

## Publisher's Note

*Defining Documents in American History* series, produced by Salem Press, consists of a two-volume collection of essays on important historical documents by a diverse range of writers on a broad range of subjects in American history. *Defining Documents in American History: Civil War (1860-1865)* surveys key documents produced during the Civil War with special attention devoted to the war-time policies of President Abraham Lincoln and the 37th US Congress. A special feature of the volumes is the inclusion of letters and diaries by soldiers and civilians writing about their experiences. These documents provide a compelling view of the extraordinary difficulties endured in battle and the home front. The two volumes are organized into several chapters that cover the progress of the war beginning with early debates on secession, through wartime events on the political and battle fronts and concludes with a look toward the issues of race and reconstruction. Designed for high school and college students, the aim of the series is to advance historical document studies as an important activity in learning about history.

### Essay and Volume Format

*Civil War* contains 67 complete and excerpted primary source documents and analytical essays. Each essay is approximately 6,000 words, consisting of a 4,000 word analysis and a 2,000 word primary source. Readers will appreciate the diversity of the collected texts, including journals, letters, speeches, and political sermons, among other genres. Critical essays, written by historians and teachers, begin by introducing readers to the historical period, followed by a brief biography of the author and the events that occasion the composition of the document. An important feature of the essays

is a close reading of the primary source that develops evidence of broader themes, such as author's rhetorical purpose, social or class position, point of view, and other relevant issues. In addition, essays are organized by chapter themes, highlighting major issues in the period, many of which extend across eras and continue to shape American life. Each chapter begins with an introduction that will explain the questions and problems, in some cases the dilemmas, underlying the subjects in the historical documents. A brief glossary highlights keywords important in the study of the primary source. Each essay offers a section of Additional Reading for further research.

### Special Features

- **Historical Images** appear at the beginning of each section. These include actual documents and relevant newspaper reports and posters.
- **Historical Timeline** and **Chronological List** of titles will support readers in understanding the broader events and subjects in the period.
- A **Bibliography** lists helpful supplemental readings for further study.

### Contributors

Salem Press would like to extend its appreciation to all involved in the development and production of this work, especially renowned Civil War historian James M. McPherson, PhD. The essays have been written and signed by scholars of history, humanities, and other disciplines related to the essay's topics. Without these expert contributions, a project of this nature would not be possible. A full list of contributor's names and affiliations appears in the front matter of this volume.

## Editor's Introduction

The Civil War is the most written-about subject in American history—for good reason. As Mark Twain expressed it in 1873, eight years after the end of the war, the conflict “uprooted institutions that were centuries old, changed the politics of a people, transformed the social life of half the country, and wrought so profoundly upon the entire national character that the influence cannot be measured short of two or three generations.”

More than five generations have passed since the war, and we are still trying to measure its impact. One measure is the tremendous cost in lives and resources. An estimated 750,000 soldiers lost their lives in the war. If the same percentage of Americans were killed in a war fought today, the number of American dead would be more than seven million. More Americans died in the Civil War than in all the other wars this country has fought combined. The war also caused enormous havoc and destruction in the South. It wiped out two-thirds of the assessed value of Southern wealth (including slaves), destroyed more than half of the region's farm machinery, consumed two-fifths of Southern livestock, and killed more than one quarter of Southern white males between the ages of eighteen and forty. In 1865 the South presented a bleak landscape of desolation. Burned-out plantations, fields growing up in weeds, and railroads without tracks, bridges, or rolling stock marked the trail of conquering and defeated armies. For the next three-quarters of a century, Southerners both white and black sought to come to grips with the consequences of the war.

