Foreign Influence on the Civil War

Since the beginning of time mankind has continued to settle conflicts through war. A prime example of this theory is the American Civil War. The Civil War was a horrible and gory event where the country fought within itself. The people from the north joined the Union side with President Abraham Lincoln as their leader. They fought against slavery. The citizens of the south stood for slavery. They believed that it was a vital work labor for their success. The president tried to settle these disagreements with his inauguration speech (Walde). However, his attempts failed and one of the bloodiest wars in history began. The people of America had turned against each other. The Confederates turned to foreign countries for aid. The war was strongly influenced by Europe aiding the Confederates, by showing support, sometimes showing neglect, and building relations with Americans.

The foreign aid to the Confederacy had an enormous impact on the American Civil War. Although European powers chose to remain neutral in the American Civil War, they still managed to supply the Southern states with supplies. "British did provide significant assistance in other ways, chiefly by permitting the construction in English shipyards of Confederate warships and blockade runners" (Foner). This is how the southern states got their abundance of supplies. In a picture of the Old Dominion confederate steamship, it is being built and upgraded in a British shipyard. (Old Dominion). This is proof of England's assistance of the Confederacy. The president is showing did not want foreign countries intervening in the war. This was shown by an article from the *Times of London*, there is much talk of the President's choices. "... From a meaningless declarationthat the President does not desire hostilities with England" (Trent). The only other foreign aid in the war that did not come from overseas; it came from foreign soldiers. Soldier Carl Schurz wrote many letters to his wife about his opinions in the war. For example, "shall the laws be enforced in the seceded states and the Union by all means preserved? This question the Northern states

will answer in the affirmative, the southern in the negative, and since this is a definitely practical question, it will lead to a new and final break however the abstract question of slavery may be adjusted" (Schurz). Obviously Schurz had some strong opinions on why slavery should be adjusted. Carl Schurz was a German-American general who fought for the Union in the Civil War. Foreign aid was taking place in the American Civil War in several ways.

Not just did they assist the Confederacy, they also showed them support. During the war, the Confederates decided to reach out to some dominant European countries for aid. The southern states grew cotton, and they exported it overseas to make a profit. Countries like England and France need the American cotton for their textile mills. Due to their dependency on cotton, confederate leaders wished that England would help defend them (Stuckey). To try to secure England as their ally, the confederacy used king cotton diplomacy (Owsley). They even threatened to stop trading with England and France if they did not assist them in the war. For example, "One southern paper told planters 'keep every bale of cotton on the plantation. Don't send a thread... till England and France have recognized the confederacy" (Stuckey). This dialogue clearly shows their manipulation to make England an ally. Not only was the Confederacy supported from foreign countries, but the Union was suppolied too. For instance in the London Times, "These justifications did little to change the British mindset. The Times proclaimed on January 9, I861 that "there is a right and wrong in this question, and... the right belongs to the states of the North." (Sideman, Belle Becker, and Lillian Friedman, cds.) Obviously, the north got credit for fighting for their fair opinions. However, not all opinions of the North from Europe were positive. British newspapers such as the *Times* and the Economist characterized the North's desire to save the Union as greedy (Trent). As you can see, both sides of the war, the north and the south, both attempted to get foreign suppot1on their side.

Although some European countries chose to indirectly aid the confederacy, they still

agreed to remain neutral throughout the war. England's indifference towards the south had less to do with traditional reasoning, and it had more to do with economic reasoning (Owsley). Even though England was strongly dependent on cotton from the south, they still had a large supply of cotton when the war began. In addition to having a large supply, they were able to look for cotton elsewhere. They were able to obtain cotton-trading partners with India and Egypt (Stuckey). They decided their need for cotton wasn't enough to make them risk their troops. With this new trade arrangement, England was less dependent on the South for their cotton. This made the interfering in the war less effective. Another reason for their neglect to help is due to the President's request. For example, *Times of London* newspaper says, "From a meaningless declaration that the president does not desire hostilities with England" (Sideman, Belle Becker, and Lillian Friedman, eds). The president was the head of the country, so naturally he had a strong influence on what happened with international relationships. Some allies couldn't participate in the war, though they would have liked to help their friends. Czarist Russia showed a friendship with the North. Unfortunately, they were in danger of going into war with England and France for reasons unrelated to the Civil War, so they chose not to risk a war of their own. (Catton). The Civil War was mainly America's problem with no international aid.

Not only did European countries aid in the war for economic reasons, they also fought because they had relationships with people fighting in America. Many letters were written to family ties in England from soldiers in America. For example a letter from a Union officer was sent to his Aunt. This letter was an interesting example on why some foreign countries may have stayed neutral during the war. It talked about the war and how they were wishing to see each other, and about what is going on in the war. In this letter he talks about his desire to return home because the business of war is tough. They wouldn't have wanted to fight each other. Therefore, they stayed out of the war (Martin). Britain justified a closer relationship with their cotton suppliers, the confederacy. (Sideman, Belle

Becker, and Lillian Friedman. *Europe*) Often, when people traded valuable goods, they created a bond with each other. They became allies, so they did not wish to fight against each other. It is not to be forgotten that the South had stronger ties with Europe through cotton. (Sideman, Belle Becker, and Lillian Friedman. *Europe*). Not only were the ties through trade, but also through family. Letters were written to family members in England. For example a letter from Hemy Brooks Adams to his brother in London writes, "To a foreigner or to anyone not interested in it, the account must be laughable in the extreme, but the disgrace is frightful" (Letter). These family ties had a huge impact on whether people wished to fight in the war or not. Relationships were a big reason why Europe decided to remain neutral during the American Civil War.

Obviously the American Civil War was enormously impacted by the interference of foreign countries. They influenced it by remaining neutral and providing some indirect assistance. Both the North and the South turned to European powers for aid. If Europe had not supplied the Confederates with ships, they would have been at a disadvantage of having fewer supplies. If countries like England had decided to send troops to America to fight, the tides would have turned. Foreign countries have a dramatic influence on wars. History would not be the same if foreign countries had not decided to stay out of the war.

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