

The Civil War in an Atlantic Context **FREE**

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Summary

America's Civil War became part of a much larger international crisis as European powers, happy to see the experiment in self-government fail in America's "Great Republic," took advantage of the situation to reclaim former colonies in the Caribbean and establish a European monarchy in Mexico. Overseas, in addition to their formal diplomatic appeals to European governments, both sides also experimented with public diplomacy campaigns to influence public opinion. Confederate foreign policy sought to win recognition and aid from Europe by offering free trade in cotton and aligning their cause with that of the aristocratic anti-democratic governing classes of Europe. The Union, instead, appealed to liberal, republican sentiment abroad by depicting the war as a trial of democratic government and embracing emancipation of the slaves. The Union victory led to the withdrawal of European empires from the New World: Spain from Santo Domingo, France from Mexico, Russia from Alaska, and Britain from Canada, and the destruction of slavery in the United States hastened its end in Puerto Rico, Cuba, and Brazil.

Keywords: American Civil War, Union diplomacy, Confederate diplomacy, recognition, slavery, emancipation, Monroe Doctrine

Subjects: Civil War and Reconstruction, Foreign Relations and Foreign Policy

Early Historiography

America's Civil War has been the most thoroughly studied and prolifically interpreted episode in the history of the United States. In the 20th century, historians went from viewing the war as an irrepressible, but regrettable, interruption of national progress, and then to a revisionist view that portrayed the war as an unnecessary disaster brought on by a generation of blundering politicians and zealous fanatics on both sides. During the black civil rights era, which coincided with the Civil War centennial, a new generation restored slavery to its central role in causing the war and made abolition the moral purpose of the war. Whether viewed as a tragic brother's war or as an overdue first step toward America's reluctant reckoning with race and slavery, the Civil War lay at the heart of America's national identity. Above all, it was America's war: fought by American soldiers, on American soil, originating in peculiarly American circumstances, and a war whose consequences were largely limited to America's borders.

Despite several praiseworthy efforts to expand the international framework of America's war with itself, it remained one of the most insular, nation-bound, and self-absorbed fields in historical scholarship.¹ David Potter lamented the general "parochialism" among American historians. "Some of our worst navel-gazing," Potter ruefully noted, "has occurred in connection with the Civil War—a conflict all our own, as American as apple pie." What Potter regretted is that American historians were not helping citizens understand their place in the world. "It has been

the curious fate of the United States,” he wrote, “to exert immense influence in the modern world, without itself quite understanding the nature of this influence.” For Potter, the main question was: “what was the role of the American Civil War in the history of the modern world?” and “Did it have historical significance for anyone except Americans?”²

The Diplomatic Duel

What makes the international context of the war so essential to our understanding of its history is the diplomatic duel that the Confederacy and Union joined in Europe, particularly in Britain and France. These were two major powers with strong economic interests in resuming cotton imports and powerful geopolitical interests in the North American hemisphere. Confederate foreign policy aimed foremost at gaining recognition as a sovereign nation, which is the common goal of all breakaway states. International recognition meant that the Confederate States of America could legitimately negotiate with officials of other nations, and that they could secure loans, make commercial treaties, form alliances, and otherwise make treaties with the other nations of the world as a full-fledged member of the family of nations. Recognition meant that the CSA existed as a nation in the eyes of international law.

Confederate foreign policy was based on two premises. The first was that the South supplied some 80 percent of the world’s cotton and that Britain, France, and Belgium, along with all the industrializing regions of Europe, could not survive for long without cotton. King Cotton diplomacy, as Frank Owsley later dubbed it, was predicated on a cotton famine forcing Britain and other European powers to recognize the Confederacy even at the risk of war with the United States. Before the Union declared its blockade of southern ports, Confederate president Jefferson Davis issued an embargo decree prohibiting exports of cotton and even burning cotton to prevent it from alleviating the coming shortage to exert pressure on Europe.

The second premise of the Confederate bid for recognition drew on a liberal argument for the right to self-government and for free trade. The Confederate government instructed its envoys to inform foreign governments that the South constituted a people, homogeneous in their Anglo-Saxon origins (as opposed to the immigrant hordes taking over the North) and an agrarian society at odds with the North’s high-tariff industrial society. They also instructed Confederate envoys not to dwell on slavery as a motive for separation, and instead told them to emphasize President Lincoln’s inaugural address, which disclaimed any power or intention of interfering with slavery in the states where it existed.

We usually think of the American Civil War as a military contest that would be decided on the field of battle, with politics and diplomacy playing secondary roles. But it was also a diplomatic duel in which the Confederacy sought recognition as an independent, sovereign nation and the Union aimed at thwarting any form of support for the rebellion. Separatist rebellions are only rarely won by arms alone; often the outcome depends on the intervention of other nations in some form: diplomatic recognition, military alliance, or perhaps the mediation of peace. Meanwhile, the rebel military struggle serves to demonstrate popular support for the independence movement and the capacity of the aspiring nation to defend itself. But success often comes from outside the civil war being waged.

