

Liberal government

Duncan Andrew Campbell analyses the attitude of Palmerston's administration to the war in America.

Letting someone else The Palmerston Ministry's foreign



FEW EVENTS IN the history of nineteenth-century Britain have been more distorted by myth and disinformation than the British response – at both the political and popular levels – to the American Civil War (the Civil War hereafter). Some of the reasons

why this is so, are sufficiently obvious. The Civil War was a pivotal event in American history, but an at best marginal one to the British. As such, the narrative has largely been created, almost from the first, by Americans, many of whom were less historians than nationalists.

else have your way policy and the American Civil War

Thus, British history was, and to an extent still is, subordinated to a patriotic American narrative which ignores facts inconvenient to it. Other reasons, however, are perhaps less apparent. A tendency to ignore British–US relations before the secessionist crisis of 1860–1 is another problem. So, too, is the habit of looking at British–American relations in isolation without reference to other nations, ignoring their influences upon them. Yet another is the tendency to look back on the past through the lens of the later detente, and then increasingly close cooperation, between Britain and the United States following the Venezuela Crisis of 1895: the so-called great rapprochement following the First World War, their alliances against Nazi Germany and imperial Japan in the Second World War and then against the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics in the Cold War. Seen from this perspective, British–American cooperation played a crucial role in advancing, or at least preserving, political liberties, and so this twentieth-century legacy is cast backwards onto the nineteenth. Taken as a whole, the above contributes to a sense of inevitable destiny, both with respect to British–American relations and the furtherance of political freedom.¹

In terms of patriotic narratives, much Civil War scholarship remains in thrall to the myth of American exceptionalism which, among other things, claims that the modern liberal state begins with the War of Independence, effectively making the United States the pathfinder nation. As one historian notes, ‘we have made ourselves at home in the world, characteristically, by regarding it as America in the making.’² These exceptionalist beliefs often encourage the notion – one best termed as delusions of morality – that the United States

behaved (and behaves) more idealistically than other nations, operating on a higher moral plane. Thus, the Civil War rather than being recognised as one of the numerous struggles for national consolidation, independence and secession that occurred across the globe from 1848 to 1870, is instead portrayed as a necessary vindication of democracy, the survival of liberal institutions everywhere hanging in the balance of the conflict’s outcome.³ Hence, a domestic event, while undeniably of consequence to the second-tier power in which it took place, has been elevated to an affair of overarching global significance: in some extreme perspectives, the most consequential event of the nineteenth century.⁴

Thus, we are told, by Civil War historians, rather than by specialists in British history, that despite being some 3,000 miles away with the world’s largest and most advanced economy, the preservation, not to say furtherance, of Britain’s own liberal institutions depended upon a Union victory. Consequently, British society’s sympathies were divided along lines of class and politics: that the working class, radicals, and liberals, as represented by John Bright and Richard Cobden, the ‘members for America’ supported the Union because they admired American democracy, while the aristocracy and conservatives championed the Confederacy because they feared the same. The Union’s victory, and Abraham Lincoln’s elevation to international icon of democracy consequent upon his assassination, vindicated the North’s supporters and directly or indirectly brought about the 1867 Reform Act. British democratisation, in turn, helped contribute to improved relations with the United States, paving the way for the later rapprochement.⁵

Palmerston
(standing) in the
House of Commons,
1860 (by Thomas
Oldham Barlow and
John Phillip;
© National Portrait
Gallery, London)

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By refusing to recognise that the Southern cause was based entirely upon the preservation of slavery and thus denying the moral cause of the Union – through ‘wilful blindness,’ in the words of the contemporaneous American historian, James Ford Rhodes – the Palmerston ministry’s behaviour towards the United States was amoral at best and pro-Southern at worst – as the Confederate shipbuilding in Britain demonstrated.⁶ A more extreme statement of events is that the prime minister was ‘as conscious as Bright and the Radicals that the Union armies were the most powerful force of militant democracy since the French Revolutionary armies of 1793. Besides this, it was one of Palmerston’s chief maxims of foreign policy to take advantage of the weakness of his opponents; and the United States was greatly weakened by being involved in a civil war.’⁷ Even more recent and more balanced, though still America-centric, scholarship argues that the Union was nonetheless in peril, because the Palmerston ministry considered offering mediation in the war and that the possibility existed that it would intervene militarily.⁸ That it did not is invariably credited to robust Union diplomacy, particularly on the part of the US secretary of state, William Henry Seward, and public demonstrations in favour of the Union decrying intervention that would aid and abet Southern secession.

Although recent and more rigorous scholarship in British history has thoroughly debunked this account, its influence lingers to an unjustified extent, especially amongst Americanists in general and Civil War historians in particular.⁹ Addressing the problems these myths present upfront – particularly those growing out of American exceptionalism and a failure to understand British–American relations before the conflict – is necessary, therefore, to properly understand the Palmerston ministry’s actions with respect to the United States in its civil war.

The United States was not the only, or even the first, nation to proclaim that freedom was inherent to its identity. Even before the American War of Independence, the idea of Britain being the home of liberty due to its liberal institutions was a foundation stone of the developing national identity.¹⁰ This belief continued despite the loss of the American colonies and throughout the nineteenth century, in part because of Britain’s leadership in abolishing slavery and the slave trade, but also because of the events surrounding the Napoleonic Wars, both of which would do much to determine British views of the United States, its institutions and its people.

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Although the War of 1812 is treated separately from the Napoleonic Wars in US historiography, it was very much the conflict’s North American theatre, as Americans at the time recognised, seeing theirs and France’s interests intertwined. For example, Andrew Jackson declared, ‘Should Bonaparte make a landing on the English shore, Tyranny will be Humbled, a throne crushed and a republic will spring from the wreck.’¹¹ The American version of the conflict is well known, a second war of independence against British encroachment – most notably their impressment policies, but also the blockade of the European continent via the Orders-in-Council.¹² The British one is less well known, but was nonetheless significant at the time. Not only were impressment in decline and the Orders-in-Council being repealed by the time the US declared war, but Britain was apparently losing the contest to Napoleon, fighting a desperate rearguard action in Spain. What prevented the American annexation of British North America (Canada hereafter) was Napoleon’s disastrous invasion of Russia – a course he embarked upon on the very day James Madison’s administration, under pressure from the so-called ‘War Hawks’, declared war upon Britain. Consequently, the self-styled Emperor of Europe’s downfall freed up both the Royal Navy and British Army to take the offensive against the United States, resulting in the sacking of Washington and the near bankruptcy of the republic. With the New England States, which had always opposed the war, threatening secession, the United States agreed to the peace treaty signed at Ghent.¹³ Fortunately for Madison’s administration, news of the treaty’s ratification came too late to prevent Jackson’s victory at New Orleans which, being one of the last major engagements, was quickly seized upon by American commentators as evidence that the conflict was a US triumph that prevented the undoing of the War of Independence.

Predictably, this American version of events found little purchase in Britain. Instead, the widespread view was that the United States’ declaration of war was an opportunistic assault while Britain was fighting not only for her own liberty, but everyone else’s too. Novelist James Fenimore Cooper, on a visit to Britain twenty-five years later, noted, ‘There is a very general notion prevalent in England, that we seized a moment to declare war against them, when they were pressed upon hardest, by the rest of Europe ... I do not remember to have conversed on the subject with any Englishman who did not betray this feeling.’¹⁴ As much as Cooper might protest there was ‘not a particle of truth’

in the British account, it was no less accurate – or self-serving – than his own nation's version of events. Further, there was undeniably an argument that the war against Napoleon was a struggle for liberty and that the American failure to grasp this was, in British eyes and to use Rhodes' expression above, 'wilful blindness'.¹⁵

While one must be cautious comparing the past to the present – especially when events are effectively two centuries apart – the Napoleonic Wars were, to an extent, to nineteenth-century Britons what the Second World War was to following generations: an important ingredient of the national identity, but also a convenient yardstick, political and moral, by which they measured themselves against other nations. One can hear this in the self-satisfied words of Sir James Fergusson who, comparing competing British and American claims to be the home of liberty, remarked that Great Britain had 'kept alive the liberties of Europe, that otherwise had been crushed out by the iron heel of military despotism.'¹⁶ In the most important struggle for liberty in the nineteenth century, the United States had been on the wrong side. Further, while the Napoleonic Wars were the experience of an older generation by the time of the Civil War, Palmerston had served as the secretary at war from 1809 to 1828. While this was a relatively junior post, the future prime minister nonetheless served in the Liverpool ministry which oversaw the war against both Napoleon's France and Madison's United States.

The consequences of the Napoleonic Wars' North American theatre – and each side's interpretation of it – cast a long shadow over British–US relations. The spectre of this conflict was repeatedly resurrected as the United States and Great Britain locked horns over the demarcation of the US–Canadian frontier, a situation worsened by the refusal, of a significant portion of American politicians and the public, to accept the political legitimacy of Canada, instead believing its destiny lay with the United States.¹⁷ Lincoln's secretary of state, Seward, being among this number. Indeed, this imperial rivalry and the international slave trade would be the chief bones of contention between Britain and the United States, having a profound impact upon the two countries' perceptions of the other. This discord also made British views of the United States quite different in key respects from those of their European neighbours, who were not, unlike Britain, perpetually involved in acrimonious diplomatic disputes with the Americans.

