



Ann L. Tucker. *Newest Born of Nations: European Nationalist Movements and the Making of the Confederacy.* Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2020. 272 pp. \$45.00, cloth, ISBN 978-0-8139-4428-9.

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In the last decade scholars have produced a small library of books locating the American South of the mid-nineteenth century and Civil War era in international perspective. Many of them focus on the Old South's and Confederacy's ideological relationship to European groups who similarly sought independence on the basis of an asserted national identity opposed to empires of which they were a part. Niels Eichhorn, Andre Fleche, and Paul Quigley, among others, have, like cosmopolitan white Southerners themselves, sought to explain the South's secession not as idiosyncratic or exceptional, but as one location of a larger transatlantic phenomenon of secession movements.[1] Eichhorn showed that a number of republican refugees arriving in the United States from the Revolutions of 1848 sympathized with and even fought for the Confederacy because they equated the Northern states' accumulating authority in the Federal government with Old World monarchies. Fleche illuminated how Confederate officials appealed for British intervention in the Civil War on evidence of traditional British sympathy, and sometimes intervention, for national independence movements on the European continent among Belgians, Greeks, Hungarians, Italians, and Poles. And Quigley emphasized that Southern fire-eaters asserted kinship with the

rebels of the German states, Hungary, Ireland, and Poland in 1848-49 because they were all, allegedly, victims of external enemies. Quigley also called attention to the evolution in white Southerners' nationalism from a civic to an ethnic ideology, although, at least for diplomatic purposes, they elided differences between racial identity necessary to justify slavery and ethnic identity that European nationalists asserted.

Ann Tucker's *Newest Born of Nations*, like these previous works, focuses on the transnational focus of white Southerners—at some point, scholarship may consider whether and how enslaved people in the late antebellum South took inspiration not only from revolutionaries in the Caribbean but also upheavals in Europe.[2] *Newest Born of Nations* proceeds chronologically from 1820 to 1865. The first chapter surveys white Southerners' attitudes toward European independence movements beginning with the Greek revolution against the Ottoman Empire and ending with fall of the Roman Republic and reestablishment of papal authority in the city in 1850. Reiterating my earlier study, Tucker emphasizes that white Southerners regarded European upheavals in this period through the prism of the American War of Independence.[3] This meant that they saluted Europeans who seemed to be emulating the

American republican example, but denigrated efforts to go beyond liberal outcomes and establish “socialism,” particularly in France and some of the Italian states. Tucker pushes Quigley’s argument further in showing how foreign upheavals helped expose antebellum white Southerners’ rejection of the universalism of the American founders.

It is in exploring the sectional crisis of the 1850s, in the second and third chapters, that Tucker first reveals the most valuable contribution of her study: there were competing strands in white Southerners’ rhetorical usage of contemporary events in Europe. As she characterizes, for example, the view of the states’ rights, anti-secessionist South Carolinian William John Grayson, “usage of international comparisons to describe the situation in the ... South ... was complicated” (p. 52). In other words, more than previous scholarship, Tucker shows multiple, possibly competing usages of European nationalism. Some white Southerners drew on European independence movements to justify filibustering in Cuba and Nicaragua, on the premise that Narciso López and William Walker were Southern versions of the Hungarian Lajos Kossuth (indeed, some Forty-Eighters were actual Latin American filibusters). [4] Inspired by proslavery Irish émigrés like John Mitchel, other white Southerners perceived that British liberals were guilty of both intriguing with American abolitionists and subjugating Ireland; the harm of British imperialism was both direct and analogous. And still other, conservative white Southerners condemned both European independence-seeking and its ramification in filibustering.

The middle three chapters of *Newest Born of Nations* offer a further elaboration of the differences among white Southerners concerning what meaning revolutionary Europe had for the Confederate States of America. Chapter 4 focuses on liberal internationalists who could draw inspiration not only from the unsuccessful independence movements of Poland, Hungary, and Ireland, but also now the establishment of the Kingdom of

Italy—though, unlike the Confederacy, Italy’s achievement was the product of nearly thirty years of struggle against Austria, and was vitally assisted by Napoleon III of France. Chapters 5 and 6 shift attention to conservative Southerners who either saw danger in liberal nationalist movements in both Europe and the American North, or condemned secessionists in both the American South and Europe as “tyrants” (p. 154). Tucker insists that “an international perspective proved critical” to both groups of Southerners in order “to promote their national values,” but this perhaps begs a question that scholars of the transnational white South in the Civil War era should address: the relationship between their interests in foreign events, and domestic political or social developments (pp. 133, 154). In Tucker’s case, that is, how did opposite reactions to revolutionary Europe complicate the relationship between liberal and anti-liberal white Southerners? And what impact, if any, did these ideological fault lines have on the fate of the Confederacy?

