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Hidden History: The role of Great Britain in the American Civil War

As told by cultural artifacts

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I. Introduction

What do statues and songs tell us about the Civil War? If the monuments are in the United States – a marker on a battlefield for instance- it is easy to decipher the context and historical significance. Soldiers passed their time with song and their lyrics are preserved to this day, performed by both pop artists and living historians. But what if these cultural artifacts reside outside the United States? Why is there a statue of Abraham Lincoln in the city of Manchester? How does a monument dedicated to the martyrs at the Lune Street Riots on Preston, Lancashire relate to the Civil War? Why does a sea shanty about one of the arguably most famous and successful ships in the Confederate Navy make mention of British individuals and geography? The quick answer is that all these fragments reveal the complicated role the British had in the American Civil War.

Foreign military aid, munitions and troops given during the American Revolution are well-known. School children learn of Marquis de Lafayette's role in bringing French troops over to fight, aiding in Cornwallis' defeat at Yorktown. Polish Americans are quick to discuss their hero, Tadeusz Kościuszko. For the American Civil War, popular historical knowledge shares no analogy. Yet a statue of Abraham Lincoln stands in Manchester, England. At least one sea shanty about one of the most successful Confederate vessels makes explicit mention of British people and geography. While no evidence exists of Great Britain taking sides in

the American Civil War at the government level, that doesn't mean no private citizen ever felt some pull to one cause or another. Exploring these investments of expression in greater detail can only enrich historical discourse and reveal its greater impact on the world.

Even before the conflict erupted British politicians, merchants, and citizens alike; looked across the ocean and discussed their perceptions and whether they believed in the inevitability of actual hand-to-hand combat. Once the American Civil War began, the British were invested in the outcome. Even though the Crown declared the country and her subjects were to remain neutral, the historical record shows that many ignored their Queen's request. In areas like Lancashire, there is evidence that many subjects took vocal roles in supporting both the Union and Confederate governments. And some even went a step further, helping to fund the Confederate Navy and construct ships to break the Union's blockade. The evidence of this support is visible, if one only knows where to look. *Roll, Alabama, Roll*, the Lincoln statue in Manchester, and the Preston Martyrs Memorial not only stand as reminders of the British involvement in the American Civil War but also represent some of the reasons why the British felt obligated to support the belligerents.

As other historians and authors have noted, the Civil War impacted more than just the continental United States. In fact, it had a global impact. Great Britain is

just one of those nations that felt the burden of the conflict on American soil. Decades before the Crown had outlawed slavery, England –specifically the industrial North–was still largely dependent of foreign cotton. However, cotton and slavery were not the only issues that connected the British. For this paper the diplomatic dispatches of Lord Lyons, Ambassador to the United States, will serve as a launching point for the exploration of what real or imagined threat the American Civil War posed to Great Britain, but also to introduce some of the individuals who broke with neutrality.

From there the discussion will shift focus to Lancashire County in Northern England. In Liverpool and Manchester the private citizens give support for both the CSA and the USA. The connection between Lancashire and the CSA is understood from the secondary sources. Sven Beckert and others argue that Lancashire rose to prominence in the mid-19th century due to cheap and high quality American cotton. *Support for Secession: Lancashire and the American Civil War*¹ by Mary Ellison explores Lancashire and its Pro-Confederate leaning. It would then be easy to extrapolate that Britain was as divided regionally over the Civil War. However, Manchester set itself apart from other cities in Lancashire, vocally supporting Lincoln and his Administration and their dedication to the abolition of slavery. For the purpose of this paper, it demonstrates that there is a

¹Mary Ellison, *Support for Secession: Lancashire and the American Civil War* (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1972).

complexity in public thought that allows for seemingly contradictory activity to exist in the same geographic location.

When Lancashire and the Civil War are discussed in secondary sources, the examples of how exactly the people of Manchester and Liverpool showed their support are not usually discussed in depth. Also too, the notion of how cotton was so important can be missed. This is where the cultural references come into play. The Plug Riots, a series of worker strikes and riots brought about by a lack of cotton, among other things. The Preston Riot in the summer of 1842 had to be suppressed with violent force. And this could have inspired the actions of Liverpool and Manchester. The Fraiser Trenholm Company financially backed the construction of the *CSS Alamama* in order to break the Union's blockade that was preventing cotton and other important cargo from being imported through their shipyards. At the same time, the workers of Manchester assemble to form their own countermovement, to align themselves with the same values President Lincoln represented. While mainstream historians do not mention these, cultural symbols like monuments and songs do recognize the role England and more specifically Lancashire played in the American Civil War. When the government strove to remain neutral in the conflict, it was the citizens in towns like Liverpool and Manchester that acted upon their own beliefs and showed support for both belligerents in the American Civil War.

