

Paris Newspapers and the American Civil War

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Initially, the American Civil War was of small concern to the people of France. Embroiled in internal political conflicts over the reign of Emperor Napoleon III, the French were also engaged in numerous diplomatic ventures, including Italian unifica-

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tion, the Polish revolt of 1863, the Prussian-Austrian War with Denmark, and attempts to control the internal affairs of Mexico.

Still, there were longstanding ideological sympathies between the United States and France dating back to their respective revolutions. All Paris newspapers claimed to be antislavery, for example, yet many found other rationales for supporting the Confederacy, especially as the hardships of the cotton embargo affected the French economy.

In his pioneering study of French newspaper coverage of the American Civil War, W. Reed West found that conservative imperialists (who supported the reign of Napoleon III) favored the Confederacy not because they approved of slavery but because

they were "enemies of the Union." For liberals, however, slavery was "the determining issue." Edwin J. Pratt, writing later, divided the Paris press into two categories—conservative followers of the Emperor, who supported the South because "the Northern cause and Imperialism were fundamentally incompatible," and the "more modern" pro-North liberals, "the spiritual successors of those who had supported American independence in 1775." Serge Gavronsky argued that internal concerns rather than slavery led French liberals to support the North; their support of democracy and Union was intended as a rebuke to the oppressive regime of Napoleon III. Finally, Lynn Case claimed that "no valid conclusion about public opinion can possibly be reached by a perusal" of French newspapers because of government manipulation (including censorship) and extensive use of bribery.¹

An examination of Paris newspapers suggests that pro-South journals generally either opposed democracy or favored a democracy guided "by a single master"; pro-North editors regarded the war as an opportunity to support democracy and to help "maintain the political traditions of France, and the liberal spirit of our country." In addition to that ideological distinction, two other factors were also influential in determining Paris newspaper attitudes towards the Civil War. The "semiofficial" ("*semi-officiel*") newspapers, which were notably pro-government, followed the Emperor when he switched from a pro-Union policy at the beginning of the conflict to a pro-Confederacy stance. Finally, a few Paris newspapers wavered in their support of the North when military victories were not forthcoming. Thus, attitudes towards democracy, the necessity for government supporters to follow the Emperor's lead, and (of lesser importance) assessment of the outcome of the war were key elements shaping the opinion of Paris editors. Other issues—including slavery, the Trent affair, and the economic im-

pact of the war on France—were not significant in transforming journalistic attitudes; rather, the press reacted to those issues as they arose in accordance with their general stance towards the Civil War belligerents.²

Pro-Confederacy journals included two distinctly different political orientations: (1) conservative supporters of Napoleon III, and (2) legitimist supporters of a Bourbon restoration and clerical supporters of the Roman Catholic church. Pro-Union papers comprised two distinct political groups: (1) supporters of republican principles of 1789 and (2) Orleanists, who favored restoration of Louis Philippe, who had been forced to abdicate as a result of the revolution of 1848.

Whatever their political views, Paris newspapers shared certain characteristics. Four pages in length, they carried international and national news on the first two pages, local news and government reports on the third page, and advertisements on the fourth. Since each paper had its own style and was highly opinionated, it is not difficult to determine point of view. Despite the

¹West, *Contemporary French Opinion on the American Civil War*, Johns Hopkins University Studies in Historical and Political Science, Vol. 42 (Baltimore, Md.: Johns Hopkins Press, 1924), pp. 9–17, 150–52; Jordan and Pratt, *Europe and the American Civil War* (Boston: Houghton, 1931), p. 227; Gavronsky, *The Liberal French Opposition and the American Civil War* (New York: Humanities Press, 1968), pp. 15–28; Case, *French Opinion on the United States and Mexico, 1860–1867* (New York: Appleton, 1936), p. xi. The author's examination of the French press uncovered only one occasion when a newspaper suggested an improper relation between Paris journalists and American officials. The pro-South editor of the *Pays* claimed that he had never asked anything of Confederate commissioner John Slidell, did not know him, and had never put foot in his *hôtel*. Could the pro-North editor of *l'Opinion nationale* say that he had never entered the *hôtel* of the federal legation? (*Pays*, July 31, 1864). Documents of the American minister to France, William L. Dayton, show that he paid 640 francs to the editor of *l'Opinion* for translating or writing pamphlets supporting the Union cause (Gavronsky, p. 19).

²The opposing views of democracy and the quotations are derived from Lucien Prévost-Paradol, a liberal, pro-North contemporary Parisian journalist who expressed his ideas in the *Courrier du dimanche*, May 10, 1865.



England and France held divergent interests in the outcome of the American Civil War. "It is in the permanent interest of France," wrote the *Temps*, that a great power in the world would serve as a "counterweight against England."

intensity with which they reported and commented on the news, however, the twenty-two political newspapers of Paris did not enjoy large circulations. They sold 236,000 copies daily in 1861, and one million in 1870. The *Siècle*, an opposition paper with 52,000 subscribers during the American Civil War, had the largest circulation, while other important newspapers had scarcely five thousand. Readership generally exceeded circulation, however, and a journalist who claimed as few as eight thousand readers was regarded as "celebrated."³

Whether their circulations were large or small, Paris newspapers made significant efforts to report the American Civil War. Often they copied articles from the American press. At irregular intervals they printed long letters or signed columns from overseas correspondents. Almost every newspaper had a *Bulletin Du Jour* column that interpreted and summarized major news stories, frequently concerning the Civil War.

Those reports were not timely, however, because American newspapers were the major source of information about the Civil War, and passage to France took approximately two weeks, traveling via England. In June, 1864, direct postal service was established between France and America; the several ships in that service could reach New York in ten to twelve days.