Not all of those consequences were negative. Northern victory resolved two fundamental, festering issues that had been left unresolved by the Revolution of 1776 that had given birth to the nation: First, whether this fragile republican experiment called the United States would survive as one nation, indivisible; and Second, whether the house divided would continue to endure half slave and half free. Both of these issues had remained open questions until 1865. Many Americans in the early decades of the country's history feared that the nation might break apart; many European conservatives predicted its demise; some Americans had advocated the right of secession and periodically threatened to invoke it; eleven states did invoke it in 1861. But since 1865 no state or region has **seriously** threatened secession. To be sure, some fringe groups assert the theoretical right of secession, but none has really tried to

carry it out. That question seems settled.

By the 1850s the United States, which had been founded on a charter that declared all men created equal with an equal title to liberty, had become the largest slaveholding country in the world, making a mockery of this country's professions of freedom and equal rights. As Abraham Lincoln put it in a speech in 1854, “the monstrous injustice of slavery . . . deprives our republican example of it just influence in the world—enables the enemies of free institutions, with plausibility, to taunt us as hypocrites.” But with the Emancipation Proclamation in 1863 and the Thirteenth Amendment to the Constitution in 1865, that particular “monstrous injustice” and “hypocrisy” has existed no more. Yet the legacy of slavery in the form of racial discrimination and prejudice long plagued the United States, and has not entirely disappeared a century and a half later.

In the process of preserving the Union of 1776 while purging it of slavery, the Civil War also transformed it. Before 1861 the words “United States” were a plural noun: The United States have a republican form of government. Since 1865 the United States is a singular noun: The U.S. is a world power. The North went to war to preserve the Union; it ended by creating a nation. This transformation can be traced in President Lincoln's most important wartime addresses. His first inaugural address, in 1861, contained the word “Union” twenty times and the word “nation” not once. In Lincoln's first message to Congress, on July 4, 1861, he used the word Union thirty-two times and nation only three times. In his famous public letter to Horace Greeley of August 22, 1862, concerning slavery and the war, Lincoln spoke of the Union eight times and the nation not at all. But in the brief Gettysburg Address fifteen months later, he did not refer to the Union at all but used the word nation five times. And in the second inaugural address, looking back over the trauma of the past four years, Lincoln spoke of one approach to war. The four years from 1861 to 1865 witnessed a conflict that evolved from an effort by the North to restore the Union into a determination to wipe out slavery and the social system it had created and to rebuild the nation on the basis of freedom. The documents and essays in this, the largest part of these volumes, illuminate the military, political, constitutional, and human elements of the experiences of Americans in both North and South in this all-consuming conflict. “These are fear-

fully critical, anxious days, in which the destinies of the continent for centuries will be decided,” wrote one contemporary in 1864. Another reflected on “whether any of us will ever be contented to live in times of peace and laziness. Our generation has been stirred up from its lowest layers and there is that in its history which will stamp every member of it until we are all in our graves. . . . One does every day and without a second thought, what at another time would be the event of a year, perhaps of a life.” Many of the documents in these volumes give the reader a flavor of the intensity of these experiences.

The outcome of the war did not fully resolve all of the issues over which it had been fought. The Confederacy was destroyed, but how were these states to be brought back into the Union? The slaves had been freed, but what did that freedom mean? Would they become citizens with all of the civil and political rights of white

citizens? What would be the balance of powers and rights of state governments and the federal government in the reconstructed Union? Americans grappled with these issues during the decade after the Civil War, but did not come up with final answers. We are still grappling with them today. The documents and essays in the final section of these volumes – Postwar: Politics of Race and Reconstruction -- provide insights into the nature of these problems during the postwar era as well as their continuing relevance to America today.

The American philosopher George Santayana once declared that those who forget the past are condemned to repeat it. The era of the Civil War and Reconstruction was unquestionably the most turbulent and traumatic part of our past. The following pages will help the reader avoid the fate warned of by Santayana.