II. Historiography

Before getting into the primary sources, it is necessary to discuss the inspiration for this work and what other scholars and historians have written. Some works will be critically analyzed for what things they omit, but others will be scrutinized for their overall argument. This paper fits within several different veins of Civil War historiography but was for the most part inspired by works like Chandra Manning's *What This Cruel War Was Over*² and the discussion of meaning behind the conflict. Her work demonstrates the notion that the war's meaning changed over time. For the Union example, slavery and abolition were motivators for some men to take up arms, but not always. Gradually, men's hearts were converted when they were confronted with what slavery meant for the African Americans who faced this reality daily.³ This also broaches the idea that there is some fluidity to the narrative and, more importantly, that multiple interpretations of the same conflict can coexist within the same time and space. This is highly important to show that just as Americans' motivations for fighting were fluid, British citizens' views on the war might also have changed over time. Or, as this paper will show, that multiple interpretations of the conflicts meaning

² Chandra Manning, *What this Cruel War Was Over* (New York: Random House Inc., 2007)

³ *Ibid*, 76-7.

and importance can exist in a relatively small area, thus provoking different responses. Important too in shaping the early stages of this research is Thomas Bender's *A Nation Among Nations: America's Place in World History*⁴ which situates American history within a more global context. This broad framework raises the question of not only what role the war played in shaping global history, but also what impact other global powers might have had on the American Civil War.

The American Civil War, as argued by those who are looking at its more far reaching impact, affected many different arenas of international relations. Historians are focusing on how the Civil War affected the global economy as well as implications for the international struggle for Democracy, Liberalism, Nationalism, and Civil Liberties.

Sven Beckert and Frank Owsley are the two main historians who effectively analyzed the world dependence on foreign cotton and thus the global impact of the American Civil War upon the 19th century's economy. As Owsley argued in his pioneering book *King Cotton Diplomacy: Foreign Relations of the Confederate States of America*,⁵ the Confederacy was relying on Europe's cotton dependency as a tool to sway support towards its cause. Owsley argues the CSA

⁴Thomas Bender, *Nation Among Nations: America's Place in World History*, (New York: Hill and Wang, 2006).

⁵ Frank Lawrence Owsley sr., *King Cotton Diplomacy; Foreign Relations of the Confederate States of America*, (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press., 1931).

sent out emissaries to France and England trying to gain financial, moral, political, and ultimately military support.⁶ All of this hinged upon cotton; the material upon which much of English and French textile fortunes had been built. While his data is pulled from 19th century sources to show the importance of cotton, Owsley only mentions Manchester and Liverpool in passing, and seems to bypass the instances of smuggling and blockade running.

Sven Beckert has pushed the analysis of the global impact of the Civil War the farthest. In *Empire of Cotton: A Global History*, Beckert looks at the cotton plant as the catalyst for the modern economic boom.⁷ The cotton market has radically altered global historical events for centuries. This simple plant not only spurred on aspects of colonization and the Industrial Revolution, but Beckert also connects the importance of Southern cotton fields with the growth of the English textile industry, centered in Lancashire County in Northern England. Droughts or shortages in cotton caused political unrest as well as economic depressions in that area.⁸ As a result of the Union blockade and Confederate manipulation of cotton supplies to England, Beckert argues, the American Civil War was not simply a tragedy to the hundreds of thousands of men killed upon American soil, but it also

⁶ Owsley, *Diplomacy*, p 13.

⁷ Sven Beckert, *Empire of Cotton: A Global History*, (New York: Penguin Random House, 2014).

⁸ Sven Beckert "Emancipation and Empire: Reconstructing the Worldwide Web of Cotton Production In the Age of the American Civil War," *American Historical Review* 109, no.5 (2004): 1410.

dethroned England as Emperor of the European cotton empire. The English attempted to export the southern cotton growing model onto the Indian subcontinent. Thus the plantation model, in Beckert's view, is moved to other countries after it was destroyed in America by the Civil War.

Global dependence slave-produced cotton shows why the American Civil War had such a great economic impact on places like the textile rich north of England. However, aside from Beckert, no other work pushes that connection across the Atlantic. Beckert mentions the impact of the blockades upon European cotton markets and makes oblique references to the impact it had on areas like Liverpool and Manchester⁹, but he does not examine these instances in depth. However, cotton and slavery were not the only issues that the Civil War touched upon. In England and abroad, the American Civil War raised other issues.

The Civil War as Global Conflict; Transnational Meanings of the American Civil War, edited by David T Gleeson and Simon Lewis is a collection of essays, each with the goal of connecting the Civil War to a different issue globally¹⁰. There are topics of race, gender, equality as well as the reception or impact of the Civil War on other nations, or how other nations affected the Civil War. While fascinating as a whole, only a handful of the collected works are

⁹ Beckert, "Emancipation and Empire", 141.

¹⁰ David T Gleeson and Simon Lewis, *The Civil War As Global Conflict; transatlantic meanings of the American Civil War* (Columbus, South Carolina: University of South Carolina Press, 2014)

directly concerned with the impact of the American Civil War on Great Britain. What is fruitful is an idea put forth in Hugh Dubrulle's essay on the role of race, Britain and the American Civil War. The American Civil War was one of many things that changed Great Britain's view on race.¹¹ Following the correspondence of a family as they move from England pre-Civil War to the Reconstruction South, their attitudes and opinions of African Americans changes sharply the longer they live in the South. The family's time in America does have an effect on their thoughts, but it is unclear how far reaching or developed these feelings were at the time of the Civil War. What is important is that Dubrulle's essay demonstrates that contradictory attitudes existed at the same time –anti-slavery and support of secession. While Dubrulle brings up this compelling notion, another work focuses these same complexities and contradictions, but in the broader context of continental Europe.

