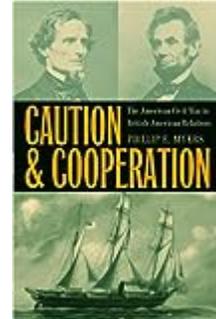


Phillip E. Myers. *Caution and Cooperation: The American Civil War in British-American Relations.* Kent: Kent State University Press, 2008. 332 pp. \$55.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-87338-945-7.



Reviewed by Charles M. Hubbard (Department of History, Lincoln Memorial University)

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Caution and Cooperation: The American Civil War in British-American Relations

Phillip E. Myers in *Caution and Cooperation* places Anglo-American relations during the Civil War in the larger context of nineteenth-century diplomacy. He postulates that there was little possibility that Great Britain would intervene in the American conflict. He incorporates in this study both Union and Confederate diplomatic efforts to influence the decisions of the Palmerston government. He relies on the traditional interpretations of Abraham Lincoln and William H. Seward to assess the Union response to the numerous diplomatic confrontations that tended to strain relations between the two Atlantic rim nations.

Myers relates a number of non-British/U.S. factors operating independently that he believes influenced Great Britain to avoid war. These include British public opinion influenced by the Greek and Italian unification movements and the persistent threat perceived from Napoleon III and France. He suggests that after the Crimean War the balance of power in Europe was fragile and the ambitions of France to disrupt stability in Europe and particularly within the British Empire required the overwhelming attention of the British government. He

further argues that a retreat from the previous military budget and even an increasing rejection of the spirit of martial arts led Great Britain to reject any military option to settle disputes between the two. Myers credits Palmerston with an almost benevolent decision not to intervene in the American war to exploit the situation to further British interest. In fact, while the Americans were involved in a life- or-death struggle for the very existence of their country, both sides were prepared to resist any British expansion into the region.

Myers concludes that the rapprochement that emerged in the nineteenth century in Anglo-American relations was strained, but not threatened by the outbreak of civil war in the United States. This position, he suggests, makes this study “contrary to the past three decades of histories written on both sides of the Atlantic that have viewed civil war diplomacy as self-contained and paid little attention to antebellum or postwar relations” (p. 5). He seems to imply that the outcome of diplomatic negotiations on a variety of events and occurrences was predetermined. While this concept has merit and is persuasively argued by Myers, the evidence

presented does not support the absolute conclusions presented throughout this book.

The narrative reads much like a historiographical essay and is based solidly on the existing literature. In his effort to present the opinions and conclusions of historians that both share and dispute his conclusions, Myers often produces apparent contradictions. This style may present problems for the reader unfamiliar with the literature. Myers is correct when he points out that most of the existing studies are limited in scope and their analysis is usually based on one or two diplomatic incidents. This book does incorporate the specialized literature in an inclusive narrative that is valuable to an understanding of the larger historical context in which the rapprochement occurred. However, this approach drives Myers to a reliance on secondary sources. Even when primary sources are used they are often the much-quoted and trite statements used for years by historians to support a variety of differing conclusions. This study should provoke further inquiry and research in the primary sources to analyze the multitude of questions and issues still open for debate on this fascinating subject.

The focus of this study is the diplomacy of Great Britain and the United States during the American Civil War. It could be argued that Myers, by devoting almost two hundred pages to the Civil War, places the diplomacy of the period at the heart of the British-United States rapprochement of the nineteenth century. It is not completely clear if Myers believes that improved and consistent relations between the two nations were determined by the diplomacy during the Civil War or if the realities of a modernizing world were responsible for the rapprochement. Although the diplomacy of the Civil War, as the title suggests, receives the lion's share of his attention, Myers does not neglect the larger international environment. He correctly argues that the strained relations caused by the war in America dominated the American experience not only in the nineteenth century but well into the twentieth century. The results of both Civil War diplomacy and the rapprochement that followed con-

tinue to influence United States foreign policy.

Myers concludes that the diplomacy of the Civil War did have a positive impact on the settlement of the disputes in the postwar years. He seems to credit these negotiated settlements with the lessons of pacification and non-threatening diplomacy acquired during the difficult years of the war. As an example, he points to the realistic approach to diplomacy practiced by both potential protagonists during the Alabama claims negotiations. In his discussion of the emerging balance-of-power politics of Europe, he fails to identify a non-European power, the United States, as holding the balance of power. The U.S. army that emerged from the Civil War was three times as large as before the war. Much of the postwar army in the United States consisted of southern whites and African Americans who chose to enlist in the army as a career. The antebellum army was led by professional officers seasoned during the war. It is unrealistic to discount this formidable force as a factor in the international arena. The U.S. navy launched a ship-building program that increased U.S. influence around the world. While Myers acknowledges this reality, apparently he does not see it as constituting a forceful, if unspoken, threat should diplomacy fail. He correctly identifies the cultural and economic links between the two nations that support his theory of continuity and constant movement toward friendly relations.

The major contribution of this book is the explanation of the seemingly very divergent components that taken as a whole comprise a strong commitment by both Great Britain and the United States to support and sustain their common interests. This study is an important contribution to the literature of the nineteenth century Anglo-American relations. It is well researched and documented and it is supported by a comprehensive bibliography. While the question remains open to debate, Myers has suggested a reinterpretation of the diplomacy of the era. *Caution and Cooperation* provides a comprehensive overview of Civil War diplomacy and places these diplomatic activities in an appropriate historical context.

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