Coverage was most extensive in the first two years of the war. The "interminable" war was "a little forgotten" in 1863 and 1864, according to the *Pays*, when French diplomatic activity in relation to the war also declined. Interest and coverage increased as Ulysses S. Grant was conducting the Wilderness campaign. "The wars of Marius and of Sulla, of Pompey and of Caesar, of Mark Anthony and of Augustus," the *Presse* remarked in June of 1864, "have not offered an interest as powerful."⁴

But how free were newspapers to express their views? Freedom of the press, charged the liberal *Siècle*, was "only a dream." Indeed,

the government exercised considerable control over the press, with power to approve both the establishment of new newspapers and hiring of editors. The government had the authority to impose suspensions on the press but did so only twice during the period. More frequent were warnings for journalistic "irresponsibility," usually for defaming a public official. Five such warnings were given to Paris newspapers in 1861, six in 1862, twelve in 1863, five in 1864, and nine in 1865.⁵

One scholar hypothesized that suspension was not effective in controlling the press, especially when the owner was wealthy. Government approval of two avowedly opposition papers on the eve of the Civil War—the *Courrier* in 1858 and the *Temps* in 1861—hints more at diluting opposition influence than massive repression. It is even possible that Napoleon III may have found an opposition press useful. The Emperor carefully cultivated public opinion, and he could have cited anticlerical newspapers, such as the

³Ernest Rouher, Minister of State, used a figure of twenty political newspapers (*Pays*, Dec. 19, 1863). Claude Bellanger et al., *Histoire générale de la presse française* (Paris: Presses universitaires de France, 1969-1975), II, 259-60, lists circulation figures for each newspaper, which were compiled by the French government in Aug., 1861. The three progovernment "unofficial" newspapers, discussed later, had the following circulations: *Patrie*, 22,904; *Pays*, 7,000; *Constitutionnel*, 19,448. See also Pierre Albert, Gilles Feyel, Jean-François Picard, *Documents pour l'histoire de la presse nationale aux dix-neuf et vingt siècles* (Paris: Centre de Documentation Sciences Humaines, n.d.), pp. 28-30; Roger Bellet, *Presse et journalisme sous le Second Empire* (Paris: Armand Colin, 1967), pp. 33-34.

⁴*Pays*, March 23, 1864. The strongly antislavery *Siècle* claimed that Europeans turned to the Polish question because the North refused to take a stand on the principle against slavery (March 16, 1863). The *Temps* said that Poland always attracted the principal attention among foreign questions (Feb. 10, 1863). See also the *Presse*, June 18, 1864, and the *Constitutionnel*, June 17, 1865.

⁵Irene Collins, *The Government and the Newspaper Press in France, 1814-81* (London: Oxford University Press, 1959), pp. 118, 119, 125; Georges d'Avenel, *Histoire économique de la propriété* (Paris: Imp. nationale, 1894-1926), II, 249-53, 313-14.

Siècle, as evidence that Roman Catholics needed a sympathetic figure on the throne of France.⁶

Ernest Rouher, the Minister of State, provided the most persuasive evidence regarding independence of newspapers when he complained that the Paris press was overwhelmingly opposed to the government. Of the twenty political newspapers, said Rouher, sixteen belonged to the "most ardent opposition," while two defended the government "resolutely and sincerely." Certainly Paris newspapers were candid and explicit in discussing American events and issues. Though they were more discreet in discussion of French policies towards that conflict, some newspapers even expressed their disagreement with official actions.⁷

While Rouher was correct that proadministration newspapers were limited in number, nevertheless they were faithful in their support of the Emperor and the American South. Those included the *Moniteur*, the official organ of the French government, and the *Constitutionnel*, the *Pays*, and the *Patrie*. The latter three were commonly called the "semiofficial press," because, while not officially sponsored, they were widely believed to reflect the views of Napoleon III. Like him, they opposed early

Southern secession efforts, but by May of 1861, they changed from support of the Union to support of the Confederacy—a transition that paralleled that of the Emperor.⁸

Legitimist newspapers, which favored the restoration of the Bourbons to the throne of France, and clerical newspapers, which supported the Catholic church and the Papacy, were not only pro-South but also part of the political opposition to Napoleon III. Such journals as *l'Union*, *Gazette de France*, and *Monde* were virulently anti-North and supported policies of Napoleon III, looking to Southern independence while sometimes criticizing specific actions or lack of action by the government.

Pro-North newspapers were, likewise, a diverse group. Some journals, favoring republican or constitutional principles, supported the ideas of 1789, a free press, and parliamentary government. The republican journals included the *Siècle*, which had the largest circulation of any French newspaper, and *l'Opinion nationale*. The *Presse* was less predictable, though supportive of republican ideals.

The Orleanist, or pro-Louis Philippe, newspapers included the *Journal des débats*, the *Temps*, and the weekly *Courrier du*

⁶The *Courrier* complained that the second suspension was unfair and illegal since it was suspended twice on the basis of the same two warnings. For report of counsel on that issue, see beginning of microfilm roll for the year 1864, Bibliothèque Nationale; for the decree suspending the newspaper and comment by the newspaper, see March 6, 1844. Collins, pp. 119, 125. One government report said the establishment of numerous rivals had the goal of diminishing the importance of the great journals (Avenel, II, 318).

⁷The *Pays* claimed that it and the *Constitutionnel* were the resolute defenders (Dec. 19, 1863). For criticism of government policy during the war, see, for example, the *Courrier*, May 7, 1865; the *Siècle* claimed that the French government was too disposed to undertake mediation and intervention (Oct. 7, 1863). Paradoxically, repressive measures against the press may have encouraged French journalists to provide extensive coverage of diplomacy. One prominent journalist of the time,

Prévost-Paradol, complained that the provincial press for reasons of security avoided discussion of local matters and focused on European and world matters (Avenel, II, 264).