Don Doyle's *Cause of All Nations; An International History of the American Civil War* focuses on the specifics of the Civil War within the context of European history and public opinion of the 1860's.¹² England and France were by no means unfamiliar with the notion of a Civil War. Italy, German, and other

¹¹ Hugh Dubrulle, "It is still impossible ... to advocate slavery... it has ... become a habit persistently to write down freedom' Britain, the Civil War, and Race," in *The Civil War As Global Conflict; transatlantic meanings of the American Civil War*, 2014, ed. David T Gleeson and Simon Lewis (Columbus, South Carolina: University of South Carolina Press, 2014), 58.

¹² Don H. Doyle, *Cause of all Nations: An International History of The American Civil War* (New York: Basic Books, 2013).

countries were struggling with their own political sovereignty and unity. The issues of citizenship, unification, individual political rights, abolition, and many others attracted European attention. Many different Europeans gave their vocal support or expressed their opinion about the conflict. These people range from the elites of France and England, to figures like Karl Marx and Giuseppe Garibaldi. In the end, the Union wins the war, but both nations lost the battle of gaining support from Europeans. Both sides courted them in different ways, but ultimately the Europeans decided for themselves. They both fed on ideas set forth by the Union to delegitimize Confederate claims and by the Confederates to rationalize their own, but came away with a blending of the two. “Both liberals *and* conservatives began framing the American conflict as part of a much larger social and ideological struggle” Doyle argues, “The American contest [...] was a decisive showdown between the forces of *popular* versus *hereditary* sovereignty, *democracy* versus *aristocracy*, *free* versus *slave* labor, all rolled into one epic battle taking place in the distant American arena.”¹³ This multiplicity, and all-inclusive and broad, definition or interpretation of the American Civil War, harkens back to notions that Manning tackles in her work. However important the ideas that Doyle sets forth, for the most part he does not focus on capital cities

¹³ Ibid,11.

like Paris and London and does not explore how these ideas diffused throughout the rest of the country.

While the focus is in the era after the Civil War and through the modern era, *The American Civil War in British Culture: Representations and Responses, 1865 to the Present*, by Nimrod Tal implies and then elaborates on Britain's continued interest in the American Civil War.¹⁴ Listing four areas of significance, Tal examines how the British have shaped their own meaning of the Civil War. Between America and Britain there has always been and seems to still exist a flow of ideas that shape the perception of historical events. American historiography but popular culture phenomena like *Gone With The Wind* and *Birth of a Nation* have shaped the British perception of the American Civil War. Tal also explores how the British have learned from the failures and successes of the Civil War both militarily and politically in dealing with their own struggles with Ireland. Most importantly, Tal actually mentions at least one of the monuments eluding to British involvement in the American Civil War: the Lincoln Statue in Manchester. In the context of the Great War and the Anglo-American alliance, the United States gifted two Lincoln Statues to England. One was placed in London, but Manchester was selected as the second location due to the pre-existing connection

¹⁴ Nimrod Tal, *The American Civil War in British Culture: Representations and Responses, 1870 to Present* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015).

between Lincoln and that city.¹⁵ While Tal's work does a better job at connecting the Civil War to various parts of England, only one work devotes its sole focus to the region of Lancashire.

Lancashire and the Civil War are the sole focus of *Support for Secession: Lancashire and the American Civil War*. The ultimate goal of this work is to take on a historiography that paints a narrative of uniformity or singlemindedness in Britain, creating a myth that Lancashire was neutral or in support of the Union.¹⁶ Once again, everything goes back to cotton. But in this work Ellison advances an argument about classism. Textile-dependent Lancashire's need for cotton was not reason enough to sway the entire country into a full-scale war.¹⁷ At the end of the day, the working class of Lancashire were looking out for their own good, reacting in a 'purely practical' way to a situation that impacted how they could live their lives.¹⁸ This work is laudable for its focus on Lancashire and its extensive work in canvassing the impact of the war on the surrounding towns. Ellison however casts Manchester as unrepresentative of the whole of Lancashire and thus should not be taken into account when considering Lancashire's activity in supporting the Confederacy.¹⁹ This is a stance this paper does not support.

¹⁵ Tal, 83

¹⁶ Ellison, *Support for Succession*, 5.

¹⁷ Ibid, 32.

¹⁸ Ibid, 96.

¹⁹ Ellison, 5.

Just like Manning points out Union soldiers who do not support the emancipation and enfranchisement of African Americans, this does not discredit the whole argument that the Union Army after the Emancipation Proclamation is an army out to set slaves free. This introduces complexity to the issue and should not be ignored. Also, she seems to portray the people of Lancashire as helpless, only lashing out their aggressions with pen and paper, but ultimately passive. Given the actions of the Liverpoolians, that simply cannot be true. Even if one sets the funding of the *CSS Alabama* aside for a moment, this whole argument that Ellison crafts seems to suggest the weakness of the printed work, belittling her own argument that many in Lancashire were swayed by the clever words of propagandists from both North and South.

With this historiography, it is evident that there are deep connections between England and America during the time of the American Civil War. However, these secondary works do not go into what specific actions British citizens took part in to support the belligerents. In the next section, Lord Lyons' dispatches will elaborate on some motivations the British had for involving themselves in the American Civil War.

