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Stève Sainlaude, *France and the American Civil War: A Diplomatic History*. Translated by Jessica Edwards. Foreword by Don H. Doyle. Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2019. xv + 285 pp. Figures, appendix, notes, bibliography, and index. \$45.00 U.S. (hb). ISBN 978-1-4696-4994-8; \$29.99 U.S. (eb). 978-1-4696-4995-5.

Review by David Prior, University of New Mexico.

Stève Sainlaude has written what will remain the definitive English-language history of U.S.-French diplomacy during the American Civil War. The volume is closely argued, richly documented, and concise. Its core contribution is to examine the inner workings of the French imperial state and the nuances of public and elite opinion in France regarding the Union and the Confederacy. An impressive range of empirical research, including into French periodicals and several volumes of largely untouched consular correspondence, inform this accessible and authoritative work.

The book contains an introduction, three parts, a conclusion, and an appendix that provides a detailed chronology of events. The introduction does much to ensure that the volume—tightly packed and thematically organized—is easy to follow. It sketches the leading actors, including Napoléon III and his chief statesmen, Édouard Thouvenel and Édouard Drouyn de Lhuys, and surveys the French foreign policy apparatus, including its consular offices in North America. It identifies the issues confronting French policy—especially whether to recognize the Confederacy as independent—and the intersection of the Civil War with Napoléon III's invasion of Mexico and plans for Latin America.

The first section of the book contains three chapters that detail French policymaking. Chapter one explores diplomatic and maritime issues from the opening stages of the war on. Foremost among these was how to treat the Confederacy, but also of note were how to implement neutrality, the legal standing of the Union's blockade, and the operation of French consular officials in the Confederacy, which the French government recognized as a belligerent but not as independent. This recognition of belligerency deeply offended Union politicians but, far from being a pro-Confederate maneuver, the decision was straightforward, with concern for French citizens in and shipping to North America being key. Indeed, the French government was often pragmatic and legalistic, opting, for example, for a strict understanding of neutrality that prevented Confederate privateers from selling prizes in French ports.

Yet, as Sainlaude's imposing second chapter shows, tensions did emerge between the pro-Confederate view of Napoléon III and his strait-laced foreign ministers. Especially during the

war's critical middle years, when Napoléon III launched a fraught invasion of Mexico and the Confederacy's prospects see-sawed, Napoléon III hoped that mediation of the Civil War or full recognition of the Confederacy would serve his strategic ends. He never managed to convince the Palmerston government in Britain of the wisdom of his proposals, however, nor even his own ministers. Union officials were likewise unreceptive to mediation. Indeed, Sainlaude wonders at the fatuity of Napoléon III's plans, and one can almost feel sorry for the Confederate emissary, John Slidell, for believing that the emperor's welcome promised action. In roughly thirty masterful pages with over 200 citations, Sainlaude examines the twists and turns of these tensions, shedding light on the Roebuck affair (in which Britain's few pro-Confederate politicians found themselves confronting the country's leadership alone), and uncovering de Lhuys's dilatory approach to Napoléon III's support for a Confederate vessel leaving port so it could load weapons at sea.

Sainlaude's third chapter examines the thesis that the Entente Cordiale between Britain and France determined French policy towards the Civil War. In this reading, the French government would have been both coordinating with and deferring to Britain, presumably increasing the prospects of recognition, mediation, or even intervention through joint action. Sainlaude notes that the Entente Cordiale had shaped mid-century French diplomacy, but explains that it had broken down by the Civil War. Palmerston distrusted Napoléon III and Thouvenel thought Lord Russell stuffy. At those moments when British and French policymakers attempted to coordinate, there was rarely reciprocity or even receptivity. The French occupation of Mexico alienated British leaders and divided French policymakers. While Napoléon III flirted with the idea of a Confederate alliance with the French-backed regime in Mexico, Thouvenel and de Lhuys saw French interests lying with a re-United States that could counterbalance British maritime power. Even if the Entente Cordiale had persisted, it was unlikely to drive forceful action towards the U.S. Civil War. European events were much more pressing.

Part two then casts a wider net to look at French views of the South and reactions to Confederate propaganda, addressing both policymakers and the press. Sainlaude finds further evidence undermining the idea that France was likely to take decisive action in favor of the Confederacy. Chapter four looks at the romantic myth of the Old South as an idyllic society populated by noble, cultured elites, noting that such fictions had their adherents in France, including Napoléon III and many of his ministers, but not Thouvenel or de Lhuys. So too did pro-Confederate arguments about free trade and self-determination find support. But French liberals and republicans were unconvinced, the French people manifested little concern with the conflict, and French consuls found Confederate policies harmful to French nationals and negligent towards their neutral status. For all the pro-Confederate rhetoric, policymakers found reason to dislike Confederate emissaries. They worried about the Confederacy's long-term intentions, and viewed it as intrinsically undemocratic and aggressive. A brief chapter looking at the issue of slavery follows. It finds that slavery was a liability for the Confederacy's reputation in France, but not a decisive one. Neither Confederate sympathizers nor critics took slavery to be more important than France's strategic interests. French liberals used the cause of anti-slavery as cover to criticize Napoléon III, but many French observers in fact worried that rapid abolition would produce anarchy.