*James M. McPherson, PhD*

## ■ **The *Chicago Tribune*: “Help from England”**

**Date:** May 16, 1861

**Author:** Unknown

**Genre:** editorial

*“The wild idea that England will send out a naval force to break through the blockade established by the United States Government, is not mentioned as a thing which has ever been dreamed of in Downing street.”*

### **Summary Overview**

In May 1861, news arrived in the United States regarding what Great Britain would do concerning the outbreak of war in North America. The *Chicago Tribune*, a staunch supporter of both the Republican Party and President Abraham Lincoln, celebrated what seemed to be a British pledge to remain uninvolved. Yet there were hints in the *Chicago Tribune*'s editorial that the British might extend “belligerent” status to the South and might, therefore, become involved at some point, either as a mediator or as a contributor of arms or men to the Confederate cause. The editorial demonstrated the transatlantic context of the American Civil War and revealed many of the international dimensions of the conflict, which ranged from the important position of Southern cotton in Britain's Industrial Revolution to the transnational network of antislavery activists in the North Atlantic during the mid-nineteenth century. Internationalizing the history of the American Civil War reveals both the larger context within which the conflict took place, including the increasingly global capitalist economy, and the pattern of state consolidation and centralization in Europe and the Western Hemisphere in which the United States was participating during the mid-nineteenth century.

### **Defining Moment**

Major European nations, especially France and Great Britain, were intensely interested in what was happening in North America in 1861. Would the rapidly expanding and industrializing United States split in two? If the Confederacy was successful, would two strong countries emerge that Europeans would have to contend with or would two weaker ones? In addition, large segments of the British population were concerned with the issue of slavery. As a result of the lengthy campaigns of activists such as William Wilberforce, in 1807, the British government ended the international slave trade in its empire and used its fleet to patrol the Atlantic Ocean to force other nations to do so as well. The United States officially ended the importation of slaves in 1808, but the British went further in 1833, when they abolished slavery in their empire. Therefore, the British had ended slavery almost three decades before the advent of the American Civil War, and British public opinion was often on the side of the North during the conflict.

The first phase of the Industrial Revolution in Britain relied heavily on the nation's textile industry, which in turn depended on an ample supply of cotton from the American South. Recognizing this, most Southern states voluntarily adopted non-exportation and refused to ship cotton to Great Britain, even during the early

part of the Civil War when the Union blockade was not yet effective along the Southern coast. The South hoped that, by withholding cotton, they could put enough financial pressure on British industry to compel British industrialists and workers to pressure Parliament to intervene, probably through mediation, but potentially even with force. While the dictatorial Emperor Napoleon III of France seemed to support the South more solidly in public, in reality, he would not intervene without the British cooperation, so the South's greatest hope for international aid lay with Great Britain. The editorial from the *Chicago Tribune*, appearing six weeks before the First Battle of Bull Run (Manassas) on July 21, was in reaction to the first major news from England on what the British government would do regarding the outbreak of war in North America.

### Author Biography

Founded in 1847, the *Chicago Tribune* began a rise to prominence when Joseph Medill and Charles H. Ray bought large shares in the paper and became the dominant owners in 1855. Medill owned one-third of the paper and was the managing editor, while Ray owned one-fourth and was the editor in chief. The paper had previously focused on some of the issues, such as temperance, advocated by the Protestant reform societies

that emerged from the Second Great Awakening, a religious revival movement during the first half of the 1800s in the United States.

Under the new editors, the paper continuously voiced an antislavery message. In addition, the paper helped strengthen the new Republican Party, which came into being in the mid-1850s after the Whig Party collapsed because of massive divisions over the proslavery Kansas-Nebraska Act of 1854. For instance, Ray was at the May 1856 meeting that formed the Republican Party officially, and he may also have helped prod Lincoln to run against Stephen A. Douglas for a Senate seat in 1858. Lincoln lost the campaign, but his speeches that year made him a national political figure. During the 1860 presidential campaign, the *Chicago Tribune* was solidly behind Lincoln and continued to support him during the war years. Eventually, Ray left the paper, and Medill was largely in control of the paper until his death in 1899. During the Civil War, the circulation of the *Chicago Tribune* increased from eighteen thousand to forty thousand. As a result of the efforts of its editors, the paper was an early and consistent voice against slavery and in favor of reunion and emancipation.