It is beyond the parameters of this paper to provide a detailed account of this imperial

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rivalry, which took place not merely in North America, but in Latin America, too. Despite the two nations' tendency towards negotiation when crises erupted, such as the ratification of the 1842 Webster–Ashburton Treaty in response to the so-called Aroostook War, tensions were constantly being brought to a boil. Of the crises, one of the more serious ones concerned the Oregon Territory during 1844–46, where Robert Peel's ministry had to inform James Polk's administration that if his Democratic Party's cry of 'Fifty-four Forty or Fight' (a demand that Britain cede all the Oregon territory up to 54° 40'N) was indeed official US policy, the British would choose the latter. Their bluff called, the Americans decided to negotiate, resulting in the 1846 Oregon Treaty.¹⁸

In Latin America, meanwhile, irrespective of the Monroe Doctrine, Britain had interests in the region that it intended to uphold. As with North America, space precludes a full discussion of British–US clashes in Latin America, but one issue that caused tension prior to the Civil War was filibustering: private military expeditions organised by American citizens directed at Cuba, Mexico, Nicaragua, and other places, which angered the British. Despite the ratification of the 1850 Clayton–Bulwer Treaty designed to settle the two nations' differences in the region, the filibuster William Walker established himself as the dictator of Nicaragua in July 1856, re-introduced slavery and annexed Greytown, a British protectorate. That the US government formally recognised Walker's Nicaraguan regime worsened the situation. Fortunately, the Latin American states resolved matters when troops from Costa Rica, Honduras, El Salvador, and Guatemala expelled the American interloper. Walker would mount another expedition in 1860, this time to Honduras. Unfortunately for him, he was apprehended by the Royal Navy and turned over to the Hondurans, who executed him. The American public was outraged by this British act, but matters were swiftly overshadowed by the secessionist crisis.¹⁹

The habitual diplomatic incidents that took place in the Americas appear minor in retrospect but do so only because they were settled without recourse to war, thanks either to British and American politicians' willingness to compromise or because of sheer luck. Yet the longest and most emotive quarrel between Britain and the United States prior to the Civil War stemmed from the international slave trade and their dispute about the right of search to determine if a ship was transporting slaves. In this

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respect, slavery divided Britain and the United States as much as the institution would divide the latter itself. Or, in other words, monarchy and republicanism did not divide Britain and the United States; imperialism and slavery did. Again, the War of 1812 played a role. To the British – officialdom and the populace alike – that impressment caused that conflict was a fabrication created to cover an act of aggression and the American claim of unrestricted freedom of the seas was designed to protect the international slave trade. To the Americans – again, to officialdom and the populace alike – that impressment caused the war was a fact with respect to national self-defence, and the British demand of right of search was an assault on the sovereignty of the United States.²⁰

Although Britain was able to sign treaties with virtually every major power guaranteeing mutual right of search – including with longstanding imperial rivals such as France and Russia – no such progress was made with the United States.²¹ Further, despite participation in the slave trade carrying the death penalty under American law after 1820, the United States never seriously enforced its own legislation. The US Africa squadron was always too small to be effective and its commanders were notorious for their lack of cooperation with the Royal Navy. Finally, given the habitual failure of US courts to convict, far less pass an actual death sentence against the few American citizens the US Navy apprehended transporting slaves, the legal threat was a paper tiger, too.

Consequently, slave traders of all nations recognised that the US flag served as a means of escape should they encounter a Royal Navy vessel. Yet many slave traders were in fact US citizens, the American merchant marine being the largest importer of slaves by the 1840s. Between 1820 and 1866, 2.2 million slaves crossed the Atlantic Ocean, and while it is unclear precisely how many Americans participated in the 5,552 slaving voyages made after 1808, extant data and eyewitness accounts establish that US citizens played an oversized role in the business.²² The overwhelming majority of these slaves, it must be noted, were destined for Brazil and Cuba rather than the United States; nonetheless the situation was such that, by the 1850s, the American flag remained the Atlantic slave trade's final defence.

It was a long-running dispute. In 1818, an Anglo-American Convention broke up in acrimony over the issue – the British accused the United States of acting in bad faith by raising impressment; the Americans denied that any of their ships were involved in the international

slave trade. Another failed attempt in 1824 featured in the contentious presidential election of that year where the US secretary of state, John Quincy Adams, contended against Andrew Jackson of New Orleans fame, with the latter accusing the former attempting to surrender to the British.²³ Eighteen years later, while the 1842 Webster–Ashburton Treaty resolved certain issues pertaining to the US–Canadian frontier, it proved less successful with respect to the right of search. Although a joint official statement declared that the two nations would cooperate in eradicating the slave trade and destroying the slave markets in Africa, American collaboration was not forthcoming. The minimum goal of fifteen ships for their Africa squadron was never met, nor was there any serious attempt to prosecute US citizens participating in the slave trade. Faced with this, the British offered a compromise: no right of search, only visit – that Royal Navy ships could verify whether a ship was, in fact, American. This compromise was rebuffed after American commentators and politicians accused Lord Palmerston, then foreign secretary, of insulting the US flag when he stated that slave traders should not be allowed to escape simply because they hoisted 'a piece of bunting.'²⁴ The rejection of this compromise led to an increase in the British stopping and searching of suspicious ships flying the US flag, resulting in a boarding crisis in 1858.

When, in May 1858, an American schooner was halted and searched by a British man o' war in the West Indies, the US public was outraged. The secretary of state and the Senate insisted that the British cease and desist all such activities, with the latter body passing a bill enabling the president to take military action if necessary. Although this prompted a counter-wave of anger in Britain, with demands that the anti-slavery campaigns be maintained even if it meant war with the Americans, Lord Derby's ministry apologised to the United States.²⁵ Derby's actions especially angered Palmerston and Lord John Russell, sitting in opposition, who recognised that this retreat undermined their longstanding and largely successful crusade against the slave trade.²⁶ Their campaign, however, faced domestic opposition from, among others, Cobden and Bright, who opposed British attempts to stamp out the international slave trade in general and the inevitable collisions it caused with the United States in particular.²⁷ Bright went so far as to dismiss the campaign against the slave trade as 'Palmerston's benevolent crotchet.' Indeed, in appreciation of the Manchester School's efforts, one American

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slave trader named his ship the *Richard Cobden*.²⁸ If nothing else, Cobden's and Bright's sobriquet, 'the Members for America', was certainly well deserved.

British–American animosities were further revived by the Crimean conflict (1854–56). Although the United States was officially neutral, the British believed that the American public and their government sympathised with the Russians – US commentators freely predicted that France and Britain's forces would meet the same fate as Napoleon's *Grande Armée*. Even before the *Alabama*, American shipyards built a privateer for the tsar's government; only the Royal Navy's shadowing the vessel all the way to Russia, prevented it from achieving the Southern ship's notoriety. Similarly, a diplomatic crisis arose when American politicians discovered that the British were recruiting US citizens to fight in their conflict against the tsar. The acrimony arising out of the Crimean War has been almost entirely forgotten, despite the fact, as one historian noted, that, by the end of the conflict, the United States was the sole remaining power that openly acknowledged its friendship for Russia. Given the hostility of British liberals and radicals towards the Russian regime, that they would remember America's backing the wrong side in the struggle for liberty, just as they had in the Napoleonic Wars, was to be expected.²⁹

