

**British Press Responses to the American Civil War: A Case Study of *The Times*, *The Economist* and *The Spectator* 1860 - 1862**

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## ABSTRACT

This study investigates the formation of the editorial stances of three British newspapers, *The Times*, *The Economist* and *The Spectator* towards the American Civil War, beginning with the election of President Lincoln in November 1860 and ending two years later on the eve of the Emancipation Proclamation. The stances they adopted reflected the range of opinions which the British public held about the conflict. All three newspapers condemned the act of secession as illegitimate and expressed abhorrence for the institution of slavery which the secessionists sought to protect. However, their stances diverged markedly once secession appeared to have become irreversible without resort to civil war. Through a close analysis of the editorials in each newspaper, the study plots the trajectory of this divergence and analyses the reasons for it. It shows how, like much of the British press, *The Times* and *The Economist* came to see the American Civil War as a futile war of conquest on the Federal Government's part, which directly threatened Britain's cotton manufacturing industry, and appeared to be motivated by a desire to preserve the Union rather than to contain the extension of slavery. The only solution, in their view, was to allow the Confederacy to separate from the Union. This viewpoint had become entrenched by the time of the first major battle of war at Bull Run in July 1861 and was unaffected by Lincoln's Preliminary Emancipation Proclamation (PEP) the following year, which was seen as a cynical act of desperation. In these views, *The Times* and *The Economist* were closely in line with British government thinking, and, in spite of feeling that the conditions for recognition of the Confederacy had largely been met, they supported the Cabinet's decision in November 1862 not to intervene in the war with an offer of mediation. *The Spectator*, on the other hand, was in a minority of newspapers in Britain which supported the Union's right to use force to quell secession and never doubted that the issue of slavery was what the war was all about. While its support for the Washington government was not uncritical, and it shared some of the reservations of the other two newspapers about the PEP, it was firmly of the view that moral right in the conflict lay with the Union. For that reason, *The Spectator* opposed recognition on principle. Underlying explanations for the differences in viewpoint are considered, including differing perceptions of where British interests lay, misconceptions about American politics and constitutional law, and changing attitudes to emancipation and race towards the end of the antebellum period.

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## **INTRODUCTION: AIMS, RATIONALE AND SCOPE OF STUDY**

This study seeks to trace the emergence and development of the editorial positions taken by three mainstream British newspapers, *The Times*, *The Economist* and *The Spectator*, towards the momentous events unfolding across the Atlantic in the six months leading up to the American Civil War of 1861-65, and in the first eighteen months of the war itself. It thus begins with the victory of Abraham Lincoln in the American Presidential election of November 1860, an event which triggered the secession movement in the slave-holding states in the Southern part of the country, resulting in the outbreak of the hostilities at Fort Sumter in April 1861. It ends with a discussion of the editorial responses to Lincoln's Preliminary Emancipation Proclamation of September 1862 and proposals discussed in the British Cabinet, but never actually put forward, for British and French mediation in an attempt to end the conflict.

The study does not attempt a chronological analysis of the press coverage over this entire period. It confines itself to three periods in the course of the conflict. These are:

1. November 1860 – February 1861: this period covers the build-up to the war, beginning with the Presidential election of November 1860 and the 'secession winter' of December 1860 to February 1861. At the end of this period seven states had seceded from the Union and a constitution of Confederate States had been established with Jefferson Davis as their President.
2. March 1861 to August 1861: this period covers Lincoln's Inauguration as President of the United States on 4 March 1861, to the defeat of the Union forces in first major battle of the war at Bull Run on 29 July 1861. In between it covers the outbreak of hostilities at Fort Sumter and Britain's Proclamation of Neutrality.
3. August – December 1862: Emancipation and Intervention: this period covers events in the Civil War from the late summer of 1862 leading up to Lincoln's Preliminary Emancipation Proclamation in September 1862, and continuing through to his message to Congress on 1<sup>st</sup> December 1862. This was exactly one month before the Full Emancipation Proclamation was due to come into force. It also covers press responses to debates and discussions in Britain, which were gathering pace during the same period, for some form of intervention to end the war, and possibly recognise the Confederacy's independence from the Union.

The rationale for this choice is as follows. The first two periods, which are contiguous, were crucial in forming the editorial stances that the British press adopted towards the conflict. These stances can be crudely plotted on a continuum with support and sympathy for the Union at one end, and support and sympathy for the Confederacy on the other. Broadly speaking, by the end of the second period in this study, a sizeable section of the mainstream press had moved from an initial position of antipathy to secession to one of strong opposition to the Federal Government's attempts to coerce the states that had seceded back into the Union. While they may not have ended up by actively supporting the cause of the Confederacy (due to a reluctance to associate themselves with slavery) they had moved some considerable distance from one end of the continuum towards the other.

*The Times* and *The Economist* can be found in this camp, though not necessarily for exactly the same reasons or by following the same trajectory, while *The Spectator* remained defiantly at the pro-Union end of the continuum where it had started. The purpose of looking closely at these two periods is to try to understand, through an analysis of the editorial content in each publication, what were the key drivers of the changes in the respective positions adopted by *The Times* and *The Economist*, and why in its response to the same events, *The Spectator* took such a different view.

The third period begins a year after the end of the second, and covers the two political developments mentioned above: the move towards emancipation of the slaves signalled by Lincoln's Preliminary Proclamation of September 1862, and proposals for Britain, either alone or with France and perhaps Russia, to intervene in the conflict and recognise the Confederacy. Both these developments, each of which had immense, potential significance for the course of the war, presented challenges to the editorial stances the three newspapers had taken. The purpose of studying this period was to see how the editors of the newspapers responded to these challenges. For example, how might a newspaper which had begun with a strong anti-slavery and anti-secession position at the beginning of the first period, but had come to believe by the end of the second period that the Confederacy should be allowed to secede in peace, respond when President Lincoln issued the Preliminary Emancipation Proclamation? Similarly, how would the same papers respond to calls being made in Parliament and outside for Britain to intervene in the conflict and recognise the independence of the Southern Confederacy?

While it might have been of equal interest to examine the editorial response of these newspapers – and indeed of the British press more generally - to subsequent events in the war, this would have required a much longer study. Furthermore, the main purpose was to try and understand how they came to take the positions they did, positions which were established in the first two periods covered in this study. Thereafter they did not change in any significant way. The only event that appeared to cause a notable shift in position was the assassination of Lincoln on 14 April 1865, less than two weeks after the fall of the Confederacy, when both *The Times* and *The Economist*, and many other newspapers in Britain which had been highly critical of him, felt obliged to revise their earlier opinions.<sup>1</sup> In doing so, they reflected the public displays of shock and grief which greeted news of the assassination.

The editorial views of the three newspapers selected for this study display the range of British public opinion towards the Civil War in America and reflect how divided the country was in its response to the conflict. Given how a sizeable section of the mainstream press wished the slave-owning Confederacy well in their struggle for independence, it is important for historians to try to understand and explain this phenomenon. This can only be achieved by an analysis of the contemporary evidence, and is what this study tries to do through a close reading of the leading articles in the contemporary newspapers. However, before embarking on a study of this nature, it is incumbent on any researcher to heed the words of the historian D.P. Crook, written 50 years ago:

The enormous heterogeneity of the economic, ideological and group interests involved in the English response – together with the spectrum of issues raised by the breakdown of the Union, should enforce caution upon the historian who wishes to paint his civil war scene in bold and simple strokes.<sup>2</sup>

With the benefit of hindsight, it easy to overlook that fact that the editors and correspondents of these newspapers did not know at the time how events would unfold in

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<sup>1</sup> Amanda Foreman, *A World on Fire: An Epic History of Two Nations Divided* (London: Penguin. 2010), p. 779. Foreman notes how “newspapers that had routinely criticised the President during his lifetime rushed to praise him” and makes specific mention of *The Times*, *The Economist* and *Punch*. Duncan Campbell in *English Public Opinion and The American Civil War* (Woodbridge: The Boydell Press. 2003), p. 227, however, cautions against reading too much into this change of heart in the British Press, noting that the mourning of Lincoln needs to be seen in the context of its time, and that “a lot of the eulogies for Lincoln were formal, nineteenth century ones”

<sup>2</sup> D.P. Crook, *The North, The South, and The Powers 1861 – 1865* (New York: Wiley. 1974) p.14.



the lead up the war, or when or how the conflict would finish once it had started. They were responding to momentous events that were often shocking and unprecedented, and developing their viewpoints in real time, not as dispassionate observers, but painfully aware of the impact of these events on the deep economic, cultural, and ideological bonds that linked Britain and America.

### **Newspapers in Mid-Victorian Britain**

The sheer volume, frequency of publication, range and accessibility of newspapers and periodicals make them an excellent source of documentary evidence. At no time was this truer than in mid-nineteenth century Britain, as the spread of literacy, the advent of the telegraph, and the construction of railways expanded the reach of newspapers to an ever-increasing number of readers across the whole country.<sup>3</sup> Meanwhile technological advances in printing using steam and rotary presses had revolutionised the speed and efficiency of printing with a consequent increase in the potential daily supply of newspapers.<sup>4</sup> Above all, demand in Britain had been stimulated by the abolition of the penny stamp tax in 1855 and the repeal of the excise duty on paper in 1861 (the so-called 'taxes on knowledge'). This made it possible for proprietors to reduce the price of newspapers, precipitating a rapid expansion of circulations and "the growth of cheap, competitive journalism with strong provincial representation".<sup>5</sup> If *The Times* was by a long way the most widely read daily newspaper in the first half of the 1850's with a circulation of between 50,000 - 65,000, its circulation was outstripped in the latter half of the decade by cheaper metropolitan penny dailies like *The Daily News* and *The Daily Telegraph*.<sup>6</sup> The latter of the two was Britain's first penny daily, and had achieved a circulation of 270,000 by early 1856.<sup>7</sup> The 1840s and 1850s saw the establishment of many new titles, reflecting the increasingly favourable conditions for circulation and sales, and feeding the public appetite for news and engagement in political debate. These included London-based dailies like *The Daily Telegraph* (1855), *The*

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<sup>3</sup> Martin Crawford, *The Anglo-American Crisis of the Mid-Nineteenth Century: 'The Times' and America 1850-1862* (Athens. Georgia: University of Georgia Press, 1987) p. 12; Hugh Dubrulle. *Ambivalent Nation: How Britain Imagined the American Civil War* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2018), p. 54.

<sup>4</sup> Martin Shaw *An Inky Business: A History of Newspapers from the English Civil Wars to the American Civil War*, (London: Reaktion Books Ltd), p. 188.

<sup>5</sup> Crawford, p. 12; Dubrulle, p. 54.

<sup>6</sup> Crawford, p.17; Joel Weiner *The Americanization of the English Press 1830s -1914*, (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2011), p. 93.

<sup>7</sup> Shaw, p. 203.

*Daily News* (founded by Charles Dickens in 1846), and *The Morning Star* (founded by the MPs John Bright and Richard Cobden in 1856 to promote Radical causes such as electoral reform),<sup>8</sup> as well as weeklies such as *The Illustrated London News* (1842), *Punch* (1841), *The Saturday Review* (a Conservative periodical founded by Alexander Beresford Hope in 1855), *The Economist* (1842), and the working-class *Reynolds Newspaper* (1850).

Much of the public appetite for news was driven by “the passion for war news”, which was “a leading feature of the 1850s and 1860s”.<sup>9</sup> In Britain this was largely driven by the reports during the Crimean War of the ‘special correspondent’ for *The Times*, William Howard Russell. Joel Wiener describes Russell as “the outstanding war reporter of the nineteenth century” whose reports from the scenes of battle “helped to triple the paper’s circulation”. It was therefore no surprise that as the events in America moved perilously towards civil war, Russell was sent by *The Times* to the United States as its special correspondent “in the expectation that he would be able to recreate his Crimean escapades”.<sup>10</sup> It was also no surprise that as the war intensified, events in America dominated the reports and editorial commentary in the British press like no other issue. In the words of R.J.M. Blackett “no other agitation in the period, not the movements in support of Polish or Hungarian independence or Italian unification, engaged public interest so extensively as did the debate over the war in America”.<sup>11</sup>

How far the newspapers of the day adequately reflected public opinion, as opposed to the individual opinions of their editors and leading article writers is difficult to say. For that reason, Blackett made copious use of other documentary evidence in his survey of British public opinion during the American Civil War, ranging from fact sheets produced by local Union and Confederate organisations, petitions, pamphlets, memorials and public addresses.<sup>12</sup> Nevertheless, it remains true that “the press in the nineteenth century was the most important medium of communication of ideas”, and as a result newspapers were

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<sup>8</sup> Brian Jenkins *Britain and the War for the Union* Volume 1 (Montreal: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 1974), p. 70.

<sup>9</sup> Wiener, p. 80.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid, p. 80 - 86.

<sup>11</sup> R.J.M. Blackett, *Divided Hearts: Britain and the American Civil War*, (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press 2001), p.168.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid.

important opinion formers as well.<sup>13</sup> Newspapers of stature, like *The Times*, carried “long, partisan editorials which not only covered but also helped to shape politics.”<sup>14</sup> The increase in the number of newspapers available by the outbreak of the Civil War, ensured that a very wide spectrum of ideas was included in their pages. Some of these tended to be sympathetic to the Union, and others to the Confederacy, but most were actually deeply conflicted, their abhorrence of slavery competing with their shock of the carnage on the battlefields, the apparent ‘unwinnability’ of the war, a desire for a peaceful resolution of the conflict, and a resumption of normal commercial activity with the cotton-producing states.

The three newspapers in this study have been chosen to reflect the division of views to be found in the press, and in the country more broadly. This is not, however, a study of public opinion, but of press opinion, and in particular, the opinion of three of the more serious, influential and well-established newspapers of the day. The choice of three newspapers for this study, with one supportive of the cause of the Union, and the other two supportive of allowing the Confederate States to secede peacefully, and opposed to continued Federal attempts to coerce them back, roughly reflects the overall ratio of editorial opinion in the London-based press on each side of the divide.

### **Rationale for the Choice of Newspapers**

#### ***The Times***

Although much has been written about *The Times*’s coverage of the American Civil War,<sup>15</sup> its inclusion in this study is justified by the fact that it was the longest established newspaper in the country, had easily the widest circulation (until the rise of the penny dailies in the 1860s) and was “by far the most influential”.<sup>16</sup> It is thus a useful yardstick against which to compare the views of its contemporaries. Nicknamed ‘The Thunderer’ following its vigorous campaign for electoral reform prior to the Great Reform Bill of 1832, *The Times* prided itself on its reach and influence on educated public opinion.<sup>17</sup> “When *The Times* took snuff”, Frank

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<sup>13</sup> Alan Lee, *The Origins of the Popular Press 1855 -1914*, (London: Croom Helm Ltd , 1976), p. 18.

<sup>14</sup> Jonathan Connolly, ‘Indentured Labour Migration and the Meaning of Emancipation: Free Trade, Race, and Labour in British Public Debate, 1838-1860.’ *Past & Present* 238 (2018), p. 88.

<sup>15</sup> See Section 1.4

<sup>16</sup> Crawford, p. 15, who notes that it was founded in 1785 under the title *Daily Universal Register*; Blackett, p. 145

<sup>17</sup> Oliver Woods and James Bishop, *The Story of the ‘The Times’*, (London: Michael Joseph, 1983), p. 49.

Owsley suggested “the rest of England sneezed”.<sup>18</sup> Its reputation for informed overseas reports was well-established outside Great Britain, and especially in America. Jefferson Davis, the President of the Confederacy, was a subscriber, and in a much-quoted exchange between Abraham Lincoln and William Howard Russell, the President remarked, on being introduced to the recently arrived *Times* correspondent, that “The London *Times* is one of the greatest powers in the world. In fact, I don’t know anything which has much more power except perhaps the Mississippi”.<sup>19</sup>

The editor of *The Times* throughout this period was John Delane, who had been appointed in 1841 at the age of 23, and shared the task of writing leading articles with a team of lieutenants which occasionally included Russell himself in between his overseas assignments.<sup>20</sup> Politically Conservative (as opposed to Liberal), despite its “independent” tag, *The Times* was supportive of the policies of the coalition government of Lord Palmerston, with whom Delane had a close personal relationship.<sup>21</sup> For that reason, one of the values of the inclusion of *The Times* in this study, is its role in representing “British governing-class attitudes”.<sup>22</sup>

It should be noted here that the terms “Conservative” and “Liberal” are of limited help in predicting the editorial stances taken in the American Civil War. While Conservative newspapers like *The Morning Post* and *Saturday Review* were generally sympathetic to the Confederacy, the Liberal press was divided. Mainstream Liberal publications such as *The Economist* and the *Manchester Guardian* strongly opposed the Union’s attempt to coerce the Confederacy into submission and supported a peaceful separation of the two sections of the Union, while newspapers on the Radical wing of the party like *The Daily News* and *The Morning Star* supported the Union.

*The Times* was informed directly about events in America by its correspondents based in the country. Apart from William Howard Russell who returned home in March 1862, the paper had a long-standing New York correspondent, Bancroft Davis, who resigned in December

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<sup>18</sup> Frank Owsley, *King Cotton Diplomacy: Foreign Relations of the Confederate States of America*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1959), p. 195

<sup>19</sup> Jenkins, p. 10; William Howard Russell, *My Diary North and South*, p. 47.

<sup>20</sup> Woods and Bishop, p. 61.

<sup>21</sup> Lee, p. 134; Crawford, p. 18; Dubrulle, p. 125.

<sup>22</sup> Crawford, p. 18.

1862 due to a combination of ill-health and disagreements with the editorial line of the newspaper. By the third period in this study, the New York correspondent was Charles Mackay and the correspondent in Richmond was Francis Lawley. Both were strong supporters of the Confederacy.

### ***The Spectator***

Founded in 1828, *The Spectator* was a long-established, London-based weekly newspaper, appearing on Saturdays, as most weekly papers of the time did. Without a formal link to any political party, the paper appealed to a fairly small, but politically well-informed, customer base, of around 2000. At the beginning of 1861, it was bought by Meredith Townsend, who had previously worked as Indian correspondent for *The Times* and who invited Richard Holt Hutton, the previous interim editor of *The Economist* to join him as co-editor. It was Hutton who wrote most of the leading articles ('Topic of the Day' pieces) on foreign affairs, while Townsend focused on domestic affairs.<sup>23</sup> In its coverage of events in America, *The Spectator* was ably assisted by the reports it received from two correspondents there, Edward Dicey, whose travels in America 1862 were published in London the following year under the title *Six Months in the Federal States*, and the American journalist, Richard Grant White.<sup>24</sup>

The main interest of *The Spectator* to the present study is that it took a very different editorial line to the American Civil War from that of *The Times* and *The Economist*, by staunchly defending the Union's right to prosecute the war provided that the goal was the ultimate elimination of slavery. It thus provides a counterpoint to the other two newspapers and allows comparisons to be made about the different perspectives they took towards the same events taking place across the Atlantic. As a newspaper, it is also comparable in terms of its readership (generally well-informed, politically engaged, and middle class) and in its lengthy, closely argued editorial commentary to the other two newspapers in this study. Both the editors had previously worked for each of the other two. Another reason for *The Spectator's* inclusion is its strong focus on American affairs, due to the fact that one of its

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<sup>23</sup> Information in this paragraph from David Butterfield *10,000 not out: The History of the Spectator 1828 – 2020*, (London: Unicorn, 2020), p. 48 – 49.

<sup>24</sup> Dicey's account has been republished under the title *Spectator of America: Edward Dicey's eye-witness account of Lincoln and the Civil War in America*, ed. by Herbert Mitgang (London: Victor Gollancz Ltd.); Butterfield, p. 51.

previous owners, Benjamin Moran, was the assistant secretary to the American legation in London. He had sold his shares to Townsend in 1861.<sup>25</sup>

### ***The Economist***

*The Economist* was founded in 1843 to advance the cause of free trade and to oppose protectionism in both economic and political life.<sup>26</sup> It was thus a bastion of Liberalism and its core readership was among the country's business and commercial classes. Like *The Spectator*, it was a weekly periodical, appearing on Saturdays, and had a circulation during this period of around 3500.<sup>27</sup> Because of the threat posed by the American Civil War to Britain's commercial interests, in particular to the cotton manufacturing industry, and the devastating impact of the war during the 'cotton famine' of 1862, the views of a newspaper like *The Economist* are particularly relevant to any study of how the British press responded to the American Civil War.

In January 1861, Walter Bagehot, who had already acquired a reputation as an essayist on subjects as varied as political economy and English literature and who would later write *The English Constitution*, the work for which he is best known, was appointed editor of *The Economist* at the age of 35. By far the publication's best-known editor, Bagehot was a prolific editorial writer for sixteen years, writing three or four leading articles a week on current affairs, including 31 on the American Civil War in 1861 alone.<sup>28</sup> The choice of *The Economist* for this study is thus partly in recognition of the interest that Bagehot himself, as one of the foremost men of letters of the Victorian Age, took in the Civil War, as well as in the governance and constitution of the United States.

### **Previous Studies**

Although discussion of British newspaper coverage is widespread in studies of public opinion during the war, as well as in histories of the impact of the war on British political, economic and diplomatic life, there is comparatively little specifically on the British press coverage of

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<sup>25</sup> Ibid, p. 48.

<sup>26</sup> Alexander Zevin, *Liberalism at Large: The World According to The Economist*, (London: Verso, 2019), p. 40.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid, p. 79. Zevin states that the circulation was 3600 in 1873, and the paper was in a healthy financial situation.

<sup>28</sup> Zevin, p.71

the war, and nothing very recent.<sup>29</sup> Probably the most comprehensive study is Thomas Keiser's 1971 unpublished PhD thesis 'The English Press and the American Civil War' which provides a survey of a very wide range of daily and weekly newspapers, both London-based and regional, and takes the reader through the whole period of the conflict, concluding with the assassination of Lincoln.<sup>30</sup> However, because of the scope and range of the study, the analysis is almost inevitably somewhat superficial: bold, interesting claims are made, often without being convincingly substantiated. Another study by Alfred Grant, published in North Carolina in 2000 and entitled *The American Civil War and the British Press*, is essentially a lengthy diatribe against the British press.<sup>31</sup> Its conclusion, and possibly even its starting point as well, is that "motivated by a fear of democracy and a multitude of similar emotions, the British papers were champions of the Confederacy".<sup>32</sup> While this may have been the case in one or two of the many British papers in circulation at the time, it is clearly inadequate as a generalisation. For a start, it completely ignores those papers who were champions of the Union.

Other book-length studies have focused on specific newspapers, and *The Times*, by virtue of both its preeminent position in the British press landscape, as well as the controversy that its coverage of the war aroused, has been the subject of at least two of these. One is Maxine Hamilton's 1982 PhD thesis from the University of Leicester entitled 'The London Times and the American Civil War' and the other is Martin Crawford's study.<sup>33</sup> The latter is particularly useful in that it starts in the antebellum period and shows how *The Times* responded to events in America in the decade before the Civil War began, and how it felt obliged to modify its position once the descent into disunion and civil war had begun. Another study that focused on a specific newspaper is Robert Allen Schellenberg's 1962 thesis from the

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<sup>29</sup> Notable studies from the twentieth century which make extensive use of British press coverage in their analyses of events are E.D. Adams, *Great Britain and the American Civil War*, Vols 1 and 2, (New York: Russell and Russell, 1924), Frank Owsley, *King Cotton Diplomacy: Foreign Relations of the Confederate States of America* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1959), D.P. Crook, *The North, the South and the Powers 1861-1865* (New York: Wiley, 1974) and Brian Jenkins, *Britain and the War for the Union* Vols 1 and 2, (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1974).

<sup>30</sup> Thomas Keiser, 'The English Press and the American Civil War'. PhD Thesis, University of Reading, 1971.

<sup>31</sup> Alfred Grant *The American Civil War and the British Press*, (Jefferson, North Carolina: Macfarland, 2000).

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 5.

<sup>33</sup> Maxine Hamilton, 'The London Times and the American Civil War', (Ann Arbor, MI: Proquest UMI Dissertation Publishing U016994, 1982); Crawford, *The Anglo-American Crisis*.

University of Omaha entitled 'The Manchester Guardian and the American Civil War'.<sup>34</sup>

There would appear, however, to be no very recent studies of this kind.

In the present century, the best discussions of the British press responses to the American Civil War have been in publications that have studied public opinion in Britain towards the issues involved in the war itself, and British views about America more generally – the people and its institutions (including slavery) in the mid-nineteenth century. Three, in particular, have informed the current study: R.J.M Blackett's *Divided Hearts: Britain and the American Civil War* (2001), Duncan Campbell's *English Public Opinion and the American Civil War* (2002) and Hugh Dubrulle's *Ambivalent Nation: How Britain Imagined the American Civil War* (2018). However, there have been no recent studies which focus on newspapers specifically, let alone comparative studies of a small representative sample, which attempt to understand and explain how their different viewpoints emerged and took shape during the conflict. This study aims to go some way towards filling this gap.

### **Structure and Organisation**

The Introduction covers the aims, scope and rationale for the study, and provides a short introduction to the three newspapers used as the primary sources in the study, and to the reasons for their selection. Chapter 1 provides context and background concerning transatlantic relations between Britain and America on the eve of the Civil War, and prevailing attitudes in Britain towards the political system of the United States, and towards slavery and race. This context is important in order to deepen understanding of the views expressed and the positions taken up in the leading articles of the three newspapers.

The heart of the dissertation lies in Chapters 2 to 4, which are the data chapters analysing the editorial coverage of each of the three selected periods of the Civil War. Discussion of the secondary literature relating to the events covered in each period, and the controversies in the scholarship surrounding them, are interwoven into these chapters. The purpose of the discussion of the secondary literature is to help illuminate the viewpoints expressed in the primary newspaper data, in the light of the fuller understanding of the events which subsequent scholarship has given present day historians access to. It should be

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<sup>34</sup> R.A. Schellenberg, 'The Manchester Guardian and the American Civil War', Unpublished PhD thesis, 1962, University of Omaha.



remembered that newspaper editorials about the events taking place in America were written under the pressure of deadlines, with inevitably incomplete knowledge of what was happening. The editors had to rely on reports from correspondents arriving by steamboat to Britain two weeks after the events themselves took place, and then develop an informed, considered assessment of these events for their newspaper within 24 hours, or at most a week. They could not possibly have been aware of all the significant developments taking place at the time in different parts of the country. Nevertheless, in the light of the constraints on access to information, the depth and breadth of some of the editorial commentary, particularly in the weekly publications, where the editors were under a little less pressure of time, is impressive. By the same account, a close analysis of the primary data is important for revealing the attitudes and priorities of the editors themselves, thereby helping later historians understand the past from the perspective of the people who lived through it and reported on it.

The Conclusion of the dissertation summarises and seeks to explain the main drivers which influenced the editorial positions taken by each of the papers, and the trajectories they appeared to follow in reaching those positions. It does not try to take sides in terms of who was in the right and in the wrong in the positions they took, and the only judgements it makes are in terms of the consistency or inconsistency of arguments put forward, or in the editorial balance, or lack of it, displayed. The Conclusion finishes with suggestions for further research in the field.

## **CHAPTER 1: BRITISH ATTITUDES TOWARDS AMERICA ON THE EVE OF THE CIVIL WAR**

### **1.1 Introduction**

In his two-volume study of Britain and the American Civil War, published 100 years ago, E.D. Adams noted that as his investigation proceeded, it became evident that “the American Civil War, as seen through British spectacles, could not be understood if regarded as an isolated and unique situation, but that the conditions preceding that situation [...] had a vital bearing on British policy and opinion when the crisis arose.”<sup>35</sup> The conditions he was referring to were both the political, diplomatic and economic relations between the two countries between the end of the colonial era and the beginning of the Civil War, and the way in which British people regarded America and its institutions, including slavery, before 1860. In the same vein, Hugh Dubrulle, writing almost 100 years later, stresses the need to understand how antebellum perceptions that Britons held about America might have shaped their and their country’s reactions to the conflict.<sup>36</sup> The purpose of this chapter is to thus to examine some of these perceptions and the bearing they potentially had on the substance and tone of editorial commentary about the war. The chapter will look at three aspects: views about American Democracy, views about slavery and race, and views about America’s rapidly growing presence on the world stage in the context of Anglo-American relations on the eve of the Civil War.

### **1.2 Views about American Democracy**

On 27 May 1861, six weeks after Fort Sumter and in the aftermath of Britain’s Proclamation of Neutrality, the MP Sir John Ramsden declared to “a scattering of sarcastic cheers” in the House of Commons that “we are now witnessing the bursting of the great Republican bubble which had so often been held up to us a model on which to recast our own Constitution”.<sup>37</sup> The speech was a not so veiled rebuke to the Radical MP from Manchester, John Bright, who was the most prominent advocate of extending the franchise in Britain on the American model. The muted reception to the speech did not, however, reflect support for Bright’s views in the Commons, but rather distaste at the apparent gloating over

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<sup>35</sup> Adams, Vol 1, p. 2.

<sup>36</sup> Dubrulle, p. 3.