⁸The French government repeatedly declared that the *Moniteur* was the only official journal and that there were no semiofficial journals; as one skeptical newspaper said, however, that statement had been made at least twenty times (*Temps*, Nov. 1, 1861). Repeated references to the semiofficial press continued throughout the Civil War. For the change in position of the semiofficial press, see West, pp. 26–30. The author's classification of Paris journals is based on an Aug., 1861, government report listing circulation of papers in each of four groups: imperial newspapers: 52,832; progressive newspapers: 91,292; legitimist and ultramontane newspapers: 38,285; and Orleanist and liberal newspapers: 36,859 (Avenel, II, 259–60).

dimanche. The *Revue des deux mondes*, a bi-weekly, was the greatest periodical in France, if not in the entire world.

Attitudes towards American democracy were the single most important factors influencing the attitudes of Parisian journalists towards Civil War questions. Conservative Frenchmen did not respect Northern democracy; rather they supported the Southern cause, whose success would result in the disruption of the American republic. Liberal Frenchmen, on the other hand, admired American democracy and favored Northern efforts to maintain American democracy intact.

Conservative Frenchmen had long been disturbed by what they viewed as an unbridled democracy. They had also been irritated by "arrogant" American claims of cultural superiority; the breakup of the vaunted American republic was thus a well-deserved lesson in humility. The "true reason" for conservative support for separation of the South was that it would result in the "death of the Republic," and its replacement by two or several monarchies, claimed the liberal *Presse*. Guardians of monarchical order supported the liberty of the Southern states, while defenders of revolutionary right suggested that Lincoln was desirous of establishing a dictatorship.⁹

The clerical, legitimist *Monde* made no secret of its dislike for American democracy. Why, it asked, did European liberals, who habitually favored independence of peoples, oppose efforts of the South to secure independence? The explanation, according to the *Monde*, was that "liberalism loves everything which rejects religion," and the United States had a purely rational base. But, warned the clerical journal, no nation could succeed without a religious base, and the United States would not be able to endure. It lamented the vices of a state "so new and already so corrupted and so degenerated."¹⁰

Pro-Union editors, of course, viewed the democratic experiment more kindly. Re-

publican journals were less critical, more admiring of American democracy. The *Siècle*, for example, referred to the North as representing the cause of justice and humanity. Orleanist journals, with their emphasis upon stability in government, admired American institutions when led by such strong leaders as George Washington. Washington, said the *Presse*, combined elevated simplicity with an exemplary political probity. The *Presse* also approvingly listed characteristics of the American government: political and religious liberty, equal rights, fraternity, guarantee of property rights, universal suffrage, a free judiciary, and separation of church and state. The United States, claimed the *Presse*, was "the most magnificent temple" for liberty. Yet the same paper could also show its devotion to law and principle by criticizing American democracy. Americans so exaggerated the principle of individual independence, charged the *Presse*, that they were threatened by anarchy; there could be no "liberty without security," warned the Orleanist journal, just as there could be no "security without liberty."¹¹

While the imperialist *Constitutionnel* complained that some newspapers saw the United States as a model "sans cesse," it was slavery rather than democracy that received major emphasis in the columns of pro-Union journals. Only the *Courrier du dimanche* made frequent reference to the North as representing democracy, "the most beautiful democracy which has ever been"; only the

⁹Case, p. ix; Case and Warren F. Spencer, *The United States and France: Civil War Diplomacy* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1970), pp. 605-7; David H. Pinkney, "France and the Civil War," in *Heard Round the World: The Impact Abroad of the Civil War*, ed. Harold Hyman (New York: Knopf, 1969), pp. 110, 112; *Presse*, Nov. 19, 1863; *Constitutionnel*, June 5, 1864; West, pp. 29-31; *Monde*, June 3, June 6, 1864.

¹⁰*Monde*, June 3, June 6, 1864.

¹¹*Siècle*, July 10, 1863; *Presse*, March 26, July 22, 1861, and June 8, 1864.



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Courier rejoiced in Northern victories as triumphs for democracy. Another distinction of the *Courier* was its suspension twice by the imperial government, the only Paris newspaper suspended during the Civil War.¹²

Pro-Confederacy editors found base Northern motives, not ideals, as the primary cause of the Civil War. The "only" reason for the conflict, said the *Pays*, was economic interest as represented in the Morrill Tariff. Conflict was inevitable, claimed the *Monde*, between Northern merchants and Southern planters. The war, concluded the *Patrie*, was "born by a question of tariff, encouraged by material ambitions, [and] pursued with the aid of frantic speculators."¹³

Pro-South papers claimed secession was consistent with the principles proclaimed in 1778. The South also legitimately opposed Northern ambitions for political power and influence. Conservative journalists cited nationalism as a justification for the Confederacy, drawing a parallel between Polish nationalists and the Confederates and charging that liberals were inconsistent in supporting nationalism in Poland but not in the South.¹⁴

Especially at the beginning of the war, pro-North newspapers saw the fundamental cause of the conflict as arising from Northern efforts to maintain a unified nation. Those editors did not equate Southerners with Poles or Irish in a common quest for nationhood, since Southerners were neither a separate people nor deserving of respect. Unlike the colonists of 1776, they were not oppressed but in fact were themselves oppressors of slaves. Citizens of a unitary state, pro-Union French editors spent little space denying the constitutionality of secession by the South.