## HISTORICAL DOCUMENT

The news from abroad by the steamers Europa and Panama, is ominous to the Montgomery traitors. Lord John Russell, has announced the firm resolve of the Government not to interfere in any manner in the contest now progressing in the United States, except to protect British interests, if actually assailed. The only crumb of comfort for Jeff. Davis, in the Hon. Secretary's speech, is the announcement that the Southern Confederacy will be recognized, not as a power, not as a Government, but simply as a "belligerent." The affect of such recognition is merely negative. It promises only that Jeff Davis's privateers will not be seized and dealt with as pirates, by British cruisers, unless they are found meddling with British property. The wild idea that England will send out a naval force to break through the blockade established by the United States Government, is not mentioned as a

thing which has ever been dreamed of in Downing street. Non-interference, thorough and absolute, is the position of England. Lord John Russell carries this wise and just policy so far as to reprobate even giving of advice to either party.

We commend the remarks of the Foreign Secretary to the New Orleans *Delta Crescent* and *Picayune*, the Savannah *News*, and the two spiteful organs of treason at Charleston. They have done little else, since the President's proclamation was issued, than prophesy the speedy appearance of British war-steamers off their ports, whose business it should be to sink the blockading fleet. Some of the more sanguine of those journals have predicted that English squadrons would be sent to blockade New York, Boston and Philadelphia. Lord John Russell does not so understand it.

## GLOSSARY

**Downing street:** shorthand reference to the office of the prime minister of Great Britain, which is physically located at Ten Downing Street in London.

**Foreign Secretary:** the British official responsible for relations with other nations, similar to the US secretary of state.

**Lord John Russell:** British foreign secretary from 1859 to 1865 under Henry John Temple, Viscount Palmerston, who was prime minister during the same period

### Document Analysis

Even before major military battles took place in the American Civil War, the question of potential European involvement was on the minds of both Northerners and Southerners. The editors of the *Chicago Tribune* believed, based on a speech by the British foreign secretary, that British neutrality in the conflict was assured. While there were a number of reasons for the British to abstain from aiding the Confederacy, the suggestion that Great Britain might extend the status of “belligerent” to the South carried a possibility of future British involvement that the *Chicago Tribune* did not recognize as potentially dangerous to the North. Overall, the *Chicago Tribune*’s editorial on potential British involvement provided a window into Confederate hopes of international aid during the Civil War and revealed the important international dimensions of the conflict.

As a staunch supporter of Lincoln and the Republican Party, the *Chicago Tribune* was solidly against secession. Therefore, the opening line of the editorial minced no words by labeling the Confederate government the “Montgomery traitors.” The *Chicago Tribune* referred to the city of Montgomery, Alabama, because when the Deep South seceded, that city had become the official Confederate capital. When the upper South left the Union, the Confederate legislature voted in May 1861 to move the capital to Richmond, Virginia, but, at the time the editorial was written, the move had not yet occurred. The new government would not meet until July in Richmond, so in May, the *Chicago Tribune* was still referring to the original Confederate capital city.

While the *Chicago Tribune* was an antislavery paper, there was no mention in the editorial of slavery, but only of “traitors” to the Union. There are two likely reasons for this. First, while the central tenet of the Republican

Party in the late 1850s had been an opposition to the expansion of slavery into the western territories, few Northerners wanted to abolish slavery where it existed in the South. Lincoln was one who held to this majority view. Therefore, ending slavery completely may not have been a goal of the *Chicago Tribune*. Second, and related, was that Lincoln’s initial war goals did not include the abolition of slavery where it existed. Until the fall of 1862 Lincoln voiced a singular objective of reunion, of bringing the South back into the United States. Therefore, the *Chicago Tribune* may also have been expressing the early war goals of Northern leaders and Northern public opinion, centered on only restoring the Union.