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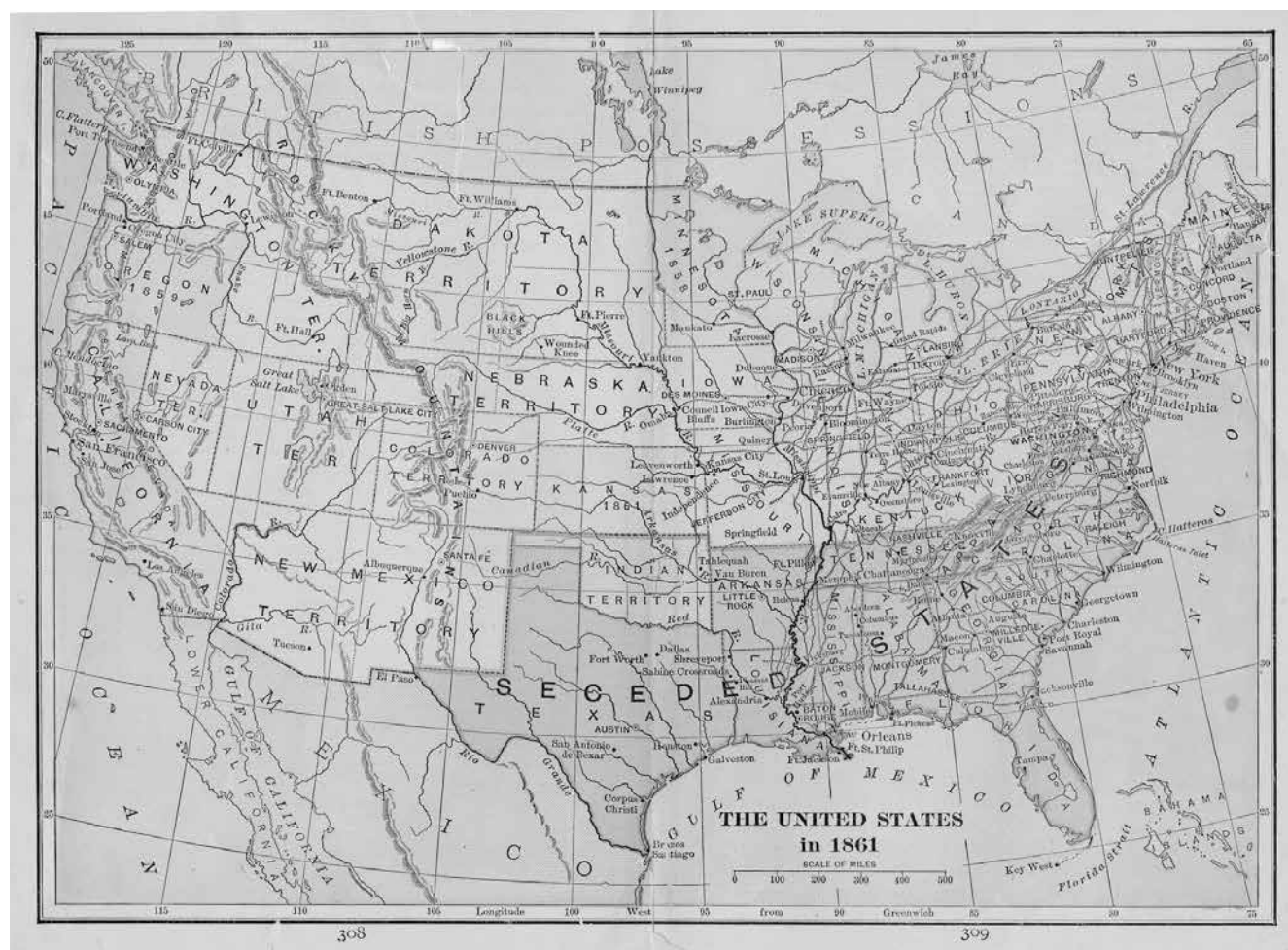
in 1829, who observed 'this eternal vituperation of England and everything belonging to us', anti-British sentiment remained widespread and popular.³²

Much of this was, predictably, reflected upon the other side of the Atlantic. Not all Britons were anti-American any more than all Americans were Anglophobes. Nonetheless, there was little in the way of either trust or concord between the two nations and their respective peoples. This could be true even of those groups theoretically in agreement, such as British and American abolitionists. For example, Harriet Beecher Stowe, of *Uncle Tom's Cabin* (1852) fame, complained in letters home that anti-slavery sentiment in Britain was often simply anti-American.³³ Nor did immigration necessarily contribute to a better understanding, as is sometimes claimed. Anywhere between one-third and one-half of all British migrants (the Irish were the exception) returned home, and those that did so were often unimpressed by their experiences. Frances Trollope's notorious *The Domestic Manners of the Americans* (1832) was a screed by a failed immigrant.³⁴

This is also why, mythology notwithstanding, British radicals' and liberals' views of the United States were at best ambiguous; Cobden's and Bright's pro-American zealotry was the exception rather than the rule. Such conservative animosity that existed meantime, was far more owed to the conflicts detailed above than out of any alleged threat to British society that America's republican institutions supposedly represented.³⁵ Far from being divided by the Civil War, meanwhile, most in Britain wished a plague on both houses. Even among the small minority who favoured one party or the other, Britons were less inclined to *support* a side in the Civil War than *oppose* one. Opponents of the Union tended to be such because they believed the South had the right of political self-determination, regularly comparing the Confederate cause to the Italian or Hungarian struggles. Opponents of the Confederacy, meanwhile, tended to be such because of slavery, regularly comparing Southern secession to Irish rebellion.³⁶

While much has been made of the various meetings held on the Civil War by each sides' partisans, in an age where mass political meetings of 50,000 and above were common – such as that held by Palmerston in Glasgow in April 1863 – only six meetings on the Civil War managed to exceed 5,000 persons, with none reaching 10,000. The number of actual partisans in any case was small, as shown by the fact that the combined membership of the pro-North

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The United States and seceded states in 1861

and pro-South organisations amounted to some 2,500 individuals – out of a nation of over 29 million.³⁷ This was unimpressive even in comparison to other foreign events. Besides the fact that the Civil War was replaced as a topic of interest by the Polish rebellion and Prussian–Danish War from 1863 onwards, both the earlier Hungarian and Italian struggles had commanded far more British attention and support.³⁸ When Lajos ‘Louis’ Kossuth visited Britain in 1851, he attracted crowds of 75,000 in Birmingham and possibly as many as 100,000 in London.³⁹ In Giuseppe Garibaldi’s case, British homes were filled with items containing his image, from plates and cups to prints, paintings and busts. Pubs and taverns were named after him, as was a biscuit. There were no such popular memorabilia with respect to Lincoln – even after his assassination, the British public response to which, in any case, was more muted than later mythology would have it.⁴⁰

Consequently, the ministry was never under any political pressure regarding the conflict – either outside or inside of parliament. When consulted by Palmerston and Russell regarding America, the leader of the Conservatives, Lord Derby, along with Benjamin Disraeli, let it be known that the Tories favoured a course of

‘bona fide neutrality.’⁴¹ Meantime, few members of either the House of Commons or the House of Lords regarded the conflict as any of Britain’s business. Only one in six referred to it in their public addresses and, of these, a clear majority supported neutrality – irrespective of their political affiliation.⁴²

Nonetheless, for all the antipathy towards the United States – and exacerbated rather than mitigated by the Union’s initial diplomacy – slavery and the spectre of the slave trade placed the South beyond the pale for most in Britain; something that became more pronounced following the 1862 Emancipation Proclamation. Little wonder, then, that in January 1863 Confederate agent Matthew Maury reported to his superiors from Britain that, ‘many of our friends have mistaken British admiration of Southern “pluck” and newspaper spite at Yankee insolence as Southern sympathy. No such thing. There is no love for the South here. In its American policy the British government supports the people’.⁴³ Maury might equally have said that the British people supported their government with respect to the conflict.

The immediate acrimony that arose between the Union and Britain from the war’s outbreak until the *Trent* Affair, demonstrates the distrust

inherent in the relationship. Secretary of State Seward, concerned about British intervention, blustered about annexing Canada, becoming even more truculent when Britain declared its neutrality. His behaviour was amplified by other Union politicians and a sizable portion of Northern opinion. Lincoln's public declarations that he would not interfere with slavery, meantime, plus the introduction of the protectionist Morrill tariff, reminded the British why the two nations had never been particularly close. By mid-1861, the Union was widely regarded as aggressive, irrational and rabidly Anglophobic. As the fiercely anti-Southern *Spectator* put it in June, 'The Americans are, for the moment, transported beyond the influence of common sense ... With all of England sympathising, more or less heartily, with the North, they persist on regarding her as an enemy, and seem positively anxious to change an ally, who happens to be quiescent, into an open and dangerous foe.'⁴⁴ The prime minister was in agreement, writing to the foreign secretary, Lord Russell, on 9 September 1861, that 'I almost doubt Lincoln and Seward being foolish enough to draw the sword against us, but they have shewn themselves so wild, that any impertinence may be expected from them,' and insisted that Canada be properly defended and the North American fleet be reinforced.⁴⁵ In this, Palmerston was upholding a long-standing British approach to the United States, characterised by one scholar as 'winning without fighting': avoid war by maintaining a demonstration of strength.⁴⁶

The most significant challenge to the Palmerston ministry's determination to avoid entanglement in the Civil War came in the winter of 1861/2 when in November, a Union warship, the USS *San Jacinto* stopped the mail carrier, RMS *Trent* in international waters, and seized two Confederate commissioners, James Mason and John Slidell, plus their secretaries, who were travelling as passengers. Predictably, this touched off a storm of outrage in Britain and one that grew considerably when news arrived from America that the *San Jacinto's* captain, Charles Wilkes, was being lionised for, among other things, defying the British. What amounted to an ultimatum was sent to Washington, altered slightly by Prince Albert who inserted a clause declaring that Britain had no doubt Wilkes had acted without authority, thus providing the Union with a means of retreat. Similarly, the Palmerston ministry refused to meet with any Confederate agents who approached the government with an offer of a military alliance against the Union in exchange for diplomatic recognition. The Lincoln

cabinet, upon receipt of the ultimatum, after some debate, bowed to both justice and pragmatism, and released the Southern envoys.⁴⁷ That this prevented a probable third British–American war has long been acknowledged. What has been less noted is that the incident also opened the way to resolving the longstanding divide over the right of search.

