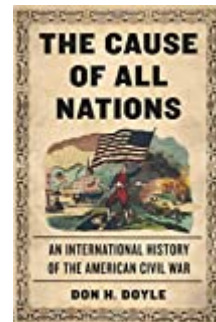


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Don H. Doyle. *The Cause of All Nations: An International History of the American Civil War.* New York: Basic Books, 2015. 401 pp. \$29.99 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-465-02967-9.



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Commissioned by Margaret Sankey (Air War College)

Despite its reputation for “American exceptionalism” scholarship of the American Civil War has experienced a transnational turn for several years by now. Studies of the international rise and fall of slavery, transatlantic currents of antislavery and proslavery thought, immigrants escaping repression on one continent in order to fight it on another, competing dreams of hemispheric expansion, the consolidation of a global capitalist order, to name a few examples, have deeply enriched our understanding of the transformations of the nineteenth century.

Don Doyle’s *The Cause of All Nations: An International History of the American Civil War* synthesizes much of this transnational scholarship while contributing the author’s own case for the primacy of ideology, both as a driver of the American Civil War internally and as a rallying point for potential allies abroad. The book is eminently readable for academic and lay historians alike, and comes alive with the contingencies of diplomatic missions and street demonstrations in the capitals of Europe.

There were, as Doyle remarks, not one but two causes in circulation among European audiences: a Union cause that belatedly embraced the universal language of liberal

republicanism and a Confederate cause linking itself to the post-1848 reactionary turn among the courts (especially Catholic ones) of Europe. Just as important, however, was the articulation of causes—any cause—beyond the mere survival of particular nation-states.

At the heart of the book stands Giuseppe Garibaldi, the Italian republican and general who led the *Risorgimento* from Sicily up the Italian peninsula and who, at a critical moment in Italy’s own struggle, offered his services to lead the Union army. Giving Garibaldi pause in 1861 was the reluctance of Lincoln administration officials to stake an ideological claim for their cause. Famously, and for myriad practical and constitutional reasons, Lincoln insisted through the first year of the war that the Union was not fighting to emancipate the slaves. Garibaldi insisted that Lincoln declare for universal emancipation before coming to the president’s aid.

While some diplomats, like Carl Schurz in Madrid, openly sought the assistance of 1848ers and republican activists to embrace the Union cause, Lincoln administration protocol as expressed through Secretary of State William Seward emphasized caution for fear of alienating key European allies. In Britain, Lord Palmerston’s Liberal government warily eyed the loss of cotton in English

textile mills. In France, Emperor Napoleon III sought his own "Latin Strategy" by installing the Austrian Maximilian as emperor of Mexico. Whatever reservations these nations possessed about defending a slave-owning power like the Confederacy—Britain and France had abolished slavery in their empires in the 1830s and 1840s—they nevertheless jealously guarded their material and imperial interests.

Sensing this conservative opportunity, Confederate president Jefferson Davis sent envoys to Europe seeking recognition and military aid. They met with mixed success, partly because of poor communication and ideological incoherence. At certain moments, however, these Confederate diplomats came close to the mark. First during the famous and oft-discussed Trent affair of late 1861, where the Union navy captured Confederate diplomats James Mason and John Slidell aboard a British ship. A second and more revealing moment came in the fall of 1862 as Lord Palmerston began preparations for recognition and intervention on the South's behalf. Here is where Doyle is at his best, balancing the closed-door conversations between conservative European aristocrats and Confederate diplomats with the pressure of the street behind John Bright's British democratization movement, France's exiled revolutionaries and, of course, Garibaldi. A quixotic appeal by mostly Protestant (and in Secretary of State Judah Benjamin's case, Jewish) Confederate diplomats to the utterly anti-liberal Pope Pius IX added a layer of transnational intrigue.

It may be up for debate whether or not Garibaldi's defenders came to the rescue of the Union in the nick of time in late 1862, as news of the Emancipation Proclamation trickled into Europe. What is unquestionably true, however, is that Union and Confederate appeals to "Britain" and to "France" (not to mention Italy, Austria, Germany, Spain, and Russia) operated on multiple levels at once. Despite the autocratic veneer of European politics in the early 1860s, revolutionary and republican currents churned just under the surface, enough to terrify any erstwhile Confederate-supporting aristocrat to pause before intervening.

Doyle's emphasis upon the *cause* of all nations—above and beyond mere interests of, and conventional diplomacy between, nations—makes a historiographical mark on a more conventional but still-fresh question: Did the Lincoln administration and Republicans in Congress embrace emancipation for deeper ideological reasons or

simply as a means to win the war? What were the motivations of leaders of the Union? Doyle clearly believes that the ideological stakes were every bit as high as Garibaldi and Laboulaye and Schurz made them out to be.

But the concluding chapter—"Republican Risorgimento"—shows the limitation of this approach. Doyle cites the failure of France's Mexico policy, the British Reform Act of 1867, the final achievement of Italian unity, and the ultimate collapse of Napoleon's empire in 1871 as evidence that the Union's vision of universal, liberal republicanism emerged triumphant around the world. And yet, one of the case studies that chronologically parallels the United States–Prussia's unification of Germany under Bismarck's decidedly anti-liberal plan—suggests that the cause of American republicanism was only partially embraced in the wake of the Civil War. Though thousands of refugees escaped the post-1848 crackdown in Baden, Frankfurt, and Berlin, many more undoubtedly hoped to carry on the fight at home. Even if they were ultimately unsuccessful in creating a liberal united Germany, their voices would have helped nuance the argument a bit.

Add to this the centralizing and authoritarian strains running from Paraguay to Japan in the late 1860s and it becomes even less clear that the cause of republicanism emanated out from the victorious Union in the late 1860s. Even Canada, cited by Doyle as attaining Dominion status as a kind of anti-imperialist move by Great Britain, actually demonstrates the continuing reservations held about republicanism. John MacDonald, one of the architects of the 1867 confederation plan, specifically cited the bloody American Civil War in his call to retain the British monarch as ultimate sovereign, for fear that actual popular sovereignty would lead to anarchy.

These are questions to be taken up in future scholarship. For now, *The Cause of All Nations* sets the terms of the debate over the international significance of the American Civil War quite clearly. The war meant more than mere national survival or, as the Confederacy sought, regional self-determination, much as those questions were relevant in mid-nineteenth-century Europe. Diplomats, intellectuals, and masses in European streets paid close attention to the meaning of the American Civil War. It is essential that historians today consider the American Civil War in light of global events as well.

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