<sup>37</sup> Foreman, p. 100.

America's troubles.<sup>38</sup> The sentiment expressed by Ramsden was in fact, as Hugh Dubrulle points out, typical of mainstream Liberal opinion in the country, which only supported electoral reform as long as there was an equitable balance of "property, intelligence and numbers".<sup>39</sup> Universal suffrage as practised in America (that is for white men only, regardless of class) was strongly felt to privilege numbers over property and intelligence, and this was a view that was frequently and unequivocally expressed in the editorials of *The Times* and *The Economist* during the Civil War. It was a view that reflected the influence of Alexis de Tocqueville's *Democracy in America*, which first appeared in 1835, and which "profoundly shaped British views of the United States in the antebellum period."<sup>40</sup>

Britain at the time of the American Civil War still had the limited franchise of the 1832 Great Reform Bill, and despite a gathering momentum behind electoral reform in the 1850s, the various proposals presented to Parliament in that decade had come to nothing. It was not until 1867 that the franchise was widened. D.P Crook argues that the decade of the 1850s was marked by political apathy in England following the demise of Chartism and the failure of the 1848 revolutions in Europe. "Englishmen", he suggested "had taken new faith in their liberal constitution which had remained impervious to the virus of 1848".<sup>41</sup> Lord Palmerston, who led Britain's predominantly aristocratic Cabinet in the years of the Civil War, had little interest in Parliamentary reform, and John Bright himself was, in the opinion of Hugh Dubrulle "a marginal political figure" on the eve of secession.<sup>42</sup>

Certainly, there was no enthusiasm for the American democratic experiment in the editorial pages of *The Times* and *The Economist*. "One of the prevalent delusions of the age in which we live", *The Times* opined at the beginning of 1861 "is to regard democracy as equivalent to liberty, and the attribution of power to the poorest and worst educated citizens of the State as a certain way to promote the purest liberality of thought and the most beneficial course of action."<sup>43</sup> At this stage, *The Times* was commenting on the folly of South Carolina's decision to secede from the Union, which had just reached the newspaper. However, this argument was applied equally, and indeed more forcefully, when castigating the actions of

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<sup>38</sup> Ibid. p. 100.

<sup>39</sup> Dubrulle, p. 123.

<sup>40</sup> Campbell, p. 11.

<sup>41</sup> Crook, p. 9.

<sup>42</sup> Dubrulle, p. 127.

<sup>43</sup> *The Times*, 7 January 1861, p. 6.

the Federal government, which it found frequent occasion to do. After the defeat at the First Battle of Bull Run, for example, *The Times* commented that “the last six months have proved beyond all question that the preponderance of popular will without check or limit is at least as likely to hurry a nation into war and debt as the caprice of the most absolute despot or the intrigues of the most selfish of aristocracies.”<sup>44</sup>

*The Economist* followed a similar line to that of *The Times*. In November 1860, while welcoming the election of Abraham Lincoln and his anti-slavery convictions, it nevertheless remained convinced that “universal suffrage in America drowns the voice of the best educated and most refined classes in the North.”<sup>45</sup> The arrival of Walter Bagehot sustained this critique with long, closely argued editorials comparing the British and American Constitutions. As America seemed to slide inevitably to armed conflict in the months between Fort Sumter and the First Battle of Bull Run, *The Economist* ran a leading article entitled ‘The Practical Operation of the American Constitution at the Present Extreme Crisis’. It concluded that although “the framers of the Constitution were anxious to resist the force of democracy [.....] they either could not or did not take the one effectual means of doing so; they did not place the substantial power in the hands of men of education and property. They hoped to control the democracy though paper checks and constitutional devices.”<sup>46</sup> In other words, the ideal balance of property, education and numbers, had been tipped disastrously, in the paper’s view, in favour of numbers. In short, events in America seemed to many in Britain to prove the superiority of the British system of government.<sup>47</sup>

In these attacks on American democracy, newspapers were also sounding a warning to their readers not to follow the path of “John Bright and his fellow-Americanizers” of the Manchester School, a sign, perhaps, of the growing momentum behind calls for electoral reform.<sup>48</sup> The Conservative-Liberal press was to a large extent playing politics with the American situation. Indeed, *The Times* was quite open about this in the same leading article following news of the Bull Run defeat in July 1861:

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<sup>44</sup> *The Times*, 12 August 1861, p. 6.

<sup>45</sup> ‘The Republican President’s Creed’, *The Economist*, 24 November 1860, p. 1304.

<sup>46</sup> *The Economist*, 1 June 1861, pp. 592-593.

<sup>47</sup> Blackett, p. 35.

<sup>48</sup> Jenkins, Vol 1, p. 153.

When we see that unlimited democracy conveys not the slightest security against the worst of wars and the most reckless extravagance, we may apply the moral at home, and congratulate ourselves that the Old British Constitution has not been precipitately remodelled after a Manchester design.<sup>49</sup>

Don Doyle describes how John Motley, the U.S. Minister in Vienna, wrote to John Bright in December 1861, at the time of the diplomatic crisis caused by the *Trent* affair, praising him for a speech he made in Rochdale in which he passionately defended the cause of the Union.<sup>50</sup> In the letter, Motley suggested that “the real secret of the exultation which manifests itself in *The Times* and other organs over our troubles and disasters is their hatred not to America so much as to democracy in England.”<sup>51</sup> This raises the question of whether the ‘hatred’ that *The Times* and other organs like *The Economist* felt about democracy (i.e. universal suffrage) in England acted as a driver for the anti-Union bias which increasingly manifested itself in their editorials in the second period covered in this study, and which showed no let-up a year later.

The question needs to be treated with some caution, however. For a start, *The Times* ran numerous leading articles in the 1850s criticising American democracy for “its extreme dependence on the popular will” but, as Martin Crawford has shown, there is no evidence of an innate spirit of hostility towards America in these criticisms that might have foreshadowed the paper’s later disaffection with the Union during the Civil War.<sup>52</sup> As he puts it, the paper’s criticisms of transatlantic democracy were often severe during this period” but “they were invariably offset by its generous applause for the accomplishments of representative government and Anglo-Saxon progress in the New World”.<sup>53</sup>

Secondly, universal suffrage, for the free, unenslaved, male population, existed in the Southern half of the Union as well as in the Northern half, and in their attacks on American Democracy during the secession winter of 1860-61, neither *The Times* nor *The Economist* sought to make a distinction between the two sections. Indeed, both newspapers were scathing about the seceded states’ refusal to accept the result of Lincoln’s legitimate

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<sup>49</sup> *The Times*, 12 August 1861, p. 6.

<sup>50</sup> Don Doyle, *The Cause of All Nations*, (New York, NY: Basic Books, 2017), p. 148.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.* p. 148.

<sup>52</sup> Crawford, p. 45.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.* p. 47.

election victory, and in January 1861, *The Times* pointedly noted the contradiction in the fact that “the practice of democracy in America had sustained the two totally opposing principles currently driving the country apart: Freedom and Slavery”:

The North is for Freedom and the South is for Slavery. The North is for freedom of discussion, the South represses freedom of discussion with the tar-brush and the pine faggot.<sup>54</sup>

Thirdly, *The Spectator*, which steadfastly supported the cause of the Union throughout the Civil War, also expressed similar criticisms of American democracy, if less stridently. This was especially at times when it felt compelled to justify its support for the Union against other newspapers which had taken a different view. “We have as little respect as any of our contemporaries”, it wrote in September 1861 “for the American Democracy of the last 20 years, and its irritating and blustering foreign policy.”<sup>55</sup> Similarly after news of the Federal defeat at the Battle of Leesburg in Virginia on 21 October 1861, *The Spectator* laid the blame squarely on the failure of the politicians rather than the Union soldiers themselves, referring to them as “the wretched rogues [.....] whom universal suffrage threw to the top”. “Our sympathy”, the paper added “is with the cause of the North, not with its people or administration.”<sup>56</sup> Hostility to universal suffrage, as practised in America, should not therefore be seen as the preserve of “pro-Confederacy” or “anti-Union” newspapers. Not all “friends of the North” felt alike about electoral reform. It was the issue of slavery that united them.

### **1.3 Views about Slavery and Race**

Britain in the 1850s had “a long-standing abolitionist tradition” and took considerable pride in the fact that it had freed its slaves in the British West Indies in the 1830s.<sup>57</sup> Britain had also taken a leading role in the abolition of the transatlantic slave trade and thereafter in the enforcement of treaties which allowed suspected slave ships to be stopped and searched. This was a cause which for Lord Palmerston had become “a lifelong obsession”.<sup>58</sup> The

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<sup>54</sup> *The Times*, 7 January 1861, p. 6.

<sup>55</sup> ‘Un-English Wishes for America’, *The Spectator*, 14 September 1861, p. 1001.

<sup>56</sup> ‘The Lesson of Leesburg’, *The Spectator*, 16 November 1861, p. 1253.

<sup>57</sup> Blackett, pp. 26-27.

<sup>58</sup> Foreman, p. 24.

abhorrence of slavery, as a moral outrage, cut across all sections of society and political parties, and was reflected in the huge domestic success of Harriet Beecher Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, which was published in 1852. Amanda Foreman notes that in its first year of publication in Britain it sold a million copies and "led to a renaissance of anti-slavery clubs after they had tottered along in a state of earnest torpor since 1833".<sup>59</sup> The national consensus around slavery as a moral issue was reflected in the British press during the year leading up to the Civil War, as events in America began to take centre stage. The three newspapers in this study described it variously as "a prolific iniquity", a national crime", "sinful" and "a curse".<sup>60</sup> Martin Crawford, who studied *The Times'* coverage of American affairs in the decade before the start of the war, argues that "for *The Times* during the 1850s to have adopted any other attitude towards southern slavery but that of severe moral condemnation would have been unthinkable."<sup>61</sup> This was the case, as E.D. Adams notes, in the public press more generally.<sup>62</sup>

Condemnations of slavery, however, begged the question of what exactly should be done about it in the context of the American Union. Even before the outbreak of the Civil War, when considerations of Britain's commercial interests came into play, there were differences of viewpoint. Firstly, there were major fears about the prospect of a slave insurrection if emancipation was delivered too suddenly. This is illustrated in the following extract from a leading article in *The Times* in December 1859, written after news of the execution of the abolitionist John Brown reached England, following his failed insurrection at Harper's Ferry:

Strong as is our sympathy for the oppressed race which toils beneath the lash in the Southern States of America, we cannot bring ourselves to wish that their bonds may be broken by an experiment so frightful as that which has once again been tried, and has once again failed – the experiment of a servile war.<sup>63</sup>

The extract contains an oblique reference to the slave revolt in Haiti in the last decade of the eighteenth century as well as to the much more recent attempt by John Brown to instigate a

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<sup>59</sup> Ibid. p. 27.

<sup>60</sup> *The Economist*, 8 September 1860, p. 981; *The Economist* 24 November 1860: p. 1304; *The Spectator*, 26 January 1861, p. 81; *The Times*, 22 March 1860, pp 8-9.

<sup>61</sup> Crawford, p. 56.

<sup>62</sup> Adams, Vol. 1, p. 32.

<sup>63</sup> *The Times*, 28 December 1859, as quoted in Crawford, p. 59.

slave uprising in Virginia in October 1859. The prospect of a bloody servile insurrection was one which would exercise a strong influence on both *The Times* and *The Economist* in their editorials on the subject of emancipation during the Civil War, and was also, as R.J.M Blackett points out, a major concern of prominent pro-Union supporters such as Richard Cobden.<sup>64</sup>

A second issue concerned whether the goal of emancipation could legitimately be achieved by war. The Abolitionist movements in both America and Britain were often led by pacifists, such as William Lloyd Garrison in the United States, with strong links to the Quakers. The prospect of civil war put these groups in a dilemma, and during the secession crisis, many 'Garrisonian abolitionists', as well as Horace Greeley's *New York Tribune*, advocated letting the seceded states go in peace, thereby freeing the Northern half of the Union from its contamination with the sin of slavery.<sup>65</sup> Once the war had begun, however, many abolitionists on both sides of the Atlantic reconsidered their positions and supported the Union on the grounds that the war had been forced upon them. It was ironic, then, that the 'go in peace' policy was taken up by the Conservative supporters of the Confederacy in Britain who advanced the view that the goal of emancipation would be best served by the severance of the Union and the creation of an independent Confederate States of America.<sup>66</sup>

There were signs, however, that attitudes in Britain to slavery, and also to race, were changing by the end of the 1850s. The abolitionist tradition appeared to be in retreat with membership of emancipation and anti-slavery societies in decline and reports by visitors to Britain, such as the celebrated African American writer, Frederick Douglass, of a loss of interest in intervention and a growing indifference to American slavery.<sup>67</sup> The reasons for this lay partly in disillusionment with the results of emancipation in West Indies.<sup>68</sup> Jonathan Connolly has shown through an analysis of newspaper editorials, including those of *The Times*, *The Economist* and *The Spectator*, that emancipation was widely seen as a failure, due to the subsequent economic decline in the sugar plantations.<sup>69</sup> In a revealing editorial in *The*

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<sup>64</sup> Blackett, op. cit., p. 30.

<sup>65</sup> James McPherson, *Battle Cry of Freedom: The American Civil War*, (London: Penguin, 1988), p. 151.

<sup>66</sup> Donald Bellows, 'A Study of British Conservatives' Reaction to the American Civil War', *Journal of Southern History*, 51 (1985), p. 522.

<sup>67</sup> Blackett, p. 50-51.

<sup>68</sup> Ibid. p. 37.

<sup>69</sup> Connolly, p. 109.



*Times* on 18 July 1857, which appears to foreshadow its subsequent position on emancipation in America, the editors wrote:

The process [of emancipation in the West Indies] was a failure. It destroyed an immense property, ruined thousands of good families, [and] degraded the Negroes still lower than they were [.....]. Everyone who comes fresh into the question, uncompromised and unbiased, admits the failure and asks why we did not attempt gradual or spontaneous emancipation.<sup>70</sup>

The British response to labour shortages in the plantations following emancipation was to introduce a government-regulated system of indentured labour migration mainly from India. This was a measure which *The Times* initially opposed on humanitarian grounds, but by the end of the 1850s had come round to support.<sup>71</sup>

The second reason for the weakening of interest in the anti-slavery cause would appear to lie in a rise in racist attitudes in Britain. Amanda Foreman notes how American abolitionists who visited Britain in the 1840s “were amazed to discover how British blacks enjoyed the same rights as their white peers”.<sup>72</sup> The former slave and author Harriet Jacobs, who Foreman also refers to, described in her autobiographical narrative her feelings on being treated as an equal while on a visit to England in the same period:

For the first time in my life, I was in a place where I was treated according to my deportment, without reference to my complexion. I felt as if a great millstone had been lifted from my breast. Ensconced in a pleasant room, with my dear little charge, I laid my heads on my pillow, for the first time, with the delightful consciousness of pure, unadulterated freedom.<sup>73</sup>

However, by the time of Frederick Douglass’s visit to England in 1859, attitudes appeared to have changed. Douglass, who had previously visited England thirteen years earlier, found on his second visit manifestations of racial prejudice which had been absent on his first. In

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<sup>70</sup> *The Times*, 18 July 1857, p. 9.

<sup>71</sup> Connolly, pp. 85 - 119

<sup>72</sup> Foreman, p. 27

<sup>73</sup> Harriet Ann Jacobs *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl* (1861), p. 275, available at: <https://docsouth.unc.edu/fpn/jacobs/jacobs.html> [accessed 24 May 2024]. Her “dear little charge” was Mary Bruce, the orphaned daughter of Jacobs’s erstwhile benefactor in New York, Mrs Bruce, who had died shortly before the voyage to England. Jacobs had been employed as Mary’s nurse.

particular, he deplored the prevalence of blacked up minstrel troupes, whose theatrical performances, portraying life on the Southern plantations, had become a popular form of entertainment.<sup>74</sup> While these shows were not a new phenomenon, the typical caricature of the slaves in these performances as childlike, ignorant and silly - objects of ridicule, as opposed to pity - reinforced growing racist attitudes as anti-slavery sentiment waned.<sup>75</sup>

This change in attitude can partly be explained by the consequences of emancipation in the West Indies where the resistance of the ex-slaves to work in the plantations came to be seen as indolence, and, as such, “a sign and a result of racial inferiority.”<sup>76</sup> Another crucial event in the hardening of attitudes towards race in Britain was the Indian Rebellion of 1857, which Connolly sees as a turning point in this regard.<sup>77</sup> Scientific support for deterministic views on race came from Social Darwinism, which developed from the debates surrounding evolution.<sup>78</sup> This theory, as cited by Duncan Campbell, took a “racist” as opposed to an “ethnocentric” view of non-white peoples, that is one which saw them as racially inferior on an evolutionary scale, as opposed to one which saw them as equal, but needing to be “raised” to the level of western civilization.<sup>79</sup> Hannah Rose Murray has argued that it was the growth of “scientific racism” that changed the nature of minstrelsy in British theatres with representation of Black people gradually becoming “more savage and cruel”.<sup>80</sup> The influence of Social Darwinism can be seen in the mission of the London Anthropological Society, founded in 1863, the year of the Emancipation Proclamation, “to question the heresies that have gained ground in science and politics of the equality of races and men”.<sup>81</sup> There had clearly already been push-back against these “heresies” in the court of public opinion in the decade before the Civil War, so that when the war broke out, British views of African Americans, and people of colour more generally, were, in Hugh Dubrulle’s words, “contradictory and increasingly negative”.<sup>82</sup>

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<sup>74</sup> Blackett p. 43.

<sup>75</sup> Ibid. p. 45. Dubrulle, p. 98, notes the influence of minstrelsy in Frank Vizetelly’s depictions in *The Illustrated London News* of slaves behind Confederate lines during the Civil War.

<sup>76</sup> Connolly, p. 108

<sup>77</sup> Ibid. p. 109

<sup>78</sup> Campbell, p. 125.

<sup>79</sup> Ibid. p. 125.

<sup>80</sup> Hannah Rose Murray, *Advocates of Freedom: African American Transatlantic Abolitionism in the British Isles*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2020), p. 102.

<sup>81</sup> Blackett, p. 41. The quote is from one of the co-founders of the Society, the Confederate agent, Henry Hotze.

<sup>82</sup> Dubrulle, p. 93.

#### 1.4 Anglo-American Relations on the Eve of the Civil War

Since the War of Independence from British colonial rule, relations between Britain and America had, as Amanda Foreman describes it, "been bent and twisted by eighty-three years of wars, disputes and reconciliations".<sup>83</sup> Whether, on the eve of the Civil War, relations were marked predominantly by dispute or by reconciliation has been a matter of some disagreement among historians. Brian Jenkins suggests that by 1860, British relations with America were "marked by disapproval, mistrust and apprehension".<sup>84</sup> This, he argues, was caused by a variety of factors, including concerns over the growth of American economic and commercial competition, indignation at American blocking of British efforts to suppress the slave trade, irritation at the consequences of Irish emigration seen in the Anglophobia in cities like New York, and anger at a series of diplomatic defeats in Britain's border disputes with the United States in Central America. Jenkins suggests that the antipathy in the relationship inevitably influenced Britain's reactions to the breakup of the Union by encouraging a preoccupation with Britain's own interests to the exclusion of America's.<sup>85</sup>

Not all historians agree with this assessment, although the factors themselves are not in dispute. H.C. Allen, for example, notes that the border issues in Central America arising from the interpretation of the Clayton-Bulwer Treaty of 1850 had largely been settled by treaties in 1859 and 1860, even if Britain had to concede far more than she gained.<sup>86</sup> Nevertheless, the settlement reflected the fact that Britain had come to accept the reality of American power in the region, and the concessions made, such as relinquishing the Protectorate on the mouth of the San Juan River on the Mosquito coast, were more of an irritation than a national humiliation. Indeed, Allen claims that the decade of the 1850s "left Anglo-American relations in a better condition than perhaps any since 1793" and saw "possibly the most distinct movement in British opinion away from contempt towards cordiality."<sup>87</sup> One of the reasons for this was the growing sense of community and shared values between the two countries at a time when much of Continental Europe was experiencing a Conservative crackdown after the revolutions of 1848. Martin Crawford, for example, notes that

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<sup>83</sup> Foreman, p. 13.

<sup>84</sup> Jenkins, Vol 1, p. 72.

<sup>85</sup> Ibid. p. 76.

<sup>86</sup> H.C. Allen, *Great Britain and the United States: A History of Anglo-American Relations 183-1952*, (London: Odhams Press Ltd, 1954), p. 440.

<sup>87</sup> Ibid, p. 441.

throughout the decade “British politicians, journalists and travel writers repeatedly urged that the two countries were set apart from the rest of the civilized world by a common commitment to liberty, progress and representative government.”<sup>88</sup> Crawford is thus largely in agreement with Allen’s upbeat assessment of Anglo-American relations, and takes the view that at the outbreak of war, “prospects for continuing progress in the friendly relationship appeared bright”<sup>89</sup>.

The successful visit to America and Canada by the Prince of Wales, the future King Edward VII, in October 1860 is cited by many historians as a symbol of the improved relations between Britain and America on the eve of the Civil War.<sup>90</sup> While this would appear to be the case, H.C. Allen tellingly quotes from one of *The Times* reports at the time describing the purpose of the visit as being “to bridge the bloody chasm which for near a century has gaped” between the two nations, and to assuage the American “triumph of success” and the British “sneers of disappointed dominion”.<sup>91</sup> These comments point to the fact that tensions between the two countries and “nationalist passions” lay not far beneath the surface, despite the improvement in relations.<sup>92</sup>

The comments also reveal something of the contradictory feelings that Britons had about Americans and America. On the one hand, there was a sense of resentment at America’s growing economic and political power, and dislike of American ‘triumphalism’, a feeling that was compounded by the threat that the inexorable rise of America posed to Britain’s own place in the world. On the other hand, Americans were also seen as ‘cousins’, people of “our stock” with ties of blood as well as of culture and religion. Their achievements were thus a source of pride which reflected well on the qualities of the Anglo-Saxon race. *The Times* in an editorial after the first shots of the Civil War were fired at Fort Sumter in April 1861 put it like this:

They are of our stock, they speak our own language, they reflect our own faults, and up to this time they appeared to be continuing our national grandeur.<sup>93</sup>

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<sup>88</sup> Crawford, p. 9

<sup>89</sup> Ibid. p.11.

<sup>90</sup> For example, Crawford, p. 10, Foreman, pp. 55-56.

<sup>91</sup> Allen, p. 443.

<sup>92</sup> Blackett, p. 19.

<sup>93</sup> *The Times*, 7 May 1861, p. 9.

Hugh Dubrulle uses ideas from post-colonial studies to help explain the way Britons thought about Americans during the antebellum period, and these provide a useful framework for understanding the ‘them and us’ attitude commonly found in the contemporary writings of travellers, journalists, politicians and newspaper editors. According to Dubrulle, due to the old colonial connection, British observers in the period tended to recognise Americans as an Anglo-Saxon yet subsidiary people – like us, but not like us. “Anglo-Saxon” implied “American equality” while “subsidiary” implied British superiority.<sup>94</sup> This conflicted attitude is well illustrated in a letter by Lord Palmerston, the Prime Minister of the British Administration throughout the Civil War period, to Lord Clarendon in 1857, as indeed are the casual racial slurs used to refer to other races:

The Yankees are the most disagreeable Fellows to have to do with about any American question. They are totally unscrupulous and dishonest and determined somehow or other carry their Point [.....]. I have long felt inwardly convinced that the Anglo-Saxon Race will in Process of Time become Masters of the whole American Continent, North and South, by Reasons of their superior Qualities as compared with the degenerate Spanish and Portuguese Americans.<sup>95</sup>

While this was a private letter, comments about Americans of this nature were common in the public domain, including newspapers, and, unsurprisingly, were reciprocated across the Atlantic with comments of similar venom about the British. The distinctly patronising, lofty tone frequently adopted by the British, often in the manner of a parent speaking to a wayward child, was a particular source of irritation to Americans.<sup>96</sup> The result was often a war of words conducted in the press, for example between *The Times* in London and *The New York Tribune*, when nationalist passions were inflamed at times of diplomatic rupture or crisis. This happened in the first year in the Civil War, when the Anglo-American relations were severely tested by Britain’s Proclamation of Neutrality in May 1861, and during the *Trent* affair in December 1861, over which the two countries came close to war.

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<sup>94</sup> Dubrulle, p. 4.

<sup>95</sup> Lord Palmerston to Lord Clarendon 31 December 1857, as quoted in Crook, *The North, The South and The Powers*, p. 3.

<sup>96</sup> Blackett, p. 19.

## CHAPTER 2: BUILD-UP TO THE WAR: THE PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION AND SECESSION: NOVEMBER 1860 – FEBRUARY 1861

### 2.1 Introduction

The first of the data chapters covers editorial press coverage in the three selected newspapers from the victory of Abraham Lincoln and the Republicans in the Presidential election of 6 November 1860, news of which received initial comment in *The Times* on 20 November, through to the end of February 1861. This period coincided with the secession of the seven Deep South states in response to Lincoln's victory at the election, starting with South Carolina on 20 December 1860, to be followed by Mississippi, Florida, Alabama, Georgia, Louisiana and Texas by early February. By the end of the month, the delegates of these states had met in Montgomery, Alabama, to declare the Confederate States of America (the CSA) with its own constitution and with Jefferson Davis inaugurated as the provisional President. Within three months of the election, therefore, and before Lincoln had even assumed office, the threats of the secessionists in all seven Deep South states had become a reality. Unsurprisingly, this period was crucial in the formation of editorial opinion in the British press, given the prospect of civil war should attempts at 'voluntary reconstruction' fail, and the consequent impact on British commercial interests.

In America, the period covers the final three months of the presidency of James Buchanan whose policies of compromise and conciliation (beginning with the Crittenden Compromise Plan of December 1860) failed to stem the tide of secession, let alone persuade any of the break-away states to reconsider their actions. The failure of Congress to adopt the Crittenden Plan led to what James MacPherson describes as a policy of "masterly inactivity" one of "watching and waiting, not making any concessions but avoiding needless provocation" in the hope of shoring up unionist sentiment in the South, especially in the Upper South and border states which had not yet seceded.<sup>97</sup> The period ended with the passing by Congress of the Morrill Protectionist Tariff which aroused much hostile

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<sup>97</sup> McPherson, p. 259

commentary in English press in the week before Lincoln's inauguration. News of this was covered in the English press in the third week of March 1861.

## 2.2 The Presidential Election 1860

Of the three papers, only *The Economist* appeared to recognize the significance of the victory of the Republican Party, although not for what it presaged for the cohesion of the Union itself, but for the future of slavery in the country. "The great importance of the election", it wrote after news of the election results reached England "is less in its immediate results than in showing that the tide of public opinion is turning against slavery in the States."<sup>98</sup>

Although its approval of Lincoln was qualified by what it regarded as his excessive moderation on the anti-slavery cause, on issues such as the Fugitive Slave Law, it argued that what was gained by his victory was in fact "incalculable" because "he stands irrevocably pledged to the principle that slavery is *wrong*, and that the national power, so far as it can be fairly used at all, must be used to limit, to repress, to promote its extinction." For that reason, it argued that the Republican success in the election "will prove one of the greatest events of modern times, if it indicates, as we trust, no mere fluctuation of public opinion in the direction of the anti-Slavery cause, but the commencement of a permanent and sustained movement."<sup>99</sup>

There was interestingly no discussion of how the Southern states might respond to the election, and of the possibilities of disunion, perhaps because, along with most of the rest of the British press, it did not take such threats seriously. *The Spectator*, for example, while commenting that the choice of Abraham Lincoln for the Presidency was "a remarkable event", did not invest it with the same significance as *The Economist* because, as it assured its readers confidently, "there will be no disunion; there will be no attack on the domestic institution (i.e. slavery); there will be a great change of persons but a very moderate change of policy". For *The Spectator* what was remarkable was that the election put an end to Southern domination of US politics and thereby signified a change of power:

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<sup>98</sup> 'The Republican President's Creed', *The Economist*, 24 November 1860, p. 1304.

<sup>99</sup> *Ibid*, p. 1303.

The main question at issue was not between slavery and non-slavery, but between those who have enjoyed power for a quarter of a century, and those who have been excluded. Slavery and the non-extension of slavery were the battle cries, but the thing contended for substantially was power.<sup>100</sup>

In a similar vein, *The Times* saw Lincoln's victory as retribution to the South for the outrage and excesses of 1855 and 1856 and "the acts of high-handed violence and oppression that preceded the advent of Mr Buchanan to power". It suggested that the result "will surprise no one who has paid the slightest attention to American politics".<sup>101</sup> Had *The Times* been paying a little more attention to American politics it might have thought twice before dismissing threats to the Union as "bluster", as in the following extract in the same editorial:

For the safety of the Union itself we confess we have no fear. Of course, it will take some time before men can cool down from the bluster which has been so profusely used for electioneering purposes to the language of moderation and truth [.....]. But when the cooler heads of the South begin to consider how imaginary is the injury which they have sustained, [.....] and how impossible it would be for the Southern States to maintain in the face of the world the strong position they now hold as members of the great American Confederacy, we suspect that the South will think better of it.<sup>102</sup>

*The Times* of course was not alone in failing to see the real danger to the Union caused by Lincoln's victory and the apparent powerlessness of the Buchanan interim government to resist the process of disunion once it had started. However, alone of the three papers, it tried to address the issue of potential secession by suggesting reasons why in its view it would not happen. This was in contrast to both *The Spectator* or *The Economist* which either simply dismissed the threat, or did not consider there to be one.