That the *Trent* Affair – or *Trent* outrage as the British called it – took place three years after the 1858 boarding crisis is important. One historian, justifying the rapturous applause the American captain received in the Union, declares, 'they praised Wilkes for avenging ... all the British maritime encroachments with one blow.'⁴⁸ By 1861, however, these 'maritime encroachments' amounted entirely to the Royal Navy's searching American ships for slaves. Further, the return of the envoys was preceded by an intemperate response from the US secretary of state. In effect, Seward declared that although the seizure was illegal, the Union was returning the envoys because they were unimportant. Had they been important, the North would have refused to return them. Although often overlooked in recent scholarship, Seward's response effectively repudiated a half-century of American views of freedom of the seas.⁴⁹ Basically, it not only justified the British position regarding the right of search – it went far beyond. If mere 'importance' of the human cargo onboard a ship justified seizure and removal, the Royal Navy had just been given a remarkably free hand with respect to American shipping.⁵⁰ The British media's response to Seward's message demonstrates this was recognised. When *The Economist* noted that 'we will consider the act of Mr. Lincoln a free gift', it was not simply referring to the administration's return of Mason and Slidell to British custody.⁵¹ The *Illustrated London News* also declared the United States was now in agreement with Britain with respect to right of search.⁵²

This impacted the negotiations surrounding the 1862 Lyons–Seward Treaty resulting in a mutual right of search between Britain and the United States. True, the Lincoln administration was already making moves toward emancipation by 1862, but the treaty, negotiated by Seward and Lord Lyons, the British minister to Washington, was ratified a full four months before the Emancipation Proclamation. While the treaty was at least partially a concession to the British government, it was also clearly an attempt to undo some of Seward's inadvertently excessive generosity in his response to the Palmerston ministry during the *Trent* incident.

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The Emancipation Proclamation has overshadowed the significance of the Lyons–Seward Treaty in the scholarship of British–American relations during the Civil War, but it was nonetheless a diplomatic milestone considering the past fifty years of British–American animosity over the right of search.⁵³

That the right of search remained important to Palmerston is demonstrated in his remarks to Russell, when informed in September 1861 by an American visitor that, contrary to appearances, the Civil War was in fact about slavery: the prime minister wrote, ‘Well, if the North are easily led to make all their present passions and sacrifices on account of their hatred of slavery, why should they not prove their abhorrence of slavery by joining us in our operations against the slave trade by giving us the facilities for putting it down when carried under the United States flag [?]’⁵⁴ That said, the Lyons–Seward Treaty did not mean accord was entirely complete. In 1863, the American slave trader, Captain Thomas Morgan, languishing in Newburyport Gaol, Massachusetts, wrote to Lincoln, demanding a presidential pardon. Lincoln, who on the reverse of the letter wrote that ‘the gentleman who brings me this letter says it is a “slave trade” conviction of a minor grade’, proved sympathetic.⁵⁵ On March 11, 1863, despite the existence of the US anti-slave-trade laws, despite being caught with 900 slaves on board a ship he commanded, Morgan received his presidential pardon. True, Lincoln did not earlier pardon Nathaniel Gordon in 1862, the only American ever executed for participation in the slave trade, but his willingness to free the notorious Morgan demonstrates that differences remained between the prime minister and the president.

Yet the 1862 Lyons–Seward Treaty, a success for the Palmerston ministry growing out of the *Trent* Affair, remained within the parameters of British–American relations for the past fifty years: crisis, followed by relatively peaceful resolution, followed by treaty. This approach also underpinned the issue of potential British mediation in the Civil War. That the Palmerston ministry wanted to avoid any military entanglement in the conflict is now the scholarly consensus.⁵⁶ The ministry also proved adept at undermining those few MPs, such as the radical John Arthur Roebuck – one of the three authors of the Peoples’ Charter – who put forth motions to enter the war on behalf of the Confederacy.⁵⁷ Even had the ministry been willing to abandon the approach of the past forty-five years with respect to the United States, Britain, having recently fought both the Crimean

War (1854–6) and the Indian Mutiny (1857) and engaged in the Maori Wars (1845–1872, escalating in 1860), was experiencing imperial overstretch, and wanted no more foreign adventures – as the disinclination to become militarily involved in the Polish Rebellion in 1863 and the Prussian–Danish War in 1864 demonstrate. Further, as the most recent examination of the Palmerston ministry’s mediation discussion points out, it took place at the same time as the cabinet crisis in France over French policies toward Italy and, more importantly, the overthrow of the Greek king. The revolution in Greece reopened the Eastern Question causing concerns for the Palmerston ministry’s foreign policy. Ultimately, the British government had to determine whether the situation in North America or the Eastern Question required more urgent attention. Given the priority European issues took over North American, the Palmerston ministry unsurprisingly determined that potential threats closer to home were more important.⁵⁸ To put it more bluntly: except for the *Trent* Affair, the Civil War was never a diplomatic priority for Palmerston’s ministry.

Offering mediation, in any case, was not the same as military intervention, but even here, the cabinet was divided. The two chief supporters of mediation, Russell and William Gladstone, the chancellor of the exchequer, not only faced opposition from the secretary of war, George Cornwall Lewis and most of the cabinet, but they could not bring Palmerston around in support of it either. Despite claims that the prime minister supported mediation, the only statement in favour of it in his correspondence came in September 1862. Yet even here, the most to which the prime minister would consent was that if Washington and Baltimore fell into the hands of the Confederates, mediation could then be considered.⁵⁹ This was a considerable qualifier. If the federal capital fell into enemy hands, it would have probably meant the end of the Union in any case. In October, after news of the North’s victory at the Battle of Antietam arrived, Palmerston argued that, instead of mediation, ‘I should be inclined to think that we might begin by a general recommendation to the two parties to enter into communication with each other in order to see whether some arrangement of their difficulties might not be made by which this afflicting and destructive war might be ended.’⁶⁰ In other words, before Britain even attempted to offer mediation, it should first be established whether the two parties would even talk to each other.

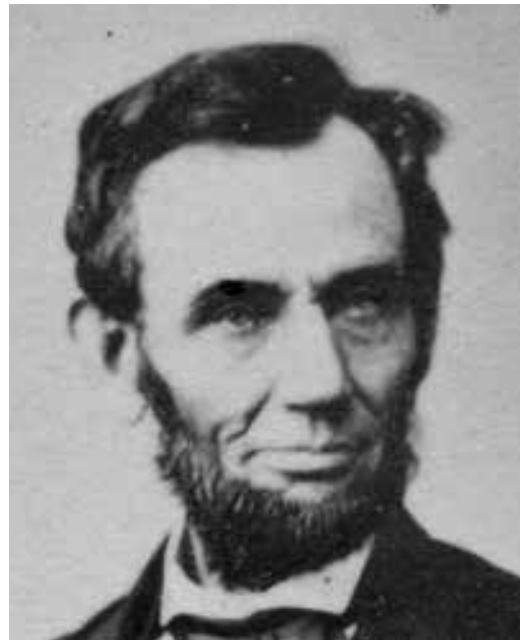
The situation was complicated by Gladstone’s the South ‘has made a nation’ speech

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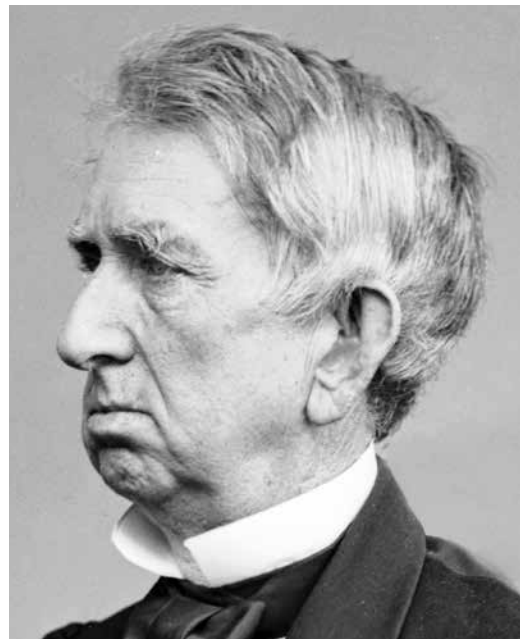
at Newcastle on 7 October 1862. As the cabinet was discussing mediation, Gladstone had caused something of a leak. Unfortunately for him, the public outcry was unfavourable, even from those hostile to the Union. For example, both *The Times* and the *Saturday Review*, two decidedly anti-Northern periodicals, condemned Gladstone's speech.⁶¹ The majority of British public opinion, like the cabinet's, was against interference in the conflict. Following this public outcry, Palmerston scrutinised Russell's proposals even more closely and on 20 October, he pointed out to the foreign secretary: 'One difficulty as [to] mediation would be the function of slavery and the giving up of fugitive slaves. Could we without offence to many people here recommend to the North to sanction slavery and to undertake to return runaways and yet would not the South insist upon some such foundations [?]'⁶² While Palmerston did finally agree to give Russell his cabinet meeting on mediation on 23 October, two days later, upon receipt of Lewis' arguments against it, Palmerston cancelled the meeting, writing to Russell that, 'I have read through your memorandum on American affairs & Lewis's observations. Your description of the state of things between the two parties is most comprehensive and just. I am however inclined to agree with Lewis that at present we would take no steps nor make any communication of a distinct proposition with any advantage.'⁶³ Given the late notice, an informal meeting was held by some of the cabinet, including Russell and Lewis, leading to an exchange between the two that became acrimonious to such an extent that Palmerston had to intervene to soothe tempers. Nonetheless, as the prime minister noted to Russell, on 26 October, '[Southern] independence can be converted into an established fact by the cause of events alone.'⁶⁴