According to *l'Opinion nationale*, the South supported slavery and secession, while the North supported Union and liberty. The *Siècle* agreed that the Northern cause was "doubly sacred": first for abolition and sec-

ond for defense of the unity of the American confederation.¹⁵

Those points were disputed by the pro-South semiofficial newspapers that found socioethnic reasons to support Southern independence. Yankees and Rebels were quite different, they claimed. Northerners were descended from Roundheads, while Southerners were descended from Cavaliers; Northerners were Teutonic and Protestant, while Southerners were Latin and Catholic. Frenchmen should realize that the South was formed "for the most part from our former American possessions, keeping our customs, our ideas, our language and the religion of the common *patrie*." The *Constitutionnel* noted affinities of race between France and the different "provinces" of the South.¹⁶

The legitimist press similarly perceived socioethnic considerations favorable to the

¹²*Constitutionnel*, June 5, 1864; *Courier du dimanche*, March 23, 1862, and Aug. 9, 1863; *Siècle*, July 10, 1863. Gavronsky's thesis is that French liberals used the United States as a "propaganda device" to "combat the excesses of the Napoleonic regime" (p. 12). No doubt some editors knew that they were making a political statement in France when they praised American democracy and freedom, but this author's reading of the Paris newspapers turned up many, many more references to the North as antislavery than to the United States as a model republic or democracy. Liberal newspapers routinely referred to the South as *esclavagiste*, to proslavery French newspapers as *esclavagiste*. It might be argued that the *Courier du dimanche*, the one journal that most commonly referred to America as a citadel of liberty, might have been suspended for that reason and that such suspension led other editors to be more circumspect. But the most obvious explanation for the suspension of the *Courier* is that it was outspoken on matters offensive to the government. It was also the least predictable of Paris journals; the weekly *Courier* published articles by persons of diverse views. Perhaps it did not have the respect and following of a homogeneous group of people, as did the *Siècle* and *l'Opinion nationale*, whose opposition to the government was notorious.

¹³*Pays*, Aug. 27, 1862, and Jan. 9, 1863; *l'Union*, June 16, 1864; *Patrie*, May 9, 1865.

¹⁴*l'Union*, June 16, 1864; *Patrie*, June 13, 1864; *Pays*, Sept. 11, 1862, and Oct. 31, Nov. 1, 1863.

¹⁵*l'Opinion nationale*, April 5, June 26, 1861; *Siècle*, June 27, July 18, 1863; Jordan and Pratt, p. 237.

¹⁶*Pays*, Jan. 14, 1862; West, p. 43.



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South. *L'Union* saw conflict inevitable between the merchants of the North and the planters of the South. The *Monde* said the war arose from an antipathy of "races," the Anglo-Saxons of the North wishing to crush the South and seize some beautiful territory. With dubious accuracy, the *Monde* claimed that George Brown, a captain in the Union Army, began the process in 1858.¹⁷

Pro-South editors rejected such views. "Are we able to forget," asked the *Temps*, "that the United States is in part our work, that the

¹⁷*L'Union*, June 16, 1864; *Monde*, May 28, 1864.

¹⁸Early in the secession crisis, the pro-Union *Presse* said that Frenchmen should not forget that Louisiana, a state French in language and customs, was at the "head" of the Confederacy (Feb. 25, 1861). See also *Temps*, Nov. 16, 1862; West, p. 32.

generous élan which carried the Lafayettees and the Rochambeaus to the other side of the Atlantic, was at the same time" an act of high political wisdom? The war was a struggle between aristocracy and democracy, between Cavaliers and Roundheads, between the military and the workers, claimed the *Presse*.¹⁸

Paris journalists also disagreed on the outcome of the war. Pro-South papers never wavered in their belief that the South would triumph. Even after the capture of Richmond, the *Patrie* expected the conflict to become more disastrous, more terrible. The legitimist *Monde* reflected frequently expressed views when it predicted that liberty would perish, prosperity would perish, and there would be military despotism—a "glo-

rious result of a Constitution founded on pure reason and false liberty!"¹⁹

The pro-Union press was not as consistent in its views of the result of the war. Before hostilities, they conceded that the North could never conquer all of the South. Immediately after the attack on Fort Sumter, the Orleanist *Presse* still saw separation as inevitable. After months of hostilities, however, the pro-Union press anticipated a Northern victory.²⁰ Normally optimistic that the North would win, the Orleanist *Courrier du dimanche* in January of 1863 concluded that a "good separation is better than a bad union." A year and a half later the journal wished for Lee's success because the United States had been destroyed by the war, democracy crushed, and slavery would continue even if the North won. The *Presse* changed its views on the outcome of the war more than once. Optimistic in 1862, that paper became gloomy in the fall of 1863 after reviewing the lack of results in battle after battle. Full of optimism once again during the campaigns of Grant and Sherman in the spring of 1864, the *Presse* by the fall of that year became discouraged and called for peace on the basis of Southern independence.²¹

Yet none of the pro-Union newspapers doubted that the North had the better cause; the republican newspapers especially never flagged in their belief that the North would be the ultimate victor.

Superficially it might seem that the slavery issue was important in shaping the attitudes of Paris newspapers towards the Civil War. Every Paris newspaper, however, claimed that it was antislavery. Indeed, pro-South journals justified their support on antislavery grounds, arguing that the North was not truly antislavery and that Southern independence was the best means of emancipating the slaves. Conservatives frequently cited Lincoln's statements that he would not interfere with slavery in the states. The *Pays* said that no one could claim the North was

opposed to slavery after issuance of the Emancipation Proclamation, which did not interfere with slavery in Northern states. Conservatives further argued that Southern efforts to free the slaves had been frustrated by Northern opposition; indeed, they claimed, Northerners hated blacks and would never give them justice. The four or five million Southern whites, claimed the *Pays*, could not hold four and a half million blacks in bondage, while the North had shown that it was not willing to support emancipation if the Union were reestablished.²²

Not surprisingly, pro-Union journalists saw slavery as the major cause of the Civil War. They were not of one mind about its role in the conflict, however, and their ambivalence was particularly evident at the beginning of the war. Union papers readily admitted, for example, that the Republican party did not support abolition of slavery but rather opposed its extension. One liberal journal even rejoiced in the Confederate victory at Bull Run in July, 1861, which afforded an opportunity to end a war not worth fighting because the North thought no more of freeing the slaves than did the South. Liberal editors also realized the limited scope of the Emancipation Proclamation; one pro-Union newspaper claimed that the proclamation was more a question of punishment than principle. One French journalist did observe that any other plan would have been unconstitutional and impolitic because the President had to conciliate the separatists in the border states.²³

In a long article in October, 1861, the *Temps* editor concluded that slavery was at the "essence" but not the cause of the war

¹⁹*Patrie*, April 20, 1865; *Monde*, June 10, 1864.