The War as Part of an International Struggle

From the outset of the war in America, foreign observers anticipated that the outcome would matter greatly to the world at large. Of course, the disruption of the cotton trade posed grave implications, not only for merchants and manufacturers but also for workers who depended on cotton production for their livelihood. It was the political implications of the American contest, however, that seemed to seize the attention of so many journalists, intellectuals, political leaders, and others viewing the war from abroad.

Conservatives in Europe received news of the debacle in the so-called Great Republic with unbridled glee, and they leaped at the opportunity to pronounce the ignoble end of the entire “republican experiment” that had been most violently witnessed in the French Revolution of 1789. Everywhere and in all of history, skeptics believed, experiments in “popular government” ended in anarchy or despotism. Democratic forms of government were inherently weak, they believed, and especially prone to self-destruction during the strain of war. Tory MP Sir John Ramsden took the occasion to advise the British public that they were “now witnessing the bursting of that great Republican bubble which had been so often held up to us as the model on which to recast our own English Constitution.” The first duty of the British government, he advised, ought to be to strengthen “the great distinction between the safe and rational, and tempered liberties of England, and the wild and unreflecting excesses of mob-rule which had too often desecrated freedom and outraged humanity in America.”³ The Earl of Shrewsbury, another venerable Tory MP, congratulated Britain on its aristocratic tradition of governing and compared its success with the extreme democracy now running amok in America. “In America,” he told his constituents, “they saw Democracy on its trial, and they saw how it failed.” Among those standing before him, he predicted, those “who lived long enough would. . . see an aristocracy established in America.”⁴

Anti-American sentiment ran equally strong among French conservatives who had witnessed two failed republican experiments in their own country. “Your Republic is dead, and it is probably the last the world will see,” Achille Fould, a member of Napoleon III’s cabinet, told one astonished American early in the war. “You will have a reign of terror, and then two or three monarchies.”⁵ French conservatives saw in America’s democracy the same fatal flaws that had doomed their violent history with republicanism. In the North, one explained, there was an aristocracy of wealth and another of “ultra-puritan reverends” who led their flock beneath a mantle of hypocrisy and intolerance. *Le Monde*, an arch-monarchist journal, condemned the American experiment as a mistake from the beginning. Eighty years ago “the republican tree” had been planted; now “its spoiled fruits had fallen, and its roots were rotten.” It added ruefully: behold slaveholding liberals in the South now crying *Vive la liberté!*⁶ French skeptics, too, prophesied the return of monarchy to the United States, whose bloody civil war was further proof that people simply cannot govern themselves.⁷

Spain’s ultra-conservative Catholic press was even more severe in its judgment of America’s godless experiment. “In the model republic of what were the United States, we see more and more clearly of how little account is a society constituted without God, merely for the sake of men. . . . Look at their wild ways of annihilating each other, confiscating each other’s goods, mutually

destroying each other's cities, and cordially wishing each other extinct!" It mocked the "model republic" founded in rebellion and atheism, "populated by the dregs of all the nations in the world" and living "without law of God or man." Now America's republic stood doomed to "die in a flood of blood and mire" and serve as a rebuke to "the flaming theories of democracy."⁸

European Designs on the Americas

While anti-democratic journalists and politicians predicted the self-destruction of the United States, European governments quickly took action to hasten the day by invading and conquering Latin American republics. In March 1861, a Spanish fleet from Havana landed troops in Santo Domingo and proclaimed the former colony re-annexed by the Spanish Empire. The Monroe Doctrine of 1823 had warned that any further efforts by European powers to colonize the American hemisphere would amount to an act of aggression against the United States. When Spain's brazen challenge went unanswered that spring of 1861, other European powers moved forward with their own plans.

America's Civil War opened the gates to further European intervention, beginning with an allied European invasion of Mexico at the end of 1861. For many years France's Napoleon III had been nurturing his "grand design for the Americas," which would begin by installing a European prince as emperor of Mexico. The plan to take over and stabilize Mexico was linked to France's recent imperial conquests in Indochina (Viet Nam). Napoleon III had become fascinated with the idea of constructing a canal between the Gulf of Mexico and the Pacific Ocean, preferably across Nicaragua. The canal would open a western pathway to the Far East and make France the master of two oceans. The plan required stabilizing Mexico, which during forty years of independence had been through some fifty changes of government. The Liberal Party had recently passed sweeping reforms that vastly reduced the power of the Catholic Church over land and education, to which the conservative church party responded by plunging the country into a horrific civil war known as the Reform War. For decades Mexico's conservatives had been lobbying in the courts of Europe to rescue Mexico from its republican anarchy. When Benito Juárez, the elected president of the Mexican republic, announced a temporary suspension of payments on the national debt, Napoleon III, seeing that the United States was going to be embroiled in a protracted civil war, seized the opportunity.⁹

Though he sought the aggrandizement of France, Napoleon III wanted to enlist other European powers in his Mexico project. He worked with Britain and Spain to form the Tripartite Alliance intended to recover debts owed to European investors by Mexico. For Napoleon III, the Mexican debt provided a pretext for launching his grand design. He nominated Maximilian, the young brother of the Austrian emperor, as his candidate for the Mexican crown. In December of 1861 Spanish troops landed in Mexico, followed by French and British forces early the next year. Once France's plan to topple the republican Juárez regime and install Maximilian became clear, Spain and Britain withdrew from the alliance. After French troops encountered stunning resistance from republican forces at the Battle of Puebla, May 5, 1862, Napoleon redoubled his commitment to the conquest of Mexico, sending over more infantry, including Belgian and Austrian forces.