The last cabinet discussion regarding mediation took place in November 1862, when the foreign secretary presented a proposal from the French emperor, Napoleon III, of joint mediation to the cabinet. The emperor's plan included a six-month armistice and a suspension of the Northern blockade. Besides Gladstone and Baron Westbury, the lord chancellor, the rest of the cabinet rejected the proposal outright. Gladstone was incensed by Palmerston's failure to support himself and the foreign secretary, but the prime minister had warned Russell of his misgivings before the meeting: 'But is it likely that the Federals would consent to an armistice to be accompanied by a suspension of blockades, and which would give the Confederates a means of getting all the supplies

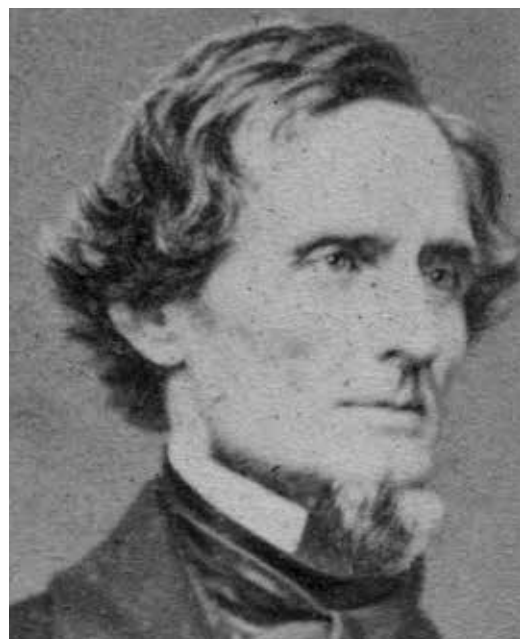
Abraham Lincoln (1809–65), 1863 (Elliott & Fry and Alexander Gardner; © National Portrait Gallery, London)



William Henry Seward (1801–72), ca. 1860–65 (by Mathew B. Brady)



Jefferson Davis (1808–89), 1860s (by Mathew B. Brady and Edward & Henry T. Anthony; © National Portrait Gallery, London)



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they may want?' That was merely one problem. There was another: 'Then comes the difficulty about slavery and the giving up of runaway slaves, about which we would hardly frame a proposal which the Southern would accept, the Northerners to agree to, and the people of England would approve of.' There was a final problem: 'The French government are more free from the Shackles of Principle and of Right & Wrong as on all others than we are.'⁶⁵ There was no trust between Britain and France. The two nations were engaged in a naval rivalry, building ocean-going ironclads, and the volunteer movement had been established in 1859 to protect against a possible French invasion of Britain. Further, in 1861, Napoleon III had established a puppet regime in Mexico in defiance of the United States, making his interests in the war very different to Britain's. In short, Palmerston had no confidence in the emperor or his proposal. The prime minister's failure to support Russell and Gladstone simply reflected his clearly expressed dissatisfaction. This was the last time the Palmerston ministry discussed mediation. In January, Poland and then Lithuania rebelled against Russia, followed by the Schleswig-Holstein crisis, resulting in the 1864 Prussian–Danish War. In terms of foreign affairs, America became less important and less relevant, especially as effects of the cotton shortages eased in 1862. One more crisis would rear its head, however, and that was the question of Confederate shipbuilding in Britain.

James Bulloch, the Confederate agent residing in Liverpool directing these efforts, recognised the advantages created by the fact that the full burden of proof fell upon the Crown when it came to violations of the 1819 Foreign Enlistment Act.⁶⁶ Working in the leading shipbuilding nation in the world and cloaking his activities under mounds of misleading documentation, Bulloch commissioned vessels that left British ports as ostensibly innocent ships of neutral nations, only to be armed on the high seas and converted into raiders. Despite the myth that the British government colluded in allowing these privateers to be unleashed upon Northern shipping, historians have exonerated Palmerston's ministry of collaboration. Indeed, in the case of the most notorious of them, the *Alabama*, the most recent scholarship blames the Union's officials for the ship's escape because they failed to provide the necessary evidence they possessed to the ministry in a timely fashion.⁶⁷

Washington, understandably outraged by Bulloch's activities, demanded that London halt them. Despite the acrimony over the *Alabama*'s

escape, the Palmerston ministry was broadly in agreement, recognising that these activities represented a dangerous precedent to the world's largest merchant marine. Having long sought American agreement that privateering was piracy, Bulloch's actions undermined British diplomatic objectives. A clampdown on his activities followed – despite some outstanding failures such as the release of the CSS *Alexandra* by the courts in June 1863 because the Crown failed to prove Southern ownership of the vessel. That same year, Bulloch audaciously tried to have two ironclad rams built for the Confederacy. Attempting to fool British officials, he covered his involvement, making it difficult to determine the vessels' purchaser. Unfortunately for him, the ministry was not deceived and in September, the ships were detained. Faced with Bulloch's ingenious paper maze that potentially prevented legal confiscation of the rams, Palmerston came up with the obvious solution – compulsory purchase of the ships for the Royal Navy.⁶⁸ Despite these setbacks, Bulloch's raiders caused havoc among American shipping. Thus, the merchant marine that had transported so many slaves across the Atlantic was savaged by a slave power. This would prove to be a major grievance of the United States during and after the war which accused Britain of deliberately releasing these privateers upon Northern shipping.

Ironically, however, Southern shipbuilding, like the *Trent* incident, compelled greater communication and cooperation between the Lincoln administration and the Palmerston ministry. Just as the *Trent* Affair, for all its sound and fury, ultimately released much of the tension that had been built up the previous year and demonstrated to all that neither Lincoln's administration nor Palmerston's ministry wanted a war, it also presaged the successful agreement with respect to right of search. So, too, did Bulloch's activities, for all the recriminations, improve communications and thus relations between Britain and the Union.

As the Civil War progressed, both Washington, involved in an increasingly protracted struggle against the Confederacy, and London, facing serious diplomatic problems in Europe, found themselves communicating on progressively more reasonable terms. Now that the United States agreed with Britain with respect to blockades, privateering, the right of search, and indeed, slavery itself, Palmerston's ministry pushed for increased cooperation at sea. In October 1863, Sir Alexander Milne, the commander of the North American and West Indies Squadron visited Washington, met Lincoln and

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Seward and had dinner with Gideon Welles, the US secretary of the navy, for precisely this purpose. Both sides regarded the negotiations a success. In January 1865, following a raid on St Albans, Vermont, by Confederate agents in Canada in October of the previous year, colonial officials passed legislation and instituted a clampdown on such activities. Seward, meantime, countermanded a Union general's orders to pursue rebels into Canada. When Congress decided to terminate the Canadian–American reciprocity treaty (1854) in retaliation for the raid, both the Lincoln administration and the Palmerston ministry tried to save it, each recognising the significance of their commercial dealings despite the Morrill tariff.⁶⁹

This growing cooperation was not unnoticed in the Confederate capital Richmond. In fact, the South regarded Britain's neutrality as so one-sided in favour of the Union that the Confederacy withdrew their representatives from Britain in October 1863. In December of that year, President Jefferson Davis, addressing the fourth session of the first Confederate congress stated: 'Great Britain has accordingly entertained with that Government [the Union] the closest and most intimate relations while refusing, on its demands ordinary amicable intercourse with us, and has ... interposed a passive though effective bar to the knowledge of our rights by other powers.'⁷⁰ Davis' opposite number, Lincoln, meantime, was satisfied with Palmerston's ministry to the extent that he wanted it to remain in power on the grounds that if it fell, it would be 'replaced by other more unfavorable to us'.⁷¹ Palmerston and Russell, meanwhile, preferred Lincoln in his 1864 re-election bid over his Democratic rival George McClellan. While in both cases this may well have been a case of sticking with the devil you know, even Seward acquired rather more respect for Britain by war's end than at the beginning. Indeed, in November 1865 he told an incredulous Sir Frederick Bruce, who had replaced Lord Lyons as minister to Washington in March of that year, that 'the interest of the two great branches of the Anglo-Saxon race on both sides of the Atlantic was to go together.'⁷²

Phillip E. Myers is fundamentally correct that the Civil War, far from being a serious disruption to British–American relations, was instead a catalyst for improved diplomatic relations, making the later rapprochement possible. Certainly, the ameliorated relations proved important in the post-war years leading up to the Treaty of Washington (1871).⁷³ Although much has been made of the fact Britain agreed to arbitration for damages accrued to American

shipping by the *Alabama* and its sister ships, the United States similarly compensated Canada for the Fenian outrages following the war. Also of overlooked importance was that the United States effectively granted what amounted to virtual diplomatic recognition of the newly formed Dominion of Canada, thus formally allowing British North America a legitimacy that many in the United States had always denied.⁷⁴ Also significant was that the United States now agreed with Britain on key aspects of belligerent rights at sea, including the right of blockades, the illegality of privateering and the right of search – all of which had been disputed in the Napoleonic Wars and in the decades afterwards. Although no one could predict it, this would be of extreme importance forty-three years later in the First World War, when Britain blockaded the Triple Alliance.⁷⁵

Civil War historians have been quick to praise the Lincoln administration's foreign policy, even if sometimes for the wrong reasons. That said, Lincoln and Seward achieved their goal of preventing foreign intervention in the war, which was certainly important, even if the claim that this applies to the Palmerston ministry is untrue. Less appreciated, however, is that by any measurement, the Palmerston ministry's response to the Civil War was both competent and intelligent, especially given the state of British–American relations before the conflict. None of the crises, from the *Trent* Affair to the Confederate shipbuilding, were allowed to escalate to the point of war. Nor were the British equivalents of the American 'War Hawks' of 1812 given succour. The long-running dispute over the right of search was settled. While meditation was considered, it was not pursued – just as the Lincoln cabinet debated, but decided against, defying Britain over the *Trent*. Similarly, Gladstone's speech at Newcastle may be paired with Seward's early diplomacy and his response to the Palmerston ministry during the *Trent* Affair. If the Confederate shipbuilding was a failure, it was a sin of omission not commission and the improved communications between the British and American governments because of it, militated against Southern activities in British North America and ultimately ensured that the United States would largely accept the British view of a belligerent's maritime rights in war and Canada's political sovereignty. The Italian diplomat and author, Daniele Varè, said that the art of diplomacy is letting someone else have your way. In many respects, this effectively sums up the Palmerston ministry's achievements in the American Civil War.

