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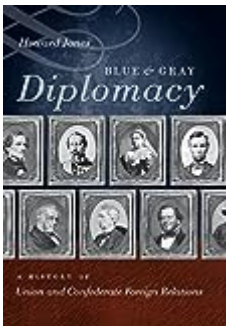

Howard Jones. *Blue and Gray Diplomacy: A History of Union and Confederate Foreign Relations.* The Littlefield History of the Civil War Era Series. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2010. xiv + 416 pp. $30.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-8078-3349-0.

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Commissioned by Martin P. Johnson (Miami University Hamilton)

A Tale of Three Countries

In *Blue and Gray Diplomacy*, Howard Jonesâs research makes clear that the lack of scholarly attention paid to foreign relations during the Civil War makes for thin understanding of this great crisis. Even the best general Civil War texts scantily cover diplomacy, relative to military operations. Yet wars are usually greater than the sum of their battle parts. Moreover, to state that slavery was the base cause of the war misses an even greater point: the Industrial Revolution, manifested in good part in Englandâs, Franceâs, and Americaâs textile mills, and the cotton gin economy were the reasons slavery became entrenched.

So the sad fact is that the worldâs industrial might got off to a potent start by fostering a morally perverted economic system. As Stephen Yafa importantly points out, for years Southerners had threatened secession over the slavery issue, yet the British textile industry, viewing this, failed to âdevelop early alternative sources for their raw material. A country so devoted to sea power might easily have envisioned a successful blockade and the possible loss of $55 million in salaries for workers in Englandâs 2,650 textile factories.â[1] Of course, this textile empire had been operating all the while the British antislavery movement had been in full swing.

By 1860, America was supplying 85 percent of cotton for British mills and 93 percent of French supplies. Nearly 20 percent of the British population was employed in textile mills. After the outbreak of the Civil War, by 1862, nearly half a million Lancashire residents were supported by organized charity. So only when one puts the diplomacy of the Civil War into the context of the Industrial Revolution, not just the textile industry, does its true status as the âthird partyâ to the war become clear. This is the most important understanding that emerges from a reading of *Blue and Gray Diplomacy*. In other words, sometimes events that do not occur are as important as those that do, in this case British and French intervention in the Civil War, as Jones demonstrates.[2]

Beyond this epiphany, one wonders what the British thinking, in terms of their initial and long-held belief that Confederate independence was a fait accompli. On

New Yearâs Day 1861, Lord Palmerston, the British prime minister, told Queen Victoria that âthe Unionâs dissolution was inescapableâ (p. 38). To their minds, the Union could not conquer and hold the whole extent of the Confederate territory. British officials never understood the Whig/Republican devotion to Henry Clayâs âUnion,â which was the secondary political divide of the war. They also never understood Abraham Lincolnâs early political need to declare preservation of the Union as the warâs major objective. Once the moral virtue of an antislavery objective was set aside, many British saw the war as one for Southern subjugation and raw commercialism. The British government deeply offended the Lincoln administration by declaring neutrality, according the Confederacy belligerent status, and repeatedly meeting with Confederate emissaries. (Although through the naval blockade Lincoln had conducted an act of war, that act was against an insurgent force; the British might have demurred to sustain good relations with the United States, particularly since neutrality was flouted by their own citizens who served on blockade runners and Confederate raiders, which Jones fails to note.)

British officials also seemed not to understand their own interests in not being more pro-Union from the beginning of the war. Londonâs dim views and misunderstanding of U.S. resolve and military, economic, and manpower might, and its strict neutrality stance threatened Britainâs short- and long-term interests: railroad and financial investments in the United States as well as their growing dependence on U. S. wheat and other foodstuffs. The British failed to recognize that war contracts with the United States would be beneficial, that internationally recognized shipping rights would also apply to the Royal Navy, that the combined power of U.S. ironclads and Dahlgren guns could decimate British assets, and that noninterference could encourage a domestic insurrection. *Economist* editors were flabbergasted that the Confederates thought Britain would interfere in the American war âon the side of those [who British merchants] deem willfully and fearfully in the wrong, simply for the sake of buying their cotton at a cheaper rateâ (p. 13). Yet, as Jones does point out, in the end both Britain and France did realize that nothing the Confederacy could offer was worth war with the United States.