### The British Will Not Intervene

Early in the war the Confederacy hoped for intervention on the part of England and France. The South sent envoys James Murray Mason and John Slidell to Great Britain in November 1861, and a Northern warship seized the British vessel they were on. A war scare followed between the United States and Great Britain, known as the *Trent Affair*, until Lincoln released the British ship, and the Confederates continued on their way. However, even at the beginning of the conflict, many Southern leaders believed that the sudden end of cotton imports to British textile factories would cause economic dislocation and then social pressure on Parliament to intervene on the side of the South, whether in the form of either mediation or, as the South hoped, naval or other military involvement. This Southern hope is evident in the *Chicago Tribune* editorial when the paper mentions the claims by “the New Orleans *Delta Crescent* and *Picayune*, the Savannah *News*, and the two spiteful organs of treason at Charleston” that “British war-steamers” would soon arrive to break the

Union blockade, a tactic that had been announced but had not been effective initially. The *Chicago Tribune* noted that some Southern newspapers had even "predicted that English squadrons would be sent to blockade New York, Boston and Philadelphia." The latter type of involvement would certainly have been a deep intervention on the part of the British government and would have likely led directly to war between the North and Britain.

As the *Chicago Tribune* noted, British involvement would not materialize. British foreign secretary Russell, who held a position similar to the American secretary of state, announced that the British position would be noninterference in the American Civil War. Of course, if British lives and property were "assailed," as threatened to occur in the *Trent* Affair later in the year, the British government would act. However, apart from such incidents, the British announced they would stay out of the conflict in North America. Not only did this mean abstaining from any sort of direct military involvement on either side, but also, as the *Chicago Tribune* noted, "Lord John Russell carries this wise and just policy so far as to reprobate even giving of advice to either party." In a sign of true neutrality, Russell would not help either side. Therefore, this excluded even the possibility of British mediation that would likely have resulted in a peace settlement and in a permanent division of the United States. Thus, the pro-Republican, pro-Union, and pro-Lincoln *Chicago Tribune* roundly praised this first sign of British noninvolvement.

#### **Reasons for British Noninvolvement**

Overall, the British had few incentives to intervene on the part of the Confederacy. First, while the textile industry did suffer from the abrupt end of Southern cotton shipments and while a number of workers in that industry experienced reduced hours and reduced wages, by the 1860s, British industry did not rely solely on textiles. Heavy industrial production was already expanding in Britain, as it would in the United States after the Civil War; historians identify this period as the second part of the Industrial Revolution as it took place in the two nations, when textile production and steam power were eclipsed by iron and steel production, coal power, and even electricity.

Second, and related, the British soon found other sources of cotton. The sudden exit of Southern cotton from the world market, in an expanding global economy largely created and held together by British trade and

British warships, led to a rapid expansion of cotton production in Egypt, Argentina, and India. Southern cotton had been higher in quality and lower in cost than cotton produced elsewhere, but with a global shortage of cotton, it became profitable to grow more of the crop in these British-dominated areas. Indeed, some of the economic hardships faced by the postwar South resulted from a glut of cotton on the global market and the resulting low prices for the product—issues directly related to the expansion of cotton production in other places.

Third, British trade with the North was quite substantial and would have ended, or at least would have been threatened, if British mediation occurred. Fourth, the South had fewer people and was weaker militarily and industrially than the North. With the economies of the Northern states completely oriented toward war production and with increasing numbers of men entering the Union Army, there was no guarantee that any sort of military involvement on the part of the British or French would have achieved Southern victory on the battlefield.

