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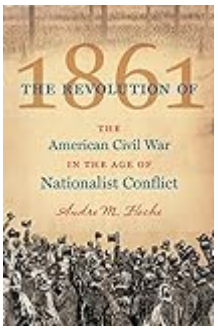

Andre M. Fleche. *The Revolution of 1861: The American Civil War in the Age of Nationalist Conflict.* Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2012. xii + 204 pp. $39.95 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-8078-3523-4.

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The American Civil War in a World of Nation-Making

Andre Flecheâs first-rate study of how the European revolutions of 1848 influenced the American Civil War arrives amidst recent calls by scholars to internationalize the history of Americaâs great conflict.[1] Fleche argues that the legacy of the 1848 revolutions influenced Union and Confederate conceptions of nationalism, as the competing sides participated in the âtransatlantic dialogueâ (p. 3) over the definition of the modern nation-state. Americans believed that their revolution provided an example for the world, and used the success or failures of subsequent European revolutionary struggles to measure the viability of American republicanism as a world model. The continental breadth of the 1848 revolutions, in addition to the thousands of influential European immigrants that came to America in their wake, made these revolutions the most salient for American observers. Fleche contends that examining the Civil War from an international context reveals how global events âshaped American ideologyâ (p. 8), how European class and labor debates influenced Northerners to support emancipation but balk at racial equality, and the dark compatibility of nationalism with racial subordination.

During the Civil War, both sides tried to cast their respective causes as part of the broader nineteenth-century world revolutionary struggle. Although the United States had long applauded European goals for national self-determination, it nonetheless defended the upholding of central authority. Northerners likened their attempt to quell Southern separatism to revolutions in France, Austria, and the German states that sought to overthrow titled nobility and create unified nations based on democratic principles. The Union compared Southern slaveholders to landed European aristocrats who had stifled progressive revolutionaries, and argued that slavery gave this small group outsized political and economic power akin to the European feudalism that was anathema to liberal democracy and equality. The North also linked national order to liberty, claiming that the emancipation of Southern slaves would usher in the type of free-labor society that would also free the European proletariat from the power of privileged oligarchies. By con-

trast, the Confederacy seized upon the right of national self-determination that underlay the European revolutions to justify seceding from the North. It embraced a âwhite republicanism,â in which the enslavement of the black laboring class inoculated the South from the disease of âred republicanismâ promoted by socialist and communist European radials who threatened property rights and individual freedom. Confederates argued that equality portended anarchy and chaos by erasing the natural distinctions of race and class that were the bulwarks of social and political stability. They pointed to the Unionâs supposed obsession with free labor and abolitionism as evidence that the North was infected with European red republicanism.

Fleche supports his argument for the importance of 1848 by highlighting the significant roles European revolutionaries played in shaping American nationalist debates in the years leading up to the Civil War, and showing their continued influence after its outbreak. In the 1850s, American audiences welcomed prominent revolutionaries, but as these exiles waded into American politics, Northerners and Southerners argued over how the legacy of 1848 should shape domestic disputes. Hungarian hero Louis Kossuth won cheers for praising Americaâs revolutionary legacy, but managed to irritate abolitionists by sidestepping slavery, and conservative Southerners by calling for escalated American intervention in European revolutionary affairs. Irish nationalist John Mitchell earned Southern applause by linking his support for Irish self-determination to a defense of slavery and Southern self-government. German forty-eighters like Carl Schurz, however, claimed that slavery spawned landholding aristocrats similar to the ones revolutionaries tried to overthrow in Europe.

These divisions continued as European Americans took sides during the Civil War. Fleche uses St. Louis, in the divided border state of Missouri, as an example to show how their differing interpretations of the legacy of 1848 informed their sectional allegiances. The cityâs German forty-eighters rallied to the Union, while the Irish residents sided with the Confederacy. The two groups came to blows during the Camp Jackson Affair, when four Union regiments, three of which were commanded by Germans, clashed with belligerent civilians in the streets of a heavily Irish neighborhood, leaving several citizens and soldiers dead. German and Irish Americans countrywide chose sides along similar lines. Irish in New York, New England, and the Upper Midwest broke with their Missouri brethren by supporting the Union, but Fleche argues that they nonetheless shared the Southern Irishâs sympathy for the Confederacy by relating its struggle to Irelandâs struggle for independence from Britain. They sided with the Union on the basis that only a strong, united America could aid Ireland against monarchial England. Despite their divided loyalties, European Americans nonetheless agreed that Americaâs Civil War reverberated with the same issues of individual rights, freedom, and national self-determination that had characterized the revolutions of 1848.

Fleche convincingly argues that world events shaped the ideological course of the American Civil War, and shows that many Americans were interested in their nationâs place within the broader scheme of nineteenth-century nation-making. Yet, he may at times overemphasize the influence of international events on European Americansâ allegiances during the conflict, therefore underplaying the importance of more localized issues. For example, although he contends that Irish in St. Louis supported the Confederacy out of fears that âideological Germansâ who were âas oppressive as the Englishâ (p. 46) threatened the republic, David Gleeson has shown in *The Irish in the South: 1815-1877* that localized racial issues, economic opportunities, and religion drove Irish to embrace Southern culture and support the Confederacy. Anne Bailey, in *Invisible Southerners: Ethnicity in the Civil War*, similarly demonstrates that Germans in Texas chose wartime sides depending on their views of various domestic, rather than international issues.[2] One also wonders if, Flecheâs argument aside, Northerners really needed European events to alert them to the dangers posed by a Southern slave power that they had long considered a threat to democracy. These points notwithstanding, Flecheâs book is a valuable contribution to Civil War scholarship, and should inspire other scholars to examine the conflict in terms of world, rather than just American, history.

Notes

[1]. See âNew Approaches to Internationalizing the History of the Civil War Era,â special issue,*The Journal of the Civil War Era* 2, no. 2 (2012).

[2]. David Gleeson, *The Irish in the South, 1815-1877* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2001); Anne Bailey, *Invisible Southerners: Ethnicity in the Civil War* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2006).

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