Interestingly, too, *The Times* took a somewhat indifferent view of Lincoln's victory in its editorial "so far as our own concerns are concerned", adding that "we must regard the accession of a Republican President without any very strong feeling of triumph".<sup>103</sup> There

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<sup>100</sup> 'The Presidential Election', *The Spectator*, 24 November 1860, p. 1116.

<sup>101</sup> *The Times*, 20 November 1860, p. 6.

<sup>102</sup> Ibid.

<sup>103</sup> *The Times*, 20 November 1860, p. 6.



was a note of suspicion here, rather as if the editor, John Delane, was reserving judgment on this new political party and its relatively unknown leader. An editorial the following week praised Lincoln as a product of America's democratic, classless society who it argued "can do anything he sets his mind to, partly from his natural pliability, partly by an immense power of fixing his attention on whatever is before him."<sup>104</sup> Nevertheless, his election victory was seen not as a result of his or his party's own success in winning the hearts and minds of Northern voters under one banner, but rather as the result of the past actions of Southern politicians, who only had themselves to blame for their election defeat:

While demanding the most implicit respect for its own opinions, the South has been even ostentatious in proclaiming a cynical and bitter contempt for the opinions and feelings of others. [...] The South has really taken so much pains to bring the present result to pass that it has no right to be surprised at its own success.<sup>105</sup>

### **2.3 The Gathering Storm**

Within a week of the reports in the English press of Lincoln's victory, news was reaching England about the growing strength of secessionist feeling in the South, especially in South Carolina. The *Times*, for example, contained a dispatch on 24 November from its correspondent in New York, Bancroft Davies, carrying extracts from the New York press and a telegraphic dispatch from Washington on 9th and 10th November. The *New York Herald* was quoted as reporting on 9th November that "the secession movement" in the South, particularly in South Carolina, "is rapidly gaining strength", with federal officers in Charleston having resigned their commissions and the State colours being displayed instead of the flag of the Union.<sup>106</sup> Although *The Times* also carried a more moderate report about the state of affairs from the *New York Times* suggesting that "the preponderance (of sentiment in the South) seems to be against any immediate movement looking to disunion", the reports coming in from America on an almost daily basis could not be ignored.<sup>107</sup> By the end of the year, therefore, we find *The Times*, *The Economist* and *The Spectator* beginning to re-assess

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<sup>104</sup> Ibid. p. 6.

<sup>105</sup> *The Times*, 28 November 1860, pp. 8-9.

<sup>106</sup> *The Times*, 24 November 1860, p. 8.

<sup>107</sup> Ibid.

their earlier assurances about the safety of the Union, and also beginning to develop their own distinctive editorial stances towards the prospect of secession.

In its editorial of 26 November 1860, *The Times* seemed to recognise that its earlier confidence in the strength and resilience of the Union may have been misplaced:

Should South Carolina, Georgia and the adjacent States separate themselves permanently from the Federation [.....], then the whole series of American politicians will have been in the wrong, and this journal, which has always declared such an event to be impossible, will have been in the wrong with them.<sup>108</sup>

The paper continued to castigate the South for “the wickedness and folly of their cause”. In its editorial two days later, it expressed some comfort in the thought that should the South’s “rough sparring” lead to bloodshed, “the aggressors will not be the stronger party”, and Mr. Lincoln “will carry with him the support of all those who, however tolerant of slavery, will not tamely acquiesce in its becoming the basis of an illegal and hostile Confederation.” Its view was that voluntary reversal of secession was the only way out the crisis, and it trusted in the moderate policy set out by Lincoln to bring this about. “We look in vain” it argued in its editorial the following week “for any hint of one dangerous step he would take if he could, or could take if he would.”<sup>109</sup>

In the same article, there were signs of *Times* adopting a distinctly more pragmatic approach in view of the rapidly deteriorating situation on the ground and suggested that the inflamed feelings that currently divide North and South could only be assuaged by taking “a moderate and rational view of the subject” of slavery itself. Consequently, the paper proposed adopting “a much quieter view of the domestic institution”, based on mitigation of the evils of slavery rather than its abolition. It also recognised that both sides of the conflict, as well as Britain itself, were economically and inextricably dependent on the fruits of slave labour in the cotton states:

May not this quarrel give way to a calm in which the real difficulties of the question will be met and quietly answered? It is too true that the commerce of the United

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<sup>108</sup> *The Times*, 26 November 1860, p. 6.

<sup>109</sup> *The Times*, 26 November, p.6, and 5 December 1860, p. 6.

States is almost, if not quite, as much committed to Slavery as its agriculture. For what would New York be without Slavery? But, what, alas! would Liverpool and Manchester? What this metropolis? Cannot all the parties in this business put their heads together, shake hands over the quarrel, and think about what can be done to mitigate what is so difficult to abolish?<sup>110</sup>

Quite how this mutual recognition of each side's commercial dependence on slavery would address the central issue of its confinement to its current borders and its non-extension into the Territories, the editorial does not expand on, but as Martin Crawford suggests, it was perhaps natural that as the situation deteriorated "*The Times* should seek to subordinate its anti-slavery convictions to what it considered the more pressing imperative of national survival".<sup>111</sup>

In a further sign of this more moderate, pragmatic approach, the paper acknowledged a week later, that "the South have some right on their side, in the form of its resentment of the protective economic policies of the Republican party:

The South may have no right to introduce slavery into the "Territories" [.....] but it has a right to the advantages of free trade, from which it is debarred by a tariff designed for the benefit of Northern manufacturers. [.....] A Southern Confederacy, enjoying free trade with England and France, and exchanging the products of its soil directly with the great manufacturing and artistic nations of Europe, is the not unnatural dream of Southern economists.<sup>112</sup>

This was a new element introduced into the discussion which foreshadowed the paper's vehement attacks on the Morrill Tariff introduced by Congress at the end of February 1861 immediately prior to Lincoln's accession. Protective tariffs had first been imposed in the 1820's to protect northern manufacturing, mainly from overseas imports from countries such as Britain, and were the cause of South Carolina's failed Nullification movement in 1832. There was no suggestion here that *The Times* was seeking to use this issue as a justification for secession, but was pointing out that on this issue, which also directly affected Britain's own commercial interests, there were two sides to a quarrel. The

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<sup>110</sup> *The Times*, 5 December 1860, p. 6.

<sup>111</sup> Crawford, p. 83.

<sup>112</sup> *The Times*, 11 December 1860, p. 9.

reference to the “dream of Southern economists” of a Confederacy of cotton exporting states enjoying free trade with Britain and France should be seen as simply that, a dream of a future Confederacy rather than a dream of *The Times*. Nevertheless, in view of the paper’s later sympathy for the Confederacy in its struggle against Federal coercion, the reference is interesting: while it clearly sat at odds with the paper’s earlier condemnation of South Carolina for “the wickedness and folly of their cause”, it was arguably not incompatible with the “quieter view” on the subject of slavery which *The Times* had proposed a week earlier.

*The Spectator* meanwhile continued to dismiss talk of secession as the posturings of ‘madmen’ in the “ill-tempered state” of South Carolina, but at the same time it admitted to some concern about the spread of the protests to the neighbouring state of Georgia. However, it was still of the opinion that the rebellion would “splutter and subside” given that there was nothing illegal in the election of Lincoln, and “nothing in his opinions which should alarm the South”:

He declares that slavery is wrong, indeed, but he supports the Fugitive Slave-law, because it is constitutional. He favours the gradual abolition of slavery in the district of Columbia, and he opposes the extension of slavery. In this he has the warrant of Washington and Jefferson.<sup>113</sup>

Like almost all the English press, *The Spectator* had seriously underestimated the strength of secessionist, anti-Republican sentiment in the South and the understandable sense of alarm felt at the prospect of a Republican administration in Washington.<sup>114</sup> As Eric Foner argues, “as southerners viewed the Republican party’s rise to power in one northern state after another, and witnessed the increasingly anti-southern tone of the northern Democrats, they could hardly be blamed for feeling apprehensive about their future.” The election in 1860, he added, had marked “a turning point in the history of slavery in the United States” and “North and South alike” knew it.<sup>115</sup>

Where *The Spectator*’s view of the subject differed from most of its contemporary publications was in its unequivocal view from the outset about the illegality of any attempt

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<sup>113</sup> ‘Reputed Signs of Disruption in the American Union’, *The Spectator*, 1 December 1860, p. 1144.

<sup>114</sup> Eric Foner, *Free Soil, Free Labour, Free Men: The Ideology of the Republican Party before the Civil War* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), p. 314.

<sup>115</sup> *Ibid.* p. 315.

by the South to secede, a view which would remain constant throughout the secession winter and would underpin its resistance to any talk of “letting the South go”. Drawing on Tocqueville’s comments of the Federal Constitution of the United States, and foreshadowing Lincoln’s own stated views on the illegality of secession, the paper argued that:

It is treason by the Constitution to levy war against the United States, and [.....] if it is not treason, is incipient treason as it may lead to a levying of war. There is no provision in the Constitution for the secession of any State from the Union. There is no reference to the possibility of secession. The Constitution appears to assume the irrevocable union of the States admitted within its precincts.<sup>116</sup>

The issue for *The Spectator* here was a clearcut, constitutional one. In its view, Lincoln’s election and his stated views on the slavery question had given the South no grounds to secede. Secession was illegal within the Constitution of the United States and was ‘incipient treason’, with the implication that any President of the Union would be duty bound to take all necessary measures to oppose it in order to defend the Constitution.

For *The Economist*, the issue at stake was not so much the illegality of secession but the containment of slavery. The paper was concerned that the Republican Party who were in a minority in both Houses of Congress, would not stand sufficiently firm in the face of concessions being discussed in Congress on issues such as personal liberty laws (which allowed Northern states to evade the Fugitive Slave Act), and the recognition of property rights (which included slave property) in the Territories.<sup>117</sup> While the paper could see room for some compromise on the first issue (by requiring Northern states to pay compensation to slave-owners for their fugitive slaves if on principle they refused to hand them over), it could see none in the second “without absolute ruin to the credit of the Republican Party”. As far as *The Economist* was concerned:

The one principle on which the Republican Party is founded is the conviction that Slavery is a disastrous evil to the Union at large, the spread of which must be prevented, and all the natural feeders of which must be, *so far as the Federal authority*

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<sup>116</sup> ‘Reputed Signs of Disruption in the American Union’, *The Spectator*, 1 December 1860, p. 1144.

<sup>117</sup> ‘The Duty of the Republican Party in the United States’, *The Economist*, 15 December 1860: pp. 1390-1391.

*will allow*, steadily obstructed and finally choked up. This, and this alone, is essential to the Party. [.....] Any concession that sacrifices this policy is suicidal.<sup>118</sup>

Not for *The Economist* then the 'quieter view' on slavery advocated by *The Times*. By contrast, *The Economist*, alone of the three publications at this stage, seemed to be making its support for the Republican Party and, by extension, its support for the Federal Government in opposing secession, conditional on the commitment of the Party to its anti-slavery manifesto. This was significant because it allowed room for *The Economist* to modify its stance later in favour of a negotiated secession of the Confederate States as it became increasingly disillusioned about the commitment of the Federal Administration to its anti-slavery agenda.

The last major American event of 1860 to receive coverage in the British press was President Buchanan's annual message to Congress, delivered on 3<sup>rd</sup> December 1860. The significance of the message from the point of view of influencing public and press opinion in Britain was the President's admission that although the South had no constitutional right to secede, Congress had no constitutional power to coerce a state into submission if it was attempting or had already withdrawn from the Union.

Unsurprisingly, Buchanan's message provoked "the first serious criticism of the way the Americans were handling the disunion crisis".<sup>119</sup> *The Times* was quick to pour scorn on Buchanan's message as an "evasion of all responsibility, [.....] weak in purpose and almost unintelligible in argument".<sup>120</sup> *The Economist* described it as "a feeble and wavering message."<sup>121</sup> *The Spectator* detected the strong influence in the message of the Southern advisers in the Cabinet, as indeed did *The Times*, with the result that the remedy for the national danger, as proposed in the message amounted in its words to "a surrender by the Republican party of the principles on which they have fought".<sup>122</sup>

For *The Economist*, the situation in the country had already gone beyond the stage where the President's message would be likely to have any weight, and for the first time, it

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<sup>118</sup> Ibid, p. 1391.

<sup>119</sup> Crawford, p. 83.

<sup>120</sup> *The Times*, 19 December 1860, p. 6.

<sup>121</sup> 'Southern Secession and the President's Message', *The Economist*, 22 December 1860, p. 1419.

<sup>122</sup> 'The President's Message', *The Spectator*, 22 December 1860, p. 1215.

contemplated the possibility of allowing the South to secede, which it argued would be almost “pure gain for the North if it could be peacefully managed” with access to the Mississippi guaranteed for the North-western states whose trade depended on it. It also argued that that secession would be the worst outcome for the Southern states which would “rapidly degrade”. However, such a separation could only come with strong conditions attached and would depend on the Republicans standing firm “as to the right of Congress to rule the Territories and not to permit the re-enactment of the Missouri Compromise, even if the line be extended to the Pacific”, as it would allow slavery to expand indefinitely south of it. “Let not the Northern Republicans deliberate for a moment” the article concluded “over any terms that would surrender the power to restrict absolutely the area of Slavery within its present limits”.<sup>123</sup>

As we enter 1861, therefore, we find *The Economist* remaining consistent in its support for the Republican Party provided that it adhered firmly to its manifesto against any extension of slavery, but willing to contemplate a disruption of the Union involving the secession of the slave-owning states on condition that slavery was restricted ‘absolutely’ within them. We find *The Spectator* remaining consistent in its view of the illegality of secession which it was the duty of the Federal Government to resist, with *The Times* adopting a more nuanced, equivocal position on both the subject of slavery and the grievances of the Southern states than was apparent in its editorials at the start of the crisis. Nevertheless, this should not be misread as expressing any sympathy with the secessionist movement. Indeed, the conclusion of its opening editorial on the subject in the New Year (4 January 1861) could not have made this clearer:

The Americans may confidently assure themselves there is no party in this kingdom which desires anything but the maintenance and prosperity of the Union. We are more disposed, indeed, to advocate conciliation at the expense of principle in the face of such high political peril. But, for all this, we cannot disguise from ourselves that, apart from all political complications, there is a right and wrong in this question, and that the right belongs, with all its advantages, to the States of the North.<sup>124</sup>

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<sup>123</sup> ‘Southern Secession and the President’s Message’, *The Economist*, 22 December 1860, pp. 1419-1421.

<sup>124</sup> *The Times*, 4 January 1861, p. 6.

## 2.4 Secession

News of South Carolina's secession on 20 December 1860 reached England in time for coverage in the press in the second and third weeks of January, by which time it was already becoming clear that the six other Deep South states would follow suit. The news was not unexpected and did not cause an immediate change in the editorial opinion in the British press. However, once it became clear that the movement across the South was rapidly becoming a *fait accompli*, the English press as a whole, as well as the British government were forced to re-appraise events in America in terms of their impact on British interests, especially commercial interests, and the likely disruption in the supply of cotton in the event of civil war.

*The Economist* began the New Year with its new editor, Walter Bagehot at the helm. In its editorial pieces on 12 and 19 January 1861, Bagehot returned to the suggestion the newspaper had mooted on 22 December that if the U.S. government could not prevent secession (which it had become increasingly clear that they could not) they would do better to allow for a Southern Federation to be formed peacefully. This would be "as extensive and not much less populous than the Northern one", and one "with which we shall have to enter into formal relations".<sup>125</sup>

This now became the official editorial line for *The Economist*, a view which *The Times* would later adopt, but not until after Lincoln's accession to power. For *The Economist*, the irretrievability of secession and the horror of a civil war overrode other considerations. Indeed, the paper professed difficulty in understanding why the Northern states should find secession so hard to accept, arguing that in the absence of the contaminating influence of slavery they would be the gainers by the change "morally, socially and politically". The seceded South, on the other hand, would have everything to lose, for example: no support from the North in the event of a servile war; no protection from the infiltration of abolitionist doctrines; and no prospect, "in their severed condition and in defiance of the general outcry of the civilized world" of realizing any of their goals, such as the revival of the African slave trade, or seizing Cuba. There was no further reference to the North imposing

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<sup>125</sup> 'The Bearings of American Disunion', *The Economist*, 12 January 1861, p. 30.



conditions restricting slavery to its current limits. “We may leave the North and South” it argued a week later “to each other’s mutual control”.<sup>126</sup>

It should be stressed here that *The Economist* was far from adopting a pro-Confederacy position, but rather responding to what it saw as the reality of the situation in America. Indeed, the paper appeared to have taken its ‘Let the South go’ line partly because, in its view, there was no room for the Republican Party to compromise on the issue of slavery without sacrificing the principles on which it had won the election, and on which it had been formed in the 1850s.<sup>127</sup> To support its argument, the paper could also point to Northern voices in the press across the Atlantic advocating the same thing.<sup>128</sup> It also seems to have been the case that this was a view that was now being taken in British government circles. E.D. Adams quotes a letter by the Foreign Secretary Lord Russell to the British Ambassador in Washington, Lord Lyons, dated 10 January 1861, saying that he did not see “how the United States can be cobbled together by any compromise” and that “the best thing now would be that the right to secede should be acknowledged”. Above all, he hoped that “no force will be used”.<sup>129</sup>

However, by adopting this line, the *Economist*, along with Lord Russell, had failed to confront the fact that there was no legal basis in the constitution for secession and the act could only be regarded by the government of the United States as treason. There was thus no right to secede to be acknowledged, even if most secessionists believed that the so-called “revolutionary right” to secede, and the notion that state sovereignty overrode national sovereignty, conferred legality on their actions.<sup>130</sup> Both *The Economist* and Lord Russell had also underestimated the Republican Party’s ideological commitment to preserving the Union. As Eric Foner puts it, “the integrity of the Union, important as an end in itself, was

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<sup>126</sup> ‘The Bearings of American Disunion’, *The Economist*, 12 January 1861, pp. 29-32; ‘The Disruption of the Union as It Would Affect England’, *The Economist*, 19 January 1861, pp. 57-59.

<sup>127</sup> See Foner, *Free Soil, Free Labour, Free Men*, pp. 83 -84: Foner shows how Salmon Chase’s position that Congress lacked constitutional authority to recognise or create slavery anywhere in its jurisdiction was endorsed by the Republican platforms of 1856 and 1860.

<sup>128</sup> McPherson. p. 252 notes, for example, that Horace Greeley’s *New York Tribune* was a prominent advocate of the ‘Go in Peace’ approach.

<sup>129</sup> Adams, Vol 1, pp. 52 -53.

<sup>130</sup> McPherson, p. 240.

also a prerequisite to the national greatness Republicans felt the United States was destined to achieve.”<sup>131</sup>

There seem to be three separate strands of thinking which emerge from a reading of *The Economist's* editorials during this period. The first was what it saw as the sheer futility of attempting to coerce the seceded South into submission, a task which it regarded as both “nearly impossible” and “foolish”:

What would they [the Federal Administration] gain by compelling eight millions of men to remain in the Union against their will? How could such compulsion be permanently continued in a Republican nation?<sup>132</sup>

The second was fear of the consequences of a policy of coercion (and the civil war that would be almost certain to follow) on the supply of cheap American cotton on which Britain's textile industry depended. “It is not easy to overestimate the extent or gravity of the consequences to Great Britain of a cessation, or even [.....] a diminution, of the supply of cotton from the United States”, the paper's editorial stated on 19 January 1861, given that the “largest portions” of the population of Lancashire, North Cheshire, Lanarkshire, as well as considerable numbers of people in Derbyshire, Leicestershire, Nottinghamshire and Yorkshire depended on the supply of American cotton for their employment and sustenance. The paper estimated that nearly 4 million people were dependent for their livelihood on the importation of cotton, 75% of which currently came from America.<sup>133</sup> The editorial did, however, anticipate that the consequences of the disruption would be mitigated in various ways, for example, by acting as a stimulus to procuring supplies from other quarters, such as Egypt, India and South America. Curiously, one of the mitigating factors that the editorial did not mention was the large surplus of stocks of cotton that had been built up in Britain's textile mills during the boom years of 1859 and 1860.<sup>134</sup> This would ensure that shortages did not begin to be felt until the second half of 1862, the year of the ‘cotton famine’, and a whole year after the start of the civil war and the imposition of

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<sup>131</sup> Foner, *Free Soil, Free Labour, Free Men*, p. 316.

<sup>132</sup> ‘Progress of American Disunion’, *The Economist*, 2 March 1861, p. 227.

<sup>133</sup> ‘The Disruption of the Union as It Would Affect England’, *The Economist*, 19 January 1861, p. 58.

<sup>134</sup> Frank Owsley, *King Cotton Diplomacy: Foreign Relations of the Confederate States of America*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1959), p. 134.

the Federal embargo on Confederate ports. A consequence of this, as Howard Jones notes, was that the Confederate States were unable to exercise any serious economic leverage on Britain and France in the first year of the war in their quest for recognition.<sup>135</sup>

*The Economist* was particularly concerned by the possibility that war would be accompanied by a slave uprising in the South, which would stop the growth of cotton, not just the South's ability to export it in the event of a civil war. "This catastrophe", it argued, "would be so terrible, its accompaniments so shocking, and its results everywhere so deplorable, that we must earnestly pray that it may be averted."<sup>136</sup> Letting the South go therefore had to be preferable to war. This fear of a servile insurrection was to reappear in the press at other points during the conflict, particularly after Fremont's Emancipation Proclamation in Missouri (September 1861) and after Lincoln's Preliminary Emancipation Proclamation in September 1862.

Nevertheless, fears for the future of the cotton industry did not mean that Britain should consider lending its support to the Confederate States. *The Economist* made this position very clear following reports in January 1861 that South Carolina and Georgia were prepared to offer free trade deals with England and France, as an inducement for their support. In a scornful and angry response, Bagehot asserted that "no bribes, however enormous, would induce the English people .... to lend its aid to a revolt which they believe to be utterly unprovoked".<sup>137</sup>

The third strand of thinking which the paper introduced into its 12 January issue, lay in a distrust and disapproval of the overweening power of the American Republic which it regarded as a potential threat to Britain's own preeminent position on the world stage. This viewpoint, which can be found in other British newspaper reports of this period,<sup>138</sup> is exemplified vividly in the following extract:

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<sup>135</sup> Howard Jones *Blue and Gray Diplomacy: Foreign Relations of the Confederate States of America*, (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2010), pp 18 – 19.

<sup>136</sup> 'The Disruption of the Union, as It Would Affect England', *The Economist*, 19 January 1861: p. 58.

<sup>137</sup> 'American Infatuation Concerning England', *The Economist*, 26 January 1861, pp. 89 - 90.

<sup>138</sup> The *National Review*, for example, in July 1861 notes that Americans "had grown aggressive, overbearing and unjust", and "revelled in the unwholesome and perverting contemplation of their own grandeur". From D.P. Crook 'Portents of war: English Opinion on Secession' *Journal of American Studies* 4/2 (1970), p. 178.

They have long been accustomed to boast to the world and to themselves of the mighty strength, the unexampled prosperity, the marvellous progress and the surpassing grandeur of their vigorous young nation. They have flung themselves and their institutions insultingly and bombastically in the face of Europe, requiring everyone to avow that no nation of the old world could match their power or rival their constitution, or hold a candle to them as regarded the well-being, the capability for self-government, and the political wisdom of their people. They have dreamed of omnipotence and immortality, and they feel with angry disappointment and bitter humiliation that such a disruption as now seems almost consummated, is a deplorable end to all these ambitious hopes and all this measureless self-glorification.<sup>139</sup>

There is a sense here that the loss of the seceded South would be a well-deserved come-uppance for America's perceived arrogance. Thomas Keiser, in his wide-ranging study of the English Press and the American Civil War, advances the theory that what explains the pro-Southern sympathies in most of the press in the course of the war was "a Machiavellian desire to see the United States destroyed" and, unsurprisingly perhaps, he cites this passage from *The Economist* to support this theory.<sup>140</sup> *The Economist* certainly saw some advantages to Britain from a break-up of the Union, such as expectations of a "less aggressive, less insolent" America to deal with, and a reining back of America's "annexing tendencies".<sup>141</sup> However, there is nothing to suggest that this was their hope all along, or that it drove their editorial position during the war. Bagehot's views as expressed here were, as we have seen in Chapter 1, not out of keeping with commonly held attitudes that people in Britain held about Americans during the antebellum period, views which tended to surface at times of tension in bilateral relations.<sup>142</sup> For *The Economist*, this characterization of Americans helped to explain why the North might be so reluctant to let the Southern slave states go, rather than to explain the reasons for its own editorial stance.

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<sup>139</sup> 'The Bearings of American Disunion', *The Economist*, 12 January 1861, p. 31.

<sup>140</sup> Keiser, p. 26.

<sup>141</sup> 'The Disruption of the Union, as it would affect England', *The Economist*, 19 January 1861, p. 58.

<sup>142</sup> See for example, Dubrulle, p. 25 and Foreman, p. 28.

*The Times* was also not averse to expressing similar sentiments about America in its leading articles, referring, for example, to “the wantonness and arrogance of prosperity” which “have never been so conspicuous in any modern nation as in the Americans”, but which now seemed set to meet its nemesis as a result of the secession crisis.<sup>143</sup> Nevertheless, *The Times* was at pains to resist any inclination to gloat over this state of affairs, asserting that:

Not only has the English press shown no joy at secession, given no encouragement to the South, and turned away from the bait of a free trade, but it has, as far as it lay in its power, strengthened the Federal government by earnest expressions of sympathy, and by advice which, perhaps, will not be wholly without effect.<sup>144</sup>

Whether the head of the Federal government, President Buchanan, whom *The Times* continued to lambast for being “entirely unequal to the situation” felt strengthened by *The Times’* comments is another matter.<sup>145</sup> Nevertheless, it is hard to find any sign in the paper’s editorial comments that *The Times* wished at this point for anything but the preservation of the Union rather than its dissolution.

Like *The Economist*, *The Times* in its leader of 22 January 1861 expressed very grave concerns about the prospect of civil war in America, which it viewed with “unaffected horror”, with dire consequences for Britain’s cotton industry in the event of a servile insurrection in the slave states:

If the Southern States of the Union are convulsed by war, a servile insurrection will be only too probable [.....]; if the slaves rebel, the cotton crop perishes; and with the failure of the cotton crop comes the paralysis of our own staple manufacture.<sup>146</sup>

To drive home its point, the paper transcribed the article from *The Economist* of 19 January about the impact of a disruption in cotton imports, concluding that:

Independently of our natural sympathies, we have enormous interests at stake – such interests, indeed, that our charity must begin at home. We deplore the political

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<sup>143</sup> *The Times*, 7 February 1861, p. 8.

<sup>144</sup> *Ibid.* p. 8.

<sup>145</sup> *The Times*, 26 January 1861, p. 8.

<sup>146</sup> *The Times*; 22 January 1861, pp. 6 -7.

catastrophe, but our first thoughts must necessarily be given to its commercial effects.<sup>147</sup>

An assessment of the events in America from the point of view of what *The Times* believed to be in Britain's best interests became increasingly to dominate the paper's editorial coverage of the war. In a comment on this editorial E.D. Adams claimed that *The Times* was "advocating an early recognition of the Southern Confederacy if needed to maintain the supply of cotton".<sup>148</sup> However, a close reading of the editorial gives no grounds for this interpretation. Quite the reverse was in fact the case. Both *The Times* and *The Economist*, and *The Spectator* too, were "resolutely opposed to any surrender to King Cotton from the start".<sup>149</sup> Their response to the likely disruption in the cotton supply from America, as well as to any pressure exerted by the Confederacy by deliberately withholding supplies, was to argue for urgent steps to step up production and imports of cotton from other parts of the world. This determination not to surrender to 'King Cotton Diplomacy' showed no sign of wavering later in the conflict either. In a leading article in December 1860, *The Times* gave Confederate threats to withhold the supply of cotton to Europe short shrift:

On this point let him [Jefferson Davis] undeceive himself. The failure of the cotton supply of the United States is like the loss of a familiar face, at first deeply regretted, then occasionally missed, and then not missed at all. We are learning how well we can do without him, and are not unapt scholars.<sup>150</sup>

Unlike *The Economist*, *The Times* in the first two months of 1861 did not propose that the states that had seceded be allowed to leave, but continued to hold out increasingly desperate hopes of averting war. These hopes rested on the compromise proposals being discussed in the Senate,<sup>151</sup> pressure from the border states to force "the seceders [...] to

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<sup>147</sup> Ibid.