²⁰*Presse*, Feb. 25, April 29, 1861.

²¹*Courrier du dimanche*, Jan. 4, 1863, June 5, 1864; *Presse*, Oct. 18, 1863, Sept. 2, 8, 17, 1864.

²²*Pays*, Aug. 30, Oct. 7, 1862, and Sept. 1, 1864; *Patrie*, Oct. 10, 1864; West, p. 92.

²³*Presse*, Feb. 11, Oct. 27, 1861; *Courrier du dimanche*, Aug. 11, 1861, and Feb. 1, 1863; *Presse*, Oct. 8, 1862.

because abolitionist opinion was weak in the North. Even so, he asked, if abolition was neither the cause nor the goal of the war, could it not become the result or consequence?²⁴

Liberal journals argued that a Northern victory would result in abolition, and a Southern victory would result in the maintenance of slavery. Liberal newspapers repeatedly quoted Alexander Stephens's famous statement that slavery was the cornerstone ("la pierre angulaire") of the Confederacy. They routinely referred to the South as "esclavagist" and pro-South newspapers as "esclavagistes." With explicit Southern support for slavery, they argued, enlightened Europeans could never support the South. To found a republic based on the maintenance and acceptance of slavery was a defiance of civilization; to recognize such a slave republic would also be a defiance of civilization. Such antislavery sentiments appeared time and time again in pro-North newspapers; no other feature of the Civil War attracted as much attention as did the slavery question.²⁵

In a manner consistent with their varying appraisals of American democracy, Paris journalists differed in their assessments of the direct impact of the Civil War on France itself. At the beginning of the conflict the pro-South *Patrie* believed that it was in the interest of Europe to "favor or at least not to hinder" a revolution that would cause to disappear from European politics a great state whose role could have been embarrassing at any time. Even before the outbreak

of fighting, the *Pays* called for recognition of the South to strengthen links of race, culture, and interest.²⁶

Pro-Union editors, on the other hand, argued that American democracy should remain intact and powerful. "It is the permanent interest of France," wrote the *Temps*, "that a great power continues to exist in America, and, by the sole fact of its presence in the world, serves as a counterweight against England and to guarantee freedom of the seas." While it was in the interest of England to see an independent South, claimed the newspaper, it was not in the interest of France to see the American republic divided. France should even avoid associating itself with British policy for fear of offending American public opinion. A war with the United States was unthinkable, argued the *Temps*, because a war would harm French trade more than did the Union blockade.²⁷

The most direct impact of the Civil War on France, however, occurred not from the hypothetical consequence of a divided or united America but rather from economic distress caused by the conflict. The loss of Southern markets for such luxury goods as silk and wine immediately hurt the French economy; the later loss of Southern cotton had devastating consequences for the manufacturing regions of France, which (according to the census) had furnished a living for 369,644 individuals and supported a total of 513,500 persons in 1861.²⁸

The war directly affected the available quantity and price of cotton, both of which varied throughout the conflict. Although French industry utilized Southern cotton for 90 percent of its products and almost no Southern cotton reached Europe right after the outbreak of the war, no serious shortage developed immediately because of the huge 1859 and 1860 crops. The price of cotton began to rise, however, after the capture of New Orleans in April, 1862. The price rose to approximately three times the

²⁴*Temps*, Oct. 19, 1861, and Aug. 20, 1862.

²⁵*Siècle*, Feb. 1, 1863.

²⁶*Patrie*, July 26, 1861; West, p. 34; Jordan and Pratt, p. 224.

²⁷*Temps*, Nov. 16, 1862; *Courrier du dimanche*, Aug. 9, 1863; West, pp. 47-48.

²⁸*Pays*, Jan. 25, April 2, 1863. The *Temps* claimed that 700,000 workers lived directly from the cotton industry in France (Nov. 4, 1861).

January-June, 1860, level in the fall of 1863, and then dropped to nearly twice the pre-war level by 1864. It did not reach the level of January, 1861, until April of 1865.²⁹

The shortage of cotton—there never was a famine—and the high prices for raw cotton had diverse effects. Producers of low-quality products of Picardy and the Seine-Inférieure claimed that operations had become unprofitable. Only producers of the high-quality, labor-intensive cotton goods of Alsace could still operate profitably. Compounding the problem, complained textile manufacturers, was the oversupply of finished textile products, which depressed the price of finished cotton goods even while the price of raw cotton was artificially high. Thus the weaving sector of the industry, especially the less-mechanized portions, suffered more than did spinning mills. The high price of cotton was a boon for speculators who had purchased large inventories of the earlier crops; indeed, rumors credited high prices for saving some houses from bankruptcy. The high prices also led some manufacturers to sell their inventory of raw cotton; observers bitterly complained that certain French industrialists sold cotton to the English while closing their own factories.³⁰

Unemployment in the cotton industry and the price of cotton followed approximately the same pattern. While some factories began reducing production in the fall of 1861, the worst of the crisis was yet to come. Large-scale unemployment in Normandy began in July, 1862; by November the *Pays* estimated that two thirds of all French cotton workers suffered unemployment as a result of the crisis. The worst of the crisis for all of France occurred in the middle of 1863; conditions improved with the arrival of cotton from new producers.³¹

Opposition newspapers provided extensive coverage of the cotton *crise*, while progovernment journals had but limited coverage. Perhaps the progovernment

newspapers were aware of pressures on the government of Napoleon III to ameliorate suffering through diplomatic initiatives or through direct relief measures and did not wish to accentuate those pressures by excessive publicity about the problem.