More than a year later, the French entered Mexico City. They set up a council of notables, made up of conservative clergy and landowners, who agreed to a monarchical form of government and nominated a delegation to offer the throne to Maximilian.¹⁰

While Spain and France took advantage of America's troubles by aggressing in the Caribbean and Mexico with utter contempt for the Monroe Doctrine, Britain also menaced a troubled United States. In November 1861, when an ambitious Union officer apprehended two Confederate envoys and their secretaries aboard the British mail steamer, *Trent*, the British press and many political leaders seemed to welcome the opportunity to ignite war fever among the British public. Prime Minister Palmerston, long antagonistic toward America and republicanism in general, sent ten thousand troops to Canada and naval reinforcements to the Caribbean. What began as an affront to the British flag very nearly set off a world war, but cooler heads in London and Washington managed to defuse the *Trent* affair before it came to that.¹¹

Union Appeals to Liberal Opinion Abroad

The United States was surrounded by hostile rebels and menacing European powers who, it became clear, wished the worst for America in its hour of peril. While at first intent on rejecting the conservative idea that the American imbroglio was proof of the failure of self-government, friends of the Union began to propagate the idea of the war as democracy on trial. Karl Marx, writing for the *New York Daily Tribune*, saw the war as the last stand of a feudal landed aristocracy fighting to preserve enslaved labor. "The first grand war of contemporaneous history is the American war," he wrote in September 1861. The "highest form of popular self-government till now realized is giving battle to the meanest and most shameless form of man's enslaving recorded in the annals of history." He excoriated the Great Powers of Europe for taking advantage of a weakened United States to launch imperialist ventures in Latin America. The Tripartite Alliance's invasion of Mexico, he wrote, was "one of the most monstrous enterprises ever chronicled in the annals of international history," marked by "an insanity of purpose and imbecility of the means employed." The Southern rebels and the aristocratic governing classes of Europe were as one, Marx told his readers, in working to defeat the emancipation of labor and the cause of human progress.¹²

French republicans and abolitionists joined their voices to those supporting the Union, often at great peril given the harsh censorship of Napoleon III's regime. Count Agénor de Gasparin, an ardent abolitionist and liberal reformer writing from exile in Switzerland, proclaimed the American conflict not as a failure but as a reveille and summons to battle. "One of the gravest conflicts of the age is opening in America." "It is time for us to take sides." Now was the moment, Gasparin implored, "to sustain our friends when they are in need of us; when their battle, far from being won, is scarcely begun."¹³

Édouard Laboulaye, one of the leading experts on American constitutional history and a professor at the Collège de France, defied the censors to lecture and write in defense of the American republic and remind his French audience of the abiding bond between the two nations. "The world is a solidarity, and the cause of America is the cause of Liberty," he wrote. "So long as there

shall be across the Atlantic a society of thirty millions of men, living happily and peacefully under a government of their choice, with laws made by themselves, liberty will cast her rays over Europe like an illuminating pharos. . . . But should liberty become eclipsed in the new world, it would become night in Europe.”¹⁴

The European understanding of the American contest as a clash of political ideologies originated with conservatives who delighted in the denouement of the democratic experiment throughout the Atlantic world, then embraced by the left. Both liberal and conservative politicians, intellectuals, journalists, and reformers came to see the American contest as something more than just a civil war in distant America. This was an epic battle between the forces of liberty, equality, and self-government on one side against those of aristocracy, slavery, and repression.

Lincoln and Seward crafted domestic and foreign policy in tandem. Both were aware of the republican experiment as a shared, international concept, and as leaders of the Republican Party they were conversant with the language of republican ideals besieged by the forces of slavery and aristocracy. Seward’s diplomatic instructions and Lincoln’s public addresses situated the American conflict within a larger struggle between democracy and its enemies in the Atlantic world. Nowhere was this more concisely and elegantly expressed than in Lincoln’s Gettysburg Address, which deftly transformed America’s war into a universal struggle: “Now we are engaged in a great civil war, testing whether that nation or any nation so conceived and so dedicated can long endure.”