III. Political Dispatches

The dispatches of Richard Bickerton Pamell Lyons enlighten modern readers to Lyons' position as a messenger of information between the United States and Britain, but also with his complex role in maintaining neutrality and enforcing neutrality between the nations. Lyons, the main author of the Political Dispatches was Britain's "Envoy Extraordinary and Minister Plenipotentiary" to the United States.²⁰ He received his post in 1858 and did not leave until 1865. From his home in Washington, Lord Lyon carried out his primary mission of conveying up-to-date information with the British Government in London. Most often Lyons responded and reported to the British Foreign Secretary Earl Russell, though often times Lyons made mention of other British Consuls or foreign diplomats. On the whole, the 300 or so letters sent to England transmitted information about the rumblings of war and, as the war progressed, information about key battles. This was also interspersed with correspondence which illuminates the scope of British diplomatic interest into the American Civil War.

With war on the horizon, could there have been a guarantee of safety for British citizens once the North American continent, and soon the Atlantic Ocean, were at a state of war? This is just one of the many questions Lord Lyons deals

²⁰ James J. Barnes and Patience P. Barnes, *The American Civil War through British Eyes: Dispatches from British Diplomats, vol. 1, 1 November 1860- April 1862*, (Kent, Ohio: The Kent University Press, 2005), V.

with in his dispatches, trying to ensure that all subjects of Her Majesty, Queen Victoria, could be safe in the upcoming conflict. As South Carolina declared itself independent, Lyons wrote, not only to advise the Government how to treat this ‘new’ entity, but how to safeguard British subjects in this new territory should it fall under attack from Federal forces. Writing in December of 1860, Lyons viewed an outright attack on South Carolina as ‘morally impossible.’ He suggested in that case, perhaps some sort of military aid should be provided.²¹ “It might be desirable that A British Man of War should be at hand to afford [British Subjects] refuge,” he wrote.²² It is clear- that at this point in time, war seemed distant and unlikely, but even in the event Lyons was proven wrong, he still believed that the interest of the Crown should be protecting their own.

With the Union blockades on Southern ports newly in effect, measures had to be taken to protect ignorant sailors on British vessels. Lyons had to be assured that these vessels would be allowed to return home safely, without their crew or cargo damaged by Union men. At first Lyons suggested a squadron of British vessels be sent so as to protect British interests,²³ but was assuaged that this would not be necessary as his communications with Seward ensured the safety of British crews and vessels and cargos, so long as they were not acting as privateers.²⁴ As

²¹ Barnes, *Civil War through British Eyes*, vol1, dispatch 304, 7.

²² Ibid.

²³ Barnes, *Civil War through British Eyes*, vol. 1, dispatch 157, 64.

²⁴ Barnes, *Civil War through British Eyes*, vol. 1, dispatch 169, 70-3.

the war progressed, and some British ignored the embargo, Lyons also had to try to best secure their safety as well.

In one brief mention Lyons wrote that Lincoln's suspension of habeas corpus and his ability to put citizens in prison, with no rights or legal help whatsoever, appalled them.²⁵ So too did moments where states forced British or other alien citizens to participate in the conflict. As with one instance, Lyons mentioned after the collapse of Fort Pulaski, Lyons had to personally wrangle with officials to ensure that no British subject would be conscripted into any sort of military role, even if it were something as insignificant as a local militia.²⁶ The lives of individuals, however, were not the only concern of Lyons. Another pressing matter takes up a significant portion of Lyons' dispatches.

While the concern for British subjects appears time and time again, much of Lyons' correspondence deals with the rather critical issue of cotton flow to the UK. Letters back and forth are littered with references to the staple crop and its importance to trade between the two nations. From the very start, Lyons reported how the states in secession believed very heavily upon their cotton bargaining chip of and how this key staple would provide them leverage when gaining support from foreign powers.²⁷ Though Lyons seems to doubt cotton's sway, his

²⁵ Barnes, *Civil War through British Eyes*, vol. 3, dispatch 226, 22-23.

²⁶ Barnes, *Civil War through British Eyes*, vol. 2, dispatch 271, 22-3

²⁷ Barnes, *Civil War through British Eyes*, vol. 1, dispatch 317, 11-12.

writings show how firmly the states in secession believed in their staple crop. Even as the war dragged on, his letters still mentioned cotton being destroyed in Southern ports,²⁸ and cotton properties being disputed at the end of the war.²⁹

By extension, the cotton trade seems to inspire one of the most powerful images of British support for the Civil War on the side of the Confederacy: the building of the *CSS Alabama*. The *Alabama* is only mentioned briefly in Lyons' documentation, but it is by no means the only British-owned ship used to support the Confederacy. In 1861, the *Peerless* was seized by the Union- while possessing British papers and flying under British flags, because the Union believed it to have been sold to the Confederacy.³⁰ Other ships were used in a similar manner or simply broke the blockade. When talking about the *Alabama*, Lyons leaves much to the imagination. He knew it was a ship built by Britain, it was sailing and fighting for the Confederacy, and it should not have been doing that. To him it seemed to be just another ship in a whole unofficial fleet of ships breaking the Union blockade and trying to smuggle in and out needed goods.³¹ In more specific instances, it was at least partially to blame for some late-stage resentment felt by Americans as the war drew to a close.³²

²⁸ Barnes, *Civil War through British Eyes*, vol. 2, dispatch 177, 163-4.

²⁹ Barnes, *Civil War through British Eyes*, vol. 3, dispatch 397, 336.

³⁰ Barnes, *Civil War through British Eyes*, vol. 1, dispatch 171, 73-4.