The principal difference, however, arose over the wisdom of French intervention to end the war. As a solution to the crisis, pro-South newspapers and cotton manufacturers hoped for the achievement of Southern independence to bring a quick end to the war. News of a Southern victory braked the increase in the price of cotton and delighted French cotton manufacturers. "Public opinion in Europe" believed that some decisive Southern advantage would lead to an intervention on the part of Britain and France. The conservative *Pays* cited unemployment as justification for its mediation proposal to end the war on the basis of Southern independence.³²

Pro-Union newspapers drew diametrically opposed conclusions about remedies for the suffering. The *Courier du dimanche* argued that intervention against the South would bring a more prompt end to the war than intervention against the North. The *Temps* claimed it was in the best interest of European manufacturers to lead the South

²⁹Claude Fohlen, *L'Industrie textile au temps du Second Empire* (Paris: Plon, 1956), pp. 294, 296, 298, gives tables of prices. See also Pinkney, pp. 128-30.

³⁰Fohlen, p. 283; *Temps*, Jan. 29, 1863; *Presse*, Nov. 20, 1862; April 2, 1863.

³¹Pinkney, pp. 130, 134; *Pays*, April 2, 1863. The *Temps* of Feb. 4, 1863, contains an appeal for funds from a committee in the Seine-Inférieure that states that there were then 100,000 unemployed and that there would be 150,000 tomorrow. *Pays*, April 2, 1863; *Siècle*, June 29, 1863. Fohlen argues that unemployment figures are difficult to establish because of questions about definition of a textile worker (many of whom were children and some of whom were peasants as well as factory employees) and lack of good figures on complete or partial unemployment. He estimated unemployment as 223,336 in April, 1863 (pp. 265-67, 276-83).

³²*Temps*, Oct. 2, 1862; *Pays*, Nov. 16, 1862.

promptly and violently back into the bosom of the Union. In short, steps to preserve the American union would bring cotton to France more quickly than would efforts to promote Southern independence. Pro-North journalists further argued that outside sources of cotton could be developed and that France should look upon the Civil War as an opportunity to break loose from the Southern monopoly of raw cotton. Finally, one pro-North newspaper advised unemployed workmen to accept their present distress as the work of Providence and to join with their patrons to make the best of things; follow the advice of John Bright, the pro-North English textile manufacturer, suggested the *Journal des débats*, and do not speak in favor of the South.³³

A more humane response for the liberal newspapers was charity fund raising for distressed workers. A committee at Rouen, organized in February, 1862, collected funds for the unemployed; the committee extended its collections to Paris in December and became a national committee in February, 1863. The organizers collected only two million francs within the year, or an average of twelve to fifteen francs per head of the unemployed in the Seine-Inférieure. A similar collection in Great Britain had raised the equivalent of 25 million francs. One liberal newspaper complained that the French were "too slow" in responding to the appeals, while clergy were only too willing to support cardinals in luxury in Rome.³⁴

The French government took few official actions during the war. It proclaimed neutrality on June 10 of 1861, played a limited role in the *Trent* affair, and made only two

official efforts at conciliation in late 1862 and early 1863. Reactions of the Paris press to government actions were predictable. Conservative newspapers invariably supported government policies. Liberal newspapers supported policies that did not harm Northern interests.

Of all those official actions, French proclamation of neutrality was the least controversial. Neutrality was the best policy, pontificated the progovernment *Constitutionnel*, because the "sword of Charlemagne and Napoleon leaves the scabbard only when the interest and the glory of the French people are at stake." The liberal *l'Opinion nationale* likewise saw neutrality as "conformable to our traditions, our honor, and our interests." More specifically, *l'Opinion* praised the French declaration of neutrality as being essentially different than the English declaration, since it was more conciliatory.³⁵

The first major diplomatic controversy of the Civil War was the *Trent* affair, which raged in November and December of 1861. An American warship stopped the *Trent*, a British ship, and American officers removed James Mason and John Slidell, two Confederates designated as Southern ministers to Great Britain and France. While the British were furious at this violation of the British flag and demanded their release, Americans seemed to relish the possibility of imminent war. Ultimately, however, Washington officials realized that retaining the Confederates might well lead to war with Britain and thus make the Confederate mission a resounding success; besides, the British had international law on their side. Accordingly, Lincoln and Seward released the emissaries and permitted them to go to Europe. As one French editor shrewdly observed, "At the moment when their mission begins, their importance ceases."³⁶

While all Paris newspapers criticized the American seizure of a British vessel, the conservative journals openly avowed anti-Union sentiments while liberal newspapers

³³*Courrier du dimanche*, July 20, 1862; *Temps*, Oct. 2, 1862; West, p. 93.

³⁴*Temps*, Feb. 4, 1863; *Presse*, Jan. 9, 1863; *Siècle*, Jan. 6, 1863.

³⁵West, p. 32; Jordan and Pratt, p. 233; *Presse*, June 20, 1861.