<sup>148</sup> Adams, Vol 1, p. 55.

<sup>149</sup> Campbell, p. 51,

<sup>150</sup> *The Times*, 10 December 1861, p. 6.

<sup>151</sup> These proposals, known as the Crittenden Compromise, were a series of amendments to the Constitution proposed by a Senate Committee led by Senator John Crittenden which would guarantee slavery in the states against future interference from the Federal Government and prohibit it in territories north of the old Missouri Compromise line of 36/30' but protect it south of that. (McPherson, pp. 252-35). Eric Foner, *Free Soil, Free Labour, Free Men*, p.223, notes that the Compromise was rejected due to opposition from even moderate Republicans like Lincoln who saw it as tantamount to allowing the extension of slavery throughout Central America. "Such a course would reverse the result of the election of 1860".

come to terms”, and a belief the “in the mutual dependence of the two sections of the Union and the essential identity of the people”.<sup>152</sup> It castigated as “utter falsehoods” the claims made in South Carolina’s manifesto about the consequences of Lincoln’s accession to power, concluding that “without law, without justice, without delay, she [South Carolina] is treading in the path that leads to the downfall of nations and the misery of families”.<sup>153</sup> Nevertheless, there was no question that *The Times* felt the responsibility for the failure to stem the tide of secession during the Interregnum period lay as much with the ineptitude of the Federal administration, and Buchanan in particular, as with the uncompromising rhetoric of the secessionist leaders. Suggesting that there was “a middle path between civil war and instant recognition”, the President, it argued, should have “used the authority vested in him to give the Union and South Carolina time for reflection”. The time for this, however, had passed, and by pinning its hopes on compromise and a negotiated settlement, *The Times* had clearly reached the conclusion that it was now too late for the Federal Administration to use the threat of coercive measures as a way of saving the Union.

Alone of the three journals, *The Spectator*’s views of the crisis were unchanged by secession and the increasing likelihood of civil war and disruption to the cotton supply. In an article on 5 January 1861 anticipating the secession of South Carolina, *The Spectator* discussed the various compromise proposals that were being considered in Congress, including the extension of 36/30 line to the Pacific, and argued that no compromise was possible without giving up “the cardinal principles” on which Republican Party had fought and won the election. Any compromise in the paper’s view would only be a temporary fix: instead of contributing to the permanence of the union, it would be “more likely to render the Union liable to a sudden and fiery disruption” further down the line. The “irrepressible conflict” between Slave states and Free states, as described by Senator William Seward, was in the paper’s view exactly that – irrepressible.<sup>154</sup>

In this view *The Spectator* and *The Economist* were in agreement. It was in the solution to the issue that they differed. For *The Spectator*, the fundamental question remained the

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<sup>152</sup> *The Times* 7 February, p. 8; 19 February 1861, p. 6.

<sup>153</sup> *The Times* 19 January 1861, p. 6.

<sup>154</sup> ‘The American Crisis’, *The Spectator*, 5 January 1861, p. 11.

unconstitutionality of secession which no amount of discussion of the various compromise proposals could disguise:

Unable to deny the validity of an election in which they [the seceding Southern states] took part, and which they endeavoured to win, they turn round and repudiate their allegiance to the fundamental pact. This fact, which underlies the whole question, should be kept in sight by everyone who attempts to estimate the probability of the adoption of some compromise.<sup>155</sup>

The impact of civil war on the supply of cotton was the subject of articles on 19 and 26 January. The paper reiterated its view that even if peace could be secured, it would only be temporary and the supply of cotton from America would henceforth would always carry risk of disruption. Its remedy was not to entertain hopes for voluntary reconstruction, let alone argue the case for allowing a peaceful secession of the Southern states, but for Britain to take immediate, pro-active steps to make up the deficiency of cotton “from other sources” in parts of the world where cotton is grown as a native crop:

This is the message of Secession to us. Peace between North and South is at the mercy of a mob, and if peace is once broken, there will be wailing in Lancashire as well as in South Carolina. But were peace not broken, [.....] were Secession peacefully accomplished, there would be no guarantee for the future. Confidence is destroyed [.....]<sup>156</sup>

The 26 January issue of *The Spectator* marked the arrival of Meredith Townsend at the new editor, and his forthright leader on the supply of cotton was accompanied by an equally uncompromising piece entitled ‘The American Bourbon’.<sup>157</sup> In it he blamed what he saw as the now inevitable break-up of the Union on President Buchanan’s earlier irresolution and failure to act when South Carolina was only threatening secession. However, unlike *The Times*, which was equally critical of Buchanan’s leadership, the paper could see no room for compromises with the secessionists and emphasised the moral dimension of the differences between the two sides:

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<sup>155</sup> ‘The Progress of Disunion’, *The Spectator*, 16 February 1861, p. 163.

<sup>156</sup> ‘Cotton Supply’, *The Spectator*, 19 January 1861, p. 60.

<sup>157</sup> Butterfield, p. 50.



Apart from either the economical or the political aspect of the question, there is one which may be more formidable at any moment—the moral aspect. The party which regards slavery as sinful may be small, but it must grow. The party which regards slavery as an evil, which must be checked by limiting the area of slavery, is large and is expanding; and that which the Southerners dread more than the Personal Liberty Laws is the project for shutting up them and their institution in a ring fence, broken only by the waters of the Mississippi [.....]<sup>158</sup>

The adherence of *The Spectator* to the moral question of slavery as the underlying cause of secession - and of the war to follow - was one which would separate it fundamentally from the stances taken by both *The Times* and *The Economist*. It is also interesting to note the reference in this extract to the Republican policy of creating a ring fence or ‘cordon of freedom’ surrounding the slave states in order to marginalise slavery within its territorial limits as a local aberration while the free states expanded westwards.<sup>159</sup> What the seceded states understood, and what they could not accept, was that behind the Republican determination to prevent the extension of slavery lay an equal determination to eventually eradicate it altogether.

## 2.5 The Morrill Tariff

A week before Lincoln’s accession to power, the United States Congress, in the absence of the Southern ‘free-trading’ senators from the seceded states, passed the Morrill Protective Tariff Bill (named after Senator Justin Morrill of Vermont who drafted it), which considerably increased the tariff on the import of certain manufactured goods such as pig iron and wool. Since 40% of Britain’s exports went to the United States, the commercial effect of the Tariff on Britain was potentially devastating.<sup>160</sup> It was also a direct challenge to the principles of Free Trade to which Britain had become ideologically committed by the middle of the nineteenth century, and sat in marked contrast to the more liberal, economic policies of the

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<sup>158</sup> ‘The American Bourbon’, *The Spectator*, 26 January 1861, p. 82.

<sup>159</sup> James Oakes, *Freedom National: The Destruction of Slavery in the United States 1861-1865*, (New York: Norton, 2014), p. 257. The phrase ‘Cordon of Freedom’ was originally used in a speech by William Lloyd Garrison, outlining the theory of containment which would eventually force the slave states to abandon slavery themselves; Foner, *Free Soil, Free Labour, Free Men*, p. 312.

<sup>160</sup> Foreman, p. 68.

seceding Southern states. The Tariff thus became “a gift to Confederate diplomacy” in their campaign to persuade Britain to recognize the Confederacy once hostilities had begun.<sup>161</sup>

The impact of the Morrill Tariff on British attitudes towards the US was, according to Martin Crawford “much greater than most modern historians have been willing to admit.”<sup>162</sup> To the extent that newspaper commentary is a reflection of public attitudes, Crawford’s opinion is borne out by the negative coverage in the press. This view is also shared in a more recent study of the Morrill Tariff by Marc-William Palen which concludes that:

Such British support for the South that existed went much further than support for self-determination or opposition to fratricide, blockades and democracy, it was also an opposition to northern protectionism.<sup>163</sup>

Opposition to the Tariff cut across all shades of public opinion in Britain, however, with even staunch Union supporters like the abolitionist Harriet Martineau, who also wrote for the *Daily News*, fiercely condemning it.<sup>164</sup>

All three newspapers in the study shared the same view about the Tariff, although the denunciation was far more pronounced in *The Economist*, a journal whose existence was rooted in the Free Trade movement, and *The Times* than it was in *The Spectator*. *The Economist* described the tariff variously as “slovenly and disgraceful”, “obnoxious”, and “an absurd and mischievous measure which cannot remain long on the statute books”.<sup>165</sup> Similarly, *The Times* described it as “suicidal folly” which will “alienate foreign nations” and “embitter domestic strife”.<sup>166</sup> Both papers blamed the measure on the failures of American democracy which in *The Economist*’s view “offered no security whatever to any nation, either for the [.....] steady pursuit of its own interests, any more than for the respect of the interests and rights of others, or for the simplest principles of morality and justice”.<sup>167</sup>

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<sup>161</sup> Don Doyle, *The Cause of All Nations: An International History of the American Civil War*, (New York: Basic Books, 2015), p. 43.

<sup>162</sup> Crawford, p. 93.

<sup>163</sup> Palen, M-W. ‘The Civil War’s forgotten transatlantic tariff debate and the Confederacy’s free trade diplomacy’. *Journal of the Civil War Era* 3 (2013): p. 37.

<sup>164</sup> Blackett, p. 152.

<sup>165</sup> ‘The American Tariff’, *The Economist*, 16 March 1861, p. 283 - 284. As it happened it remained on the statute books well into the twentieth century and the Tariff was increased in the second year of the Civil War.

<sup>166</sup> *The Times*, 12 March 1861, p. 9; 5 March 1861, p. 9.

<sup>167</sup> ‘The American Tariff’, *The Economist*, 16 March 1861, p. 283.

*The Spectator*, in a short comment on the Tariff, agreed with *The Economist* that the Tariff “cannot long endure” on the grounds that the duties would be evaded by smuggling and suggested that the measure would hurt the prosperity of the North more than any blow that “Mr. Jefferson Davis will be able to inflict”.<sup>168</sup> However, apart from that, the paper had little to say about the issue, and it did not have any impact on its editorial line with regard to the American crisis. *The Economist*, too, had formed a view that the Federal government would be best advised to negotiate a separation from the Southern states that had already seceded, and there was little indication at this stage of a change or modification of this view as a result of the Tariff, except perhaps to increase its belief in the fundamental incompatibility between the two sections of the Union.

For *The Times*, on the other hand, the Tariff became something of a game changer in its attitude to the American conflict. In its third and longest editorial on the issue, the paper advanced the view that “Protection was quite as much a cause of the disruption of the Union as Slavery”.<sup>169</sup> This was significant because, if slavery was no longer seen as the root cause of the conflict between North and South, it appeared to open up for the paper the prospect of recognizing the new Confederacy in spite of its attachment to slavery. This seems to be the implication in this extract from the same editorial and is worth quoting in full:

For the present, the great American Union is effectually divided in to two rival Confederacies [.....]. Their internal institutions are their own affair; their financial and political arrangements emphatically ours. Brazil is a Slaveholding Empire but by its good faith and good conduct it has contrived to establish for itself a place in the hierarchy of nations far superior to that of many Powers which are free from this domestic contamination. If the Northern Confederacy of America evinces a determination to act in a narrow, exclusive and unsocial spirit [reference to the Morrill Tariff] while its southern competitor extends the hand of good fellowship to all mankind, with the exception of its own bondsmen, we must not be surprised to see the North, in spite of the goodness of its cause and the great negative merit of the

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<sup>168</sup> ‘The Last American Phase’, *The Spectator*, 16 March 1861, p. 273.

<sup>169</sup> *The Times*, 12 March 1861, p. 9.

absence of Slavery, sink into a secondary position, and lose the sympathy and regard of mankind.<sup>170</sup>

By the time of Lincoln's inauguration, therefore, *The Times* appeared to be moving rapidly to a position closer to that of *The Economist*, in terms of advocating a negotiated settlement to the conflict and allowing the states in the new Confederacy to secede. It had also seemed to have dropped its earlier antipathy to slavery as an obstacle to any future dealings with the seceded South, and to have fully adopted "the much quieter view of the domestic institution" proposed in its editorial of 5 December 1860.

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<sup>170</sup> Ibid.

## CHAPTER 3: THE OUTBREAK OF WAR: FROM LINCOLN'S INAUGURATION TO BULL RUN AND ITS AFTERMATH: MARCH 1861 TO AUGUST 1861

### 3.1 Introduction

The second data chapter begins with editorial coverage of Abraham Lincoln's much anticipated Inaugural Address on 4 March 1861. It then tracks the way the three newspapers responded to subsequent events which led to outbreak of hostilities at Fort Sumter in April 1861, and from then to the first major battle of the war. This was the First Battle of Bull Run where, on 21<sup>st</sup> July, the Union army were routed by Confederate forces just 30 miles south west of Washington. The period is crucial in the formation of editorial opinion in the English press because it had become apparent firstly that there would be no further negotiation with the seceded states either for re-integration into the Union or for secession from it, and secondly that, after Bull Run, any hope that the conflict might be of short duration were misplaced. It should be emphasized that although in retrospect, the slide into civil war might seem inevitable, it did not necessarily seem that way to observers in Britain. Even in early May 1861, after the fall of Fort Sumter, and after Virginia and North Carolina had voted to join the rebels, *The Times* found it almost inconceivable that a people "of our stock" and "who speak our own language" should actually resort to "the barbarities of war" to sort out their differences.<sup>171</sup> This appeal to racial characteristics to explain how people across the world responded, and would respond, to the events they were involved in was typical of much of the political discourse and editorial commentary of the period.

From a British point of view, the period was also significant for a marked deterioration in diplomatic relations between Britain and America in the wake of Queen Victoria's Proclamation of Neutrality on 13<sup>th</sup> May 1861, which, by granting belligerent status to the seceded states, was viewed by the Federal government, and especially by Secretary of State William Seward, as an unfriendly act and the first step to recognition of the Confederacy by the Palmerston government. The Proclamation also closely coincided with the arrival in England of three Confederate envoys, William Yancey, Pierre Rost and Dudley Mann, whose reception on their arrival by Britain's Foreign Secretary Lord Russell on 3 May compounded

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<sup>171</sup> *The Times*, 7 May 1861, p. 9.

Seward's anger.<sup>172</sup> His response, in "Dispatch No. 10" to Charles Francis Adams, the United States Minister in London, was to threaten war with Britain if they recognized the Confederacy.<sup>173</sup> Seward's pugnacious diplomacy in this period, together with the hostile reaction to the Proclamation in the Northern press in America, would also have an influence on the way that sections of English public opinion and the press came to view the Northern cause.

### **3.2 Lincoln's 1861 Inaugural Address**

President Lincoln's Inaugural Address to Congress was closely analysed by all three of the newspapers in this study, as well as by the British press more broadly, for what it signaled in terms of the new administration's policy towards the seceded states, and more pressingly, in terms of the prospects for peace or war in America. Lincoln's primary purpose in the Address was, as McPherson points out, to preserve an undivided Union peacefully, by appealing to the common, historic "bonds of affection" between the two sides of the divide, and by reiterating his party's pledge "not to interfere with the institution of slavery where it exists." At the same time, Lincoln stated his Administration's resolve to "hold, occupy and possess" Federal property in the seceded states and to collect duties and taxes.<sup>174</sup>

In the literature tracing the shift of English public opinion from the North to the Confederacy in the first year of the civil war, some historians have suggested that Lincoln's Inaugural Address, with its commitment not to interfere with slavery where it existed, sowed the first doubts about the justice of the Northern cause, since if slavery was not the cause of the dispute, then a civil war, should it come, would arguably be no more than a war of conquest order to preserve the Union.<sup>175</sup> While it is true, as Duncan Campbell has shown, that the Lincoln administration's caution on the issue of slavery, "with the emphasis on preservation of the Union rather than emancipation" cost Union popular support in England,<sup>176</sup> the Inaugural Address itself was not criticized on those grounds by any of the three papers in

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<sup>172</sup> See McPherson, pp. 388 -389.

<sup>173</sup> Lincoln's intervention ensured some softening of the language of the dispatch, and also gave Adams discretion to discuss the substance of the dispatch with Lord Russell, the British Foreign Minister, rather than present it to him as it was written. See McPherson, p. 389, and Foreman, p. 100.

<sup>174</sup> McPherson, pp. 262-263.

<sup>175</sup> Adams, Vol. 1, p. 50, for example, states that following Lincoln's Inaugural Address, "a note of uncertainty began to replace the earlier unanimity of opinion that the future of slavery was at stake in America" and that this offered an excuse for "a switch about of sympathy" among Britain's commercial classes.

<sup>176</sup> Campbell, p. 19.

this study. *The Economist* for example, commended the Address for its forbearance on the issue.<sup>177</sup>

As shown previously, both *The Times* and *The Economist* had, prior to Lincoln's accession to Presidency, argued for the need for a negotiated settlement which accepted secession as a *fait accompli*. Nevertheless, their responses to the Inaugural Address were notable for their differences. *The Economist* gave the speech a cautious welcome, seeing in it a tone of "gentle compulsion" rather than coercion, which might persuade Virginia and North Carolina to remain in the Union, and thus leave the Confederacy comparatively "weak, poor and helpless". In the paper's view, this was essential for checking any ambition the Confederacy might harbour to declare war on Mexico for the spread of slavery southward and renewal of the African slave trade. For *The Economist*, the Lincoln administration's best strategy in the crisis was not simply to avoid civil war, which it had long argued would be fruitless and deeply foolish, but also to ensure that the Union retained "an overwhelming superiority of force" to thwart Confederate expansionist ambitions.<sup>178</sup> In other words, once Lincoln had reiterated in his Inaugural Address his commitment to the official Republican Party policy not to interfere with slavery in the states where it already existed, there could, in the paper's view, be no justification for coercing the seceded states back into the Union. There was, however, every justification for taking steps to ensure that the secession movement was arrested in its tracks so that its reach and power were restricted. The editorial concluded:

Mr. Lincoln is impressing the American public with a considerable sense of his shrewdness, reticence, and caution – of his desire to feel his way very carefully before he takes any strong step, - and of his deep wish to avoid the horrors of a fruitless civil war.<sup>179</sup>

What the paper misunderstood at this stage, or perhaps chose to disregard, was that behind the 'reticent' and 'cautious' tone of the Address lay a firm resolve to preserve the Union at all costs, even at the risk of civil war. *The Times*, by contrast, seemed to understand this a little better, deploring the Address in its editorial of 18 March 1861 as "nothing more and nothing less than a declaration of civil war", but nevertheless continuing to argue (and even

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<sup>177</sup> 'American Affairs, *The Economist*, 23 March 1861, pp. 310 – 311.

<sup>178</sup> Ibid, p. 310

<sup>179</sup> Ibid, p. 311.

presuming to advise) that the only realistic option open to the President was to recognize secession as a reality and hear what terms the South was prepared to propose:

Would it not be better to recognize at once the formation of the Southern Confederacy, and to think a little less of constitutional powers and decorums which can end in nothing but civil war, and a little more of negotiation and arrangement, by which alone civil war can be averted?<sup>180</sup>

In the view of *The Times*, therefore, it would appear that “the momentous issue of civil war” now lay in the President’s hands, rather than in those of his “dissatisfied fellow-countrymen” – an interesting reversal of Lincoln’s message in his Inaugural Address.<sup>181</sup> What is also notable about *The Times*’s editorials during this period is an apparent reframing of the Confederacy’s motives for secession with no reference to the issue of slavery. For *The Times*, the motives now seemed to lie elsewhere: in “the wish to secure a vast tract of territory”; in their “dislike of a protective Tariff”, the abandonment of which was described in an editorial the following week as “the chief object for which they had seceded”; in “the determination of her public men to retain office and power”; in “the distrust of the Judges who may be introduced into the United States’ Courts by a Republican President”; and “above all, in the bitter antipathy which has grown up and strengthened year by year between the two nations of the Union”.<sup>182</sup> The reference here to the Northern Union states and the seceded South as consisting of “two nations” is also striking, not only when set against the paper’s earlier expressed belief in “the essential identity of the people” of the United States, but also when placed in the context of future discussions in and out of Parliament about whether Britain should recognize the Confederacy.<sup>183</sup>

It is clear that by the time of Lincoln’s accession, *The Times* had decided that the opportunity to reverse the secession movement had irretrievably gone and that the only solution now was for the new administration to negotiate a severance of the Union into two separate nations. However, it would also appear that in anticipation of that happening, *The Times*

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<sup>180</sup> *The Times*, 18 March, 1861, p. 8; *The Times*, 19 March, 1861, p. 9.

<sup>181</sup> “In *your* hands, my dissatisfied fellow countrymen, and not in *mine*, is the momentous issue of civil war”. From ‘Lincoln’s First Inaugural Address’ in *The Harvard Classics: American Historical Documents 1000-1904*, ed. by Charles Eliot, P.F. Collier: New York (1938), pp. 321-322.

<sup>182</sup> *The Times*, 18 March 1861, p. 8; 26 March 1861, p. 8.

<sup>183</sup> *The Times*, 19 February 1861, p. 8.



was now seeking to give greater legitimacy to the Confederacy by downplaying the slavery issue as a cause for secession in the first place. Normalizing the Confederacy in this way (not simply by *The Times*) would also have the effect of making it appear to an increasing number of observers in Britain that the Confederate States were simply fighting for self-determination, like the Italians had done, against an imperial power bent on preserving the Union rather than containing slavery.<sup>184</sup>

In marked contrast to both *The Economist*, which saw in the cautious tone of the Address the possibility a negotiated settlement with the Confederacy, and *The Times*, which deplored its legalistic stance as a declaration of war, *The Spectator* in its editorial of 23 March 1861 argued that “the position assumed by the President. is precisely that which would be adopted under the same circumstances by any European monarch or statesman”. For *The Spectator*, “the primary idea” of the speech (from which it quoted at length) was that secession was an official impossibility and that failure to defend the Union and ensure that its laws are “faithfully executed in all the states” would therefore not only be a dereliction of duty but could even be viewed as an act of treason. Tellingly, the paper speculates about how a British Prime Minister might respond if Britain found itself in a similar situation:

Suppose Ireland to set up for herself, declare our "Union" at an end, abolish all customs dues, and raise an army for defence against Great Britain and the world, — would a Premier be expected to negotiate, or to recognize secession, or to frame a new Act of Union, or to argue that the Irish Parliament was a nullity, Irish acts treasonable, and the rights of the central Government de jure unimpaired. We cannot but suspect that the Premier who adopted any course but the one Mr. Lincoln has so laboriously defined, would be pronounced, without too patient a hearing, a traitor to his country.<sup>185</sup>

It would have been interesting to know how John Delane or Walter Bagehot, the respective editors of *The Times* and *The Economist*, would have responded to this line of argument. In the case of *The Times*, a clue is provided in its editorial of 5<sup>th</sup> April in which the paper

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<sup>184</sup> See Anne Tucker, *Newest Born of Nations: European Nationalist Movements and the Making of the Confederacy*. Tucker points out that “these international comparisons made up in enthusiasm and emotion what they lacked in accuracy and realism.” (p. 95).

<sup>185</sup> Mr. Lincoln’s Manifesto’, *The Spectator*, 23 March 1861, ‘pp. 299 – 300.

compared the Federal Government's policy of trying to coerce the seceded states into submission to that of English Government at the time of the American War of Independence in 1776:

If the English Government had been content not to tax the Colonies, or if, having fallen into that great error, it had been content to allow them to depart peacefully [.....] how much of the bitterness and the evil of the separation would have been spared!<sup>186</sup>

In other words, the practical reality of events on the ground (by the beginning of March 1861), and the perceived fruitlessness of attempting reintegration by war outweighed matters of constitutional principle. Another line of argument was to blame the American democratic process as a system leading to rule by the mob. This consequently hardened the divisions in the country, and made settlement of differences that much more difficult.<sup>187</sup> Nevertheless, even at the time, it must have required a stretch of imagination to believe that the first act of the newly inaugurated, democratically elected President, with a mandate to preserve the Union and contain the extension of slavery, would be to negotiate for a settlement that allowed the rebel states that had formed themselves into a Confederacy to secede from it.

### **3.3 Fort Sumter and the Outbreak of the Civil War**

By the time of the outbreak of hostilities at Fort Sumter, *The Times's* impatience with the Lincoln government's failure to listen to their advice and negotiate with the Confederacy had hardened, and shortly before news of the fall of Fort Sumter, the paper wrote that "it would be a great political error, not to say a crime, if the Republican President should plunge the New World into war in order to show his attachment to his party or his consistency with former principles."<sup>188</sup> *The Times* was quite clear now that the responsibility for civil war in America, should it break out, lay entirely with the President, whose intransigence and adherence to principles (curiously described as 'former') could indeed be regarded as crimes. That view did not change after news of the fall of Fort Sumter (even though it was the Confederate forces that fired the first shots and bombarded the fort before it could be

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<sup>186</sup> *The Times*, 5 April 1861, p. 6.

<sup>187</sup> *The Times* editorial of 12 August 1861, p. 6, is a good example of this critique of American democracy. See also the discussion in Chapter 1.2.

<sup>188</sup> *The Times* 19 April 1861, p. 8.

resupplied with provisions),<sup>189</sup> and indeed the paper's antipathy to the Federal Government only increased, as we shall see, after Britain's Proclamation of Neutrality and the hostile response to it in America.

By contrast, *The Economist*, while it deplored the prospect of civil war and like *The Times* favoured a negotiated separation of the two sections of the Union, was in no doubt that the responsibility for the outbreak of hostilities lay with the "presumptuous aggression of the seceders" in the face of the "truly legal caution and forbearance of the President":

The Southern leaders have unquestionably the whole responsibility for this fateful step. The blood which at length has begun to flow must be upon them and their children.<sup>190</sup>

The starkly different attitudes displayed by the two papers can perhaps be explained by the fact that *The Economist* had not lost sight of the fact that was it for the protection of slavery and the right to extend it beyond its current state borders that the states in the South had seceded. It even expressed the hope that "the war will draw together the Northern States [.....] and teach them the all-important character of the Slavery issue", and that this in turn might persuade border states like Kentucky and West Virginia to eradicate slavery themselves.<sup>191</sup> *The Times*, on the other hand, had come to view the Confederate cause more as one of self-determination, the right to run their own affairs, irrespective of the issue of slavery, and the process had now gone too far to be reversed by coercive measures. This was not just the view of the editor of *The Times*, but also its owner, Mowbray Morris, who, as Martin Crawford notes, wrote to the paper's pro-North leaning New York correspondent, Bancroft Davis on 18 April 1861, arguing that "the time for coercion is past and the only course now open to the Government of Washington is to accept secession as a *fait accompli*. To allow full scope to a revolution until it is fully organized, and then to oppose it, seems to be nothing short of madness".<sup>192</sup> This view that separation had become inevitable was reinforced by reports by their special correspondent, William Howard Russell, who, following

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<sup>189</sup> See Macpherson, pp. 271-275.

<sup>190</sup> 'The Evil and the Good in the American Civil War', *The Economist*, 4 May 1861, p. 478. It should be added that this view was not expressed again in the paper's editorials which otherwise maintained the line that coercion could only be justified if there was a sufficient minority in the seceded states who desired reunion.

<sup>191</sup> *Ibid*, p. 479.

<sup>192</sup> Cited in Crawford, pp. 92-93.

his arrival in New York City on 16 March 1861, had embarked on an extensive tour of the Confederate States and found evidence of near-unanimous support for secession as well as a determination to resist any attempt by Washington to coerce them back into the Union.

The real prospect of civil war in the lead-up to Fort Sumter inevitably caused most of the British press to assess what it was that each side was actually fighting for. *The Economist*, in an editorial entitled 'The True Issue Between North and South' argued that in the absence of any explicit commitment from the Lincoln government to prohibit the introduction of slavery into any new districts, the real issue was not the abolition or the extension of Slavery, but "whether a Free-Labour or Slave-holding Republic shall henceforth hold the reins and direct the policy of the Great American Federation". It exhorted its readers not, therefore, to give their sympathies "to those Northerners who would appear to be preparing to maintain the old Union by force, on the erroneous impression that they are about to fight on the grand, intelligible and worthy ground of confining Slavery forever within its present area". It went on:

If it were so, and there was a fair prospect of success, we could almost wish them God speed, though a terrible civil war was the only means to their cherished end. But alas! it is not so. Abhorrence of Negro-slavery, as we feel it here, [.....] are sentiments confined to but a small minority of the citizens of the Northern Federation.<sup>193</sup>

One cannot help detecting in the high-minded tone of this assessment of the Federal Administration's policy an element of double standards. Having commended Lincoln earlier for his caution and care to maintain the loyalty of the border states, including Virginia, North Carolina and Tennessee, which at this point had not yet seceded, he is now criticized for not making explicit a policy, which clearly *was* shared by the Republican Party as a whole (and what they had fought the election on), but which may well have alienated the wavering border states if it had been made an explicit war aim. After all, Lincoln's audience was his fellow-Americans, not the British public. Since it was so clearly in Britain's commercial interests to maintain the uninterrupted supply of American cotton through a negotiated settlement which would allow "the Seceding States [.....] to separate and reorganize

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<sup>193</sup> 'The True Issue Between North and South', *The Economist*, 13 April 1861, pp. 395 – 96. The editorial appeared before news of the fall of Fort Sumter had reached Britain.

themselves without interference”, *The Economist’s* line of argument could be seen as somewhat self-serving.<sup>194</sup> Whether the paper really would have changed its position and supported the prosecution of the war by the Union if they had explicitly made the extension of slavery the central issue remains, of course, a matter of conjecture. Two further editorials a month later (18<sup>th</sup> and 25<sup>th</sup> May) would suggest otherwise, with the paper not only moving to a more unequivocal anti-war position, but one much less condemnatory of the seceding states, which by then had been joined by Virginia, North Carolina and Tennessee.

