person does in the course of everyday routines." (66) He predicts that Americans will devote increasing time to innovation, and that the future growth rate of the economy may consequently be higher than at most times in the past.

The devastating impact of the Great Depression hangs over the history of the first part of the twentieth century. Jean Caldwell and Timothy G. O'Driscoll review its causes, citing the three main alternative explanations offered by economists: the Keynesian approach, which sees the Depression as having been caused primarily by a fall in total demand that needed to be corrected by large increases in government spending; the monetarist explanation championed by Milton Friedman that sees actions taken by the Federal Reserve as having caused and perpetuated the Depression ; and the alternative view that the Great Depression was a global problem that was particularly devastating for the U.S. because of its commitment to the gold standard.

The special section also includes two lesson plans provided by the National Council on Economic Education—one on the Great Depression and the other on the economic sections of the U.S. Constitution. It concludes with a feature by Tawni Hunt Ferrarini and Joseph Calhoun recommending internet resources for teaching economics in the social studies classroom.

In line with the economic focus of this issue, this month's Looking at the Law column examines a subject that directly affects the personal financial future of our students—the structure and functioning of the credit system. Katie Fraser takes the reader through an overview of the topic, while the accompanying activity by James Landman shows teachers how to familiarize students with the methods of developing and adhering to a budget.

In our Teaching with Documents column, Stacey Bredhoff looks back to the drama of the assassination of Abraham Lincoln. The featured document comes from the testimony of Robert King Stone, Lincoln's family physician, to the military tribunal that tried eight of the accused conspirators. Stone was summoned to attend to Lincoln soon after the president was shot by John Wilkes Booth in Ford's Theatre. Lee Ann Potter provides teaching suggestions for the most effective use of the document in the classroom.

John A. Donnangelo reviews the presidency of Gerald Ford, who passed away this winter. Starting with Ford's famous comment, "I'm a Ford, not a Lincoln," Donnangelo maintains that the Ford presidency exemplifies the theory of Stephen Skowronek that presidential power and success are determined by the conjuncture of outside forces at the time of the presidency rather than by the qualities of the president himself. Donnangelo turns to the nineteenth century to find a comparable presidency to Ford's, that of Rutherford Hayes.

This issue concludes with a copy of a letter sent by NCSS Executive Director Susan Griffin and NCSS President Peggy Altoff to all members of the 110th Congress requesting congressional recognition of the vital importance of social studies education to our nation's future.

As always, the editors of *Social Education* welcome the comments of readers on any of the contributions to this issue, at socialed@ncss.org.