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The Palmerston Ministry's foreign policy and the American Civil War

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- 1 The origins of this tradition are discussed in my *Unlikely Allies: Britain, America and the Victorian Origins of the Special Relationship* (Continuum, 2007). A recent retelling of it is Walter Russell Mead, *God and Gold: Britain, America, and the Making of the Modern World* (Alfred A. Knopf, 2007). Similar works include: Kathleen Burk, *Old World, New World: Great Britain and America from the Beginning* (Little, Brown, 2007), and Kevin Phillips, *The Cousins' Wars: Religion, Politics and the Triumph of Anglo-America* (Basic Books, 1999). But see, also, James Belich, *Replenishing the Earth: The Settler Revolution and the Rise of Anglo-World, 1783–1939* (Oxford University Press, 2009).
- 2 Benjamin Schwarz, 'The Diversity Myth: America's Leading Export', *The Atlantic Monthly* (May 1995), pp. 57–67, 57. Schwarz is warning against this view. For a critique of American exceptionalism generally, see, Ian Tyrrell, 'American Exceptionalism in an Age of International History', *American Historical Review*, 96/4 (Oct. 1991), pp. 1031–55.
- 3 See Carl Degler, 'One Among Many: The Civil War in Comparative Perspective', the Twenty-Ninth Annual Fortenbaugh Memorial Lecture at Gettysburg College, in 1990, which explores the conflict within the context of other contemporaneous events, noting similarities between Abraham Lincoln and Otto von Bismarck and comparing the Civil War to the 1848 Sonderbundskrieg in Switzerland. Further similarities are noted by Ian Tyrrell in his *Transnational Nation: United States History in Global Perspective Since 1789* (Palgrave MacMillan, 2007), pp. 87–91. The best comparative study to date, however, is Niels Eichhorn, *Liberty and Slavery: European Separatists, Southern Secession and the American Civil War* (Louisiana State University Press, 2019). The need for more work in this area has recently been acknowledged by Erinco Dal Lago, who has written a number of

- comparative studies between the Civil War and Italian unification, including *The Age of Lincoln and Cavour: Comparative Perspectives on 19th-Century American and Italian Nation-Building* (Palgrave, 2015), and in his 'Writing the US Civil War Era into Nineteenth-Century World History', *The Journal of the Civil War Era*, 11/2 (Jun. 2021), pp. 255–71.
- 4 While there is a surfeit of offerings from this school, such as Dean Mahin, *One War at a Time: The International Dimensions of the American Civil War* (Brassey's 1999), a recent and extreme example of Americanising world history is Don Doyle, *The Cause of all Nations: An International History of the Civil War* (Basic Books, 2015). With a handful of honourable exceptions, much the same is true of most of the essays found in David T. Gleeson and Simon Lewis (eds.), *The Civil War as Global Conflict: Transnational Meanings of the American Civil War* (University of South Carolina Press, 2014).
- 5 Often referred to as the traditional interpretation, one of the most recent recitations of it is Brent E. Kinser, *The American Civil War and the Shaping of British Democracy* (Ashgate, 2011); see, also, Robert Saunders' review of the same in the *American Historical Review*, 117/3 (Jun. 2012), pp. 930–1. Other recent versions include Alfred Grant, *The American Civil War and the British Press* (McFarland & Company, 2000) and R. J. M. Blackett, *Divided Hearts: Britain and the American Civil War* (Louisiana State University Press, 2001). Charles Campbell argues the democratisation of British politics led directly to better relations between Britain and the United States in his *From Revolution to Rapprochement, 1783–1900* (Wiley, 1974).
- 6 James Ford Rhodes, *The History of the Civil War* (Macmillan, 1917), p. 261. Rhodes was one of the early creators of the traditional myth, asserting that 'They [the pro-Northerners] had as their followers the working men whom hunger stared in the face but who realised, as did the upper class, that the cause of the Union was the cause of democracy in England' (p. 69). Ironically, Rhodes' family, as he himself admitted, were 'copperheads' – that is, Northerners who supported the South.
- 7 Jasper Ridley, *Lord Palmerston* (Constable, 1970), p. 549. A more balanced account is

David F. Krein, *The Last Palmerston Government: Foreign Policy, Domestic Policies and the Genesis of 'Splendid Isolation'* (Iowa State University Press, 1978). See, also, David Brown, *Palmerston: A Biography* (Yale University Press, 2010), pp. 450–55.

- 8 This is the thesis of Howard Jones in his *Union in Peril: The Crisis over British Intervention in the Civil War* (University Press of North Carolina, 1992), *Abraham Lincoln and a New Birth of Freedom: The Union and Slavery in the Diplomacy of the Civil War* (Nebraska University Press 1999), and *Blue & Gray Diplomacy: A History of Union and Confederate Foreign Relations* (University Press of North Carolina, 2010). My review of the last appears in the *Journal of the Civil War Era*, 1/2 (Jun. 2011), pp. 277–9. A more nuanced analysis which takes account of pre-war relations is Phillip E. Myers, *Caution and Cooperation: The American Civil War in British–American Relations* (Kent State University Press, 2008).
- 9 *My English Public Opinion and the American Civil War* (Boydell and Brewer, 2003) points to the errors, factual and interpretive, of this traditional account. See, also, Peter O'Connor, *American Sectionalism in the British Mind, 1832–1863* (Louisiana State University Press, 2017) and Michael J. Turner, *Stonewall Jackson, Beresford Hope, and the Meaning of the American Civil War in Britain* (Louisiana State University Press, 2020). Although Hugh Dubrulle has abandoned his earlier faith in the traditional interpretation, he still overstates the extent of US influence upon nineteenth-century Britain in his otherwise useful study: Dubrulle, *Ambivalent Nation: How Britain Imagined the American Civil War* (Louisiana State University Press, 2018). Robert Saunders' authoritative *Democracy and the Vote in British Politics, 1864–1867: The Making of the Second Reform Act* (Ashgate, 2011), meanwhile, demonstrates how little impact the Civil War had on the 1867 Reform Act.
- 10 See, for example, Linda Colley, *Britons: Forging the Nation, 1770–1837* (Yale University Press, 1992), pp. 30–42, and Margot Finn, 'An Elect Nation? Nation, State, and Class in Modern British History', *Journal of British Studies*, 28/2 (Apr. 1989), pp. 181–91. See, also, Liah Greenfeld, *Nationalism: Five Roads to Modernity* (Harvard University Press, 1992), and Gertrude Himmelfarb, *The Roads to*