In the first, *The Economist* argued that the Northern case for going to war was primarily one of vengeance for wounded feelings rather than the principle of maintaining the Union of the country, a cause which they saw as already lost. It concluded that “even if the North were sure of a complete and easy victory [.....], the war which was to end in such a victory would still be [.....] an objectless and unprofitable folly”.<sup>195</sup> The second, entitled ‘The Civil War: the price and the profit’ was more striking in its editorial shift. Still optimistic at this late stage that a peaceful parting of the ways would be achieved, given the horrors of the alternative of civil war, the paper argued passionately that such an outcome would be “an unalloyed advantage” for both sides.<sup>196</sup> This scenario had been discussed in previous editorials in the paper but the benefits had been seen to apply exclusively to the North, while the seceded South would be deliberately left “poor, weak and helpless”, unable to expand slavery southwards into Mexico, or to revive the African Slave Trade, or to resist the infiltration of “Abolitionist doctrines”.<sup>197</sup> By the end of May, this scenario had been substantially modified:

How will it be with the South? The Slave States will be left with a noble empire and an almost boundless field. [.....] We are even much inclined to hope that the institution of Slavery may be mitigated, and that the Negro population may be better off than of late, both as to actual condition and remote prospects.<sup>198</sup>

The reason for this hope, the paper explained, lay in the fact that the Southern leaders would no longer be harried by “the ceaseless reproaches of Northern Abolitionists” who had

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<sup>194</sup> Ibid, p. 395.

<sup>195</sup> ‘America: An Earnest Appeal Against Civil War’, *The Economist*, 18 May 1861, p. 534.

<sup>196</sup> ‘Civil War: The Price and the Profit’, *The Economist*, 25 May 1861, p. 562.

<sup>197</sup> ‘American Affairs’, *The Economist*, 23 March 1861, pp. 310 -311; ‘The Bearings of American Disunion’, *The Economist*, 2 January 1861, pp. 29 – 32.

<sup>198</sup> ‘Civil War: The Price and the Profit’, *The Economist*, 25 May 1861, p. 563.

goaded them into a state “almost of frenzy” and “daily self-defense” on the issue of slavery, and would thus “be compelled by the undisguised greatness and peril of the question to turn all their powers to its study and solution.”<sup>199</sup> The contrast with the paper’s earlier condemnations of both Slavery - the “deeply ulcerated semblance of civilization of which the Southern planters are so proud” - and the seceding states for their “presumptuous aggression” is striking, even allowing for the rapidly changing circumstances in America.<sup>200</sup> The solution was no longer to eradicate slavery but only to mitigate it, seemingly by improving the conditions in which the slaves lived and their “prospects” for the future. In the light of the paper’s former high-minded protestations on the issue, the Federal charge of hypocrisy, frequently levelled at sections of the English press during the American Civil War, is sometimes hard to refute. One wonders whether the “unalloyed advantages” which *The Economist* saw in a peaceful separation of the Union were really for Britain, and not America at all.

*The Times*, likewise, as we have seen, had come to see the war as a pointless battle for territory, in which slavery was not the main issue. Neither side, in its view, was fighting for any “high principles”:

The North may be justified in its denunciation of slavery, but it is not fighting for the purpose of driving slavery out of the land. The South may be justified in fighting for its independence, but that independence was not assailed. Stripped of its pretext and trappings, the contest stands out as a mere quarrel for territory, or a struggle for aggrandizement.<sup>201</sup>

The editor of *The Times* was clearly shocked and angered that war had actually broken out, and that there had been no negotiated settlement, blaming the “wavering and dilatory policy of Mr. Lincoln, who [.....] wasted in fruitless deliberation and inexplicable delay the priceless moments during which the peace of the country might possibly have been secured.”<sup>202</sup>

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<sup>199</sup> Ibid, pp. 563 – 564.

<sup>200</sup> *The Economist*, 15 December 1861, p. 1390; 4 May 1861, p. 478.

<sup>201</sup> *The Times*, 7 May 1861, p. 8.

<sup>202</sup> Ibid.

It was clear that the Lincoln government's strategy of downplaying the slavery issue had in Don Doyle's words "cost them dearly" in terms of international sympathy for their cause, if the views expressed by *The Times* and *The Economist* at this time are representative.<sup>203</sup> However, it is worth recalling that *The Times* had also decided it was important to downplay the slavery issue, well before Lincoln's assumption of the Presidency, in order to find a peaceful solution to the conflict.<sup>204</sup> It thus seems very unlikely that the paper would have changed its position if the Lincoln administration had decided to make the "high principle" of the containment of slavery an explicit war aim. For *The Times*, the avoidance of civil war by letting the seceded states depart peacefully was the only solution.

The surprise which *The Times* expressed at the outbreak of hostilities, and the belief shared by both *The Times* and *The Economist* that Lincoln's administration would eventually negotiate for peace showed a grave underestimation of the Federal government's utter repudiation of the right of secession and its determination to maintain and defend the existence of the Union, a cause which Lincoln certainly *did* regard as a "high principle", and one to which he made repeated reference in his speeches. The cause was closely bound up with the cause of democracy and representative government, which America, alone in the world at that time, epitomized, and the understanding that any move to recognize the Confederacy would be a betrayal of those principles. The attachment to the Union was a cause that was clearly felt by the people of the Northern states themselves who answered Lincoln's call for troops in droves following Fort Sumter. As Howard Jones remarked, with reference to the crisis of British intervention a year later, "the British never grasped the magnitude of the Northerners' devotion to the Union."<sup>205</sup>

In marked contrast to both *The Times* and *The Economist*, and indeed the majority of the British press, *The Spectator* was in no doubt that the cause of the war was slavery, however much "politicians may chatter about State prerogatives and the declaration of independence, protective tariffs and the value of cotton."<sup>206</sup> The paper's editorials at this

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<sup>203</sup> Doyle, p. 6.

<sup>204</sup> See for example *The Times*, 5 December 1860, p. 6, and its proposal for "a quieter view" on the subject of slavery.

<sup>205</sup> Howard Jones, *Union in Peril: The Crisis over British Intervention in the Civil War*, (The University of North Carolina Press, 1995), p. 4.

<sup>206</sup> 'The Civil War in America', *The Spectator*, 4 May 1861, p. 468.

time struck a defiant tone, aware perhaps that in its analysis of the fast-moving events in America, it was running against the current of much public opinion which, above all, wanted peace. These views were both reflected in and influenced by publications like *The Times*, which had a much wider circulation and reach than *The Spectator*. “We shall be told” *The Spectator* stated “that slavery is *not* the issue [and that] the Confederacy arms to support State rights”, a view it repudiated point blank:

The cause of war is at all events the extension of slavery, and Englishmen, unless utter hypocrites, are as opposed to the spread of the institution as to the institution itself. If the North wins, slavery, even if it continues to exist, must be restricted to the dominion it has already acquired [.....] if the South is victorious, slavery will be extended from Missouri to Panama. Whatever the issue, those are the results, and on which side are Englishmen to stand?<sup>207</sup>

The paper acknowledged that for England, the immediate effect of the war on the supply of cotton “can only be disastrous”, but it was clear that this should have no bearing on England’s opposition to recognizing the Confederacy, or its sympathy for the Northern cause, as the following extract states unambiguously:

The quarrel, cover it with cotton as we may, is between freedom and slavery, right and wrong, the dominion of God and the dominion of the Devil, and the duty of England, we submit, is clear. It is to refuse to recognize the Confederacy, even if in that mysterious Providence which occasionally confounds faith, slavery should for the moment win the game.<sup>208</sup>

For *The Spectator*, therefore, a consideration of where Britain’s interests lay with regard to the conflict in America involved a great deal more than the supply of cotton for its textile industry.

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<sup>207</sup> ‘The Duty of England and the American Crisis’, *The Spectator*, 1 June 1861, p. 581.

<sup>208</sup> ‘The Civil War in America’, *The Spectator*, 4 May 1861, p. 468; ‘The Duty of England and the American Crisis’, *The Spectator*, 1 June 1861, p. 581.



### 3.4 The Queen's Proclamation of Neutrality and Reaction

While Queen Victoria's Proclamation of Neutrality in May 1861 caused little controversy in Britain, its significance for the formation of attitudes in Britain regarding the Civil War lay in its hostile reception in America, particularly in the North. The Proclamation, declared shortly after the Federal Government declared a blockade of Southern ports, closed British ports in every part of the world to privateers and their prizes and recognised the "belligerent rights" of both parties in the war, including the North's right to impose a blockade. It reflected the British government's policy to "for God's sake, if possible keep out of [the contest]" and in this, it was joined soon afterwards by Spain and France.<sup>209</sup> The policy of neutrality was favourably viewed in Britain by all political parties, and certainly by all three newspapers in this study. For *The Spectator*, it was "the only course open to England to pursue"; for *The Economist* it was "just and wise", while *The Times* praised the parts cautioning British subjects not to participate on either side.<sup>210</sup> There was no sense in Britain that it favoured one side over the other, and as Duncan Campbell has argued persuasively, if anything, it favoured the Union.<sup>211</sup>

It was not, however, seen that way by the Union government for whom recognition of belligerent status for the Confederacy was seen as the first step to granting them diplomatic recognition, and the Northern press lost little time in denouncing it. These denunciations were reinforced by a strongly-worded letter to *The Times* from Cassius Clay, the U.S. Minister at St Petersburg, attacking the policy of neutrality in an attempt to persuade public opinion to support the Union cause. In his letter he asserted that the Union would easily subdue the "revolted states" and asked which side England would prefer to be on, and whether indeed they could "afford to offend the United States", a country which "in half a century will amount to a hundred millions of people."<sup>212</sup>

Of three newspapers in this study, it was *The Times* that took the deepest umbrage at the Northern reaction to the Proclamation of Neutrality. It began by running a withering response to Cassius Clay's letter on the same day it was printed, dealing dismissively with

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<sup>209</sup> Lord Russell to the House of Commons, 2 May 1861, quoted in Foreman, p. 91.

<sup>210</sup> *The Spectator*, 15 June 1861, p. 635, *The Economist*, 18 May 1861, p. 535, *The Times*, 15 May 1861, p. 8.

<sup>211</sup> Campbell, pp. 31-32.

<sup>212</sup> *The Times*, 20 May 1861, p. 8.

the six questions it proposed. It took particular exception to the final “momentous” one which asked whether England could afford to offend the United States, a country which would in the not too distant future be more populous and powerful than it. “Let Mr. Clay and his countrymen look well to the present”, *The Times* retorted “and they will find enough to occupy them without troubling themselves with long visions of humiliation and retribution, which no man now alive will ever see accomplished.”<sup>213</sup> In a series of three editorials in June 1861 (3<sup>rd</sup>, 5<sup>th</sup> and 11<sup>th</sup>), the paper adopted an increasingly indignant and self-righteous tone in its defence of British neutrality against the anger expressed in the American press, by the Washington government, and by various United States’ ministers in Europe. “What have we done?”, the paper asked on 5 June:

How have we misbehaved ourselves? Why are we to be scolded, and threatened, and warned? Wherefore this attack?<sup>214</sup>

In the same editorial, it argued that it was “quite absurd” for the Northern states “to expect us to take part in this quarrel, and it is rather a sign of imbecility to suppose their scolding can affect us”.<sup>215</sup> There are unmistakable signs in these editorials of *The Times* taking these attacks personally, to the detriment of an impartial assessment of the events in America, almost as if the paper indeed *was* taking part in the quarrel. As Martin Crawford argues, *The Times*’ assessment of the federal cause now increasingly “depended upon the attitudes the northerners themselves chose to adopt towards Great Britain” with a resulting “loss of editorial balance” and “a failure to maintain a common critical standard toward the competing republics across the Atlantic”.<sup>216</sup> “The North” for example, were accused of embarking on the contest “in a vindictive spirit”, and in a later editorial *The Times* criticized the Federal government of inconsistency, making the striking claim that Lincoln “had clearly acknowledged the revolutionary right to secede”.<sup>217</sup> That theory, the editorial asserted:

[.....] had been fully enunciated by Mr. Buchanan, and assented to by the leading statemen of the North, and by none more completely than by Mr. Seward, who, while

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<sup>213</sup> Ibid. p. 8.

<sup>214</sup> *The Times*, 5 June 1861, p. 9.

<sup>215</sup> Ibid. p. 9.

<sup>216</sup> Crawford, p. 109.

<sup>217</sup> *The Times*, 20 May 1861, p. 8; *The Times*, 11 June, p. 9.

expressing a hope that the seceders might be coaxed back, yet acknowledged that an appeal to arms was impossible.<sup>218</sup>

*The Times* suggested therefore that “that the whole grievance of the Northerners against us is that we think as they thought six weeks before”.<sup>219</sup> The editorial line here is puzzling to say the least. For a start, Lincoln had expressly and painstakingly rejected any right to secede in his Inaugural Address:

The Union of these States is perpetual [.....]. The Union is much older than the Constitution. [.....]. It follows from these views that no State, upon its own motion, can lawfully get out of the Union; that resolves and ordinances to that effect are legally void, and that acts of violence, within any State or States, against the authority of the United States, are insurrectionary or revolutionary, according to circumstance.<sup>220</sup>

Secondly, there had been no acknowledgement by *The Times* of any right to secede during the secession winter. On the contrary, as we have seen, the newspaper had no sympathy at all with the secessionists, and upbraided President Buchanan for his lack of firmness in dealing with the crisis.

Around this time differences began to be apparent between the views expressed in the editorials of *The Times* and those in the reports from the newspaper’s New York correspondent, Bancroft Davis, differences which would eventually culminate in Davis’s resignation from the paper at the end of the year. On 5 June, for example, the same day as the ‘What have we done?’ editorial, *The Times* carried a report from its correspondent arguing that “neutrality will be a difficult position to maintain” with all the existing commercial relations between Britain and America.<sup>221</sup> His report commented on the disappointment felt in New York towards England’s response to “the perils of this nation”, and warned that nothing could be further from the truth than to view the conflict as if all that was at issue was “the right of self-government”:

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<sup>218</sup> *The Times*, 11 June, p. 9.

<sup>219</sup> *The Times*, 11 June 1861, p. 9.

<sup>220</sup> From ‘Lincoln’s First Inaugural Address’, in *American Historical Documents 1000 – 1904: The Harvard Classics*, edited by Charles Eliot (New York: Collier, 1938), p. 316.

<sup>221</sup> ‘The Civil War in America’, *The Times*, 5 June 1861, p. 5.

To claim that there is in the constitution of the country a right of Secession is as sheer nonsense as it would be to make the same claim on behalf of the Sepoys of India or the Irish rebels [.....]. Government or no government, restraint or rapine, order or anarchy, is the issue which the North sees in this controversy. This is it which makes them so unanimous [and] which will sustain them in the controversy.<sup>222</sup>

The leading article in *The Times* six days later claiming that Lincoln, Buchanan and Seward had all at various times recognised the revolutionary right to secede, seems to have been a direct repudiation of its own correspondent's views on the subject.

Davis's views, however, were increasingly out of line with the view of the conflict being adopted in much of the British press. *The Economist* in its editorial on 29 June 1861 expressed astonishment at the "utterly unwarranted and unexplained irritation against England manifested by the United States" in their reaction to Britain's policy of neutrality.<sup>223</sup> Their irritation was caused, the editorial argued, by their conviction that most Englishmen now believe that "Secession cannot be prevented" and that the dissolution of the Union was inevitable. And in case there was any doubt about *The Economist's* position, the editorial now spelt it out clearly and unambiguously:

We *do* believe the Secession of the Slave States to be a *fait accompli* – a completed and irreversible transaction. We believe it to be impossible now for the Union to lure back the South into the Union by any compromise, or to compel them back by any force.<sup>224</sup>

The resentment felt in the British press against the American response to the Proclamation of Neutrality had the effect of hardening their positions about the irreversibility of secession and the pointlessness of trying to prevent it by force. As E.D. Adams concisely put it: "The majority of the London papers, though not all, passed through the same shifts of opinion and expression as *The Economist*: first upbraiding the South, next appealing to the North not to wage a useless war, finally committing themselves to the theory of an accomplished

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<sup>222</sup> Ibid.

<sup>223</sup> 'Is the Success of the North Possible?' *The Economist*, 29 June 1861, p. 702.

<sup>224</sup> Ibid, p. 702.

break-up of the Union and berating the North for continuing through pride alone, a bloody conflict doomed to failure.”<sup>225</sup> This trajectory was certainly true of *The Times’s* response as well. An additional element in this trajectory was a conspicuous toning down of the opprobrium expressed against slavery, as has been noted, for example, in *The Economist’s* editorial of 25 May, where slavery is described as “a local difficulty” to be “mitigated”, rather than eradicated.

One newspaper that was decidedly not in this camp was *The Spectator*. It addressed the outrage felt in the Northern states against the Proclamation of Neutrality in a long piece entitled ‘The Causes of American Bitterness’, arguing that the outrage was essentially unjustified because neutrality “does nothing to help or provide resources for the South, even if it gives them a standing that rebels would not normally enjoy”. The article went on to note with satisfaction that MP William Gregory’s proposed motion in the House of Commons that Britain should recognise the Confederacy “elicited only 4 cheers in the Commons and was silenced before it was withdrawn.” There thus seemed to be no question, in *The Spectator’s* view, of Britain’s neutrality leading inevitably to recognition of the Confederacy, and, more to the point, no question that it should.<sup>226</sup> *The Spectator* had already made its position clear that the Federal Government had every right, and no choice but to try to coerce the seceded states back into the Union.

Nevertheless, *The Spectator* was sufficiently concerned about American outrage to blame the Federal government, for the first time, for not making the issue of slavery an explicit war aim:

Let the North once distinctly proclaim that issue, declare that the object of the war is the extinction of slavery, that no peace is possible which shall leave slavery in existence, and in the unanimous response of Englishmen even the dread of a cotton famine will be removed.<sup>227</sup>

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<sup>225</sup> Adams, Vol. 1, p. 174.

<sup>226</sup> ‘The Causes of American Bitterness’, *The Spectator*, 15 June 1861, pp. 635 – 636.

<sup>227</sup> *Ibid*, p. 635.

It would appear that the paper was not just aware of the uncertain state of public opinion towards the two sides in the conflict, but also conscious, perhaps, of its increasingly isolated editorial position.

### 3.5 The First Battle of Bull Run and its Aftermath

From the point of view of an analysis of the editorial response of the British press to the events of the American Civil war, the rout of the federal army at the First Battle of Bull Run on 29 July 1861 was significant for the conclusions different publications drew from it. For *The Times* and *The Economist*, the news reinforced the positions they had respectively come to hold regarding the need to accept secession and negotiate a settlement. “The disruption of the Union must be the inevitable result” was *The Economist’s* conclusion, a view which the paper believed the Government in Washington would eventually come round to, once they realized that “the project of subduing the South” was “simply insane”.<sup>228</sup> In the same vein, *The Times* argued that “there must rise a gathering doubt [in the Northern states]” that this Southern nut is too hard to crack, and that the military line [.....] does not answer.”<sup>229</sup>

Commenting on eye witness accounts of the battle, including that of their own correspondent, William Howard Russell, *The Times* adopted a distinctly mocking tone:

It requires the testimony of the Americans themselves and the witness of our own correspondent to suggest to us that 75,000 American patriots fled for 20 miles in an agony of fear, although no one was pursuing them, and that 75,000 other American patriots abstained from pursuing these 75,000 enemies because they were not informed how stark-frightened these were.<sup>230</sup>

The anger the paper felt towards the Northern states, and especially the New York press, for their continuing antipathy to Britain, arising from the Proclamation of Neutrality and now exacerbated by defeat on the battlefield, showed no sign of abating. The editorial concluded that:

These people do all in their power to alienate our sympathy, for they are amenable neither to courtesy nor to misfortune. Nothing civilizes them. They seem to think

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<sup>228</sup> ‘Cotton and Civil War’, *The Economist*, 10 August 1861, p. 869.

<sup>229</sup> *The Times*, 7 August 1861, p. 8.

<sup>230</sup> *Ibid.* p. 8.

that at all seasons and on all occasions England is a safe target for their insults and their threats.<sup>231</sup>

The attitude towards Americans, as expressed in the editorials of *The Times* in this period, provides a striking example of Britain's conflicted post-colonial relationship with the country, as described by Hugh Dubrulle and discussed in Chapter 1.4.<sup>232</sup>

*The Economist* responded to events in America in the aftermath of the Bull Run debacle, in a similar spirit of condescension, albeit less out of a sense of pique, which seems to have driven *The Times's* response. "From first to last", the paper stated, the Americans have been "singularly at fault in their conjectures and prophesies" whereas "we, on this side of the water have been much nearer the truth". The explanation for this difference lay, in *The Economist's* view, partly in the fact that the Americans were "a wholly untried people [.....] who have never yet faced a really formidable foe", and partly in the American system of democracy which makes "the masses everywhere omnipotent":

The consequence, as everyone is too well aware, is that the Ruler and Legislators of the United States are, almost without exception, either the vulgarer or shallower men of the nation who share the popular faults and passions.<sup>233</sup>

As has been shown, this was a theme used frequently to explain the perceived shortcomings of the Federal Government's response to the crisis of the Union. Indeed, the view of *The Economist* was that "there is no degree of incapacity, confusion, feebleness, mismanagement, and thorough imbecility on the part of the government in Washington which is not *upon the cards*", and it suggested that "a sudden collapse of the Washington government and the Federal war" could not therefore be ruled out.<sup>234</sup> In this conjecture, at least, it was *The Economist*, rather than the Americans, that would be "singularly at fault".

The main concern of *The Economist*, however, was the likely impact of a greatly prolonged war, which the paper regarded as certain following the Federal defeat, on the cotton market and cotton prospects. In its editorial on 10 August the paper noted that in spite of the Federal embargo on Southern ports, the pressure had not yet been felt in Lancashire's

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<sup>231</sup> Ibid. p. 8.

<sup>232</sup> Dubrulle, p.4.

<sup>233</sup> 'What May Be in America', *The Economist*, 17 August 1861, p. 897.

<sup>234</sup> Ibid, p. 898.

manufacturing districts as they “were unusually well-stocked with the raw material”<sup>235</sup>. However, a stricter enforcement of the blockade could be anticipated, with greatly diminished prospects for cotton imports from the States, and the need for the year ahead to depend on “our current stock and our Indian resources”. The editorial concluded on an optimistic note of economic determinism by expressing “the instinctive conviction” of Lancashire merchants that “an article grown by an eager seller and consumed by an eager buyer *will* find its way from one to the other in spite of all hostile barriers and prohibitions.”<sup>236</sup> That optimism would be sorely tested in the course of the following year.

In contrast to *The Times* and *The Economist*, *The Spectator* responded to the Federal defeat at Bull Run with a sanguine, but upbeat assessment of the damage done (from a Union perspective), and a strong reaffirmation of the importance of supporting the Federal cause. Arguing that “the centre of American power is still untouched”, the paper predicted that, with some “sharp drill” and military reorganization of the Federal army, “the American Government will in a month be the stronger for its defeats.” No suggestion here of a sudden collapse. Moreover, the paper maintained its view that this should be “the wish of every Englishman, for the consequences of defeat must be disastrous to human freedom”. These consequences, the editorial elaborated, would be a powerful independent Confederate State in a position to conquer Mexico, control the silver mines, extend the area of slavery, and perhaps re-open the slave trade.<sup>237</sup> *The Spectator’s* argument was that protection against such a misfortune lay in the strength of the American Government, “however deep our disgust at its tone”, and that:

[...] it is with that Government that the sympathies of all free men perforce must lie. It is freedom which is at stake, and before that great interest all others must disappear.<sup>238</sup>

The two sharply contrasting perspectives here, that of *The Times* and *The Economist* on the one hand, and that of *The Spectator* on the other, are noteworthy. For all three papers, it could be said that freedom was indeed the issue at stake. In the absence of an explicitly

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<sup>235</sup> ‘Cotton and Civil War’, *The Economist*, 10 August 1861, p. 870. Surpluses of cotton had been built up during the boom years of 1859 and 1860. See Owsley, p. 134.

<sup>236</sup> ‘Cotton and Civil War’, *The Economist*, 10 August 1861, p. 870.

<sup>237</sup> ‘The First American Battle’, *The Spectator*, 10 August 1861, pp. 858 – 859.

<sup>238</sup> *Ibid*, p. 859.



declared aim by the US administration either to contain or to eradicate slavery, *The Times* and *The Economist* had come to see the war as one of conquest and aggrandizement by the Union against the freedom of the seceded states to go their own way and run their own affairs. The fact that it was also in Britain's mercantile interests that they should be allowed to do so was a different issue, even if this clearly influenced the position each paper took. For *The Spectator*, the issue at stake in the war was freedom from slavery, and whether Lincoln's administration had made this an explicit war aim or not, victory by the Confederate States would inevitably lead to its perpetuation and extension, while victory by the Union, would, in the paper's view, certainly lead to its demise, if not its eradication.

As the month of August 1861 wore on *The Spectator* seemed to revise its optimistic assessment about the Union's ability to recover swiftly from the defeat at Bull Run, amid reports of mutiny and desertion among regiments in New York and Maine, and also due to its disappointment at Congress's response to the defeat.<sup>239</sup> For *The Spectator*, the need to make slavery an explicit war aim became ever more pressing, not simply for rekindling the wavering support of the European powers, but also to shore up support for the war effort at home. To support its case, the paper carried a report at the end of August from *The New York Daily Tribune* based on an interview between their correspondent in Richmond and "a shrewd Virginia politician" who asserted that:

[...] if the North were to make the war a downright war for the abolition of slavery, the prejudices of the Old World against that institution would militate against us, retard recognition, and, above all, it would inspire the Northern army with a moral foundation for the prosecution of the war."<sup>240</sup>

*The Spectator* argued that this was now vital. "If they make the war an anti-slavery war", the report concluded, "they may yet reach shore. But Mr. Lincoln, with his constitutional and legal instincts, still shrinks from so bold a step."<sup>241</sup> It would take another year before emancipation became an official, explicit war aim, although well before then, the enslaved people themselves, by crossing into the Union lines in ever greater numbers and converting themselves to 'contrabands' (in the areas where this policy existed), ensured that the slavery

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<sup>239</sup> 'The Difficulties of the North', *The Spectator*, 24 August 1861, pp. 919 – 920.

<sup>240</sup> *The Spectator*, 31 August 1861, p. 937.

<sup>241</sup> *Ibid*, p. 937.

issue was in practice at the forefront of what the war was all about and what the Union soldiers were fighting for.<sup>242</sup>

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<sup>242</sup> See McPherson, pp. 356-358.

## CHAPTER 4: EMANCIPATION AND INTERVENTION: THE BRITISH PRESS AND THE CIVIL WAR

### SEPTEMBER – DECEMBER 1862

#### 4.1. Introduction

This chapter moves the press coverage of the war on by one year to the late summer of 1862 at which point the military fortunes of the Union on the Eastern front were at their lowest ebb. General McClellan's Army of the Potomac had been repulsed from the outskirts of the Confederate capital, Richmond, by the Confederate forces under General Robert E. Lee following the Seven Days' Battles (25 June to 1 July) and the Peninsula campaign had ended in failure. A month later, the comprehensive Confederate victory over General Pope's much larger Union forces at the Second battle of Bull Run (28 – 30 August) opened the way for Lee's invasion of Maryland on 4 September, and a subsequent campaign that was eventually ended by the perceived Union victory at Antietam on 17 September 1862.

Just as the summer of 1862 marked the high point of Confederate battlefield successes in the war, so too did it mark the height of anti-Northern sentiment, and in some cases, Confederate sympathy, in England.<sup>243</sup> Public opinion was increasingly alienated by the Union's apparently futile persistence in trying to crush the rebellion after the end of the Peninsula campaign, and the disruption that the continuation of the war posed to the cotton manufacturing industry in Lancashire.<sup>244</sup> Meanwhile, the dashing military victories of the Confederate troops led by Lee and Stonewall Jackson excited admiration in Britain, a sentiment typified in an editorial in *The Times* on 16 September:

From all parts of Europe [.....] comes the tribute of admiration. When the history of this war is written, the admiration will doubtless become deeper and stronger, for the veil which has covered the South will be drawn away and disclose a picture of patriotism, of unanimous self-sacrifice, of wise and firm administration [.....] and whatever the fate of the new nationality or its subsequent claims to the respect of

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<sup>243</sup> Campbell, pp. 129-30.