The Birth of Public Diplomacy

America’s Civil War took place in an era of mass-circulation newspapers, popular journals, a vast new network of telegraphs, the internet of their day, and fast steamship mail carriers able to cross the Atlantic in ten to eleven days. Running through the diplomatic correspondence and foreign correspondence of the day were frequent references to something called the “public mind,” which was thought to be open to persuasion through print. The American Civil War witnessed the birth of what we now call “public diplomacy,” by which we mean deliberate, sustained, state-sponsored programs aimed at influencing foreign policy abroad by appealing to public sentiment and bringing pressure to bear on governments.

William Seward took the lead in mastering the new art of public diplomacy, sending a bevy of clergy, and political and business leaders to carry out lecture tours as unofficial spokesman for the Union cause. His old mentor, Thurlow Weed, a seasoned journalist and political operator, arrived in Europe just in time to help defuse the *Trent* crisis through adept management of the press. Seward also made the diplomatic correspondence of the United States state department public by issuing voluminous annual reports, the inauguration of what became the annual FRUS series (Foreign Relations of the United States) beloved by historians. Seward instructed his diplomats and consuls to report on foreign public opinion and the press, along with their dispatches on government. From numerous diplomatic posts abroad, Seward was told that the governments of Europe might be pleased to see the Great Republic dismembered, but the public was generally favorable toward the Union, if and only if this became a war for something more than merely restoring its territorial sovereignty. Writing from Spain, U.S. minister Carl Schurz, a

German-born radical, urged Seward: conservative monarchies across Europe greeted America's war as the "final and conclusive failure of democratic institutions," and we must "place the war against the rebellious slave States upon a higher moral basis and thereby give us the control of public opinion in Europe." Why, Schurz asked Seward, should we expect Europeans to support a war whose cause was nothing more than "the privilege of being re-associated with the imperious and troublesome Slave States"?¹⁵

Confederate Public Diplomacy

The Confederacy soon answered Seward's public diplomacy initiatives with its own appeals to the foreign public. One of their most able defenders was Henry Hotze, a Swiss-born immigrant who had come to Mobile, Alabama, before the war. Hotze was a young, intellectually gifted man with experience in journalism and diplomacy. He had collaborated with Josiah Nott, a Mobile anthropologist, in publishing an English translation of French author, Arthur Gobineau, whose *Essay on the Inequality of the Human Races* (1853) provided the foundation for scientific racism. After a brief tour of duty procuring arms in Europe, Hotze returned to Richmond and convinced Confederate leaders that they must answer the Union's propaganda efforts with their own program to educate the public mind. After arriving in London, Hotze decided to launch his own journal, *The Index: A Weekly Journal of Politics, Literature and News*, which soon became the unofficial mouthpiece for the Confederacy across Europe. Hotze distrusted foreign spokesmen, who were inclined to denounce slavery even as they defended the right of the South to independence. Instead of apologizing for slavery as barbaric relic of the past, Hotze presented the South as a forward-leaning model for white supremacy in the new age of European imperialism.

While Hotze ran *The Index* from London, Edwin De Leon served as "ambassador to public opinion" in France. He also brought a favorable combination of skills as a journalist with diplomatic experience and an extraordinary dose of audacity. Jefferson Davis gave him a purse of \$25,000, which he spent freely as "inducements" to journalists and publishers across France. De Leon decided also to publish anonymously his own pamphlet, a thirty-two-page account of *La vérité sur les États Confédérés d'Amérique* (The Truth About the Confederate States of America). Published anonymously, but in the voice of a knowing native of the South returning from a recent visit, De Leon sought to "educate" the French on two matters. First, the valiant South was determined to fight to the death, and its recent losses in New Orleans would only strengthen resolve. Second, he sought to persuade the French that Southern slavery, quite unlike the French Caribbean variety, was a benign domestic institution and that the happy loyal Negroes' only fear was the vicious Yankee invaders who cared nothing for their welfare. The most novel aspect of De Leon's pamphlet was his argument for South's Latin affinities. Northerners, he explained, were descended largely from "the races of Anglo-Saxon origin," the zealous Puritans. The South, in contrast, "was principally populated by a Latin race" that descended from Louisiana Creoles, South Carolina Huguenots, and Anglo-Normans whose Cavalier ancestors had defended King Charles against the zealous Puritans.¹⁶

De Leon's public-diplomacy portrayal of the Latin South coincided with a new initiative to ally with France. Judah P. Benjamin, appointed Confederate secretary of state in spring 1862, launched an aggressive strategy to lure France into an alliance with the Confederacy. In July of that year, the Confederate envoy to France, John Slidell, met with Napoleon III to offer France a highly lucrative, long-term commercial convention by which French merchants could bring their exports into the Confederacy free of duty. All France had to do was recognize the Confederacy and then break the blockade of Southern ports to open commercial relations. As a "subsidy for defraying the expenses of such expeditions," Slidell was authorized to offer to the French 100,000 bales of cotton, worth more than 63 million Francs (over 12.5 million dollars) "gratis." Slidell also assured Napoleon III that his government was fully in support of his Mexican venture and did not subscribe to the Monroe Doctrine. On the contrary, the Confederacy would welcome a stable monarchy as its southern neighbor, especially given the South's affinity with the Latin race. Slidell, a Louisianan who had married into a prominent Creole family and was fluent in French, elaborated on the "common interests and congenial habits" the French and Southerners shared. He went further to suggest that the two nations "make common cause with him against the common enemy," the Anglo-Saxon, Puritan fanatics of the North.¹⁷