³⁶*Presse*, Jan. 17, 1862.

reported the event in sorrow. The *Constitutionnel*, the most moderate of the pro-Confederacy newspapers, speculated that a war between Britain and the United States would open Southern ports for the export of cotton to France. More typical of conservative journals, the *Pays* related the seizure to violence in American democracy.³⁷

With but one exception, liberal newspapers were sympathetic to the North in the Trent affair. While agreeing that the North was wrong, they doubted that the American commander was acting on orders of his government; they hoped and anticipated that Washington would release the Confederates; and they further hoped that France would be neutral in any war between Britain and the United States. The *Courrier du dimanche* was more strident in its tone: Because the United States lacked "pride of certain old monarchies," it would not "experience any difficulty in repairing the involuntary wrong." The *Courrier* praised America for releasing the emissaries but criticized Britain, "the model of parliamentarism" for weakening the only truly free state in the New World.³⁸

On the other hand, the normally pro-Union Orleanist *Presse* saw the affair as a "direct insult to England" that reflected the "egotism, the absolute indifference for all causes" in America. The question of rights on the sea was important, and France ought to join England in war against America. The *Presse* claimed that the French foreign minister's note on the subject (urging the release of the Confederates) deserved "the honor of the pacific conclusion" of the affair; the paper was disappointed that Seward did not accept the principles of maritime law, but acted only because of force.³⁹

Thus the ideological values of Paris newspapers were at least as influential as the objective events in shaping attitudes toward the Trent affair. The same situation prevailed in the much more important and extensive debate over the question of French inter-

vention in the Civil War. The question was multifaceted: Should France try to break the Union blockade, recognize the South, or try to mediate to end the war? While the discussion of intervention arose throughout almost the entire war, the discussion was most spirited during the time of severe economic distress.

Pro-Confederacy journals advocated intervention for various reasons, but economic reasons were the most prominent. As early as October, 1861, residents in some manufacturing centers of France and England had sought to recognize the South because of the shortage of cotton. Progovernment newspapers wrote of the right of the South to be recognized as early as December, 1861. But it was in the summer of 1862 that the imperial press cried for mediation to end the war in "the name of humanity, interests of civilization, and human progress." More specifically the *Pays* advocated recognition of the South because it would encourage the South, help prevent bloodshed, and help Europe secure cotton. As late as February, 1865, the *Pays* called for European mediation in the name of humanity to prevent racial warfare.⁴⁰

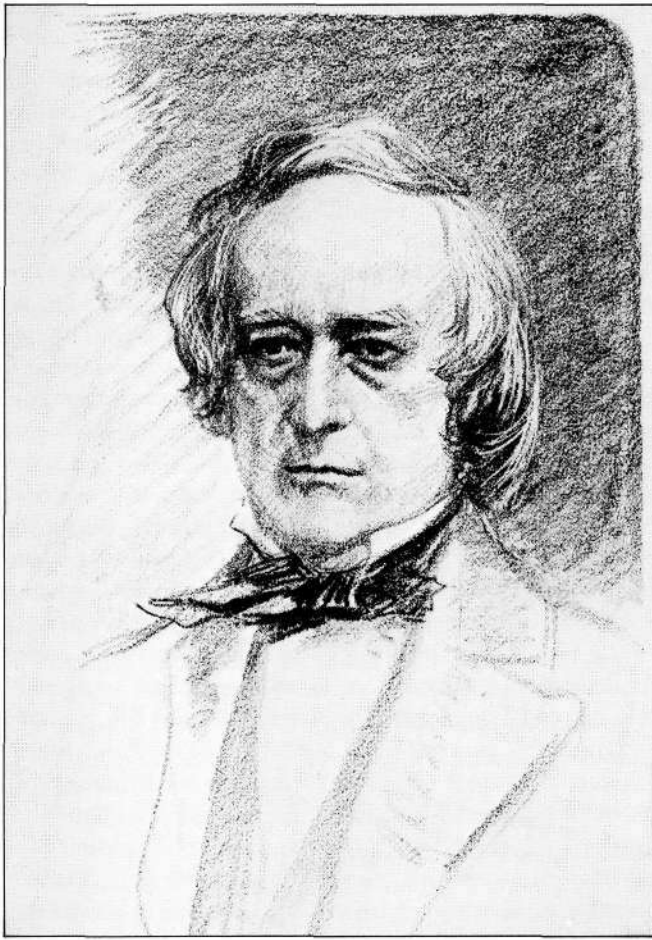
Liberal opposition shows how opposing factions of the Paris press could use the same events to draw different conclusions. The *Presse* said the true reason for interventionist sentiment was the need for cotton, but "if there was a need for cotton, there was also a need for wheat, and the North had the wheat." The *Temps* observed that when the South won a battle, the price of cotton dropped. Yet it really was in the interest of European manufacturers that the South be brought back promptly and violently into the bosom of the North. While the liberal

³⁷West, pp. 411-13; *Pays*, Dec. 6, 1861, Jan. 10, 1862.

³⁸West, pp. 52-55; *Temps*, Dec. 6, 8, 12, 1861; *Courrier du dimanche*, Jan. 5, 19, 1862.

³⁹*Presse*, Dec. 7, 1861, and Jan. 10, 17, 1862.

⁴⁰*Temps*, Oct. 19, 1861; West, p. 44; *Pays*, Sept. 17, 1862, and Feb. 12, 1865.



John Slidell, Confederate Commissioner to France

press did use these economic arguments to oppose intervention, their major arguments, endlessly repeated, were that intervention to support slavery was unthinkable and that the North would win the war.⁴¹

Napoleon III's proposal for joint mediation with Great Britain and Russia was dated October 30, 1862, and published in the official *Moniteur* on November 13, 1862. Immediately motivated by economic distress in France and public opinion that demanded

some official actions, the proposal provided for a six months' truce during which time the South would be free to ship cotton to Europe. Neither Britain nor Russia accepted the French proposal.⁴²

The imperial press praised the Emperor's initiative. The *Pays* thought the measure a "grand and noble cause in soliciting the return of peace in the name of the suffering that the war imposes on workers in diverse countries."⁴³

The *Presse*, on the other hand, said that it was not equitable to treat a recognized state and insurgents as equals. The *Temps* also saw no chance of acceptance; further, it warned that the North would view the proposal "as

⁴¹*Presse*, Jan. 19, Jan. 20, 1862; *Temps*, Oct. 2, 1862.