³¹ Barnes, *Civil War through British Eyes*, vol. 3, dispatch 226, 25-6.

³² Barnes, *Civil War through British Eyes*, vol. 3, dispatch 403, 338.

Sadly, while the dispatches do not always go into the greatest of detail into all events and Lyons tries to navigate this role as messenger and advocate as well as he can. Lyons' perhaps does let a little of his own thoughts slip into one dispatch, recounting the news of yet another set of ships that had been accused of breaking the Union blockade to trade in southern ports. He laments and says 'we can no longer see these actions as neutral.'³³ This quote how the entirety of British involvement in the American Civil War can be viewed; not entirely neutral. While the Crown could prevent the entire country from joining the conflict, the private citizens could not always be stopped. As the dispatches demonstrate, the British had some legitimate reasons to be wary of the war in the United States. However, some incidents in Britain's recent history might also shed some light as to why and how the citizens of Northern England might voice their support for either side in the American Civil War.

³³ Barnes, *Civil War through British Eyes*, vol. 3, dispatch 308, 33.

IV. Proud Preston and the Plug Riots of 1842

The county seat of Lancashire is a town north of Manchester and Liverpool named Preston which serves as an example of not only why the Civil War was important to England's economy but also explains why the public took certain actions. In front of what is now a restaurant, a monument is dedicated to an event known as the Lune Street Riot, a civilian riot which local authorities suppressed with violent force. Three stone figures fall back as they are shot by a wall of four soldiers. Though seemingly unrelated to the conflict almost 20 years later, bloodshed in Preston and the larger Plug Riots of 1842 would have been in the minds of individuals as they watched the upcoming war across the Atlantic. And this riot in Preston, along with its outcome, may have pushed some toward a specific type of action.

Understanding the origins of the Plug Riots and greater General Strike of 1842 is necessary to understand their importance in regards to British support for the American Civil War. The General Strike of 1842 was a reaction by the workers of various industries—textiles, pottery, mining—in the north and middle of the country to political alienation. Due to an economic downturn, historians note wages to workers were cut several times in that year alone.³⁴ Chartists were

³⁴ William Lawrence, "British workers strike for better wages and political reform ("The Plug Plot Riots"), 1842," Global Nonviolent Action Database, accessed November 30th 2016.

demanding political rights for the working men of the under-represented industrial heartland of England, and this movement soon turned riotous when the subsequent petitions to the government failed.³⁵ Riots started by workers in Manchester quickly trickled out through the valleys and towns. It would reach a bloody culmination in the Preston in the summer of 1842. The events from that time are detailed in local newspapers like The Preston Chronicle. Angry workers in Preston forcibly closed down their factories – removing the steam plugs to the engines, hence the genesis of the riot’s name- and took to the streets on the morning of August 13th. Troops were called out at 8am. At the bottom of Lune Street, the wealthy mill-owning Mayor Samuel Horrocks and other prominent mill-owning officials read the men, women, and young children gathered in protest the Riot Act. The assembled crowd pelted him with stones and other small projectiles and other constable was even “struck a violent blow on the arm with a stick.”³⁶ The troops retreated and the order to fire was given –though it is unclear whether it was Mayor Horrocks or someone else who gave it- and in the aftermath eight were wounded, five mortally.³⁷ The Preston Strike was not the

<https://nvdatabase.swarthmore.edu/content/british-workers-strike-better-wages-and-political-reform-plug-plot-riots-1842> .

³⁵ “General Strike 1842”, Chartist Ancestors, September 27, 2017, accessed November 30, 2017, <http://www.chartistancestors.co.uk/general-strike-1842/>.

“Preston Riots; firing upon the people,” Preston Chronicle, August 13, 1842. Accessed November 30, 2017. <https://www.britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk/viewer/bl/0000099/18420813/040/0003>

³⁷ “The Riots at Preston” Preston Chronicle, August 20, 1842. Accessed November 30, 2017. <https://www.britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk/viewer/bl/0000099/18420820/017/0002>.

only instance where civilian deaths occurred in conjunction with a workers' revolt in this era but the violence was not wide spread. Nevertheless, the deed was done and just twenty years later mills across Northern England were being forced to close and their workers were unemployed. These circumstances may have led to the types of action to be discussed later in this paper.

Just as it is hard to form a consensus in American historiography as to the one cause for men to enlist, it is equally hard to determine one cause for British support for Americans in the Civil War. However, given the issues enumerated by Lord Lyons and the Plug Riots, the importance of American cotton to the industrial heartland of England is evident. Perhaps fears of a repeat of the 1840s loomed in some individuals' minds, but certainly the immediate impacts over the loss of cotton influenced some to support their financial interests. Others, however, used their voices to support liberty through public group demonstrations. These acts classify the type of support the towns of Liverpool and Manchester gave to America and they seem to be related to the outcome and nature of the General Strike and Plug Riots of the 1840s.

V: Liverpool: *Roll, Alabama, Roll* and the Fraser Trenholm Company

When the Alabama's keel was laid,
Roll, Alabama, roll.
It was laid in the yard of Jonathan Laird,
Oh, roll, Alabama, roll.

It was laid in the yard of Jonathan Laird,
Roll, Alabama, roll.
It was laid in the town of Birkenhead,
Oh, roll, Alabama, roll.

Down the Mersey ways she rolled then,
Roll, Alabama, roll.
Liverpool fitted her with guns and men,
Oh, roll, Alabama, roll.