By the end of the first year of war, Confederate foreign policy and public diplomacy were shifting to the right, abandoning their earlier avoidance of slavery to assert a forthright defense of slavery and white supremacy. The South was also trying to ally itself with the French European imperialist scheme to roll back republicanism in Latin America. As part of the same shift to the right, in 1863 the Confederacy sought the support of the pontiff of Rome, Pope Pius IX. Pio Nono, as he was known in Italy, had established a reputation as the archenemy of republicanism, liberalism of all kinds; his Syllabus of Errors listed eighty heresies all Catholics were instructed to renounce, among them freedom of speech, press, and religion; the separation of church and state; religious tolerance; and the idea that the Catholic Church must adapt to the modern world. At the behest of Confederate envoy Dudley Mann, the pope issued a letter to "President" Jefferson Davis calling for peace, which Confederate propagandists used to rally Catholic support and discourage Irish and others from emigrating to join the Union army.¹⁸

Emancipation and Public Opinion Abroad

While the Confederacy fashioned its appeal to conservative Europe, the Union was aligning its cause with liberal Europe by appealing to antislavery and republican sympathies. Lincoln's Emancipation Proclamation, which historians usually interpret as an expedient of domestic politics and military necessity, was also designed as foreign policy. William Seward was worried that an emancipation edict would appear desperate and might provoke European powers to intervene lest racial strife permanently injure cotton production in the South. He did all he could to stall and even derail Lincoln's emancipation policy. Lincoln, however, had heeded the prediction of Carl Schurz and many other advisors in Europe that popular support for a Union war against slavery would make it impossible for European governments to intervene on behalf of the South.

News of Lincoln's emancipation decree arrived in Europe in early October 1862, just as Prime Minister Palmerston and his cabinet were about to consider a plan for joint intervention in the American Civil War in cooperation with France. The initial reaction in the British press seemed, at first, to validate Seward's worst fears. Editorials were cynical, alarmist, and altogether negative, even some in the liberal press. Lincoln, one London editorial fairly screamed, "invokes the aid of the savage negroes, and wishes to excite an insurrection, like that of St. Domingo." The *London Times* ridiculed the president's moral pretense: "Where he has no power Mr. Lincoln will set the negroes free; where he retains power he will consider them as slaves." It also warned of the "massacres and utter destruction" in the "servile insurrection" of blacks that would follow. In France, also, the conservative press denounced the "bloody butchery" Lincoln's policy would bring.¹⁹

Just as news of the Emancipation Proclamation arrived in England, William Gladstone, a rising star in Palmerston's cabinet, sent up a test balloon on the intervention question during a speech in Newcastle. "We may have our own opinions about slavery; we may be for or against the South; but there is no doubt that Jefferson Davis and other leaders of the South have made an army; they are making, it appears, a navy; and they have made what is more than either—they have made a nation."²⁰

Gladstone's speech ignited an excited public debate that coincided with the arrival of news that Lincoln had issued his emancipation policy. At the same time, huge demonstrations took place in Hyde Park in central London, Birkenhead, and elsewhere in support of Giuseppe Garibaldi, the wildly popular Italian hero whose "Letter to the English Nation" appeared in the London newspapers at exactly at the same time in early October. The letter was a full-throated, passionate appeal to the English people to stand by "the great American Republic," which was "after all your daughter, risen from your bosom" and "struggling today for the abolition of slavery."²¹

Garibaldi had written from a prison hospital in Italy after being wounded and arrested for leading a march on Rome that was intended to complete the unification of Italy. The incident set off an international crisis that forced France to abandon its plans to join Britain in their plan for multilateral intervention in the American war. Palmerston and his foreign secretary Earl Russell, alarmed by popular reaction to Gladstone's speech and reluctant to intervene on their own, chose to let the war in America play out on the battlefield and in the political arena, where Lincoln and the Republicans would face a strong reelection challenge in 1864.²²

Much of the early negative reaction in the British press drew on the cynical suspicion that the proclamation was an insincere ploy, but the news that the proclamation was enacted on January 1 was received with robust popular approval when word reached Europe. Hundreds of public meetings took place across the British Isles with Radicals, those calling for universal voting rights, workers, and Quakers and other dissenting religious groups, chief among the participants, all proclaiming solidarity with the new war for "Union and Liberty," the new motto of the North. In France political meetings and demonstrations were banned, but support for America's abolition war was manifest nonetheless. More than seven hundred clergy signed a public petition imploring the Protestant clergy of England to stand by America and its war against slavery.²³

Public support for the Union abroad drew from many sources, not only organized antislavery reformers. Insofar as the American war came to be seen as a contest between republican democratic ideals and those of slavery and aristocracy, Radicals in Britain advocating a vast expansion of voting rights and republicans in France opposing the Second Empire embraced the Union cause as their own. In France, where government censorship forbade political debate and demonstration, the American question offered an arena in which politics could be discussed safely, so long as they were disguised as a distant foreign matter.