Fifth, British public opinion largely sided with the North. While ending slavery would not be an official goal of the war until the fall of 1862, with Lincoln's Preliminary Emancipation Proclamation after the Battle of Antietam (also known as the Battle of Sharpsburg), British citizens recognized that the South was defending slavery and that the North (at least some of its Republican Party) was attempting to halt the expansion of slavery in North America. With the official end of slavery in the British Empire in 1833 and with a significant movement of social reformers, which included a strong abolitionist segment (as it did in the United States), the British public was not likely to support intervention on behalf of the Confederacy.

#### **Potential Threats to the North in 1861**

At the same time, the *Chicago Tribune* was insufficiently worried about the threat contained in the potential British extension of the status of "belligerent" to the South. While the *Chicago Tribune* noted that the British government would recognize the Confederacy "not as a power, not as a Government, but simply as a 'belligerent,'" such a label could have possibly ended with some form of British intervention. When a nation truly desires to aid neither side in a conflict, or at least when it does not want to aid the rebelling side, it will remain silent on the status of the two sides. Techni-

cally, this means that a nation would not recognize that there are two contending sides in an armed conflict, despite the situation on the ground, and would act only as if the legally constituted government was the only entity with whom one could deal and interact. Extending the status of “belligerent,” however, means that a nation recognizes that there are two armed sides in a conflict and thus opens the possibility that aid—in the form of money, troops, ships, or mediation—can be extended to either side, including the rebels. Therefore, the possibility that the British may have recognized the Confederacy as a “belligerent” in May 1861 was not as reassuring as the *Chicago Tribune* seemed to think. Not only would Confederate privateers be allowed to operate (if they stayed away from British property) under belligerency status, but also the British might deepen their contacts with the Confederacy after establishing that such status existed. Military intervention was still unlikely, but the *Chicago Tribune* was incorrect to be so calm about the possibility that the British would extend belligerency status to the Confederacy.

In addition, there would be a number of moments during 1861 and 1862 when the British swung close to mediation offers. After the Union defeats of the Seven Days Battles and Second Battle of Bull Run (Second Manassas), British leaders thought about offering to help broker an agreement between the two sides. However, they decided to wait for the outcome of General Robert E. Lee’s invasion of Maryland in 1862. The resulting stalemate at Antietam showed that the Confederacy was not yet clearly victorious on the battlefield, however, and effectively scuttled the South’s chances of international involvement. In addition, Lincoln issued his Preliminary Emancipation Proclamation, and British public opinion solidified behind the North’s newly stated goal of ending slavery. At a few other points during the second half of the war the French voiced interest in intervention, and a few British figures agreed, but the strongest possibility of British intervention had been in the summer of 1862 with Union losses piling up and economic dislocation in the British textile industry beginning to cause a measure of unrest among textile workers. The point is that the *Chicago Tribune* was incorrect in declaring that the threat of British involvement had ended conclusively so early in the war.

### Essential Themes

The international aspect of the American Civil War was an important dimension of the conflict. The ques-

tion of British and French involvement on behalf of the Confederacy, whether through mediation or more substantial military assistance, was not fully settled until the fall of 1862, a year and a half after the war started. While a number of factors seemed to preclude British involvement, the combination of economic distress in the British textile industry, threats to British shipping by Northern war vessels, and Confederate victory on the battlefield had the potential, in combination, to produce British intervention in some form.

Even before the First Battle of Bull Run the solidly Republican *Chicago Tribune* brushed off the threat of British involvement but did not fully understand that the extension of belligerency status to the Confederacy might have been a prelude to some sort of British action in the Civil War. Historian Thomas Bender, in his book *A Nation among Nations: America’s Place in World History* (2006), has placed the Civil War in the larger context of the consolidation and centralization of national states—including Argentina for instance—in the mid-nineteenth century in Europe and the Western Hemisphere. In addition, the triumph of the North demonstrated to a world still largely consisting of empires and monarchies that nationalism, democracy, and liberalism could coexist in one country. Thus, the editorial from the *Chicago Tribune* revealed a number of international issues concerning the American Civil War.

Kevin E. Grimm, PhD

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