From the Western Isles she sailed forth,
Roll, Alabama, roll.
To destroy the commerce of the North,
Oh, roll, Alabama, roll.

To Cherbourg port she sailed one day,
Roll, Alabama, roll.
To take her count of prize money,
Oh, roll, Alabama, roll.

Many a sailor he saw his doom,
Roll, Alabama, roll.
When the Kearsage hove in view,
Oh, roll, Alabama, roll.

A ball from the forward pivot that day,
Roll, Alabama, roll.
Shot the Alabama's stern away,
Oh, roll, Alabama, roll.

Off the three mile limit in '64,
Roll, Alabama, roll.
The Alabama sank to the ocean floor,
Oh, roll, Alabama, roll!³⁸

The *CSS Alabama* was one of the main ships of the Confederate Navy, her history is chronicled in the above song, and select stanzas illustrate her connections to the city of Liverpool as well as some of its citizens. Being neutral, the Crown never approved or supplied funds for the building of this or any other ships given over to the Confederacy. In early dispatches Lyons tries to get Seward to elaborate to what extent British could trade with both Union and Confederacy. While Seward's response was at times unclear, it was most

³⁸ *Roll, Alabama, Roll* (Special Collections, Marshall University, 2007) accessed November 11, 2016. http://www.marshall.edu/special-collections/css_alabama/anon_roll_alabama_roll.asp.

certainly clear that direct military aid could not be given to either side on the Crown's behalf. In Queen Victoria's own proclamation, she strictly forbade her Subjects from fighting or being recruited to fight. From the start however, the issue of funding ventures was a grey area. Thus, all funds used in the building and outfitting of the *CSS Alabama* were donated privately, by prominent Liverpudlians, and for a time not strictly forbidden.

*When the Alabama's keel was laid
Roll, Alabama, roll.
It was laid in the yard of Jonathan Laird,
Oh, roll, Alabama, roll.*

The *CSS Alabama* was built by John Laird Sons and Company but the contract was arranged and negotiated by the Fraser Trenholm Company. Fraser Trenholm Company was not only a commercial house that dealt greatly with cotton, but it also had other ties to the US South. The necessity for cotton would be desire enough, according to those who aligned themselves with the King Cotton Diplomacy theory, for the factory owners and other merchants of Liverpool to give aid in order to circumvent the blockade. According to American sources, five-sixths of all cotton Great Britain imported came from North America.³⁹ Much of that came through port cities like Liverpool, handled

³⁹ "England and the Cotton Supply," *The New York Times*, June 1, 1861, accessed November 11, 2016. <http://www.nytimes.com/1861/06/01/news/england-and-the-cotton-supply.html>.

by companies like Fraser Trenholm Company, and would then go on to be manufactured in towns and cities in the surrounding area. This, however, was perhaps not the only motivating factor for the Fraser Trenholm Company. In the specific instance of the *CSS Alabama*'s construction, the personal ties between individuals on both sides of the Atlantic can also provide an explanation as to why this company became so linked with the CSA.

While desire for cotton was high, and Liverpool served as a cotton import and export hub, the close personal and familial ties between the Frasier Trenholm Company and the newly created Confederate government provide another rationale as to why such a ship could be financed. At the time of the Civil War's outbreak, the senior partner of the Frasier Trenholm Company was Charles Prioleau. American-born and raised in Charleston, South Carolina, Prioleau immigrated to England. Upon the outbreak of war, Fraser Trenholm Company still had a US branch there. This US branch was led by George Trenholm, who became Secretary of the Treasury of the CSA in 1864. In 1865 he was arrested by Union forces and held at Fort Pulaski Prison for his involvement, along with others from the company and the Confederate Government, for financing the Confederate Navy.⁴⁰ Prioleau's involvement goes beyond just financing ventures

⁴⁰ Ethel Trenholm Seabrook Nepveux, "George A, Trenholm: Last Secretary of the Treasury" *Confederate Historical Association of Belgium*, accessed November 11, 2016. <http://www.chab-belgium.com/pdf/english/Trenholm.pdf>.

though. In his own personal letters, he had directly referenced his own ships being used to smuggle goods to the US South as well as deliberately running Union blockades and hoping to avoid capture by Union forces.⁴¹ Prioleau tried his best to work within the legal framework of the time in order to evade criminal implications, some of the same things that would later be done when the *CSS Alabama* was built and financed.

Liverpool fitted her with guns and men

While the country was neutral, there were laws and formalities about what aid could be given to countries at war. Lyons often remarked on these tensions between the Crown and both the Union and Confederate governments over recognition as well as extent of trade. The British were forbidden from giving direct aid to both sides, and the Union's blockade of Southern ports disrupted trade. However, Trenholm found loopholes. He discovered that technically a ship could be built, but not equipped with guns. Guns would be classified as giving direct military aid and thus violating neutrality. So the *CSS Alabama* was commissioned. From the start, its specifications were exactly the same as that of

⁴¹Charles K Proileau to Mr CH Moise, July 1 1862, in *Letterbook of Charles K Prioleau, 1862-1865*, accessed November 30, 2016. <http://www.liverpoolmuseums.org.uk/maritime/archive/displays/americancivilwar/letterbook-prioleau.aspx>.

a sloop of war, as seen in many of its original drawings.⁴² However, the ship was built in England but never fitted for guns while in the country. The ship was finished in the summer of 1862 and sailed to the Azores where it was modified to accept guns and then commanded by Captain Raphael Semmes and officially commissioned as a sloop of war on August 24th 1862. In 1864, the *CSS Alabama* made her final voyage. It was intercepted off the coast of Cherbourg, France where it was going to dry dock temporarily and instead was sunk by the *USS Kearsarge*.