⁴²Case and Spencer, pp. 358-61.

⁴³*Pays*, Nov. 16, 22, 1862.

a manifest act of hostility." Before publication of the proposal, the *Siècle* had approved the principle of mediation but went into opposition when it realized that the proposal envisioned a suspension of the blockade. Would France have accepted such a proposal when the Vendée revolted during the French Revolution? asked the republican journal.⁴⁴

Napoleon's proposal of mediation—in January of 1863—was a simple offer by France alone of its good offices. The *Constitutionnel* argued that a commission, proposed in the offer, could lead to reconciliation and the end of the war. *L'Union*, the clerical Bourbon journal, liked the idea of France acting alone. By advocating a unilateral stance, *L'Union* could support the goal of French policy while being critical of the Emperor's efforts to act in concert with other powers. *L'Union* behaved consistently with its values in characterizing as arrogant Seward's statement to the Senate that each offer of mediation ought to be considered as hostile because it would prolong the rebellion.⁴⁵

Since the second mediation proposal was more limited than the first, liberal criticism of the second offer was more muted. Nevertheless, liberals realized that Napoleon's proposal could result in Southern independence; as a result, they had no difficulty in finding reasons to oppose it. In principle, said the *Temps*, the new overture appeared more acceptable and less contrary to the North than the first. Yet the *Temps* doubted that either might be accepted or "if they are accepted that they would be followed by the desired effect." The *Presse* said that even if the proposal had the approbation of all of Europe, it was worthless because it said nothing of slavery. The *Courrier du dimanche* said that there was no question of ill will in the proposal, but it would not end the war and would not end the suffering of French workers. Would not the suffering be worse if complicated by a disappointment?⁴⁶

Paris newspapers were even more circum-

spect in their treatment of building ships in French ports for raiding commerce. Such construction, it is clear, was done with the connivance of the French government. On the occasion of the visit of the Russian fleet to America, the *Siècle* pointedly related that visit to a possible Russian war with France; if such a war occurred, the journal hoped that the American government would not tolerate construction of warships for the Czar; now was a good time for the French to put an end to such construction. Nearly a year later the same journal reported that two ships destined for the Confederates were being built at Nantes. The *Siècle* promised to hold its readers abreast of what would be decided, since "our intention is not to lose from sight the two pro-slavery steamers."⁴⁷

The other Paris newspapers largely remained silent or evaded the question of government complicity in construction of raiders. The *Patrie* reported that the *Stonewall* was constructed for the Danish government, but the Danes refused delivery because of nonfulfillment of conditions. Later the ship became a Confederate warship. The French government finally settled the issue by accepting the obligation of a neutral and forbidding the construction of additional warships in French shipyards.⁴⁸

This examination of Paris newspapers suggests that various groups of journals maintained reasonably consistent attitudes that reflected their appraisal of American democracy, their stance toward the regime of Napoleon III, and their judgment of the outcome of the war.

Conservative newspapers, for example,

⁴⁴*Presse*, Nov. 14, 1862; *Temps*, Nov. 15, 1862; West, p. 95.

⁴⁵*Constitutionnel*, Jan. 10, 1863; *L'Union*, Jan. 30, March 17, 1863.

⁴⁶*Temps*, Jan. 29, 1863; *Presse*, Feb. 1, 1863; *Courrier du dimanche*, Feb. 15, 1863.

⁴⁷*Siècle*, Nov. 25, 1863, and Aug. 22, 1864, which cites the *Phare de la Loire* as a source for its information.

staunchly supported official French policy, which during almost all of the Civil War was pro-Confederacy. Legitimist newspapers, i.e., supporters of Bourbon restoration, were an exception among the conservative press; legitimists were critical of both American democracy and the *conduct* (but not the goals) of official French policy. Liberal opposition newspapers, friendly to American democracy, staunchly supported the North, though some Orleanist journals were critical of Northern failure to follow proper principles—something of a counterpart to the legitimist journals in the conservative camp.

The presumed outcome of the war helped shape attitudes toward the conflict. Conservatives firmly believed that the South would win. Most liberal journals were equally convinced that the North would win; when some Orleanist journals doubted a Northern victory, they favored independence for the South.

Whatever the motivation of the editors, their influence on the French government and public opinion was limited. While Napoleon III was not insensitive to popular views, his caution and failure to support actively the Southern cause can be explained in terms other than fear of offending the Paris press, which mostly favored the North. Napoleon could not act decisively without British support, and such support was not forthcoming. In addition, if he interfered between the North and the South, he would set a precedent for the North to oppose his efforts to put Maximilian on the throne in Mexico. Finally, crises in Europe, such as the eternal Polish question, the Italian unification issue, and the Prussian-Austrian war with Denmark—all of which attracted much attention in France—severely limited the Emperor's options in the American conflict.

Further, French opinion was most exercised and desirous of intervention during the cotton *crise* from late 1862 until 1864; the shortage of cotton, on the other hand, did not change the attitude of any Paris

newspaper toward the American Civil War.

Since Paris newspapers had limited circulation and no newspaper served as a spokesman for a popular, mass political party, it is reasonable to conclude that they reflected the attitudes of comparatively small groups in French society. During most of the war French opinion supported the Southern cause, while most of Paris supported the North. The press neither molded nor reflected public opinion; indeed, French public opinion and Paris newspaper views seem to have been two separate and independent entities.

Since Paris journalists used the same events to draw very different conclusions about the Civil War, it is also reasonable to conclude that attitudes in Paris, not events in the United States, were most influential in shaping French journalistic views about the American Civil War.

Napoleon declined to take any steps that would prompt the North to oppose a French presence in Mexico.