- Modernity: The British, French and American Enlightenments* (Random House, 2004).
- 11 Jackson, quoted in Donald R. Hickey, *Glorious Victory: Andrew Jackson and the Battle of New Orleans* (Johns Hopkins University Press, 2015), p. 33.
- 12 Donald Hickey, *The War of 1812: A Forgotten Conflict* (University of Illinois Press, 1989) remains the best American account of the conflict, although more recent ones include Alan Taylor, *The Civil War of 1812: American Citizens, British Subjects, Irish Rebels and Indian Allies* (Alfred A. Knopf, 2009), and J. C. A. Stagg, *The War of 1812: Conflict for a Continent* (Cambridge University Press, 2012).
- 13 See, for example, Jon Latimer, *1812: War with America* (Harvard University Press, 2007); Brian Arthur, *How Britain Won the War of 1812: The Royal Navy's Blockades of the United States, 1812–1815* (Boydell and Brewer, 2011); and Jeremy Black, *The War of 1812 in the Age of Napoleon* (University of Oklahoma Press, 2009). See, also, Duncan A. Campbell, 'The Bicentennial of the War of 1812: Reconsidering the "Forgotten Conflict"', *American Nineteenth Century History*, 16/1 (Mar. 2015), pp. 1–10.
- 14 James Fenimore Cooper, *England with Sketches of Society in the Metropolis* (Baudry's European Library, 1837), p. 211.
- 15 As Stuart Semmel reminds us, the British were divided over Napoleon at the time, in his *Napoleon and the British* (Yale University Press, 2004). By the same measure, the Americans were divided over the War of 1812. What is being referred to here are the subsequent national – and nationalist – narratives.
- 16 James Fergusson, *The Personal Observations of a Man of Intelligence: Notes of a Tour in North America in 1861*, ed. Ben Wynne (The True Bill Press, 2009), p. 105.
- 17 That many Americans believed the mere existence of British North America rendered the War of Independence incomplete has been forgotten, is one of the consequences of the later British–American accord. An introduction to the subject is Reginald C. Stuart, *United States' Expansionism and British North America, 1775–1871* (University of North Carolina Press, 1988); but see, also, Donald Warner, *The Idea of Continental Union: Agitation for the Annexation of Canada to the United States, 1849–1893* (University of Kentucky Press, 1960), and D. C. Masters, *Reciprocity, 1846–1911* (The Canadian Historical Society, 1961).
- 18 An account of the British–American imperial rivalry appears in my *Unlikely Allies: Britain, America and the Victorian Origin of the Special Relationship* (Continuum, 2007), ch. 5. Other works on the diplomacy include: Charles Campbell, *From Revolution to Rapprochement, 1783–1900* (Wiley, 1974); Kenneth Bourne, *Britain and the Balance of Power in North America 1815–1908* (University of California Press, 1967); Francis M. Carroll, *A Good and Wise Measure: The Search for the Canadian–American Boundary, 1783–1842* (University of Toronto Press, 2001); D. M. Pletcher, *The Diplomacy of Annexation: Texas, Oregon and the Mexican War* (University of Missouri Press, 1973); and Wilbur Devereux Jones, *The American Problem in British Diplomacy, 1841–1861* (University of Georgia Press, 1974).
- 19 The Latin American rivalry is discussed in several of the works listed in the endnote above, but on filibustering see, Charles Brown, *Agents of Manifest Destiny: The Lives and Times of the Filibusters* (University of North Carolina Press, 1980), and Robert E. May, *Manifest Destiny's Dark Underworld: Filibustering in Antebellum America* (University Press of North Carolina, 2002). On the freebooter's fate, see, Regis A. Courtemanche, 'The Royal Navy and the end of William Walker', *The Historian*, 30/3 (May 1968), pp. 350–65.
- 20 See Bernard Semmel, *Liberalism and Naval Strategy: Ideology, Interest and Sea Power during the Pax Britannica* (Allen & Unwin, Inc., 1986). A good recent study is Sarah A. Batterson's Ph.D. dissertation, "An ill-judged piece of business": The failure of slave trade suppression in a slaveholding republic', (University of New Hampshire Durham, 2013). Another Ph.D. dissertation which should be consulted is Mark Clyde Hunter, 'The Political Economy of Anglo–American Naval Relations: Pirates, Slavers and the Equatorial Atlantic, 1819 to 1863' (University of Hull, 2003).
- 21 For example, Anglo–French differences over the matter are discussed in Lawrence C. Jennings, 'The Interaction of French and British Antislavery, 1789–1848', *Proceedings of the Meeting of the French Colonial Historical Society*, 15 (1992), pp. 81–91.
- 22 Numbers derived from Batterson, "An ill-judged piece of business", p. 3. See, also, Anne Farrow, Joel Lang, Jennifer Frank, *Complicity: How the North Promoted, Prolonged and Profited from Slavery* (Ballantine Books, 2005), and John Harris, *The Last Slave Ships: New York and the End of the Middle Passage* (Yale University Press, 2020).
- 23 The 1824 dispute is discussed in Bradford Perkins, *Castlereagh and Adams* (University of California Press, 1964), and Betty Fladeland, *Men and Brothers: Anglo–American Anti–Slavery Cooperation* (University of Illinois Press, 1972).
- 24 Quoted in Muriel E. Chamberlain, *British Foreign Policy in the Age of Palmerston* (Longman, 1980), p. 45.
- 25 On this crisis, see, Richard D. Fulton, 'The London Times and the Anglo–American boarding dispute of 1858', *Nineteenth Century Contexts*, 17/2 (1993), pp. 133–44.
- 26 Roger Anstey credits Palmerston and Russell for being the main cause of the slave trade's decline. Roger Anstey, 'The Pattern of British abolitionism in the eighteenth and nineteenth century', in Christine Bolt and Seymour Drescher (eds.), *Anti–Slavery, Religion and Reform: Essays in Memory of Roger Anstey* (Archon Books, 1980), p. 33. See, also, John Oldfield, 'Palmerston and Anti–Slavery' in David Brown and Miles Taylor (eds.) *Palmerston Studies II* (Hartley Institute, 2007), pp. 24–38.
- 27 Bright, along with Cobden, conspired to have the Royal Navy's Africa squadron disbanded, only to be thwarted by Russell and Palmerston's resolute opposition. Christopher Lloyd, *The Navy and the Slave Trade: The Suppression of the African Slave Trade in the Nineteenth Century* (Routledge, 2012), pp. x, 97, 107, 149. The Manchester School's free trade policies presented a moral problem for British abolitionists given that slave-grown products would also be freely exchanged. See, Simon Morgan, 'The Anti–Corn Law League and British Anti–Slavery in Transatlantic Perspective, 1838–1846', *The Historical Journal*, 52/1 (Mar. 2009), pp. 87–107.
- 28 On the good ship *Richard Cobden*, see, Richard Bilger, 'The United States and Great Britain on the African slave trade, 1842–1862' (Ph.D. dissertation,

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- University of Nebraska at Omaha, 1968), p. 42.
- 29 On Anglo-American tensions during the Crimean War, see, Alan Dowty, *The Limits of American Isolation: The United States and the Crimean War* (New York University Press, 1971). See, also, Frank A. Golder, 'Russian-American relations during the Crimean War', *American Historical Review*, 31/3 (Apr. 1926), pp. 462–76. Golder is the scholar referred to in the paragraph.
- 30 Free trade, it should be recalled, was always presented as a moral policy, as the words of one of its great apostles, Richard Cobden demonstrate: 'I see in the Free-trade principle that which shall act on the moral world as a principle of gravitation in the universe – drawing men together, thrusting aside the antagonism of race, and creed, and language, and uniting us in the bonds of eternal peace.' Quoted in John Bright and James Thorold Rogers (eds.), *Speeches on Questions of Public Policy by Richard J. Cobden, M.P.*, ii (2 vols., London, 1870), pp. 362–3. On the divide between Great Britain and the United States over tariffs, see, Marc-William Palen, *The 'Conspiracy' of Free Trade: The Anglo-American Struggle over Empire and Economic Globalization, 1846–1896* (Cambridge University Press, 2016).
- 31 This is a point Myers makes in *Caution and Cooperation*.
- 32 Basil Hall, *Travels in North America in the Years 1827 and 1828*, iii (3 vols., Robert Cadell, 1829), p. 60. British travellers' accounts of widespread Anglophobia in the US throughout this period are discussed in my *Unlikely Allies: Britain, America and the Victorian Origins of the Special Relationship* (Continuum, 2007), pp. 103–10. See, also, Peter O'Connor, *American Sectionalism in the British Mind, 1832–1863* (Louisiana State University Press, 2017).
- 33 Noted by Benjamin Lease, *Anglo-American Encounters: England and the Rise of American Literature* (Cambridge University Press, 1981), p. 160. The other fundamental difference was that by the mid-nineteenth century, American abolitionists were outliers on the US political spectrum whereas British abolitionists were the mainstream. See, Fladland, *Men and Brothers*; and Clare Taylor (ed.), *British and American Abolitionists: An Episode in Anglo-American Understanding* (Edinburgh University Press, 1974).
- 34 On British migration to the United States before the Civil War, see, William E. Van Vugt, *Britain to America: Mid-nineteenth-century Immigrants to the United States* (University of Illinois Press, 1999).
- 35 See, D. P. Crook's authoritative *American Democracy in English Politics: 1815–1850* (Oxford University Press, 1965) which demolished the popular, but unrigorous, work of G. D. Lillibridge, *Beacon of Freedom: The Impact of American Democracy upon Great Britain 1830–1870* (University of Pennsylvania Press, 1954). Other studies demonstrating that British views of the United States cannot be crudely divided between a positive radical/liberal view versus a negative conservative/reactionary one, include Jon Roper, *Democracy and its Critics: Anglo-American Democratic Thought in the Nineteenth Century* (Allen Unwin, 1989) and Michael J. Turner, *Liberty and Liberticide: The Role of America in Nineteenth-Century Radicalism* (Lexington Books, 2014). See, also, Ray Boston, *British Chartists in America, 1839–1900* (Manchester University Press, 1971), especially ch. 4, 'Political disillusionment'.
- 36 Further, Irish nationalists generally favoured the Confederacy, as Joseph Hernon, Jr. points out in *Celts, Catholics, and Copperheads: Ireland Views the American Civil War* (Ohio State University Press, 1968).
- 37 The membership numbers derive from R. J. M. Blackett, *Divided Hearts: Britain and the American Civil War* (Louisiana State University Press, 2001). Blackett's dividing the British population into pro-Confederate and pro-Union camps relies upon his concentrating almost entirely on each side's partisans, to the exclusion of the wider society. Besides ignoring the diplomatic sphere entirely, and despite the irrefutable evidence that this profoundly impacted upon British views of the United States, Blackett simply assumes pro-Southerners were conservative while the pro-Northerners were radical. This leads to his mislabelling individuals such as John Arthur Roebuck and William Schaw Lindsay as conservatives, which in American terms, is akin to identifying Radical Republicans Charles Sumner and Thaddeus Stevens as pro-slavery Democrats. Other historians have also noted Blackett's misidentifications, see, for example, Lawrence Goldman, 'A Total Misconception: Lincoln, the Civil War and the British, 1860–1865', in Richard Carwardine and Jay Sexton (eds.), *The Global Lincoln* (Oxford University Press, 2011), p. 122. Blackett's claim that dissenters favoured the Union, meanwhile, is based upon the views of selected Methodists while ignoring other groups, such as the Unitarians, whom scholars have demonstrated did not support the North. See, Douglas Charles Strange, *British Unitarians against American Slavery, 1833–1865* (University of Toronto Press, 1984). Although uncritically accepted by Americanists generally and Civil War historians specifically, the claims in this study do not stand scrutiny.
- 38 As Margot Finn demonstrates in her authoritative *After Chartism: Class and Nation in English Radical Politics 1848–1874* (Cambridge University Press, 1993) British radicals always paid more attention to Europe than the United States. See, especially, p. 204n. Consequently, the United States does not much feature in nineteenth-century British radical thought compared to Europe.
- 39 On Kossuth, see Zsuzsanna Lada, 'The Invention of a Hero: Lajos Kossuth in England (1851)', *European History Quarterly*, 43/1 (2013), pp. 5–26.
- 40 Thomas J. Keiser, 'The English Press and the American Civil War', (Ph.D. dissertation, University of Reading, 1971), demonstrates that not only were the obituaries for Lincoln far from overly laudatory, in many cases, they were often quite critical. The idea of Lincoln as a British hero is the creation of the so-called great rapprochement following the First World War, when Anglo-American elites erected statues of the sixteenth president in London and Manchester during the 1920s. This was also the era in which the narrative of the traditional interpretation was essentially finalised.
- 41 Quoted in David F. Krein, *The Last Palmerston Government*, p. 62.
- 42 For British politicians' opinions on the conflict, see, Duncan A. Campbell, *English Public Opinion and the American Civil War* (Boydell & Brewer, 2003), ch. 4.
- 43 M. F. Maury to B. Franklin Minor, 14 Jan. 1863, Maury Papers, vol. 17, quoted in Warren F. Spencer, *The Confederate Navy in Europe* (University of Alabama