The *CSS Alabama* became one of the most successful raiders in the Confederate's tiny fleet. In estimates after the war, the *CSS Alabama* was held accountable for the capture or seizure of 58 ships and helped sink close to 150 other ships by some estimates.⁴³ While her career was exceptional, she was just one in a Liverpool-backed fleet of ships that raided the Northern blockade. The Frasier Trenholm Company commissioned the *Hope* and the *Colonel Lamb* as blockade runners, and the Laird Shipyard would go on to build other vessels as well: the *Lark* and the *Wren*. These ships, along with the *Banshee* and *Florida* made up a bulk of the Confederate fleet, and would be evidence used against the

⁴² Image of ship, 1862, B/FP/5/3/214, Merseyside Maritime Museum, <http://www.liverpoolmuseums.org.uk/maritime/archive/displays/civilwarships/#museum>, accessed 11/16/2017.

⁴³Leslie Brown, "The Alabama Claims, 1862-1872," *CSS Alabama; A Virtual Exhibit*. accessed November 11, 2016. http://www.marshall.edu/special-collections/css_alabama/claims.asp.

British after the war when they were forced to pay war reparations for the damaged caused by these ships.⁴⁴ However, the combined damage wrought by ships like the *Alabama* did not accomplish the goals the Confederacy believed it would. The Union blockade was a joint effort between the US Navy and private individuals. The Confederacy hoped to raid enough private ships that the owners themselves would be less likely to venture out, or to drive insurance prices to such heights that doing so would be prohibitive. Neither of these events happened, however. The Union Blockade was unsuccessful in blocking all shipping traffic. Many ships were fast enough to sail past slower and more heavily-equipped ships. However, these ships were so small that the cargo they held was insignificant.

The *CSS Alabama* represents the international repercussions of the Civil War and the lengths desperate men and women were willing to go to in order to ensure their livelihoods. Those involved in the cotton markets (traders, shipping agents, mill owners, etc.) had a vested interest in the outcome of the Civil War. While maybe their home countries would wish to remain neutral, they could not. The *CSS Alabama* is just one instance where a select few individuals showed where their loyalties lay and is a physical manifestation of alliance. While politicians were speaking loftily about Democracy and Freedom and Liberty,

⁴⁴ "The Alabama Claims, 1862-1872."

merchants were speaking in terms of cold hard cash. However, this is not the only way people within the larger Lancashire county showed their support.

Among those in Lancashire, who chose to support the Confederacy, there seem to be two prime motives for why they choose to help finance the Confederacy. In case of the Trenholm family, it was personal and financial. Their financial interests as well as family were in the new Confederate States of America. To ensure their well-being they commissioned the construction of ships to help smuggle in war material and return the flow of cotton. However, Manchester, just miles away, is the antithesis of Liverpool. It too was a great center for cotton manufacturing, but unlike the wealthy of Liverpool, the working men of Manchester threw their moral support behind Lincoln and Liberty.

VI: Lincoln, Manchester, and Emancipation.

Juxtaposed with Liverpool and their pro-Confederate leanings, Manchester proved to be a bastion of pro-Union sentiment in Lancashire. Manchester, to this day, still retains signs of its support for Lincoln and Emancipation. The City Centre has a Lincoln Park with a statue dedicated to President Abraham Lincoln. Originally meant to go to London, the statue of Lincoln was erected almost a century ago in hopes to commemorate the connections between America and Great Britain. At the time, it was fitting not only to show that the US and the UK had seemingly buried the hatchet and forgotten the War of 1812.⁴⁵ However due to extenuating circumstances the statue was not formally put in its current position until after the Great War. The choice of subject matter –Lincoln, the great emancipator- and its location was not lost on the citizens of Manchester.⁴⁶ It harkened back to their role of not only supporting the American president but setting themselves apart from their neighbors who supported secession. While London still was the center of political and intellectual debate over the Civil War, Manchester was a strong hub for such discussion. Emancipation, Abolition, and Anti-slavery societies existed in the country from the time that England itself had

⁴⁵“George Grey Barnard Statue of Abraham Lincoln.” Waymarking, accessed April 26, 2017.http://www.waymarking.com/waymarks/WMDKDT_George_Grey_Barnard_Statue_of_Abr_aham_Lincoln_Manchester_UK

⁴⁶ Nimrod Tal, *The American Civil War in British Culture*, P83.

gone through its own slavery crisis. As the war broke out and Liverpool showed its support, the workers of Manchester fought back in their own way.