<sup>244</sup> Dubrulle, p. 74.

mankind, it will assuredly begin its career with a reputation for genius and valour which the most famous nations may envy.<sup>245</sup>

By late summer 1862, *The Times* had become quite openly a cheer-leader for the Confederacy in their quest for independence. They had replaced their New York correspondent Bancroft Davis with Charles Mackay, “known to be a fanatical supporter of the South” and who lost no time in making his anti-Union government views clear.<sup>246</sup> They had also appointed the equally partisan Francis Lawley as their special correspondent, following the departure of William Howard Russell. He was based in the Confederate capital, Richmond.

Events on the battlefields of the Civil War, the ferocity of the fighting and the lack of any decisive breakthrough for either side were to a large extent responsible for the two political developments which form the basis of this chapter. The first, and, in the context of the subsequent course and outcome of the war, the most significant, was the drive towards emancipation of the enslaved, symbolised by the Preliminary Emancipation Proclamation issued in September 1862. The second was the movement towards some form of British and European mediation to stop the fighting which gained momentum in the second half of 1862. The chapter will focus on how the three newspapers in this study responded to each of these developments in the late summer and autumn of 1862, and how they absorbed them into the editorial positions about the war that they had each built up over the preceding 18 months.

## **4.2. Emancipation**

### **4.2.1 Background**

The decision by President Lincoln to make emancipation a formal, military strategy of the war, and to issue the Preliminary Emancipation Proclamation (PEP) was finally taken on 22 September 1862, immediately following the Battle of Antietam. While in retrospect the battle was not the convincing victory that the Union had hoped for, it succeeded in pushing

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<sup>245</sup> *The Times*, 16 September 1862, p. 6, written soon after news of the Second Battle of Bull Run reached England.

<sup>246</sup> Woods and Bishop, p. 103. Woods and Bishop describe the appointment of Mackay as “Delane’s worst mistake”. (p. 103).

the Confederate forces back across the Potomac, and gave Lincoln the opportunity to issue the PEP on the back of a perceived military success. This was important to avoid giving the impression both in America and in Europe (where proposals to intervene to mediate an end to the war were under serious discussion) that emancipation was an act of desperation to rescue the Union from defeat, rather than “an expression of triumph” following victory.<sup>247</sup>

The Proclamation applied only to those states of the Union in rebellion, who were given until 1 January 1863 to return to the Union before the Proclamation came into effect. Thereafter, all slaves held in those areas in rebellion, over 3.5 million people, would be “forever free”.<sup>248</sup> The restricted range of the PEP was the focus of much of the scorn poured on it by the British press for whom its wider significance in “forever changing the relationship of national government to slavery” was generally lost.<sup>249</sup>

The PEP was followed up by Lincoln’s 2<sup>nd</sup> Message to Congress on 1<sup>st</sup> December which effectively extended the removal of slavery to all states in the Union by the year 1900 with full financial compensation to slaveowners. The speech concluded with an appeal to the historical significance of “the fiery trial through which we pass” and the promise that “in giving freedom to the slave we assure freedom to the free”.<sup>250</sup> This section of the chapter will look at the press responses to each event in the three newspapers that form the data for this study.

The PEP should be seen, as Chandra Manning has argued, as an important step in a series of measures, aimed to clarify and formalise the process of military emancipation which had begun with General Butler’s ‘contrabands order’ in May 1861, and culminated in the full Emancipation Proclamation of 1 January 1863.<sup>251</sup> Butler’s order claimed the right of army commanders to confiscate as “contrabands of war” property of the enemy, including slaves, used against the Union, and put them to work for the Union, rather than return them to

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<sup>247</sup> Oakes, p. 307; Eric Foner, *The Fiery Trial: Abraham Lincoln and American Slavery*, (New York: W.W. Norton, 2010), p. 42. Both Oakes and Foner note the influence of Secretary of State Seward’s advice to Lincoln on the timing of the Proclamation at a Cabinet meeting on 21 July 1862.

<sup>248</sup> In the final version of the Emancipation Proclamation of 1st January 1863, Lincoln chose to replace the phrase ‘shall .... forever be free’ by the less resonant ‘are and henceforth shall be free’. The reason for this, as Eric Foner notes in *The Fiery Trial* ‘remain s unknown’ (p. 240)

<sup>249</sup> Doris Kearns Goodwin, *Team of Rivals: The Political Genius of Abraham Lincoln*, (London: Penguin, 2009) p. 501.

<sup>250</sup> <https://millercenter.org/the-presidency/presidential-speeches/december-1-1862-second-annual-message>

<sup>251</sup> Chandra Manning, *Troubled Refuge: Struggling for Freedom in the Civil War*, (New York: Vintage Books, 2016), p. 190; see also Manning, p. 174; Foner, *The Fiery Trial*, p. 169; McPherson, p. 355.

their former owners under the provisions of the Fugitive Slave Act. It was thus an example of military emancipation, the process by which the task of freeing enslaved people was put into the hands of the army, as refugees from slavery came into Union lines and set up 'contraband camps' wherever the Union army went.<sup>252</sup> Amy Murrell Taylor notes that observers at the time used words like 'flood', 'stampede' and 'swarm' to describe the scale of this movement of fugitive slaves during the war, and this helps to explain how the enslaved people themselves – men, women and children - managed to exert pressure on the Lincoln administration.<sup>253</sup> The pressure was reflected in a series of measures passed in Congress designed both to clarify and extend the policy of military emancipation. These included the two Confiscation Acts of August 1861 and July 1862, the second of which emancipated all rebel-owned slaves who escaped to Union lines in Confederate territory subsequently occupied by Union troops, whether or not they had been actively employed in the Confederate war effort.<sup>254</sup> As Eric Foner notes, every victory by the Union army thereafter was "a victory for emancipation."<sup>255</sup>

Other measures against the institution of slavery in the spring of 1862 included the prohibition of slavery in the Territories, emancipation in the District of Columbia, and the March 1862 law, banning Union soldiers and sailors from apprehending fugitive slaves in the Confederacy and returning them to their owners, regardless of their owners' political loyalties. This, in effect, "neutralised" the Fugitive Slave Act of 1850.<sup>256</sup> In the meantime, Lincoln pursued a plan for gradual, compensated emancipation in the border states, Virginia and Tennessee. This was presented in a message to Congress in March 1862 where it quickly met with approval, and although it was later rejected by a majority of Congressmen in the border states themselves, the policy remained in place and was reiterated in Lincoln's December 1862 message to Congress.<sup>257</sup> Importantly, the policy was specifically referred to in the PEP: the individual Confederate states were given the offer of adopting the plan of

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<sup>252</sup> Amy Murrell Taylor, *Embattled Freedom: Journeys Through the Civil War's Slave Refugee Camps*, (Chapel Hill: University of South Carolina Press, 2018), p.11.

<sup>253</sup> Ibid. p. 15.

<sup>254</sup> Foner, *The Fiery Trial*, p. 215, Manning, p. 188.

<sup>255</sup> Foner, *The Fiery Trial*, p. 218.

<sup>256</sup> Manning, p. 185

<sup>257</sup> Foner, *The Fiery Trial*, p. 196.

gradual, compensated abolition of slavery if they returned to the Union, as opposed to immediate, uncompensated military emancipation if they chose to remain in rebellion.<sup>258</sup>

By September 1862, the momentum to abolish slavery across the Union had thus been set in pace through a process of military emancipation in the areas where the Union armies were advancing, through legislation abolishing it in the Territories and the District of Columbia, and through a policy for gradual, compensated emancipation in the border states. The PEP, by declaring all slaves in rebel-held territory “forever free” with effect from 1<sup>st</sup> January 1863 unless the seceded states returned to the Union before then, added to this momentum by linking the restoration of the Union irrevocably with the destruction of slavery.<sup>259</sup>

The caution which marked Lincoln’s decision to issue the PEP reflected in part his awareness of the resistance it would meet, not just in the border states but by large sections of the Democratic party. Predictably perhaps, the Democrats were united in their opposition to the PEP, but as James McPherson points out, “on all four crucial congressional roll-call votes concerning slavery in 1862 – the war article prohibiting return of fugitives, emancipation in the District of Columbia, prohibition of slavery on the territories, and the confiscation act”, 96% of the Democrats had voted against.<sup>260</sup> They were opposed in principle to emancipation as a war measure and from the start of hostilities had attempted to introduce resolutions in Congress stating that the US military had no business to interfere with slavery in any of the states.<sup>261</sup> This was certainly not the position of much of the British press, for whom the absence of any reference to the issue of slavery in the Federal Administration’s justification for the war made the war objectless. The reasons, therefore, for their opposition to the PEP need closer analysis.

#### **4.2.2 British Press Responses to the Preliminary Emancipation Proclamation**

“The London newspaper press was very nearly a unit in treating the proclamation with derision and contempt and no other one situation in the Civil War came in for such vigorous denunciation.”<sup>262</sup> So claimed E.D. Adams in his discussion of the British press response to the

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<sup>258</sup> Oakes, p. 305.

<sup>259</sup> Oakes, p. 317.

<sup>260</sup> McPherson, p. 506.

<sup>261</sup> Oakes, p. 113.

<sup>262</sup> Adams, Vol. 2, p. 102. The ‘proclamation’ he is referring to is the PEP, not the full EP.

PEP. His claim is supported by an extract from *The Times*, which “led the way”, footnotes citing other publications both in and outside London (including *The Manchester Guardian* Oct 7, *London Morning Advertiser* Oct 9, *London Press*, Oct 11, *London Globe* Oct 6, *London Examiner* Oct 11 and Oct 18.) and quotations condemning the PEP from *The Liverpool Post*, *The Edinburgh Post* and the Edinburgh-based *Blackwood’s* magazine.<sup>263</sup> Duncan Campbell takes issue with Adams’ claim, arguing that the Emancipation Proclamation was “better received than historians have acknowledged”.<sup>264</sup> However, his argument is significantly weakened in two respects. First, in his discussion of British reactions to emancipation, he has chosen to conflate the two Proclamations, the PEP of September 1862 and the Full Emancipation Proclamation (EP) of 1 January 1863, which has meant that the important differences between them are overlooked, as indeed are the different responses to them. The EP was generally more favourably received than the PEP. Secondly, he unwittingly misrepresents, or rather misreads, the views of *The Economist*, whose apparently positive response to emancipation forms the main example to support his argument. Campbell states that in its editorial of 25 October 1862, *The Economist* considered the PEP to be “commendable on several grounds”.<sup>265</sup> What the editor actually wrote was that “we consider it condemnable on several grounds”.<sup>266</sup> Quite an important difference. It is also worth noting that even pro-Union newspapers like *The Spectator* were distinctly unenthusiastic in their response to the PEP, as also were fervent pro-Union supporters like the MP John Bright, who feared that “sudden emancipation would bring catastrophe”.<sup>267</sup> When that did not happen, he changed his views dramatically in the wake of the full EP. One is thus more inclined to trust E.D. Adams’s original assessment of the press reaction in Britain to the PEP than Campbell’s later one.

Nevertheless, terms like ‘derision’ and ‘contempt’, while they may be appropriate in depicting the responses of *The Times* and *The Economist*, do not accurately describe the more nuanced comments on the PEP by periodicals like *The Spectator* and more especially

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<sup>263</sup> Ibid, p. 103.

<sup>264</sup> Campbell, p. 131

<sup>265</sup> Ibid. p. 131

<sup>266</sup> ‘The Emancipation Proclamation: Its Meaning and Probable Consequences’, *The Economist*, 25 October 1862, p. 1177.

<sup>267</sup> See section 4.2.5 below; Doyle, p. 247. Doyle goes on to note that his misgivings had all changed by early February 1863.



*The Illustrated London News*. That popular and groundbreaking weekly journal ran a leading article on the PEP, giving it a cautious welcome, in spite of its view that “as a mere decree of the Executive it could have no permanent validity”<sup>268</sup>. The article concluded that it nonetheless heralded “the approaching doom of slavery” and would help to convince the border states that “the status quo of American slavery is hopeless and forever gone”. In this respect, its views were not dissimilar to those of *The Spectator*.

#### **4.2.3 *The Times***

News that President Lincoln had issued the Preliminary Emancipation Proclamation reached England at the end of the first week of October.<sup>269</sup> Of the three publications in this study, all of which reacted for different reason negatively to the PEP, *The Times* was by some distance the most hostile. The initial report on the Proclamation appeared in their New York correspondent Charles Mackay’s piece which reached the paper on 6 October, and which reported that it was considered “a blunder” by all except extreme abolitionists. The Democratic Party (of which Mackay was a keen supporter) opposed it “as illegal, unconstitutional, ill-timed, and unjust”. The report contained three selective reports from the New York press, all of which were Democrat organs, one of which, *The World*, blamed Mr Lincoln for his “lack of backbone” in yielding under pressure to the Radicals.<sup>270</sup> It was clear that with Charles Mackay as their correspondent in New York, the readership of *The Times* was being given a very different perspective on the views and attitudes of New Yorkers than they had been getting when Bancroft Davis had been their correspondent. It would appear too that this perspective aligned much more closely with the views of the editor, John Delane.

In anticipation of a move by the Federal Administration towards emancipation, *The Times* ran a leading article on 19 September 1862, arguing that any such move would be Lincoln’s attempt to revenge the North’s failures on the battlefield by “inciting 4 millions of blacks to

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<sup>268</sup> Weiner, p. 48. *The Illustrated London News* “broke new ground” by allowing readers to see, as well as read, the news from exotic locations like the Crimea, India, China, and America; *The Illustrated London News*, 11 October 1862.

<sup>269</sup> Misleadingly, perhaps, the press at the time just referred to it as the Proclamation of Emancipation, without the qualifying adjective ‘Preliminary’. This was presumably because the final Proclamation had not yet been issued.

<sup>270</sup> *The Times*, 6 October 1862, p. 7.

murder, lust and rapine upon the unguarded plantations of the South.”<sup>271</sup> Readers of the newspaper would therefore have been prepared for the editor’s excoriating attack on the PEP which appeared on 7 October 1862. While denouncing the discriminatory aspect of the decree – “where he has no power Mr Lincoln will set the negroes free, where he retains power he will consider them as slaves” - the main focus of the editorial was its accusation that Lincoln was trying to incite a slave insurrection in the Confederacy. This it did in language which is lurid to say the least. “Mr. Lincoln”, the paper asserted, proposes to “excite the negroes in the southern plantations to murder the families of their masters while these are engaged in the war”, a policy which it described as a “gigantic wickedness.” Warming to the theme, the paper continued:

He will appeal to the black blood of the African; he will whisper of the pleasures of spoil and of the gratification of yet fiercer instincts; and when blood begins to flow and shrieks come piercing through the darkness, Mr Lincoln will wait till the rising flames tell that all is consummated, and then he will rub his hands and think that revenge is sweet.<sup>272</sup>

The editorial concluded by suggesting that the Proclamation is “not a formidable document” but rather Lincoln’s “last card” to save the Union. “Powerful malignity”, the paper observed “is a dreadful reality, but impotent malignity is apt to be a very contemptible spectacle.”<sup>273</sup>

Fears of a slave uprising in the Confederacy as a consequence of the PEP were also expressed by Democrats across the Northern states of America.<sup>274</sup> What is notable about *The Times’s* coverage is the image of Lincoln deliberately and wickedly stoking the flames of insurrection by issuing the decree. It may be true, as Howard Jones argues, that Lincoln “realised that any war-time measure against slavery would grow into widespread resistance to the institution that would not abate until all blacks were freed”.<sup>275</sup> But that is not the same as accusing him of wishing to cause a slave rebellion. Reading this editorial, it is hard not to agree with Martin Crawford’s conclusion that *The Times’s* response to emancipation

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<sup>271</sup> *The Times* 19 September 1862, p. 6.

<sup>272</sup> *The Times* 7 October 1862, p. 8.

<sup>273</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>274</sup> McPherson, p. 560.

<sup>275</sup> Howard Jones, *Union in Peril*, p. 142.

was “hysterical” and evidence of “a serious decline in Printing House Square’s editorial judgment”.<sup>276</sup>

It is indeed difficult to reconcile the image of the President painted in *The Times* editorial with the man of moderation welcomed by the paper during the secession winter.<sup>277</sup>

However, by this stage of his Presidency, *The Times* had come to view him as a dictator who had suspended *habeas corpus* in the Federal states, and “a would-be conqueror” of the seceded South.<sup>278</sup> For *The Times* the only sure way to put an end to slavery was through the success of the Confederates and not through the forcible emancipation of the kind proposed which, in its view, could only result in “massacre and utter destruction”.<sup>279</sup> This was also the view expressed by the pro-Confederate Liverpool businessman James Spence in his influential publication *The American Union*, published in 1861. In it, he argued that restoration of the Union would lead to the perpetuation of slavery, rather than its demise, as part of the “conditions of peace” between the two sides. “The supreme object would be to buy back the affections of the estranged partner.”<sup>280</sup> Independence for the Confederacy, on the other hand, “affords the prospect of its early amendment, and ultimate extinction”, since it would no longer be shielded by the Union and thus be more susceptible to the power of public opinion.<sup>281</sup> This analysis had strong appeal among Conservative politicians and writers who supported the Confederacy, like Alexander Beresford Hope and Charles Kingsley.<sup>282</sup>

Significantly, Spence was invited by *The Times* in January 1861 to contribute regular pieces entitled ‘American Affairs’, and over the next three years forty-five of his articles were published by the paper under the pseudonym ‘S’.<sup>283</sup> They were, as R.J.M. Blackett puts it “a sustained and unapologetic assault on the Union and an invaluable weapon in the

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<sup>276</sup> Crawford, p. 135. Printing House Square was the site of the offices of *The Times* and is used by Crawford synonymously with the name of the paper.

<sup>277</sup> In *The Times* editorial of 5 December 1860: “We look in vain for any hint of one dangerous step he would take if he could, or could take if he would.”

<sup>278</sup> *The Times*, 7 October 1862, p. 8.

<sup>279</sup> *Ibid.* p. 8.

<sup>280</sup> James Spence, *The American Union: Its Effect on National Character and Policy, with an inquiry into Secession as a Constitutional Right and the Causes of Disruption*, (London: Richard Bentley, 1861), p. 158.

<sup>281</sup> *Ibid.* p. 164.

<sup>282</sup> Bellows, p. 521.

<sup>283</sup> Blackett, p. 147. Blackett tellingly describes Spence’s book *The American Union* as “the most important book published in England about the American conflict.” p. 63.

Confederate's propaganda arsenal".<sup>284</sup> One such piece reinforced the central message of *The Times* regarding the PEP:

The proclamation now issued is the most consummate folly ever perpetrated by a ruler. No wit of man could devise another measure so fatal to the political unity of the North, so disastrous in its effect on the wavering States, and especially the great State of Kentucky, or so stimulating to every energy of the South [.....]. Practically it is the recognition of the independence of the South by Mr. Lincoln.<sup>285</sup>

Hindsight of course shows that the opposite was in fact the case, but few commentators in Britain at the time saw it as a turning point in the war that it came to be after the release of the full Emancipation Proclamation on 1 January 1863, let alone as the momentous event it assumed in the history of the country. It was also the case that Mackay's correspondence from New York, with its heavy focus on the views of the Democrats, continued to reinforce the hostile editorial line which *The Times* adopted. A report in the same edition of the paper as the leading article suggested that "the vast mass of people" in New York considered the document "illegal and unconstitutional, and as complete a breach of his oath on assuming office as if he [Lincoln] had abolished trial by jury or any other institution of the country". The report concluded that if the Democratic party obtained a majority in the next Congress "the impeachment of Mr Lincoln" would be a much more probable result than the abolition of slavery.<sup>286</sup>

A notable feature of *The Times'* editorial commentary in this period was its highly personal attacks on Lincoln himself. Along with much of the English press, *The Times* had, since his election, frequently adopted a condescending attitude to the President, seeing him as an honest man, but one of mediocre intellectual capacity and a second-rate rural attorney with bad grammar.<sup>287</sup> However, with the PEP, the depiction of the man changed dramatically. In the 7 October article, he appears as a somewhat sinister figure, almost a pantomime villain bent on vengeance and destruction. In a later editorial Delane suggested that Lincoln will

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<sup>284</sup> Ibid. p. 147.

<sup>285</sup> 'American Affairs', *The Times*, 9 October 1862, p. 9.

<sup>286</sup> 'The Civil War in America', *The Times*, 7 October 1862, p. 9

<sup>287</sup> This attitude was shared by at least one of the ministers in Palmerston's predominantly aristocratic Cabinet: D.P. Crook in *The North, the South and the Powers* quotes a letter from Sir George Cornwall Lewis, Secretary of State for War, to Walter Bagehot in May 1861 questioning what "that village lawyer Lincoln" hoped to gain "if the North beat the South." (p. 235).

go down in history as 'Lincoln the Last' (i.e. the last President of the American Union), and asked in tones once again bordering on the hysterical:

Is the reign of the last President to go out amid horrible massacres of white women and children, to be followed by the extermination of the black race in the South? Is the name of Lincoln "ultimately to be classed among that catalogue of monsters, the wholesale assassins and butchers of their kind?"<sup>288</sup>

By the end of 1862, in its response to Lincoln's message to Congress on 1<sup>st</sup> December, *The Times'* opinion of the PEP appeared to be unchanged even though the anticipated servile insurrection (of the kind it had forecast) showed no signs of coming to pass. The Message was dismissed as "the dream of a very weak man", the terms of which might have been enough to save the Union if offered by "a unanimous North ... three years ago", but which now "scarcely read like a serious proposition".<sup>289</sup>

Apart from the paper's continued personal attack on Lincoln's leadership, what is notable in *The Times'* editorial response to the Message is the absence of any sense that a programme to emancipate the slaves – not just in the rebel states but in the Union as a whole – might be a morally desirable goal for the Federal Government to pursue, irrespective of the manner in which it was to be implemented. This was in spite of the paper's previous denunciations of slavery before and during the 'secession winter' of 1860-61. One can only conclude that in the view of *The Times* the moral imperative of recognising secession as a *fait accompli* and letting the Confederate states separate peacefully to avoid further bloodshed overrode the moral imperative of putting an end to slavery. The intensity of *The Times'* reaction to Lincoln's programme of emancipation suggests too that the paper saw it as a threat to its settled editorial judgment that the war was unwinnable, that it was never about slavery in the first place, and that the only solution was for the Federal Government to recognise secession as a fact. The full Emancipation Proclamation, which was due to come into effect just two weeks later on 1 January 1863, and the President's Message on 1 December 1862, challenged that judgment in two ways. Firstly, it made the abolition of slavery a goal and an outcome of the war, and secondly, it ensured that the war would continue either until that

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<sup>288</sup> *The Times*, 21 October 1862, p. 9.

<sup>289</sup> *The Times*, 16 December 1862, p. 8.

goal was attained, or until the policy was reversed in the event of a change of government in Washington two years later. This was still a long way off, however, in the fast-moving events of the war. It would not be surprising, therefore, if the pre-eminent newspaper in Britain, and indeed in the world at the time, which acted in the expectation that its views would be sought after and listened to by the governments of the day, found itself in the uncomfortable position at the end of 1862 of confronting the possibility that it might have misread events in America. Consequently, it 'doubled down' in its critique of the Federal government.

#### **4.2.4 *The Economist***

*The Economist* ran two editorials on the PEP, one on 11 October 1862 at the end of the week that the news reached England, and the second two weeks later on 25 October. There was no further editorial on the President's Message to Congress. Like *The Times*, the paper was scathing about the decree, but for different reasons, and in more measured and certainly less lurid terms. Indeed, the main purpose of the second editorial was to distance itself from the views expressed in *The Times*.

For *The Economist* the PEP, along with the parallel order declaring martial law and the suspension of *habeas corpus*, revealed "the astonishing lack of statesmanship .... which has distinguished the Washington Government from the outset of the civil war", a view with which *The Times* would doubtless have agreed. However, unlike *The Times*, the editorial did not comment on the PEP as the trigger for a bloody servile insurrection but attacked it primarily for its inconsistency in freeing only those slaves in the states outside Federal control:

He [President Lincoln] proclaims emancipation to the slaves whom he cannot liberate, and he retains in slavery those whose fate lies within his power. He confirms the servitude of those whom he *might* set free, and he decrees the freedom of those whom neither his decree nor his arm can reach!<sup>290</sup>

The editorial also criticised the PEP as politically "injudicious" in that it would not achieve any of the three objects which the paper ascribed to it, namely, to weaken the Confederacy

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<sup>290</sup> 'Mr Lincoln's Two Proclamations', *The Economist*, 11 October 1862, p. 1121, 1123.

by raising up internal foes, to unite and energise the North, and to obtain the moral support of Europe. On the contrary, the paper felt that the decree would be a source of bitter division in the Union States; it would not command support in Europe due to its half-hearted nature; and it would leave the enslaved in those rebel states which were beyond the reach of the Federal troops unsupported and unprotected. The article concluded that “the position taken by the President in this decree is so curiously infelicitous, so transparently un-anti-Slavery that we cannot conceive how it could have emanated from a shrewd man.”<sup>291</sup>

Along with much of the British press, *The Economist*, in its critique of the Preliminary Emancipation Proclamation, failed to appreciate, or so it would appear, two central facts about the decree. Firstly, in issuing it, Lincoln was acting in his capacity of Commander-in-Chief. This was a war measure, required by military necessity, a fact Lincoln was at pains to emphasise, and one which would thus only apply to states the Federal Government was at war with.<sup>292</sup> And it would cease to apply to them if they individually agreed to rejoin the Union before the beginning of the New Year. As President, as opposed to Commander-in-Chief, he had no constitutional power to act against slavery in states that were already in the Union, a position which he had clearly expressed in his 1860 Presidential campaign, his Inaugural Address, and had held consistently since then.<sup>293</sup> While this does not necessarily invalidate *The Economist's* criticism, it is surprising that a constitutional historian like Walter Bagehot, the editor of *The Economist*, appears to have overlooked this important constitutional distinction. It would suggest that Bagehot did not really know the U.S. Constitutional system that well. Given Lincoln's scrupulous care to abide by the legal frameworks set out in the Constitution, the PEP could hardly have been anything other than partial in its reach.

The second central fact about the PEP which drew very little comment in the mainstream British press at the time, and certainly not in *The Economist's* editorial, was its irrevocable nature, should the seceded states fail to take up the offer to rejoin the Union. As it was almost inconceivable that any of them would do so after fighting so resolutely and with

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<sup>291</sup> Ibid, p. 1122 – 1123.

<sup>292</sup> John Fabian Witt *Lincoln's Code: The Laws of War in American History* (New York: Free Press, 2011), p. 235. Witt shows how the jurist Francis Lieber's notion of military necessity to justify measures considered to be indispensable for securing the ends of war was an important influence on Lincoln's prosecution of the war from 1862 onwards.

<sup>293</sup> See McPherson, p. 558.

considerable success for well over a year, it was equally inevitable that the full EP would come into effect on the chosen date of 1 January 1863. Following this, the slaves in all those states would be “forever free”, a promise which it would arguably be difficult to revoke in the event of a change of administration in Washington after 1864. From the date of the full EP, it would also become increasingly difficult for slavery to co-exist in the few remaining border states, an issue that Lincoln was to address in his Message to Congress in December. The PEP therefore established in practice the White House’s momentum for the abolition of slavery across the United States, a fact which, while it might not have been appreciated by *The Times* and *The Economist*, was not lost on at least one keen British observer and commentator of the American war, Karl Marx. He described the decree at the time as “the most important document in American history since the establishment of the Union”.<sup>294</sup> Subsequent events beginning with the full EP of January 1863, and the re-casting of the Union war effort as a campaign of liberation (and not just one of preserving the Union) showed that the President’s position taken in September 1862 was a lot shrewder than *The Economist* gave him credit for.

In the paper’s follow-up editorial on 25 October 1862, Bagehot appeared to have revised, but only to a very limited extent, his earlier assessment of the PEP, by recognising its historical significance and noting that “it deserves, perhaps, calmer attention than it has yet received.” In particular, the editorial took issue with *The Times* for the savagery of its attack on the PEP “in language even more severe and unmeasured than usual”, as well as for its central argument that the purpose of the decree was to incite a slave rebellion. *The Economist* could find no evidence to support that argument, which if true, would, in its view, have made the Proclamation “atrocious and indefensible”. In the view expressed in the editorial, Lincoln’s main idea “as far as he had any definite idea at all”, was not deliberately to incite an insurrection but to weaken the Confederate war effort by, for example, encouraging the slaves to take strike action and forcing soldiers to return home to look after their homes. The measure should therefore only be regarded “as a military and political expedient to damage his enemy, and to animate and unite his own party”.<sup>295</sup> In all other

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<sup>294</sup> Quoted in Doyle, p. 242.