Beyond these major points, Jonesâs book comprises a veritable thicket of political analysis, largely assessing relations between Britain, France, and America, although Russia is discussed as well. For example, he notes that the 1862 Morrill Tariff did much to sour Anglo-American relations at a time when they were already acid. He shows that after the Confederacy declared an unofficial embargo on cotton, many British took much umbrage at this rather blatant effort to extort recognition and it begged the argument that the Northern naval blockade was not just a paper one. And he maintains that surprisingly the Emancipation Proclamation initially infuriated British and Continental citizens, mainly because it left Border State slaves untouched. (In this the Europeans erred: Lincoln could only issue a military order in areas governed by martial law, that is, the revolted states.)

The British were squeezed in a political vise; for them to recognize the Confederacy, the Confederate States of America had to prove its national legitimacy on the battlefield, which it never did. But then once legitimacy was proven, why would the Confederacy need British recognition? âThe Confederacy came to fear that it would get no help abroad until it required noneâ (p. 19). Lord Palmerston remained firm in his resolve to await Confederate legitimization, which is largely what kept Britain from affording recognition and intervening, in whatever way.

Jonesâs work details many not well-known facts and events. He presents a valuable discussion on the 1856 Declaration of Paris, which defined neutral rights. He includes information about the ten thousand British troops who were deployed to reinforce the Canadian border and the supplies that were sent to Gibraltar for ships potentially bound for the United States, in the aftermath of the HMS *Trent* affair in which United States Navy Captain Charles Wilkes took Confederate emissaries James M. Mason and John Slidell off *Trent*. Jones shows that Germany also suffered greatly from a âcotton famine,â and that the Lincoln administration may have sent two million dollars to help Benito Juarez fight Louis Napoleonâs troops, which had invaded Mexico. In organizing this material, Jones first details political views expressed in Britain and France at the outbreak of the war; then discusses Britainâs declaration of neutrality; goes on to the *Trent* affair; outlines Britainâs and Franceâs cooperation and consultations regarding intervention to stop the war; covers the effects of the issuance of the Emancipation Proclamation; and goes on to describe Napoleonâs grand design to reestablish a French empire in North America, in which he was looking to have the Confederacy serve as his buffer for his puppet state in Mexico. Although the Emancipation Proclamation blunted British moves, it spurred Napoleonâs ambitions in Mexico.

Despite the considerable analysis Jones presents, much of which is very repetitive, as I read further in *Blue*

and Gray Diplomacy I became somewhat disappointed. The work largely focuses on the consideration of aid being provided to the Confederacy by Britain and France, a few lobbyists being informal emissaries with no diplomatic standing. More material on Union dealings with Britain and France was needed, especially since Charles Francis Adams was a superb ambassador. Moreover, what Unionists, American or otherwise, were lobbying the British government? From the few remarks quoted, liberals John Bright and Richard Cobden seemed two who had politically realistic views of the conflict, unlike the Confederates.

Moreover, Jones provides little information on British mass political opinion. Although the book notes the unemployment rate of textile workers, it virtually ignores the strength of political opinion among the workers, which became particularly important in light of the Emancipation Proclamation. What popular political pressures were being put on cabinet and Parliament members? How politically isolated were they? Jones also never fully explains how the British government maintained civil order in light of the unemployment rate. Two answers are that the mill owners did develop alternative sources for cotton in Brazil, China, Egypt, and India, and that workers benefited from U.S. war contracts. But it would seem that if a nation envisioned a need to go to war over its cotton shortages, a lengthier explanation as to why that need diminished should have been given.

Regardless of the above caveats, this is a very valuable, densely researched, well-written, and thought-provoking book. Many more points could have been made in this review to the myriad issues presented in the work. We now just need to hear from more writers on the international aspects of the Civil War.

Notes

[1]. Stephen Yafa, *Cotton: The Biography of a Revolutionary Fiber* (New York: Penguin Group, 2005), 168-169. The steam engine was applied to textile machinery in 1790 (p. 64).

[2]. Ibid.

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