After coming close to intervening in the war in the early fall of 1862, Europe's Great Powers refrained from intervention. Already the development of new cotton supplies from India, Egypt, and other parts of the world diminished King Cotton's sway over Europe, while the Union's formidable army and navy raised the risk of war.²⁴ Still, many European leaders remained convinced that the North could never subjugate the South and that it was only a matter of time before it would accept peace on terms of separation. One barometer of confidence in Confederate success can be seen in the volatile prices of Confederate cotton bonds. After a strong opening in March 1863, they plummeted after Gettysburg, selling at less than 40 percent of par value by the end of 1863. They rose in 1864 to 85 percent of par before the election in November. Only after Lincoln won reelection, as Sherman's army marched unopposed through Georgia and South Carolina decimating everything in its path, did bond prices sink, along with hopes of Confederate victory.²⁵

The International Impact of America's Civil War

News of Lee's surrender at Appomattox arrived in Europe shortly before the news of Lincoln's assassination in late April 1865. Wherever the news of the assassination arrived, by telegraph, steamship, or railroad, public demonstrations proved an astonishing interest in the American war and the leader who had led the Union to victory. Huge public meetings took place across Britain, and, in bold defiance of government bans and police force, French students staged mass demonstrations in the Latin Quarter, Masonic fraternities draped their lodges in black crape, and workers and common citizens issued letters of condolence. John Bigelow, the U.S. minister to France, was astonished at the bold display of public support for America, much of it a thinly veiled rebuke of Napoleon III and the Second Empire. Hundreds of letters of condolence and resolutions of sympathy, with tens of thousands of signatures, poured into U.S. legations around the globe, many of them from students, workers, abolitionists, former slaves, exiled reformers, and common citizens in small villages and large cities. They expressed sympathy for America and the widow Mrs. Lincoln, of course, and many took the occasion to register disgust with their governments for having taken sides against Lincoln and the Union cause. In Nantes, France, a subscription drive for a medal for Mrs. Lincoln caught the disapproving eye of government authorities who confiscated the list of donors and the money. It became a cause célèbre when a group of prominent French liberals, including Victor Hugo, styling themselves the Committee of the French Democracy, took the subscription national, gathered forty thousand donors, and presented the gold medal to U.S. minister John Bigelow with a message: "If France possessed the

liberties enjoyed by republican America, it is not by thousands, but by millions that would be counted, with us, the admirers of Lincoln, and the partisans of those opinions to which he devoted his life, and which are consecrated by his death.”²⁶

America’s war with itself, so long the subject of historical introspection among historians, truly mattered to the world of the 1860s. The resilience and fortitude of the American republic surprised many anti-republican skeptics and emboldened reformers and revolutionaries throughout the Atlantic world. One British Radical noted: “Under a strain such as no aristocracy, no monarchy, no empire could have supported, Republican institutions have stood firm. It is we, now, who call upon the privileged classes to mark the result.” Soon after the American war, British Radicals organized the Reform League, a grass-roots movement that pushed for extending voting rights to workers and even to women. In the face of massive public demonstrations and civil disobedience, Parliament caved in to their demands to pass the Reform Act of 1867.

Meanwhile, Spain, facing fierce guerilla resistance in Santo Domingo, withdrew its occupying forces in the summer of 1865 only to face a republican uprising in Cuba two years later. One year after taking the throne of Mexico, Emperor Maximilian issued plaintive appeals to Washington asking for recognition, all to no avail. In the summer of 1865, General Ulysses S. Grant sent General Phil Sheridan to the Mexico border with forty thousand troops. They were there to intimidate French forces, but also to aid the beleaguered armies of Benito Juárez with clandestine transfers of arms and ammunition on the banks of the Rio Grande. Napoleon III, facing the prospect of one million men at arms in a victorious Union army, in January 1866 announced France’s “civilizing mission” in Mexico to have come to an end and ordered the gradual withdrawal of French troops. In June 1867 Maximilian faced a Mexican firing squad whose shots echoed across the Atlantic as a somber warning against further European incursions in the Americas. In March of 1867 the Russian Empire sold Alaska to the United States and withdrew from the Western Hemisphere, and Britain, having organized Canada into a federated, self-governing polity, effectively withdrew from North America as well.

The survival of the republican experiment coincided with the death of slavery in the Americas. Two-thirds of all slaves in the American hemisphere were freed by the passage of the Thirteenth Amendment in December 1865. What might have been the beginning of a vast expansion of slavery in 1861 became its death knell in 1865. The republican revolution in Cuba in 1868 issued vague promises of freedom to slaves who joined their cause. In 1870, Spain, having undergone its own republican revolution in 1868, answered by passing legislation that granted freedom to those slaves who fought for Spain and granted eventual freedom to all children born to slave mothers in Cuba. Brazil followed the next year with its own “free womb” law. Slavery was abolished altogether in Puerto Rico in 1873, Cuba in 1886, and Brazil in 1888. An institution that had been deeply embedded in the economy and society of the Americas for centuries and had seemed on the verge of resurgence and expansion with the promise of Confederate secession in 1861 had come to an end everywhere in the Americas.