<sup>295</sup> ‘The Emancipation Proclamation: its meaning and possible consequences’, *The Economist*, 25 October 1862, pp. 1177 – 1179.



respects, *The Economist* continued to find the PEP objectionable and above all, unconstitutional, concluding that:

Mr Lincoln's proclamation was one which he had no claim or power to issue; that it is *ipso facto* null and void, as being in direct violation of the provisions of the Constitution [.....]; and that it must either fall to the ground *sub silentio* as a worthless parchment, or be formally disavowed and annulled as unconstitutional by the Supreme Court of the United States. We have little doubt that this last course will be the one preferred.<sup>296</sup>

#### 4.2.5 *The Spectator*

Some readers of *The Spectator* might have been surprised, in the light of the paper's consistently pro-Union stance throughout the war, to find its response to the PEP decidedly less than enthusiastic. "We are not disposed to exalt over the President's manifesto", it began its 'Topic of the Day' piece on 11 October 1862, adding that "it is only a hopeful promise." The paper's disappointment stemmed from the lack of any moral, principled stance on slavery in the President's decree:

The principle at stake is entirely disregarded, and emancipation promised as a mere incident in a war. The Government liberates the enemy's slaves as it would the enemy's cattle, simply to weaken them in the coming conflict.<sup>297</sup>

The absence of any moral statement in the PEP against slavery was also a complaint of many abolitionists and Radical Republicans in America.<sup>298</sup>

Like both *The Times* and *The Economist*, the paper fiercely attacked the unequal nature of the decree, freeing only those enslaved in the rebel states, and leaving those inside the Union in bondage: "The principle asserted", the editorial noted "is not that a human being cannot justly own another but that he cannot own him unless he is loyal to the United States". This is not a principle, the paper understandably asserted, for which the outside world can be expected to feel any enthusiasm. "There is no morality whatever in such a

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<sup>296</sup> Ibid, p. 1179.

<sup>297</sup> 'The President's Last Proclamation', *The Spectator*, 11 October 1861, p. 1125.

<sup>298</sup> Foner, *The Fiery Trial*, p. 232.

decree”, the paper continued “and if approved at all, it must be on its merits as a political measure”.<sup>299</sup>

It is here - in the political effects of the PEP - that *The Spectator* found some mitigating features, and these were not insignificant. Firstly, it argued, by implying that the Federal Government considers slavery “inexpedient”, it presented “a serious menace” to the slaveholders as it enlisted against them “the opinion of all those who love freedom, by whomsoever secured”. Secondly, by forbidding every general from returning fugitive slaves, the decree was seen to increase “inducements to peaceable flight”. Thirdly, and crucially in the paper’s view, the Proclamation pledged the Federal armies to conduct all future movements into the South, “not as mere invaders, but as emancipators”. Unlike *The Times* and *The Economist*, *The Spectator* here recognised the potentially transformative effect of the PEP on the prosecution of the war by the Union armies and navies. The paper also recognised that while the future remained at this stage “wholly obscure [.....], the North is drifting slowly, but steadily, towards a policy of abolition”.<sup>300</sup>

Nevertheless, the overall tone of *The Spectator*’s initial response to the PEP was one of disappointment mainly because of its failure explicitly to make emancipation a moral issue rather than a military strategy. This, the paper felt, was needed to give the Federal forces a cause worth fighting for:

As a matter of policy, the North must fight the South with an idea as strong and as coherent as its own [.....]. To resist men like Jefferson Davis, the North must call up an enthusiasm equal to the one he wields, and the only influence potent enough to confront the pride of race is the fanaticism of freedom.<sup>301</sup>

If some readers at the time were surprised by *The Spectator*’s lukewarm response to the PEP, the more discerning readers would not have been. Ever since the Federal defeat at the First Battle of Bull Run in July 1861 the paper had been arguing that the Federal Government needed to make opposition to slavery an explicit war aim, and had become increasingly exasperated at Lincoln’s reluctance to do so. Indeed, in *The Spectator*’s News of the Week

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<sup>299</sup> ‘The President’s Last Proclamation’, *The Spectator*, 11 October 1861, p. 1125.

<sup>300</sup> Ibid, p. 1125.

<sup>301</sup> Ibid, p. 1126.

section in the issue that carried its editorial on the Proclamation, the reporter suggested that Lincoln had issued the decree “reluctantly” and “with no clear or resolute mind”:

“The abolitionists serenaded Mr Lincoln for his hesitating and reluctant act, and the effect on the poor man was like that of a joyous congratulation to a patient who has just consented to undergo an amputation.”<sup>302</sup>

This unflattering description appeared to disregard the fact that Lincoln was having to play a delicate balancing act between the abolitionist wing of the Republican Party who wanted the PEP to go further and make explicit provision for arming the slaves, and more moderate voices both within and outside the party who feared that it would alienate the support of the border states.<sup>303</sup> The constraints on Lincoln’s freedom of action were, nevertheless, recognised in *The Spectator’s* editorial of the same day which noted that “he is hemmed in by all manner of parchment barriers, by the opinion of his people, the prejudices of his troops, and perhaps his own scruples as to the extent of his constitutional power.”<sup>304</sup>

It was in its criticism of Lincoln’s reluctance to make an explicitly moral stance against slavery that *The Spectator* appeared not to have taken account of two important elements in the thinking behind the President’s decision. The first was the conditional nature of the PEP: it was preliminary, and would only take effect if the rebel states failed to return to the Union by the end of the year. If Lincoln was hoping to use the terms of the PEP to persuade the rebel states in good faith to come back, he could not expect to achieve that if at the same time he declared slavery a sin against God, as *The Spectator* would have had him do.

Secondly, Lincoln was acutely concerned about the legal validity of both the PEP and the later Emancipation Proclamation itself, and was aware that outside of military necessity, he lacked authority under the Constitution to liberate the enslaved.<sup>305</sup> Or in the words of Eric Foner, a presidential decree emancipating the slaves “would only survive judicial scrutiny as a war measure, not as one issuing from the bosom of philanthropy.”<sup>306</sup>

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<sup>302</sup> *The Spectator*, 11 October 1862, p. 1121.

<sup>303</sup> See for example McPherson, p. 557 and Foner, *The Fiery Trial*, p. 227

<sup>304</sup> ‘The President’s Last Proclamation’, *The Spectator*, 11 October 1862, p. 1125.

<sup>305</sup> David Reynolds, *Abe: Abraham Lincoln in his Times*, (New York: Penguin Random House, 2020), p. 586.

<sup>306</sup> Foner, *The Fiery Trial*, p. 243.

In its editorial on 20 December 1862 commenting on the President's Message to Congress, *The Spectator* took a much more positive view of Lincoln's programme of emancipation which included his offer to compensate in full slave-holders in the border states if they emancipated their slaves. In contrast to *The Times* and *The Economist*, *The Spectator* had clearly come to realise the magnitude of the original Proclamation as the date for its implementation approached. It noted that "Mr. Lincoln stoops to no explanation, or softening, or withdrawal of that tremendous decree" and had indeed "gone further rather than retreated on the path to emancipation". And while it was not uncritical of the plan set out in the Message, calling it "a poor one", it nevertheless conceded that "for the first time an American President has risen to the conception of universal emancipation without conditions of colour, without involuntary expulsion, and with an effort to compensate all who will suffer under that social change".<sup>307</sup>

#### 4.2.6 Concluding Analysis

*The Spectator* stood in a conspicuous minority among the British newspapers of the day in its growing recognition of the significance and importance of Lincoln's Preliminary Emancipation Proclamation, especially as the time drew near for the full Proclamation to come into effect. Given the abhorrence of slavery which all three papers expressed at the start of the crisis in December 1860 and the scorn heaped on South Carolina when it formally seceded and began the process of disunion, it is worth reconsidering why it was that Lincoln's emancipation plans were received with such hostility by *The Times* and *The Economist*. It is true that some of the newspapers in the Northern states of America were equally opposed to the PEP, as the reports of Charles Mackay in *The Times* have shown, and these in turn reflected a strong segment of public opinion in the Union. The Democrats made significant gains in the 1862 Congressional elections, fuelled by opposition to Lincoln's emancipation plans and fears by voters of their being inundated by freed slaves from the Southern states looking for work.<sup>308</sup> However, much of the opposition to the PEP in the Northern states reflected opposition to the principle of emancipation itself.<sup>309</sup> Britain, on the other hand, had led the world in abolishing slavery in its own dominions in the West

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<sup>307</sup> 'The President's Message', *The Spectator*, 20 December 1862, pp. 1404 – 1405.

<sup>308</sup> Foner, *The Fiery Trial*, pp. 234-35.

<sup>309</sup> Jones, *Union in Peril*, p. 143.

Indies in the 1830s, and thus its press might have been expected to take a more sympathetic attitude to the PEP, certainly as regards its overarching purpose. It will be recalled, for example, that *The Economist*, in an editorial in April 1861, had suggested that if the abolition of slavery had been the true issue of the war, “and there was a fair prospect of success, we could almost wish them God speed, though a terrible civil war was the only means to their cherished end.”<sup>310</sup> By the beginning of 1863, when it was clear that the war had indeed become a war to eradicate slavery, the paper showed no sign of questioning or revisiting the editorial line it had adopted. Similarly, *The Times*, whose fears of a bloody servile insurrection as a consequence of the PEP were expressed so luridly in its editorials, showed no indication of a change of editorial stance when those fears failed to materialize.

The most plausible explanation for the adverse reaction to Lincoln’s emancipation programme up to and beyond the full EP at the beginning of 1863 is that newspapers like *The Times* and *The Economist*, along with a sizeable section of public opinion, simply wanted the war to end as swiftly as possible. This was not just to stop the carnage, but to protect Britain’s commercial interests and restore the flow of cotton to Lancashire where, by the second half of 1862 the cotton famine had become a reality. They had long regarded the war as being pointless and unwinnable by either side, and the PEP, which was regarded even by *The Spectator* as a cynical war measure, had not shaken that opinion, especially after the crushing defeat of the Union forces at Fredericksburg in December 1862. The problem with the PEP and then the full Emancipation Proclamation was that it made certain that there would be no ‘Southern independence’ imminently, and that the war would continue for a lot longer and with even greater intensity. This was recognised in an editorial in *The Economist* following the announcement of the full EP: having promised freedom to millions of men, the President “could not at once make a peace consigning them again to slavery.”<sup>311</sup>

Furthermore, both *The Times* and *The Economist* had come to believe, well before the PEP was issued, that the eradication of slavery would paradoxically be best achieved through success of the Confederacy rather than victory of the Union. In an editorial in *The Economist* on 15 February 1862, Bagehot, while agreeing with the views expressed by supporters of the Union like J.S. Mill that confining slavery in its present states would ensure its ultimate

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<sup>310</sup> ‘The True Issue Between North and South’, *The Economist*, 13 April 1861, p. 395.

<sup>311</sup> ‘The Increased Probability of a Long Duration of the American War’, *The Economist*, 17 January 1863, p. 58.

extinction, argued that this could only be achieved with any certainty once the slave states were independent. This was because the extension of slavery beyond its limits would then be “forbidden, and its boundaries rigidly fixed and jealously watched”. On the other hand, he feared that vested interests in the cheap production of cotton would ensure that “the North”, following victory and reunion with the Confederacy, would “once more be involved in the sin [.....] of slavery, and of riveting, consecrating, and consolidating that disastrous institution again by the physical strength and moral sanction of the *entire* Union.”<sup>312</sup> These arguments were not dissimilar to those that had originally been put forward by James Spence in *The American Union*. However, they had clearly been derailed by the PEP, and again by the subsequent December message to Congress. There would be no ‘riveting of slavery’ as a result of a Northern victory, certainly as long as the Lincoln administration was in power, so it is perhaps curious that *The Economist* did not pause to revisit its earlier position in the course of its two lengthy editorials on the PEP.

The opposition to the PEP manifested by *The Times* and *The Economist* may also reflect deeper reservations about emancipation more generally as a result of the British experience of the effects of emancipation in their West Indies colonies. It was one thing to condemn the practice of slavery, it was another to find a practical solution which did not harm the continued commercial production of the plantations. As emancipation had come to be viewed by both *The Times* and *The Economist* as a failure in the West Indies by the end of the 1850s,<sup>313</sup> it would be surprising if this view did not influence their view of the prospect of sudden emancipation in America.

It also seemed to be the case that the press in Britain, including *The Spectator*, had failed sufficiently to see the PEP in the context of the gathering momentum against slavery in the spring and summer of 1862, driven by the exodus of fugitive slaves to Union lines, and enforced by the earlier measures to formalise and widen the remit of military emancipation. The responses of all three newspapers to the PEP in September 1862 made no or little reference to this wider context which, even before the PEP was issued, had, as Eric Foner

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<sup>312</sup> ‘The Prospects for Slavery, as affected by the success of the North and that of the South Respectively’, *The Economist*, 15 February 1862, pp. 170 – 172. An editorial in the previous month entitled ‘Shall the Blockade Be Respected?’ had also argued that “it is in the independence of the South, not in her defeat, that we can alone look with confidence for the early amelioration and the ultimate extinction of the slavery we abhor.” *The Economist* 25 January 1862, p. 89.

<sup>313</sup> Connolly, p. 109, and the discussion in 1.3.

argues, “clearly changed the character of the war”.<sup>314</sup> By failing to see the PEP as a step in that process, both *The Times* and *The Economist* largely missed its potential, historical significance.

Finally, another explanation for the failure of newspapers like *The Times* and *The Economist* to be more receptive to Lincoln’s emancipation plans may relate to changes in British attitudes towards race in the decade before the Civil War, discussed in Chapter 1, and the shift towards a more racist, unsympathetic view of blacks.<sup>315</sup> By way of illustration, the following editorial from *The Times* on 9 October 1862 reveals a marked ambivalence towards the issue of emancipation, combined with an essentialist, racist view of the enslaved people, which strikes today’s readers as highly offensive:

The question of slavery has still to be answered, and it will not be answered by a proclamation that the African is everywhere free. Call these negroes what we will, they will still be negroes, and we can no more divest them of their slavish nature than we can wash them white. If they are to be emancipated, amalgamated, and what not, it will be in Heaven’s own way and in due time, but we do not see how it is to be done either by Mr Lincoln’s proclamation or by any possible event of the present war.<sup>316</sup>

### 4.3 Intervention, Mediation and Recognition

#### 4.3.1 Background

Rumours of a French-initiated intervention to break the blockade of the Confederate ports following the visit of Henri Mercier, the French Minister in Washington, to Richmond in May 1862 had led to editorials in the British press considering the case European mediation.<sup>317</sup> *The Economist*, for example, listed the various circumstances that would justify friendly mediation between belligerents, such as when the object of the war had clearly become

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<sup>314</sup> Foner, *The Fiery Trial*, p. 220.

<sup>315</sup> Dubrulle, p. 90. As an example of this, Dubrulle compares the views of Fanny Kemble, the Georgia plantation mistress whose *Journal of a Residence on a Georgia Plantation* was a powerful indictment of slavery with those of her daughter Fan Butler, who took over the plantation after emancipation, and whose views on her black workers were in marked contrast with the sympathetic views of her mother.

<sup>316</sup> *The Times*, 9 October 1862, p. 8.

<sup>317</sup> See for example, ‘Mediation: Its Reasons, Objects and Prospects’, *The Economist*, 14 June 1862, pp. 645 – 648, and *The Times*, 12 June 1862, p. 8.

unattainable, or when the fighting had clearly reached a stalemate. The paper concluded that in the case of the war in America the reasons “to warrant friendly interposition were clear and irrefragable.”<sup>318</sup> With the military reverses suffered by the Federal Army in Virginia in July 1862, and no end in sight to the devastating loss of life on both sides, discussions and proposals around some form of intervention by Europe to mediate terms to end the war gathered momentum in August and September of that year.

Intervention by neutral powers did not necessarily mean recognition of the Confederacy as a sovereign state, but rather an attempt to mediate proposals that would end the war. Howard Jones suggests that this was the view of Lord Russell, the British Foreign Secretary, who favoured mediation, but initially in this period “remained opposed to recognition.”<sup>319</sup> However, as an indication of how British government thinking changed in response to events on the ground, correspondence between Russell and Prime Minister Lord Palmerston after the news of the Union’s defeat at the Second Battle of Bull Run, shows that Russell agreed with Palmerston’s proposal that Britain and France should offer to mediate, adding that if the Federal Government refused, “we ought ourselves to recognise the Southern States as an independent State”.<sup>320</sup> From then on Russell, along with William Gladstone, the Chancellor of the Exchequer, became the leading advocates in the British Cabinet for European intervention with a view to recognising the Confederacy should attempts at mediation fail.

The distinction between mediation and recognition was never accepted in Washington, where the Lincoln administration feared that any mediation by foreign powers would inevitably lead to recognition of the Confederacy and the potential disruption of the Union.<sup>321</sup> Consequently, Secretary of State Seward repeatedly warned Britain and France that intervention would result in retaliatory action and a severance of diplomatic relations with the Union.<sup>322</sup> Indeed, one of the factors which influenced Lincoln’s timing of the PEP was fear of European intervention in the war and a desire to quell European agitation for

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<sup>318</sup> ‘Mediation: Its Reasons, Objects and Prospects’, *The Economist*, 14 June 1862, pp. 645 – 648.

<sup>319</sup> Jones, *Union in Peril*, pp. 144-145.

<sup>320</sup> See Crook, *The North, the South and the Powers*, p. 222, and MacPherson, p. 556.

<sup>321</sup> Jones, *Union in Peril*, pp. 127-127.

<sup>322</sup> Crook, *The North, The South and the Powers*, p. 213, reports on Seward’s note in June 1862 warning Britain that any intervention or mediation favouring the Confederacy would force the Washington administration to foment a retaliatory servile war.



it.<sup>323</sup> In the event, however, fears in Europe that the Proclamation would result in a slave uprising in the South helped to increase rather than reduce moves for intervention by Britain and France.<sup>324</sup>

Pressure for European intervention to end the war and in particular to lift the Northern embargo was intensified over this period by the growing distress in the textile manufacturing regions of Britain and France, due to the shortage of American cotton and the fact that in England the surpluses built up immediately before the war were running low.<sup>325</sup> It was thus not until the mid-1862 that the cotton famine took hold. According to Jones, almost half of Britain's industrial work force was unemployed in the summer of 1862 and cotton stocks were only a sixth of what they were the previous year: 200,000 bales as compared with 1,200,000 in 1861.<sup>326</sup> By September the stock had fallen to 100,000 bales. *The Economist's* 'Board of Trade Tables' published in its issue at the beginning of August 1862 shows that the value of cotton imported from America fell from over £17 million in 1861 to a mere £180,703 in 1862. And while there were significant increases in imports from Brazil, Egypt and the British East Indies, the total value of cotton imports fell over the year from just under £19 million to £5,702,413. "These" the paper noted wryly, "are the figures of the cotton famine."<sup>327</sup> Of the 1,678 textile mills in Lancashire, only a third were operating full time: 80,000 textile workers were out of work with 370,000 on half time.<sup>328</sup> Social unrest in the cotton centres was a real possibility, and Gladstone, in particular, wanted mediation before that happened so that Britain would not be accused of intervening purely out of self-interest.<sup>329</sup>

In Britain, the discussions around intervention and mediation took the form of correspondence between Lord Lyons, the British Minister in Washington, and Lord Russell,

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<sup>323</sup> Foner in *The Fiery Trial*, p. 219, notes that Seward advised Lincoln to delay issuing the Proclamation until after a military victory to forestall possible attempts by Britain to intervene to assist the Confederacy. A premature announcement would in Seward's view be seen in Europe as an act of desperation, rather than a principled stand against slavery.

<sup>324</sup> Jones, *Union in Peril*, p. 140.

<sup>325</sup> Owsley, p. 134, notes that "the years 1859 and 1860 had been years of abnormally large cotton crops in America and elsewhere, and all this surplus had been taken by Europe, thereby making an immediate famine impossible".

<sup>326</sup> Jones, *Union in Peril*, p. 130; Figures for stocks of cotton in this paragraph are taken from Owsley, p. 137. Figures for the monetary values of the bales imported are from *The Economist* 2 August 1862, p. 845.

<sup>327</sup> *The Economist*, 2 August 1862, p. 845.

<sup>328</sup> Howard Jones, *Blue and Gray Diplomacy*, p. 163.

<sup>329</sup> Crook, *The North, The South and The Powers*, p. 231.

diplomatic communications between Lord Cowley, the British ambassador in Paris, and Eduard Thouvenal, the French foreign minister, and discussions in Cabinet. These Cabinet discussions culminated in the eventual decision not to support the French proposal in November led by Emperor Napoleon III for a six-month armistice and lifting of the blockade. One reason was that the terms of the armistice proposed by the French were considered to be too heavily weighted in favour of the Confederacy to be accepted as a credible offer by a 'neutral' country, a fact which even *The Times*, which was sympathetic to the principle of recognition of the Confederacy, acknowledged.<sup>330</sup> However, the main reason, ultimately, was the Union's determination to continue the prosecution of the war. This had clearly not wavered, despite setbacks in the Congressional elections in November 1862, which saw gains to the Democrats, who favoured negotiating a peaceful settlement with the rebels. It was felt that the Federal Government would thus resist any attempt at foreign mediation, possibly by force, and that consequently the risks of intervention "far outweighed the gains".<sup>331</sup> In the words of Lord Palmerston, who presided over a divided Cabinet on the issue, with both Russell and Gladstone strongly in favour of mediation, talking peace to the Americans "would be a useless as asking the winds .... to let the waters remain calm."<sup>332</sup> It should also be noted that there was no concerted popular movement for intervention in the cotton manufacturing districts, due to the support the Union received "from numerous British textile workers".<sup>333</sup> Intervention, as a British policy, was thus put on hold until such a time that a decisive victory by the Confederates had sapped the will and energy of the Union to continue the war. Such a moment never came.

The case for recognition rested on the argument that secession was in effect an accomplished fact and that the Confederate States had earned the right to independent status by forming themselves into a coherent nation with its own constitution and government. Furthermore, they had by the summer of 1862 successfully resisted, for over a year, attempts by the Federal government to coerce them into submission by force of arms. Precedents for recognition were seen to exist in the recognition that Britain had extended to

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<sup>330</sup> *The Times*, 12 November 1862, p. 8.

<sup>331</sup> Patrick Kelly, 'The North American Crisis of the 1860s', *Journal of the Civil War Era*, 2/3 (2012), p. 344.

<sup>332</sup> Quoted in K. Bauer 'British Mediation and the American Civil War: a reconsideration' *Journal of Southern History* 38 (1972), p. 59.

<sup>333</sup> Jones *Union in Peril* p. 155. Blackett in *Divided Hearts* also notes the mixed responses among the textile workers to calls for intervention.

countries such as Greece and Italy following armed struggles against their imperial overlords. A considerable section of educated public opinion in Britain at this time, though how significant is hard to gauge, wanted to see the American war end with Southern separation. Howard Jones refers somewhat vaguely to “large numbers of people”, and Frank Owsley writes that opinion in England at this time was “being swung powerfully in favour of the South.”<sup>334</sup> This view was supported by *The Spectator*, which lamented that “the educated million in England, with here and there an exception, have become unmistakably Southern.”<sup>335</sup> However, Duncan Campbell takes a much more cautious view, suggesting that pro-Confederate sympathy, as opposed to anti-Northern sentiment, was “extremely limited.”<sup>336</sup> Jones also makes the point that “calls for a Southern military victory did not necessarily prove pro-South sympathy”, but rather a desire to see an armistice followed by negotiations aimed at peace.”<sup>337</sup> Those who supported independence for the Confederacy, however, did not necessarily think that Britain should intervene to achieve that result, or abandon its position of neutrality by unilaterally recognising the Confederacy. This view was echoed by much of the British press, including *The Times* and *The Economist*.

Calls for recognition of the Confederacy were taken up by the MP William Lindsay whose motion to that effect was presented to the House of Commons on 18 July 1862. Lindsay eventually withdrew the motion following the intervention of Palmerston who informed the House that, due to the still uncertain and incomplete picture as to the military balance of power between the two sides, recognition by the Government would be premature. James McPherson notes that the British Prime Minister warded off this motion “even though a majority in [the] Commons clearly favoured such a step.”<sup>338</sup> Duncan Campbell, however, disagrees, arguing that Lindsay’s poor performance in the Commons on the night, and the Conservatives’ disinclination to become involved in the debate suggest that, if anything, the opposite was the case.<sup>339</sup> The crucial issue, though, seemed to be the uncertain military intelligence about events of the Civil War itself. If there had been a majority in the Commons in favour of recognition, it would only have been on the back of what they perceived to be a

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<sup>334</sup> Jones, *Union in Peril*, p. 212; Owsley, p. 300.

<sup>335</sup> ‘Mr Gladstone at Newcastle’, *The Spectator*, 11 October 1862, p. 1124.

<sup>336</sup> Campbell, p. 173.

<sup>337</sup> Jones, *Union in Peril*, p. 136.

<sup>338</sup> McPherson, p. 554.

<sup>339</sup> Campbell, p. 165.

decisive turning of the tide in the war. In an editorial the following morning, *The Times* could only concur: “we are but uttering the thoughts of nine Englishmen out of ten”, their leading article stated, “when we say that should it appear that the army of McClellan has been so totally defeated as to be incapable of resuming offensive operations, then the propriety of treating the Confederates as an independent people, may be fully discussed by the British Cabinet.”<sup>340</sup> It would not be long before such discussions began in earnest.

#### 4.3.2 Press Reactions to Gladstone’s Newcastle Speech

The controversial subject of British intervention received renewed discussion in the British press following Gladstone’s famous and much quoted speech at Newcastle on 7 October 1862 asserting 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.” He went on to declare that “we may anticipate with certainty the success of the South, so far as regards separation from the North” and that “it may be that the time might arrive when it will become the duty of Europe to offer expostulation or friendly aid in compromising the quarrel”.<sup>341</sup>

The interest which the speech aroused was in the apparent implication that Gladstone, the third most senior member of the Cabinet after Palmerston and Russell, had signalled that recognition of the Confederacy was set to become the policy of the Government. This would have constituted a dramatic shift in British policy, and it was certainly the way *The Spectator* interpreted the speech. The paper expressed difficulty in believing that Gladstone would have spoken as he did “except to announce a settled and official resolve”:

The recognition may not be immediate, may be postponed till Parliament meets, or may await a combination of many Powers, but the Cabinet has made up its mind that the American struggle is over, and that henceforth two nations must exist on the American continent.<sup>342</sup>

As a pro-Union paper, *The Spectator* bitterly lamented this apparent decision but felt that it could not “honestly blame the Cabinet” who had “only followed the lead of the people”.

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<sup>340</sup> *The Times* 19 July 1862, p. 11.

<sup>341</sup> The full text of the speech was printed in *The Times* 9 October 1862, page 7.

<sup>342</sup> ‘Mr Gladstone at Newcastle’, *The Spectator*, 11 October 1862, p. 1124.

Nevertheless, the paper argued that the Premier would be “wise to wait as long as events and precedents will permit.”<sup>343</sup>

Not for the first time in the war *The Spectator* felt painfully aware that it was running against the tide of public opinion in England, and, according to David Butterfield, was paying the price in the form of falling sales.<sup>344</sup> For *The Spectator*, the fact of the matter was that Britain and the Northern states of the Union were alike “based on the principle of free labour” and it was unintelligible that the country should hope for an alliance with a confederacy of states based on “an avowed denial of that right”. The paper felt that Britain would gain nothing from recognition except “the certainty that in the very next great struggle in Europe, the North with its strong marine will be found in the ranks of our foes, a risk scarcely worth incurring in order to show our haste to recognize the only State on earth which has made out of Slavery a primary political principle.”<sup>345</sup>

In *The Spectator’s* view, recognition of the Confederacy by the British Government would only appear to be permissible if the Federal Administration had lost the will and resources to continue the battle, and if the Confederate States were prepared to give up slavery. Neither scenario was even a remote possibility at the time of Gladstone’s speech. For *The Times*, on the other hand, the conditions for recognition had largely been met already. In its leading article on 9 October 1862, *The Times* avoided the issue of whether Gladstone’s speech was a statement of British government policy or whether the time was right for intervention, but fully subscribed to his view that “if any community ever did earn the name of a nation, the Southern Confederates have”. This, it argued was “a bare fact”, independent of political or moral considerations: in the same way that the Italians are admitted to be a nation, the paper argued, “so also are the Confederates a nation”.<sup>346</sup> Two days later *The Times*, following Gladstone’s tour down the Tyne, ended its editorial with as strong a plea for recognition as it would ever give its readers:

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<sup>343</sup> Ibid, p. 1124. Campbell, p. 213, when discussing *The Spectator’s* editorial stance in the war, notes in a footnote that this editorial (on 11 October 1862) was an example of the paper’s support for mediation. This seems to be a misreading of the editorial in question.

<sup>344</sup> Butterfield, p. 51, notes that “even *The Spectator’s* own readers turned their backs: subscribers fell below a thousand for the first time since the paper’s very earliest years, and the title almost collapsed.”

<sup>345</sup> ‘Mr Gladstone at Newcastle’, *The Spectator*, 11 October 1862, pp. 1124 – 1125.

<sup>346</sup> *The Times*, 9 October 1862, p. 8.