- Press, 1983), p. 136.
- 44 *The Spectator*, 15 Jun. 1861.
- 45 Palmerston to Russell, 9 Sep. 1861, Russell Papers, National Archives, PRO30/22/21.
- 46 Andrew Lambert, 'Winning without fighting: British Grand Strategy and its Application to the United States, 1815–1865', in B. A. Lee and K. F. Walling (eds.), *Strategic Logic and Political Rationality: Essays in Honour of Michael I. Handel* (Frank Cass, 2003), pp. 164–93.
- 47 On the *Trent*, see Gordon H. Warren, *The Fountain of Discontent: The Trent Affair and Freedom of the Seas* (Northeastern University Press, 1981) and Norman Ferris, *The Trent Affair: A Diplomatic Crisis* (University of Tennessee Press, 1977).
- 48 Howard Jones, *Union in Peril: The Crisis over British Intervention in the Civil War* (University of North Carolina Press, 1992), p. 83.
- 49 Frank Lawrence Owsley made this point in his *King Cotton Diplomacy*, 2nd ed. rev. Harriet Owsley (Chicago University Press, 1959 [1931]), pp. 77–83. D. P. Crook meanwhile notes, that 'In effect, he [Seward] had capitulated to a high British view of belligerent prerogatives, contrary to American tradition, on every issue at stake except that of adjudication.' *The North, the South and the Powers, 1861–1865* (Wiley, 1974), p. 160.
- 50 True, Seward tried to work impressment into the argument, stating that the British response to the *Trent* Affair meant they now agreed with the United States over that issue, but the comparison was dubious at best. Impressment had involved the Royal Navy seizing suspected British deserters from American ships. Mason and Slidell were neither seized on the grounds they were deserters nor compelled to serve in the US Navy. Warren H. Gordon correctly describes Seward's message as a 'monument to illogic' in *The Fountain of Discontent: The Trent Affair and Freedom of the Seas* (Northeastern University Press, 1981), p. 115.
- 51 *The Economist*, 11 Jan. 1862.
- 52 *The Illustrated London News*, 11 Jan. 1862.
- 53 Although all historians of Civil War diplomacy reference it, the last in-depth study of the treaty appears to be A. Taylor Milne, 'The Lyons–Seward Treaty of 1862', *The American Historical Review*, 38/3 (Apr. 1933), pp. 511–25. Even Myers' authoritative *Caution and Cooperation* only devotes two pages out of 332 to the treaty.
- 54 Palmerston to Russell, 24 Sep. 1861, Russell Papers, National Archives, PRO30/22/21. The American in question was John Lothrop Motley, yet another contributor to the traditional myth.
- 55 'Letter from Thomas Morgan at Newbury port goal', 1 Dec. 1861, to Abraham Lincoln, Record Group 204, Records of Pardon Attorney, Box 10, 358. National Archives. Quoted in Sarah A. Batterson, "An ill-judged piece of business", p. 188.
- 56 Despite believing the potential for conflict existed, Howard Jones nonetheless insists, 'there can be no question that the Palmerston ministry wanted to avert a war with the Union': *Union in Peril: the Crisis of British intervention in the Civil War* (University of North Carolina Press, 1992), p. 111. Earlier works such as Crook, *The North, the South and the Powers* and Krein, *The Last Palmerston Government* already held this view. This is also the position of Myers in *Caution and Cooperation* and Niels Eichhorn in 'The Intervention Crisis of 1862: A British Diplomatic Dilemma?', *American Nineteenth Century History*, 15/3 (Nov. 2014), pp. 287–310.
- 57 On the efforts of the pro-Confederates in parliament, see, Campbell, *English Public Opinion*, ch. 5 and 'Palmerston and the American Civil War', in Miles Taylor and David Brown (eds.), *Palmerston Studies II* (University of Southampton Press, 2007), pp. 144–65.
- 58 Eichhorn, 'Intervention Crisis'.
- 59 Palmerston to Russell, 14 Sep. 1862, Palmerston to Russell, 17 Sep. 1862 and Palmerston to Russell, 22 Sep. 1862, Russell Papers, National Archives, PRO30/22/14D.
- 60 Palmerston to Russell, 8 Oct. 1862, Russell Papers, National Archives, PRO30/22/14D.
- 61 For more details on the reaction to Gladstone's speech, see, Campbell, *English Public Opinion*, pp. 177–9.
- 62 Palmerston to Russell, 20 Oct. 1862, Russell Papers, National Archives, PRO30/22/14D.
- 63 Palmerston to Russell, 22 Oct. 1862, Russell Papers, National Archives, PRO30/22/14D.
- 64 Palmerston to Russell, 26 Oct. 1862, Russell Papers, National Archives, PRO30/22/14D.
- 65 Palmerston to Russell, 3 Nov. 1862, Russell Papers, National Archives, PRO30/22/14D.
- 66 Bulloch's memoirs make it clear that he had to conceal his activities from the British government. James D. Bulloch, *The Secret Service of the Confederate States in Europe; Or, How the Confederate Cruisers Were Equipped* (2 vols., Bentley and Son, 1883).
- 67 Frank J. Merli, *The Alabama, British Neutrality and the American Civil War*, ed. David M. Fahey (University of Indiana Press, 2004), chs. 2–6
- 68 The definitive account of the Alabama saga is Merli, *The Alabama*, chs. 2–6, as well as his *Great Britain and the Confederate Navy, 1861–1865* (Indiana University Press, 1970). See, also, Warren F. Spencer, *The Confederate Navy in Europe* (University of Alabama Press, 1983).
- 69 See, Myers, *Caution and Cooperation*, chs. 7–8.
- 70 Fourth Session of the First Congress, 7 Dec. 1863. *The Messages and Papers of Jefferson Davis and the Confederacy*, ed. James D. Richardson, i (2 vols., Chelsea House, 1966), p. 357.
- 71 Lincoln's comments recorded in Gideon Welles, *Diary of Gideon Welles: Secretary of the Navy Under Lincoln and Johnson*, ed. Edgar Thaddeus Welles, i (3 vols., Houghton Mifflin, 1909), pp. 451–2.
- 72 Bruce to Clarendon, 30 Nov. 1865, Clarendon Papers, quoted in Myers, *Caution and Cooperation*, p. 185.
- 73 This is the argument of Phillip E. Myers in *Dissolving Tensions: Rapprochement and Resolution in British–American–Canadian Relations in the Treaty of Washington Era, 1865–1914* (Kent University Press, 2015).
- 74 The argument that the Treaty of Washington represented 'virtual diplomatic recognition' of Canada by the United States was made to the author by Professor Francis M. Carroll of the University of Manitoba in an email.
- 75 On the US, Britain and Germany on neutral and belligerent rights at sea, see, Justin Quinn Olmstead, *The United States' Entry into the First World War: The Role of British and German Diplomacy* (The Boydell Press, 2018).