The final chapter of the section examines the interplay of Confederate diplomacy and the occupation of Mexico. Given the Confederacy's location, Napoléon III saw the possibility for his regime in Mexico to forge an alliance, walling off future Yankee forays into Catholic, Latin

America. But such schemes proved farfetched. Other observers rightly doubted Confederate expressions of friendship and saw the country for what it was, a fledgling pro-slavery state whose leaders had been the driving force behind antebellum U.S. expansionism. In the South, that expansionism was linked as well to a commitment to the Monroe Doctrine, which raised further doubts about Confederate sincerity towards Maximilian's regime. By the time Maximilian was finally ensconced in Mexico City, the Civil War had turned decisively against the South, leaving little reason to pursue the already problematic idea.

The book's final section then brings French discussions of the Confederacy into the context of their views of the North. Chapter seven briefly examines how the French pondered the fate of the Union. On the one hand, there were widespread doubts about the legality of secession and the viability of the Confederacy. Even if it managed to win a decisive military victory, the South would still face an antagonistic, embittered neighbor and problems controlling its own states. On the other hand, there were moments, especially in the summer of 1862, when onlookers doubted that the Union could win, and pondered what the future would hold if the Confederacy remained intact. Even under such circumstances, however, neither Thouvenel nor de Lhuys wanted to see an independent Confederacy, preferring instead some kind of compromised reunification. Chapter eight considers the Confederacy and the Union as French trading partners. The French worried over a cotton famine that would prompt a sharp downturn in employment in Normandy, Alsace, and the Nord. Because of this, Napoléon III toyed with the idea of a joint British and French naval force breaking the Union's blockade. Leading British statesmen, however, were not receptive and, besides, Napoléon III failed to propose the idea through official diplomatic channels. What is more, it soon became clear that the Union's blockade was porous and that the real problem was a Confederate embargo and partisans who burned cotton to keep it from Union hands. The famine itself proved less severe than first anticipated because of pre-war surpluses and re-exports of British Indian cotton. The final nail in the coffin for the Confederate's cotton diplomacy was that the North was just as if not more important in transatlantic trade. The North sold grain, imported French goods, and moved the bulk of trade in its own ships and through its own ports.

The last chapter then looks at French appraisals of the Union's military and logistical power and their potential implications for the French occupation of Mexico. This includes a section discussing the perspicacious French consul in the Confederate capital of Richmond, Alfred Paul, and his dispatches to Thouvenel and de Lhuys. Paul led the way in grasping that secession would entail a dreadful but, for the Confederacy, futile war, and offered several other keen observations. French observers were often impressed by the Union's innovations, but some were unsure whether Union might would prevail over southern will. Some French conservatives delighted in seeing the republic tear itself apart. But most eventually came to the same conclusion as Paul: the Confederacy could not survive without decisive European support, which was beyond reach. Early uncertainty about Lincoln's abilities and northern resolve diminished with time, although Democratic gains in the midterm elections of 1862 did raise questions about war-weariness. Napoléon III was not alone in believing George B. McClellan's 1864 presidential bid raised the prospect of peace, although here he simply misunderstood McClellan's politics, which were anti-emancipation but pro-Union. As Union victory began to loom, many French observers now doubted whether the North would be able to govern the South. The prospect of a French policy supportive in any way of the Confederacy had long had to contend with the realization that antagonizing the North threatened Napoléon III's foray into Mexico and distracted from events in Europe and southeast Asia. The volume then concludes by reiterating that while there was

favorable sentiment among some French elites towards the Confederacy, this was not enough to move policy. Interests prevailed.

Sainlaude's book is a welcome addition to the burgeoning literature on the international dimension of the American Civil War. This includes well-crafted studies that have been successful with broader audiences, such as Don H. Doyle's *The Cause of All Nations* and Amanda Foreman's *A World on Fire*. Several academic monographs, such as Timothy Mason Roberts, *Distant Revolutions*, Andre Fleche, *The Revolution of 1861*, and this author's own *Between Freedom and Progress*, have examined different facets of this topic.[1] In the context of this work, Sainlaude offers an important corrective. The tendency of the "America and the World" literature has been to play up how interconnected the world was and to call attention to how developments in one country proved pivotal to those in another. While well-researched and insightful, this scholarship has long begged for a rebuttal that stresses the very real ways in which, at least in the mid-nineteenth century, cultural and geographical distance worked to isolate, or at least insulate. Sainlaude helps build the groundwork for that rebuttal by showing us the disinterest of much of the French public in the American conflict, the way French elites filtered the Civil War through their own domestic lenses, and that it took someone like Napoléon III to imagine deliberate and sustained entanglement between the Civil War and French imperialism. Sainlaude's volume underscores, if only implicitly, how incomplete and uneven global integration was in the mid-nineteenth century.

NOTE

[1] Don H. Doyle *The Cause of All Nations: An International History of the American Civil War* (New York: Basic Books, 2014); Amanda Foreman, *A World on Fire: Britain's Crucial Role in the American Civil War* (New York: Random House, 2010); Timothy Mason Roberts, *Distant Revolutions: 1848 and the Challenge to American Exceptionalism* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2009); Andre M. Fleche, *The Revolution of 1861: The American Civil War in the Age of Nationalist Conflict* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2012); David M. Prior, *Between Freedom and Progress: The Lost World of Reconstruction Politics* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2019).

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