

H-Net Reviews

in the Humanities & Social Sciences



Peter O'Connor. *American Sectionalism in the British Mind, 1832-1863.* Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2017. 280 pp. \$47.95 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-8071-6815-8.

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Published on H-War (September, 2019)

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“We may be for the North or the South; but we have no doubt of this—that Jefferson Davis and the other Confederate leaders have made an army; they are making, it appears, a navy; and they have made what is more than either—they have made a nation.”[1] These famous words by Chancellor of the Exchequer William Ewart Gladstone in Newcastle upon Tyne are the linchpin upon which Peter O'Connor constructs his argument.

Engaging the growing literature of US in the world and transnational Civil War scholarship, O'Connor faults scholars for focusing too narrowly on the Civil War years, which skews their understanding of British public opinion.[2] By looking at leading British intellectuals and their writings about the United States, especially travelogues, O'Connor argues that the prewar discourse regarding politics, slavery, and sectionalism influenced British attitudes concerning the secession crisis and Civil War, leading to a reluctance to support either section. He closes the book in 1863 when the implementation of the Emancipation Proclamation permanently changed British opinion in favor of the United States. Divided into two sections, the book starts with the Nullification Crisis of 1832, tackling “issues of race, slavery, and labor” in chapter 1, perceptions of “US ethno-cultural regional identity” in chapter 2, and “political policy, political culture, and states’ rights” in chapter 3 (pp. 8, 9).

British observers frequently reported the paternal attitude southern planters had toward their chattel, thus downplaying the human carnage of slavery. Furthermore, to these Britons, guilt for slavery did not rest solely at the door of the plantation mansion but with the entire

country that tolerated and profited from slavery’s products. In a long-overdue nuanced fashion, O'Connor explains that British perceptions that the southern identity centered on slavery did not translate automatically to a pro-northern attitude. This part of O'Connor’s argument is reminiscent of what Duncan A. Campbell illustrates in his works on British public opinion (*English Public Opinion and the American Civil War* [2003] and *Unlikely Allies: Britain, America and the Victorian Origins of the Special Relationship* [2007]): anti-southern views did not automatically mean an embrace of the other section.

Next, O'Connor engages ethnicity and geography as Britons looked for an image of themselves in the United States. Observers frequently invoked a Puritan New England and Cavalier South to illustrate the distinctive characters of the two sections. Complicating matters was that the northern parts of the country included a diverse immigrant population, diluting its British heritage. Therefore, pure Britishness was located in the Cavalier, ethnically cohesive southern parts. Confounding things was the Irish population in cities like New York, O'Connor argues. British anti-Irish and anti-Catholic attitudes translated into concerns about the northern section. Finally, O'Connor’s subjects indicated a detailed understanding of politics in the United States that escalated sectional divisions. In the course of this discussion, O'Connor notes how Britons continued to perceive of the democratic system in the United States as mob rule and even more how some, but certainly not all, viewed democracy as a northern phenomenon and saw an aristocratic society in the southern states. However, the detailed engagement Britons had with the states’ rights issues in the United

States caused many to view the growing crisis from a constitutional point of view, rather than a moral slavery-based argument. Thus, O'Connor provides an important overview of antebellum British opinions about the United States.

In the second part of the book, O'Connor chronicles the changing British attitude in 1861 and 1862. Based on thirty years of matured understanding, Britons located many pitfalls with the northern government, such as the anti-free trade Morrill Tariff, as well as the absence of abolition as a war goal, which allowed Confederate sympathies to spread. As long as slavery was not a war goal, Confederate and Confederate-sympathetic propagandists could liberally build on British prewar attitudes of the United States and planter paternalism. The reports on the use of Irish soldiers and the significant number of foreign-born soldiers permitted the return to arguments about the Britishness of the southern part of the country. However, again embracing a nuanced approach and reminding readers of Campbell's work, O'Connor cautions that "antipathy toward the Union" did not mean "sympathy for the Confederacy" (p. 176). Finally, O'Connor notes that "disillusion with immediate emancipation in Britain ... stemm[ed] from the nation's experience in the West Indies" (p. 146). Nevertheless, O'Connor concludes that Abraham Lincoln's Emancipation Proclamation forced Britons to reevaluate their view on the sectionally torn United States and permanently aligned them with the US.

O'Connor's work fits into an emerging pattern of scholarship that has moved away from looking at the Civil War era's diplomatic relations confined by the four years of fighting. Instead, like Philip E. Myers (*Caution and Cooperation: The American Civil War in British-American Relations* [2008]) and Jay Sexton (*Debtor Diplomacy Finance and American Foreign Relations in the Civil War Era, 1837-1873* [2005]), O'Connor believes the key to understanding British wartime attitudes lies in the antebellum years. However, O'Connor does not explain why he starts in 1830, considering that sectional issues and geographic differences existed well before then. Similarly, how much does the focus on a select group of intellectuals and their travelogues skew the understanding? Did they have an influence outside of their specific intellectual strata? How much did they influence the middle strata of society and even the working class? While these are important intellectual components, there is very little politics. Prime Minister Lord John Palmerston is only mentioned about a dozen times and Foreign Secretary Lord John Russell even less, yet these were the leading

politicians in the country during the Civil War. Did they accept and read these works?

American Sectionalism in the British Mind is an appreciated and critical addition to the transnational literature of the Civil War era. The book forces scholars interested in the transnational and diplomatic aspects of the era to consider the long durée of political, diplomatic, and intellectual narratives and no longer engage solely on the four years of war. Finally, this book hopefully will encourage other studies. Besides the pantheon of travelogues used by O'Connor, there are other famous ones by Alexis de Tocqueville and his travel companion Gustave de Beaumont that critically assessed the political and racial landscape in the United States. How did these two and others affect French perceptions? How did antebellum literature influence people in other countries in regard to the United States? Importantly, O'Connor alters the narrative from the US-centric transnational account available so far and looks at the people who mattered in making British opinions, British opinion-makers and policymakers. This book will have a lasting impact on the international aspects of the Civil War.

Notes

[1]. William Ewart Gladstone, "Speech on the American Civil War," Town Hall, Newcastle upon Tyne, printed in *The Times* (London), October 9, 1862.

[2]. Enrico Dal Lago, *William Lloyd Garrison and Giuseppe Mazzini: Abolition, Democracy, and Radical Reform* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2013); Don H. Doyle, ed., *American Civil Wars: The United States, Latin America, Europe, and the Crisis of the 1860s* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2016); Don H. Doyle, *The Cause of All Nations: An International History of the American Civil War* (New York: Basic Books, 2014); Niels Eichhorn, *Liberty and Slavery: European Separatists, Southern Secession, and the American Civil War* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, forthcoming 2019); 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); David T. Gleeson and Simon Lewis, *The Civil War as Global Conflict: Transnational Meanings of the American Civil War* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 2014); Jörg Nagler, Don H. Doyle, and Marcus Gräser, eds., *The Transnational Significance of the American Civil War* (Cham: Springer International Publishing, 2016); Paul Quigley, *Shifting Grounds: Nationalism and the American South, 1848-1865* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011); Paul Quigley, ed., *The Civil*

War and the Transformation of American Citizenship (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2018); Brian Schoen, *The Fragile Fabric of Union Cotton, Federal Politics, and the Global Origins of the Civil War* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2009); and Ann L. Tucker, “Newest Born of Nations”: *European Nationalist Movements and the Making of Southern Nationhood, 1820-1865* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, forthcoming).

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Citation: Niels Eichhorn. Review of O’Connor, Peter, *American Sectionalism in the British Mind, 1832-1863*. H-War, H-Net Reviews. September, 2019.

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