Discussion of the Literature

Much of the best work on the Civil War and the Atlantic world has been limited to Anglo-American relations, owing in part because of the major role Britain played at the time and to the relative ease of working in English-language sources. Some of this scholarship has been colored by the idea of a “special relationship” that is supposed to have always existed between the United States and Britain. American historian Ephraim Douglas Adams’s pioneering two-volume study, *Great Britain and the American Civil War*, published in 1924, concluded that Britain never meant any harm to the United States, though much of his evidence suggested otherwise.²⁷ A half century later, the eminent British historian Brian Jenkins drew similar conclusions in his two-volume work, *Britain and the War for Union*. Jenkins has recently added an excellent study of Lord Lyons, Britain’s minister to Washington during the war.²⁸ R. J. M. Blackett’s *Divided Hearts* revisited a nagging dispute over the nature and extent of working-class support for the Union and brought to light the neglected role of British racial attitudes.²⁹ Duncan Andrew Campbell reexamined the Union’s strained relationship with Britain within the longer history of the “special relationship.”³⁰ Philip Myers, *Caution and Cooperation*, sustains the argument for a neutral British posture on the American Question.³¹ Howard Jones, focusing on the summer and fall of 1862, shows how close Britain came to intervening in favor of the South.³² Amanda Foreman’s *A World on Fire* offers a sweeping story of Anglo-American relations during the war that returns to the familiar theme of genuine British neutrality.³³ Thomas Sebrell’s superb work on the public diplomacy battle in Britain, *Persuading John Bull*, unearths a wealth of new evidence on the efforts of both sides to influence British foreign policy.³⁴

On Confederate diplomacy, historian James Callahan gave a succinct assessment of the subject as early as 1901 that remains useful.³⁵ Frank Lawrence Owsley’s *King Cotton Diplomacy*, still the most comprehensive study of the subject, argues that inept Confederate politicians and diplomats, in addition to the failure of the “cotton famine” to have its intended effect, not slavery, doomed the Confederate quest for foreign allies.³⁶ Charles Hubbard, *The Burden of Confederate Diplomacy*, came to similar conclusions.³⁷ Gregory Mattson’s unpublished dissertation argues instead that slavery was a major obstacle to diplomatic recognition and that no European nation dared risk public outrage at home or international scorn abroad by lending aid to the secessionists.³⁸ Australian scholar D. P. Crook’s *The North, the South, and the Powers* gives close attention to European as well as North American national interests. Howard Jones, the premier diplomatic historian of the Civil War era, has written extensively on the subject, most recently *Blue and Gray Diplomacy*.³⁹

The premier study of France and the American Civil War is Lynn Case and Warren Spencer, which remains unsurpassed.⁴⁰ Henry Blumenthal produced several pioneering works on Franco-American relations that no student can ignore.⁴¹ Nancy Barker produced a series of brilliant journal articles and a fine study of his ambitious wife, Empress Eugenie.⁴² David Carroll contributed a fine study of Henri Mercier, France’s minister to Washington.⁴³ Alfred and Kathryn Hanna provide the deepest study of France, Mexico, and Napoleon III’s Grand Design.⁴⁴ Important studies of the French press and public opinion by Serge Gravonsky, Warren West, and George Blackburn remain useful.⁴⁵ A still useful study of public opinion in Britain and the European Continent is found in Donaldson Jordan and Edwin Pratt’s pioneering 1931 study.⁴⁶

More recently, Steve Sainlaude, among the few French historians with an interest in the subject, has contributed two volumes on French diplomacy toward the Confederacy, and is presently working on a book in English.⁴⁷

Other parts of the European world have barely been touched by historians. Albert Woldman's *Lincoln and the Russians* has been updated by Norman Saul, *Distant Friends*.⁴⁸ James W. Cortada illuminates Spanish imperial ambitions in the Americas, which is supplemented by Wayne Bowen.⁴⁹ In *Lincoln and the Emperors*, A. R. Tyrner-Tyrnauer, a Hungarian-born journalist, reveals a fascinating picture of imperial intrigue with special focus on the Austrian Habsburgs.⁵⁰ Canada's important role in the Civil War has been all but neglected by historians. Robin Winks, *Canada and the United States*, remains the most comprehensive treatment, while Greg Marquis deals with the Maritime Provinces.⁵¹