The course is plain, and it is our only safety. We must recognise an actual and well-asserted independence. It is not for us to make nations or unmake them; but, together with the rest of the world, we must recognise existing unities, and cease to recognize those which have really ceased to exist. We have the same rule for Italy and America.<sup>347</sup>

This course, though, was never plain as far as the British Cabinet were concerned, in spite of Gladstone's speech, and although *The Times* might feel there was an open and shut case for recognition, it would still follow the Government line when it came to British intervention to achieve such a goal. This was much to the disappointment of the paper's contributor, James Spence, whose regular pieces under the pseudonym 'S' argued passionately for British recognition of the Confederacy.<sup>348</sup> Endorsement of his views by Britain's leading and most influential newspaper would have been a major propaganda victory for his cause.

The course was also far from plain to *The Economist*. Its editorial on 18 October 1862 was at pains to draw a distinction between recognition and mediation, a process which it argued would only be impaired by immediate recognition. It thus expressed "regret that Mr Gladstone should, by implication, have sanctioned it, and led the world to expect it." It also made the point that recognition would exasperate the North still more and increase their animosity towards Britain, giving them "a pretext for thinking we have intervened in their Civil War, but for which they would have won". This was a scenario which it seemed clear they would never accept. The only scenario the paper could envisage the Federal government being willing to accept was a joint mediation proposal "in the spirit of neutrality" involving Britain, France and Russia.<sup>349</sup>

Nevertheless, *The Economist* made it clear that in its view the conditions which would normally warrant intervention by friendly, neutral powers were all present. These were

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<sup>347</sup> *The Times*, 11 October 1862, p. 8.

<sup>348</sup> See Blackett, p. 147.

<sup>349</sup> 'Recognition or Mediation?', *The Economist*, 18 October 1862, pp. 1149 – 1150. In an earlier editorial on the subject of mediation, *The Economist* had argued strongly that any proposals for mediation that came from Britain alone would be rejected out of hand because of the country's unpopularity with the Americans: "The confederates do not love us and the Northerners [...] absolutely hate us". ('Mediation: Its Reasons, Objects and Prospects', *The Economist*, 14 June 1862, p. 647).

firstly, that there was sufficient equality in the strength of the belligerents as to “render the subjugation of either hopeless”. Secondly, this equality made the war “objectless”:

Since the Union cannot be restored, nor the Slave States reduced to insignificance, the only two aims that caused and could justify the war are unattainable, and the prolongation of the war therefore becomes a crime.<sup>350</sup>

The third condition was that the conflict had assumed “the character of desperation and features of atrocity” which thus warranted intervention on grounds of “common obligations of humanity and civilisation”.<sup>351</sup> The questions to resolve, therefore, were more about when the intervention should take place, which neutral powers should be involved, and what the proposals for mediation should be put forward. These were the questions that would be carried through to the more intense Cabinet discussions in late October and November 1862, and were actually never resolved.

#### **4.3.3 Press Reactions to French Mediation Proposals**

Gladstone’s Newcastle speech was delivered just two days after news of the Preliminary Emancipation Proclamation reached England, and a day after the first reports of the PEP appeared in *The Times*. The speech contained no reference to the decree, which suggests that it was prepared before Gladstone had heard the news and that he had decided not to change it. It is unlikely that he would not have known of the PEP if the reports had already appeared in the press. Although one of the purposes of the timing of the PEP was to forestall European plans to mediate an end of the war based on terms for separation, the decree actually had the opposite effect. Firstly, because the Union victory at Antietam was so thin, the British denounced the PEP as an act of desperation – “an exploitative move against slavery that would escalate the war”.<sup>352</sup> The editorials in *The Times* and *The Economist* made this viewpoint clear. Secondly, many European leaders feared that emancipation would, in the words of Don Doyle “ignite racial mayhem and throw the world cotton economy into chaos”. Some European leaders therefore “moved quickly to mediate an end to the war.”<sup>353</sup> Lord Russell was one such leader, but the Memorandum he presented to Cabinet on 13

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<sup>350</sup> ‘Recognition or Mediation?’, *The Economist*, 18 October 1862. p. 1150.

<sup>351</sup> Ibid.

<sup>352</sup> Jones, *Union in Peril*, p. 179.

<sup>353</sup> Doyle, p. 211.

October 1862 proposing a joint mediation plan with the French only had limited support, due to issues of timing, and almost certain Union rejection of the plan.<sup>354</sup> Another arguably more significant player was Emperor Napoleon III of France, and it was his proposal which Russell presented to Cabinet on 11 November 1862.<sup>355</sup>

This proposal called for British support for a six-month armistice with a lifting of the embargo and a suspension of all military activities during this period. For once all three newspapers were in agreement on the inadvisability of the proposal. All agreed that the terms were so favourable to the Confederacy that, in the words of *The Times* it amounted to a request to the North “to tie up her right arm”.<sup>356</sup> *The Spectator* likewise saw it as “a victory for the South” which would allow the Confederacy “to replenish its funds, by selling cotton, which it would employ to purchase arms, guns and steamers.” The paper even suggested that an armistice might actually result in “a strong party in both sections” intriguing for a restoration of the Union with slavery as its cornerstone”.<sup>357</sup>

*The Economist* also felt that the terms of the armistice tended in every respect “to the advantage of the South”, and listed other cogent reasons for rejecting the proposal. These included the absence of any proposals to form the basis of an agreement between the two sides and “the absence of distinct parties to treat with” – a reference to the fact that the boundary lines separating the Union from the Confederacy were in dispute.<sup>358</sup> Above all, the timing was wrong. The paper argued that the Federals were preparing for a renewal of the conflict on a larger scale than ever, threatened as they were by the return of Democratic ascendancy in the Congressional elections. There was thus no sign that mediation would be welcome in Washington, but would instead be received with indignation. This indeed became the view that prevailed in the Cabinet, thanks in large part, as Howard Jones has shown, to the influential voice of George Cornwall Lewis, the Secretary of War. He argued that if Britain intervened now “it would become a virtual ally of the South in achieving its independence” with the certainty that war with the Union would follow.<sup>359</sup> “Whichever way we view it”, *The Economist* concluded in its editorial, “the difficulties are tremendous, and

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<sup>354</sup> See Bauer, p. 59, who notes that Gladstone was the only Cabinet minister who supported Russell’s proposal.

<sup>355</sup> Ibid. p. 60.

<sup>356</sup> *The Times*, 12 November 1862, p. 8.

<sup>357</sup> ‘The Effect of an Armistice’, *The Spectator*, 15 November 1862, p. 1264.

<sup>358</sup> ‘Proposed Mediation with America’, *The Economist*, 15 November 1862, pp. 1261 – 1262.

<sup>359</sup> Jones, *Union in Peril*, pp. 214-15.



we scarcely see how we can hope to intervene as pacificators with much effect until both parties are weary of the contest.”<sup>360</sup>

On the subject of British or European intervention to mediate an end to the conflict, all three of the newspapers in this study ended in agreement, perhaps for the only time in the course of the war. The reasons for this agreement were to a large extent the terms of the French proposal, but also the fact that the British Cabinet itself, if not all the individual members of it, had got cold feet about the wisdom of British intervention anyway. While intervention might well have resulted in recognition of the Confederacy, which would have pleased *The Times*, the risk of a consequent war with the Union was a price which few newspapers were prepared to countenance. It would also have been very surprising if *The Times*, as the country’s leading establishment newspaper, had opposed the agreed government policy on the issue of intervention. Similarly, *The Economist*, which also favoured a mediated end to the conflict leading to recognition of the Confederacy, made it clear that the determination of both sides to continue the fight meant that the time was not right for it. *The Spectator* agreed, but unlike both *The Times* and *The Economist*, vehemently objected to recognition in principle.

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<sup>360</sup> ‘Proposed Mediation with America’, *The Economist*, 15 November 1862, p. 1262.



## CONCLUSION

The year 1862 ended with the abandonment of attempts by the Europeans to intervene in the American conflict and the imminent issue of Lincoln's full Proclamation to free the slaves. Both these events ensured that the war would now be fought out to the end, whatever that might be, and that it would almost certainly be prolonged and unforgiving. The Confederacy would be fighting for its life and for the existence of the institution which sustained it, while The Union would be fighting to put an eventual end to it. In Britain, the Emancipation Proclamation in January 1863 had the effect of re-energising support for the Union in the country, although, by and large, the editorial positions of the press, which had by that time become well-established, remained unaltered.<sup>361</sup> This was certainly the case of the three newspapers in this study. The Conclusion to the study therefore reflects on the key drivers that led these newspapers to adopt the positions they did, beginning with *The Times* and *The Economist*, and concluding with *The Spectator*.

Along with the British press generally, all three papers began on the same page with severe condemnation of the secession movement, abhorrence of the institution of slavery which the secessionists sought to protect, and legitimacy of Lincoln's election victory in November 1860. Yet even before Lincoln's inauguration, *The Economist* had taken the view that the only realistic solution would be for a negotiated settlement allowing the seceded states to leave the Union in peace, and *The Times* had moved very close to that position. Neither newspaper sought to defend the right of secession and continued to pour scorn on the secessionist movement. However, they were increasingly dismayed by the failure of the Buchanan administration to take effective steps to quash the movement in its infancy. The more it appeared clear that this would not happen, and as more states joined the movement, the more these newspapers looked to the inevitable impact on British commercial interests, and on the supply of American cotton in particular, should the impasse in America result in civil war and a possible slave uprising in consequence. They had also come to the view by the time of Lincoln's inauguration that, with seven states having joined the fledgeling Confederacy, coercion by the Federal Government would be futile both military and politically. Even if the Union were able to re-acquire by force of arms the vast

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<sup>361</sup> See Foreman, pp. 394 – 95.

geographical area that had seceded, which they strongly doubted, it would never be able to command the allegiance of the conquered people themselves. This was also the view of both Lord Palmerston and Lord Russell.

War, then, should be avoided at all costs, both in Britain's interests and in America's, and, following the failure of the Crittenden Compromise proposals, this could only be achieved by the Federal government accepting secession as an accomplished fact. This line of argument had the effect of shifting the editorial narrative in each of the two newspapers from blaming the seceded states for causing the crisis to blaming the Federal Administration for failing to contain it. The Morrill Tariff was a turning point in this respect, since it directly harmed Britain's own commercial interests. Indeed, as we have seen, *The Times* began to see Northern protectionism as conferring some legitimacy to the Confederacy's demand for self-determination, claiming that it was as much a cause of secession as slavery.<sup>362</sup> Thereafter, the Federal government increasingly became the focus of exasperation by both newspapers as it became clear in the months following Lincoln's Inaugural Address, and particularly after Fort Sumter, that the Union felt it had no option but to meet the challenge of secession by force. D.P. Crook put it well when he referred to "the disenchanting march of events" during this period which "gradually eroded British patience with the Northern cause".<sup>363</sup> This disenchantment was exacerbated by the diplomatic fall-out between Britain and the Union government following Britain's Proclamation of Neutrality. However, in their misplaced hopes that the Federal government would not ultimately resort to coercion, both *The Times* and *The Economist* had seriously misunderstood the nature and maturity of the American Republic, and the historical and constitutional ties that bound it together. They seemed to regard it more as a loose affiliation of states that could, if circumstances demanded, be dissolved, rather than a "perpetual", interdependent Union, which the new Republican government felt it had a *prima facie* constitutional duty to preserve and sustain.

On the question of slavery, there is no indication from the press data that Lincoln's studied reassurances in his 1861 Inaugural Address not to interfere with slavery where it already existed, influenced the editorial stances in either *The Times*, *The Economist* or *The Spectator*. Neither did his subsequent refusal in the months that followed to make the issue of slavery a

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<sup>362</sup> *The Times* 12 March 1861, p. 9.

<sup>363</sup> Crook, *The North, The South and The Powers*, p. 39.

war aim. All three newspapers recognised the difficult position in which Lincoln found himself. Despite *The Economist's* claim that had Lincoln made the eradication of slavery an explicit war aim, it might have adopted a different stance, it had taken its position on peaceful separation well before Lincoln's accession to power. There is nothing to suggest that either *The Economist* or *The Times* would have changed their positions once hostilities had started, however the causes of the war were presented. There is also evidence in the editorials of both these newspapers of a notable toning down of their earlier abhorrence of slavery as they sought to justify their evolving editorial responses to events in the build-up to the war.<sup>364</sup> Furthermore, by the time of the PEP in September 1862, both *The Times* and *The Economist* had come to the view that the cause of emancipation of the slaves would be better served if the Confederacy were allowed to leave the Union than if it were re-integrated into it, either following a Union victory or an armistice. This view was not shaken by the PEP, which both newspapers condemned as an unconstitutional act of desperation on Lincoln's part which would not achieve any of its military or political aims, and in the view of *The Times*, was intended to incite a slave uprising.

Nevertheless, Lincoln's perceived ambivalence on the issue of slavery in the first months of the war provided an excuse for both *The Times* and *The Economist* for not taking a moral stance themselves in support of the Union war effort: if the Union was not fighting for the liberation of the enslaved, the argument went, why should it expect Britain's support? Above all, it raised the question of what the war was really all about, and fuelled the argument that in the absence of any higher moral purpose, the war was essentially one of conquest on the part of a 'vindictive' Federal Government. Increasingly, this was how the war came to be represented in their editorials. This interpretation paved the way for the view of the war as one of self-determination by the Confederacy against an oppressive 'foreign' government, akin to the liberation movements of the Italians or Greeks in Europe, and this in turn strengthened the case for recognition of the Confederacy by Britain and France.

Nevertheless, both newspapers, while recognising that the conditions for recognition had largely been met, backed away from endorsing any proposals for British intervention in the war in order to achieve this. In this view, they followed the British Government's line.

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<sup>364</sup> See for example *The Times*, 5 December 1860, p. 6 (and discussion in 2.3) and *The Economist*, 25 May 1861, pp. 562 - 564 (and discussion in 3.3).

There were differences between the two newspapers, however. At the outset of the secession crisis, *The Economist* took a stronger anti-slavery line than *The Times*, which had argued in early December 1860 for a “quieter view” of the subject.<sup>365</sup> This was because *The Economist* could see no room for compromise on the issue without the Republican Party abandoning the manifesto promises it had been elected on. Consequently, it came to its view of a peaceful parting of the ways before *The Times*, which until the inauguration of President Lincoln, had held out some hopes for a compromise which would have allowed the seceded states to return. When this did not happen, and when Lincoln’s Inaugural Address made it clear that the road of compromise had been exhausted, *The Times* moved swiftly to the position of that of *The Economist*: secession had to be accepted as a reality. It should be stressed that in their critique of the Federal Government, which in the case of *The Times* grew increasingly strident in the second period covered by this study, neither newspaper had become by the time of the First Battle of Bull Run ‘pro-South’, (i.e. pro-Confederacy) as distinct from ‘anti-North’ (i.e. opposed to the policies and diplomacy of the Lincoln Administration).

This, however, appeared to have changed by the third period of this study. *The Times*, as we have seen, had come to adopt a markedly sympathetic attitude in its editorials towards the aspirations of the Confederate leaders for independence, and praised the valour and military skills displayed by their officers and soldiers on the battlefield.<sup>366</sup> Although it had not abandoned its support for the British policy of neutrality in the conflict, and supported the eventual British decision not to intervene, there was little doubt that it wished the Confederacy well in its struggle.<sup>367</sup> In addition, its critique of the Federal Administration had become increasingly vicious, especially in its personal attacks on President Lincoln at the time of Preliminary Emancipation Proclamation. *The Economist*, while also berating the perceived weaknesses of the Federal Administration, mercilessly on occasion, steered clear of championing the Confederate cause and its leaders. It also pointedly took *The Times* to

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<sup>365</sup> *The Times*, 5 December 1860, p. 6.

<sup>366</sup> See for example, *The Times* 16 September 1862, p. 6.

<sup>367</sup> As if to confirm this, *The Times* carried a leading article on 17 March 1863, p. 9, endorsing the sentiments expressed in a speech by Lord Hartington following a visit to America, concluding that “excepting a few disappointed gentlemen of Republican tendencies, we all expect, and nearly all wish, success to the Confederate cause”.

task for its editorial on the PEP in which it had accused Lincoln of deliberately trying to incite a slave uprising in the cotton states.<sup>368</sup>

There seems to be two reasons for this change in attitude by *The Times*. Firstly, as the foremost newspaper in Britain, as well as its perceived role in America as representing the views of the British government, it was in the firing line of the hostility directed at Britain by the Northern press in America at times of tension between the two countries. This was especially so in the aftermath of Britain's Proclamation of Neutrality in May 1861 and William Howard Russell's candid reports for *The Times* on the First Battle of Bull Run in July 1861. There were clear signs of *The Times* taking these attacks personally in its aggrieved editorial responses, perhaps because it felt the need to defend Britain's honour and reputation, as well as its own. The result seems to have been the beginning of a loss of editorial balance which had clearly become more pronounced by the third period of this study, as its response to the PEP appeared to show. The second reason for this change of attitude was the appointment of the Southern sympathiser Charles Mackay to replace Bancroft Davies as *The Times* New York correspondent in New York in 1862. This meant that both *The Times's* correspondents in America - in New York as well as Richmond, where Francis Lawley was based, were giving the readers of the newspaper, as well as its editor, John Delane, a very one-sided perspective on events in America, and this was reflected in its editorials.<sup>369</sup>

On the issue of American democracy, there was no indication in the editorials of either *The Times* or *The Economist* that this acted as a driver in the increasingly 'anti-North' positions they took regarding the conflict. Unquestionably, the cause of the Union in the Civil War acted as an inspiration to movements for democratic change in Britain and Europe,<sup>370</sup> and unquestionably, too, both newspapers regarded this with concern. However, their attacks on American democracy were always in the context of explaining the reasons for what they perceived to be the failures of leadership in the Federal Administration's response to the

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<sup>368</sup> 'The Emancipation Proclamation: its meaning and possible consequences', *The Economist*, 25 October 1862, pp. 1177 – 1179.

<sup>369</sup> Mackay was eventually fired by the proprietor of *The Times*, Mowbray Morris, but not until April 1865, by which time the damage to *The Times's* reputation in America had been done. Delane escaped censure and remained editor until 1877, retiring due to ill-health two years before his death at the age of 62. (See Oliver and Woods, p. 103, 114).

<sup>370</sup> See Doyle, *The Cause of All Nations*.

crisis: in short universal suffrage had simply failed to produce men of the right calibre to lead the nation in its hour of need, and this was held up as a lesson to those demanding extension of the franchise in Britain. The issue of democracy, however, important though it was to each newspaper, was not used to explain the reasons for their opposition to the Federal government and its policy to wage war, rather than reach a peaceful settlement with the Confederacy and recognise the reality of secession. The primary reasons for this opposition stemmed from a desire, firstly, to see the end of a war they saw as futile, secondly, to stop the mounting and unprecedented carnage of the war, and thirdly, to safeguard Britain's cotton manufacturing industry. It was not to deliver a crushing blow to the concept and appeal of universal suffrage, however attractive that might have been as an outcome.

Similarly, the editorial stances that each paper adopted were not driven by a desire to see the United States divided and its burgeoning global power diminished as a result, as Thomas Keiser claimed.<sup>371</sup> Again, while this might not have been unattractive outcome, as *The Economist* itself admitted, there is no evidence in the editorial commentary that this was a driving force in the positions they adopted.<sup>372</sup> Irritation at the perceived "arrogance", "boastfulness" and "self-glorification" of Americans, was a feature of editorial commentary in *The Spectator* as well as in *The Times* and *The Economist* and it would be a misreading of the data to conclude that it influenced their perceptions of the conflict. There is also no reason to doubt the sincerity of *The Times* during the secession winter in earnestly hoping that the seceded states would see sense and return to the Union.<sup>373</sup>

Turning to *The Spectator*, it began, like *The Times* and *The Economist* by condemning the secessionist movement in South Carolina, but rejected the right to secede in starker, legal terms than the other two newspapers: secession was "incipient treason", which no government would be expected to countenance.<sup>374</sup> Thereafter, it differed from the other two in two vitally important respects. Firstly, it did not argue that the Federal Government of the United States should accept the reality of secession on the grounds that by March

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<sup>371</sup> Keiser, p. 26. See also discussion in 2.4.

<sup>372</sup> See 'The Disruption of the Union, as it would Affect England', *The Economist*, 19 January 1861, pp. 57 – 59.

<sup>373</sup> See, for example, *The Times* 4 January 1861, p. 6.

<sup>374</sup> See *The Spectator's* 'Topics of the Day' pieces on 1 December 1860, pp. 1143 – 1144, cited in Chapter 2, and on 23 March 1861, pp. 299 – 300, cited in Chapter 3.



1861 it seemed to have become a *fait accompli* which would be hugely difficult to reverse. As far as *The Spectator* was concerned, this was up to the Federal Government to decide, not the British press to advise on. If the Lincoln Administration chose to try and reverse it by force of arms it was their right to do so. Secondly, *The Spectator* never lost sight of the moral dimension of the conflict. For the editors of the newspaper and its contributors in America like Edward Dicey, it was always about the future of slavery. If it was not about slavery, the states which eventually formed the Confederacy would never have seceded in the first place. The fact that Lincoln resisted making the issue of slavery the object of the war on political and constitutional grounds did not, in *The Spectator's* view, alter this fundamental fact. Furthermore, unlike *The Times* and *The Economist*, *The Spectator* saw no reason to tone down of its abhorrence of slavery in response to events in the run up to the Civil War. There could be no mitigation of the sin it represented. Consequently, the paper stuck fast to its original assessment of the rights and wrongs in the conflict, and did not alter its essential position throughout the period of this study.

This did not mean that *The Spectator* was an uncritical friend of the Union, and as we have seen, it found frequent occasion to criticise Lincoln for his failure, in its view, to expressly make the issue of slavery a cause to rally the Union armies. The paper also later criticised the Preliminary Emancipation Proclamation in September 1862 for being a purely military measure with no explicit moral underpinning. *The Spectator's* support for the cause of the Union was also not considered by the editors to be incompatible with Britain's policy of neutrality in the conflict, a policy it embraced, like *The Times* and *The Economist*, as the only practical course for an outside power like Britain to take. Finally, *The Spectator* was as keenly concerned about Britain's interests as *The Times* and *The Economist*. The difference was that in *The Spectator's* view, these were better served by remaining on friendly terms with the Union and showing sympathy for the cause they were fighting for. What was at stake was not just Britain's short-term commercial interests but its future long-term relationship with the Northern 'Free States' of America. Disruptions in the supply of cotton from the Confederacy would have to be offset by obtaining cotton from other sources.

Curiously, Duncan Campbell casts doubt on *The Spectator's* level of commitment to the Union cause claiming firstly that "slavery was without doubt the only reason *The Spectator* sympathised with the Union", and then going on to claim that it supported European

mediation on more than one occasion.<sup>375</sup> The editorial data examined in this study does not support this interpretation. Campbell's first claim ignores *The Spectator's* condemnations of secession as treason at the outset of the crisis. Furthermore, in a later editorial in November 1861, the newspaper explicitly affirms the view that preservation of the Union was in itself a justifiable reason to go to war:

Even apart from the great anti-slavery struggle which the North is unconsciously waging, we hold that national existence is a worthy object of battle, and that the division of North America into half a dozen jarring republics [.....] is a heavy blow to the best interests of mankind.<sup>376</sup>

*The Spectator's* editorials up until the end of the period of this study do not appear to show any support for mediation either, even if the paper feared that, following Gladstone's Newcastle speech, recognition of the Confederacy was about to become official British government policy. It made it clear, however, that this was not a policy it supported.<sup>377</sup> It is true, as Campbell points out, that in an editorial earlier that year, the newspaper asserted that "Europe cares nothing about the preservation of the Union as such" and that if the Confederacy were to agree to emancipate its slaves it would be recognised within a week. However, this was the paper's assessment of government opinion in Europe and not its own view. The context of the editorial was a recent offer from the Confederacy of a treaty whereby they would suppress the import of slaves and would emancipate every slave born after the date of the treaty in return for recognition by Britain and France of their independence and "disavowal" of the embargo. *The Spectator*, while suggesting that Britain and France might be tempted by such an offer, was at pains to dismiss the proposal as nothing more than "a bribe". With regard to the offer to emancipate slaves born after the date of the treaty, the paper pointed out that the consequence of accepting the offer would be to start a war with the Union which was trying to achieve the same thing anyway. Its conclusion was unambiguous:

[...] not even for that great end [emancipation from 1862] is England justified in committing a crime, in commencing a war for a cause which has no plea of self-

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<sup>375</sup> Campbell, p. 213.

<sup>376</sup> 'The Lesson of Leesburg', *The Spectator*, 16 November 1861, p. 1253.

<sup>377</sup> See discussion in 4.3.2.

defence, or urgent necessity, or claim on avenging justice. [.....] We are to declare war on the free in order that slaveholders may promise one day to commence emancipation. A more cynical proposal was never made to a great State, or one which, if accepted, would tend more directly to demoralize the few principles by which nations contrive to save themselves from utter selfishness and contempt of right.<sup>378</sup>

This dissertation study has attempted to analyse and explain the different perspectives that three of the longest-established newspapers in Britain in the mid-nineteenth century took when commenting on the momentous and distressing events taking place across the Atlantic. It has not attempted to judge the rightness or wrongness of the stances they adopted, but to try and explain them in the context of the unfolding events themselves, the prevailing attitudes in Britain in which the editors were writing, whether towards slavery, race, democracy, or Americans themselves, and the readers they were writing for. All three newspapers, along with the whole of the British press, were shocked and horrified by the death toll of the battles fought in the course of the war. They were also understandably concerned about the impact of the war on Britain's commercial interests, and especially on the plight of the people in the manufacturing towns of Lancashire during the cotton famine. At the same time, they recognised the evils of slavery, the 'domestic institution' of the Southern states which had precipitated the crisis in America. All these factors were weighed up and prioritised in the different responses each newspaper adopted in its coverage of the war, and the differences between them reflected the different degree of importance they gave to each one.

Due to the in-depth comparative analysis of the three newspapers, which was necessary to understand how each newspaper reached the positions they did, and what the similarities and differences between them were, this study has focused on just three periods of the Civil War, finishing at the end of 1862. This does not lessen its value in providing a barometer of educated public attitudes in Britain towards the American Civil War at the most crucial period in their formation and when interest in the conflict was at its height. Furthermore, the forensic nature of the analysis has made it possible to trace changes in editorial stances from month to month, to explain them in the light of events, and also to reveal

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<sup>378</sup> 'The Southern Bid', *The Spectator*, 25 January 1862, p. 89.

inconsistencies with earlier viewpoints. All this helps to build up a picture of how conflicted people in Britain felt about the unfolding drama in America, how they struggled to make sense of what was happening, and reach an informed viewpoint. Nevertheless, in December 1862, when this study ends, the war still had more than two years to run. A secondary study would complete the picture by looking at the editorial responses to the battles of Vicksburg and Gettysburg in 1863, the Presidential election of 1864, General Sherman's controversial 'scorched earth' marches through Georgia and the Carolinas in 1864-65, and finally, General Lee's surrender in April 1865 followed a week later by the assassination of Lincoln. All of these events presented challenges of one form or another to the settled viewpoints that each newspaper had developed over the first two years of the conflict.

There has been very little recent scholarship on British press coverage of the American Civil War, and the field is ripe for further research to supplement this study. Little, for example, has been written about the viewpoints of the many regional newspapers in the country. Keiser's broad-brush PhD thesis of 1971 covered both the national and regional press, but specific studies of regional publications to supplement Schellenberg's 1962 study of *The Manchester Guardian* would be welcome and timely. Such studies could attempt to identify regional differences in viewpoint, or could look at a specific region, such as Lancashire, which bore the brunt of the cotton famine. Of the national papers, there is a need for in-depth research into the coverage by the new penny dailies like *The Daily News* and *The Daily Telegraph* whose circulations rapidly outstripped *The Times* during the American Civil War.<sup>379</sup> This would provide a more 'popular', as opposed to an 'establishment' perspective on the war, as indeed would a study of the republican, working-class *Reynolds Weekly Newspaper*. Finally, this study has drawn attention to changing attitudes to slavery, emancipation and race in mid-nineteenth century Britain. Following the approach used in Jonathan Connolly's study,<sup>380</sup> it would be instructive to investigate this topic by identifying attitudinal shifts in newspapers like *The Times*, *The Spectator* and *The Economist* in the antebellum and Civil War periods. A study of this nature would allow for a longer perspective, beginning, for

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<sup>379</sup> Campbell, p. 14, while making references to an impressive cross-section of the British press in his study, avoids consideration of journals which he regards as having "prostituted themselves out" to one side or the other. One of these is *The Daily News*. Whatever the merits of Campbell's opinion about *The Daily News*, its circulation of over 100,000 (Weiner, p. 93) suggests that it is nonetheless worthy of consideration.

<sup>380</sup> Connolly, 2018.

example, in 1834, the year in which slavery was abolished in Britain's colonies and finishing with the ratification of the Thirteenth Amendment in December 1865 abolishing slavery in United States.

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