In her last two chapters and conclusion, Tucker documents both the futility of ideologues who persisted in claims that the wartime Confederacy was like the ethnic nations of Europe, and the frustrations of Unionists in the South who, like much more numerous Northerners, both immigrant and native-born, saw the Confederacy as an American version of European despotism. Regarding the former group, of course, Southerners wished to emphasize only that their kinship to certain European nationalists (i.e., Greeks and Italians) should prod Britain to recognize the Confederacy, but distinctly not the prospect that Confederate dreams of self-determination would, like those of Hungarians, Irish people, and Poles, be dashed. Here, for all their cosmopolitanism, the newspaper editors and politicians on whom Tucker bases her study appear naive or collectively in denial: absent a renunciation of slavery, there was little chance that enough Europeans nationalists, or, alternatively, anti-nationalist European governments, would help rescue the Confederacy. As

a result, for example, when Giuseppe Garibaldi saluted the Union's attack on slavery, as early as mid-1863 (when the Civil War's outcome was hardly ensured) Southern ideologues, who earlier had celebrated the Italian military hero, "rema[d]e" him into a hypocrite or "blaspheme[r]" (pp. 173, 172), rather than pragmatically considering why he had "abandoned" the Confederacy. And nearer the end of the war, a Richmond newspaper attributed the Confederacy's failure, bizarrely, to the theory that Confederate adversity was nothing like what the Greeks had faced earlier against the Ottoman Empire.

In the book's final chapter, Tucker focuses on the pro-Union newspaper editor and governor of Tennessee, William Brownlow, who, ironically, characterized the Irish rebel John Mitchel, then writing for the pro-Confederate *Richmond Enquirer*, as a "despot" (p. 198). The reader is left to wonder, however, whether Brownlow's and Mitchel's newspaper war was a tempest in a teapot or a telltale of larger fractures among Confederate ideologues.

Tucker relies on newspapers, magazines, pamphlets, and printed speeches for her research for *Newest Born of Nations*, because those sources represent "the bulk of the ideas and information that would have been available to the elite white southern men who ultimately decided the national fate of the South" (p. 6). Print discourse is valuable, although incorporation of manuscript sources could have revealed whether Southern elites said one thing publicly and something else in private, possibly explaining the apparent naïveté of liberal international secessionists. Manuscript sources also could help locate important Southerners who appear in the book only briefly: Vice President Alexander Stephens is cited twice, President Jefferson Davis is cited once, Secretary of State Judah Benjamin, not at all. In Tucker's defense, an analysis of Confederate diplomacy is not the book's purpose. Yet more attention to whether Confederate statesmen used print discourse about

European nationalism could help establish how much that discourse "made" the Confederacy.

In sum, *Newest Born of Nations* makes an important contribution in showing that cosmopolitan white Southerners' adaptation of European revolutionary, and counterrevolutionary, ideology was quite common; scholarship continues to push back against claims about the region's peculiarity in the United States, and in the world.[5] And the book illuminates how, in service of justifying Confederate nationalism, white Southerners' understanding of nationalism was not uniform.

Notes

[1]. Niels Eichhorn, *Liberty and Slavery: European Separatists, Southern Secession, and the American Civil War* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2019); Andre Fleche, *The Revolution of 1861: The American Civil War in the Age of Nationalist Conflict* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2014); Paul Quigley, *Nationalism and the American South, 1848-1865* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011).

[2]. For example, Matthew Clavin, *Toussaint Louverture and the American Civil War: The Promise and Peril of a Second Haitian Revolution* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2011).

[3]. Timothy Roberts, *Distant Revolutions: 1848 and the Challenge to American Exceptionalism* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2009).

[4]. Michael Miller, "Central America: Forty-Eighters in the Filibuster Wars of the Mid-Nineteenth Century," in *Transatlantic Revolutionary Cultures, 1789-1861*, ed. Charlotte Lerg and Hélène Tóth (Leiden: Brill, 2017), 193–208.

[5]. While claims of Southern exceptionalism now seem out of date, scholars still find grounds to emphasize the South's unusual international situation on the eve of secession. As an illustration of the historiographical evolution of this question, compare William Freehling, "The Divided South,

Democracy's Limitations, and the Causes of the Peculiarly North American Civil War," in *Why the Civil War Came*, ed. Gabor Boritt (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996), 126-76; and Frank Towers, "Origins of the Antimodern South: Romantic Ethnic Nationalism, Modernity, and the Se-

cession Movement in the American South," in *Secession as an International Phenomenon: From America's Civil War to Contemporary Separatist Movements*, ed. Don Doyle (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2010), 174-92.

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