The international turn in historical studies is beginning to penetrate the nation-bound narrative of America's Civil War, thanks often to perspective coming from abroad. Stig Förster and Jörg Nagler's *On the Road to Total War* (1997) is a collection of essays that give special attention to the war as it related to Germany, its unification, and the evolution of modern warfare. Sven Beckert's sweeping *Empire of Cotton* situates America's conflict within the broader framework of the global economy.⁵² Enrico Dal Lago has carried out a number of transatlantic studies with rich rewards for Civil War-era history.⁵³ Richard Carwardine and Jay Sexton brought together a bevy of international scholars to contemplate the impact of the Civil War through Lincoln's reputation and memory.⁵⁴ Andre Fleche, *The Revolution of 1861*, examines how the South and the Union sought to situate their cause within the rhetoric and meaning of the Age of Nationalism.⁵⁵ Edward Rugemer locates the origins of America's conflict in the Caribbean.⁵⁶ Don Doyle's *The Cause of All Nations* views the conflict through foreign eyes as a public-diplomacy contest for popular support abroad.⁵⁷

Several historians have situated America's Civil War within the broader framework of global history.⁵⁸ Before and during the sesquicentennial, several conferences and books of essays have brought together U.S. and foreign scholars with wonderful results for students of the international context.⁵⁹ Jorg Nagler, Marcus Gräser, and Don Doyle's *The Transnational Significance of the American Civil War* offers an array of exciting new interpretations. Doyle's *American Civil Wars* brings historians from Europe, Latin America, and the United States together in a new interpretation of the war as part of a broader Atlantic world crisis in the 1860s.⁶⁰

Primary Sources

Union and Confederate Diplomacy

Research on U.S. diplomatic history must begin with FRUS, Foreign Relations of the United States, the annual published account of selected diplomatic correspondence between the envoys of the United States and the secretary of state in Washington, which was inaugurated by William Seward in 1861 as part of public diplomacy strategy. It is available online at several sites, including the University of Wisconsin Digital Collections Center <<http://digital.library.wisc.edu/1711.dl/FRUS>>.

More complete records of diplomatic correspondence, including many confidential dispatches and instructions that are not found in FRUS, are found in Record Group 59, National Archives and Records Administration, College Park, Maryland. Confederate diplomatic records are less extensive and are in their original and microfilm form as Confederate States of America Records [<http://rs5.loc.gov/service/mss/eadxm/mss/eadpdfmss/2003/mso03052.pdf>](http://rs5.loc.gov/service/mss/eadxm/mss/eadpdfmss/2003/mso03052.pdf), formerly known as the Pickett Papers (to avoid any semblance of official recognition), Library of Congress, Manuscript Room. A published version of most, but not all, of the CSA diplomatic correspondence is included in the Official Records of the Union and Confederate Navies in the War of the Rebellion, series 2, vol. 3, State Department Correspondence with Diplomatic Agents, commonly cited as ORN. This is available online at Cornell University, Making of America [<http://ebooks.library.cornell.edu/m/moawar/ofre.html>](http://ebooks.library.cornell.edu/m/moawar/ofre.html).

Foreign Observers

Among the numerous foreign interpreters of the war writing from abroad were Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, whose selected writings on the war have been recently reissued as *The Civil War in the United States*, ed. Andrew Zimmerman, 2d ed. (New York: International Publishers, 2016). A more complete set of their many articles and private letters concerning events in America are found online at: Marx Engels Archive, at Marxists.org [<https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/index.htm>](https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/index.htm). One of the most perceptive American journalists writing from Europe was William Edward Johnston, writing under the pen name “Malakoff” for the *New York Times*. Most of his articles are reprinted in *Memoirs of Malakoff*, 2 vols. (London: Hutchinson, 1907). The *New York Times* had many other excellent overseas correspondents, and its archives are available to subscribers online [<http://query.nytimes.com/search/sitesearch/>](http://query.nytimes.com/search/sitesearch/).

European newspapers are not as easily accessible to online researchers. *The Times of London*, perhaps the most important newspaper of record in Europe, is available at The Times Digital Archive [<http://www.thetimes.co.uk/tto/archive/>](http://www.thetimes.co.uk/tto/archive/), 1785–1985. *The Times of London*, of course, provides a conservative view of the war. A greater variety of British opinion is now available online through the British Library at British Newspaper Archive [<https://www.britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk/>](https://www.britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk/). The most important Confederate journal is

The Index: A Weekly Journal of Politics, Literature, and News, edited by Confederate special agent Henry Hotze, also available online at the British Library [<http://www.bl.uk/onlinegallery/onlineex/uscivilwar/highlights/theindex/theindex.html>](http://www.bl.uk/onlinegallery/onlineex/uscivilwar/highlights/theindex/theindex.html).

For French publications, the place to begin online research is Gallica, The Bibliothèque Nationale de France digital library [<http://gallica.bnf.fr/>](http://gallica.bnf.fr/). The portal to Spanish journals and other publications is Biblioteca Nacional de España, Hemeroteca Digital, Biblioteca Digital Hispánica [<http://www.bne.es/es/Catalogos/HemerotecaDigital/>](http://www.bne.es/es/Catalogos/HemerotecaDigital/).

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