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in the Humanities & Social Sciences

Gerald Horne. *Negro Comrades of the Crown: African Americans and the British Empire Fight the U.S. before Emancipation.* New York: New York University Press, 2012. v + 361 pp. $39.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-8147-7349-9.

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Commissioned by Margaret Sankey

Gerald Horne argues that Great Britain consistently attempted to threaten U.S. national security between the end of the American Revolution and beginning of the Civil War by attempting to sow discontent in America's slave population. Horne's work joins the recent trend in early American historiography to place the United States within a global context. The author uses this new approach to portray the "often tortured diplomatic relationship" between the United States and Great Britain in the context of a relationship dominated by slavery and abolition instead of more traditional diplomatic concerns (p. 5). With this effort, Horne effectively rewrites the history of U.S.-British diplomatic relations in the period and introduces a fresh new argument both as to why Great Britain moved toward abolition in the 1830s and how it attempted to compete globally with the United States–by using America's own slaves to threaten the young nation's very existence.

In his first argument, Horne depicts the rising abolition movement in Great Britain as one that had significant public support. However, he portrays the war against the slave trade in the early nineteenth century and the movement against slavery itself that culminated in the 1833 Abolition Act as having strong diplomatic imperatives aligned with it which sped its adoption. Horne contends that abolition in Great Britain became a diplomatic issue as the empire consistently relied on black troops to protect its overseas possessions. The use of these troops tipped the racial dynamic within the empire and convinced government officials that maintaining an artificial racial hierarchy would handicap larger national goals. Abolition released the British from that restriction (one with which the United States still dealt) as it would no longer have to spend significant amounts of time, money, and attention defending against slave rebellion. All of those resources could then be devoted toward battling the United States on multiple diplomatic, political, and economic fronts. At the same time, the British began to make foreign policy decisions based not only on race but also on the potential to weaken the United States. Slave patrols along the African coast and support for abolition in the United States from Britain would further weaken the U.S. economy and therefore the country's ability to project power internationally.

However, the major focus of Horne's book rests in the link between fears of southern masters over slave revolt and familiar diplomatic scuffles between the United States and Great Britain. Horne places much of the relationship between the two powers within the context of slavery by communicating that the British hoped to weaken the United States by enticing slaves to revolt or run away to British territory. In addition, the British hoped to flex their imperial muscles by encircling the United States by its own territory (Canada, Bahamas, and Bermuda) or through its control of puppet states. Horne deeply explores the support the British provided Haiti after its independence (which Americans interpreted as an abolitionist infused mission) and the British interest in the annexation of Texas. Horne places the older argument that southerners feared British control over the Republic of Texas within the context of other U.S.-British border and trade disputes to argue that throughout the 1830s and 1840s, Americans frequently defined their relationship to the British Empire with slavery in the background and feared the spread of abolitionism and British domination of the hemisphere. The 1841 USS *Creole* incident and southern concerns over the presence of free black British seamen in its ports frame Horne's discussion of how, as the nation moved closer to Civil War, fear of British abolitionism entering the United States or enticing southern slaves to flee to the Bahamas, Haiti, or Canada dominated diplomatic conversations.

Horne's work provides readers with a new framework to imagine diplomatic relationships between world powers in the nineteenth century, something especially important as historians begin to blend racial, cultural, and social history with diplomatic history in an effort to

globalize American history. Although the author could have provided some additional framing with regard to other diplomatic relationships the United States had over slavery (France, Spain, and Mexico seem to be natural fits here), Horne's meticulously researched monograph will provoke thought and discussion on the relationship between the peculiar institution and diplomacy in this important and growing field of study.

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