On the eve of the Emancipation Proclamation going into effect in the United States, the working men of Manchester assembled at the Free Trade Hall in the city center. The leaders of the group comprised of individuals like the Mayor of Manchester, T. Bazley, M.P., also self-identified working men like J.C. Edwards and E. Hooson. While the men there represented part of the official government, they made it clear that these men were assembled out of their own feelings towards the war. Mayor Heywood presided over the meeting to provide a sense of order, but he made it clear that he felt “an interest in the proceedings of the working men. I have felt an interest in their behalf during the whole of my life.”⁴⁷ He was taking up a role in an official capacity, as was fitting, but it was also out of his own interest which aligned with that of the founding members of the committee. The details of the meeting on December 31st, 1861 would be made known to the Americans in later months, but on this night the members of the society outlined their beliefs and rallied for support for their cause. First, the members aligned themselves with the Union, supporting its war goals of ending

⁴⁷ “ Address From Working Men to President Lincoln” Manchester Guardian, January 1st, 1863. Quoted in Hourani, B.A., Manchester and Abraham Lincoln: A side-light on earlier fight for freedom” (R. Aikman & Son: Manchester, 1900), 4.
https://archive.org/stream/manchesterabraha00hour/manchesterabraha00hour_djvu.txt

slavery and preserving the Union from the illegitimate Confederate government⁴⁸. The proclamation goes a step further, making allusions to other ways that their fellow countrymen had turned against the Crown and supported the Confederate government.

Although not directly referenced, the *CSS Alabama* and the widespread pro-Confederate propaganda acts of Liverpool are some of the main issues that the members of the Union and Emancipation Society are simultaneously outraged but also seeking to ameliorate with their own counter measures. The petitioners reaffirmed Britain's neutrality but their support for Union against the 'so-styled' or illegitimate Confederate government⁴⁹ and wanted to seek specific and direct action from the crown upon the '40 some odd ships' built in Liverpool. The petition also makes references to belligerents from the UK who are fighting for either side, but that reference is still not very direct. The petitioners also make a point of outlining their strength in numbers and their role in promulgating information based upon their beliefs of the nature of the start of the conflict as well as the aims of ending slavery. This may be a direct reference to the work of individuals such as James Spence. James Spence was a Liverpool based agent

⁴⁸ Thomas Bayley Potter, "The Protest from the Manchester Emancipation Society." *The New York Times*, April 12, 1863, accessed November 11, 2016. <http://www.nytimes.com/1863/04/12/news/protest-manchester-emancipation-society-honorable-commons-great-britain-ireland.html>.

⁴⁹ "The Protest from the Manchester Emancipation Society"

who wrote the *American Union*, a pro-Confederate work of propaganda that reframed the debate of the Civil War and gave legitimacy to the Confederate Government.

While this petition of appeal was directed at the Crown, President Lincoln did take notice himself. Lincoln, not writing to the members of the Union and Emancipation Society but, to the ‘working men of Manchester’ thanked them for their support and sacrifice due to the war’s effect upon them.⁵⁰ Echoing the sentiment expressed in the initial petitions for a return to neutrality and support for the Union, Lincoln cemented this bond that would be later recognized once the war was over.

⁵⁰ “Letter From President Lincoln to the Working-men of Manchester” *Manchester Guardian*, February 11th, 1863, Quoted in Hourani, B.A., *Manchester and Abraham Lincoln: A side-light on earlier fight for freedom* (R. Aikman & Son: Manchester, 1900), 10.

Conclusion and Synthesis:

This thesis was a result of seeming gaps in Civil War historiography and popular misconceptions about the American Civil War. First, the idea that the American Civil War is only pertinent to Americans. As many other historians have noted, the Civil War had far-reaching consequences, many of which were felt by England. Next, that other foreign powers did not give much material or moral support to Americans fighting this conflict. As shown in this project, even though the Crown officially made its position clear, its citizens took it upon themselves to be both vocally and actively supportive of both combatants, in complete disregard for Royal Proclamations. As shown by other authors and mass media such as television and internet sites, other nations too weighed in on the conflict.

In the context of Great Britain however, actions taken by private citizens (not government officials or officials acting under specific royal directives) have been scrutinized by other historians, but some have ignored key events, and others have forgone older historiography. This work has synthesized these various viewpoints to a more cohesive one, also drawing into context Britain's own history.

The historiography and this project examine different reasons why English subjects chose to throw their support behind either combatant in the American Civil War. This project agrees with stances taken by Dubrulle and Ellison, that

factors such as the inherent governmental differences between England and America, the slow death of the Abolition movement, and a shifting towards more American racial views lead some individuals to side with the Confederacy, while commitment to government and humans rights prevented others from doing so and thus they sided with the Union. This is where the history of England steps in and the role of Preston and the Plug Riots becomes more pronounced. It explains why simultaneously both Liverpool and Manchester can have such differing views and actions. Liverpool supported the South for cotton, its industrial necessity. These mill owners and other individuals with ties to cotton knew what would happen if their mills closed for good, not only would they be at a loss but their workers could rise up like they had no more than 20 years ago. However, in Manchester, these workers with their newfound voice and rights, took the onus on themselves to evaluate the actions of their fellow countrymen and pen the president.

As with the extended manuscripts like Mary Ellison and Chandra Manning's, these historians could afford to delve deep into the personal writings of scores of individuals to tease out a general consensus or pattern of thought and activity for either their support of the Confederate Government or for their reasons to enlist and fight in the Union and Confederate Army. This project did

not have that luxury, nor did it seem like a necessary course of study given the works that had already come before. Discovering motivation was not the goal of this research project. It was, rather, to uncover stories and actions that had been overlooked and connect them back to a greater narrative. On one level Great Britain was a neutral entity in the American Civil War. On another, Great Britain was far from neutral in thought or deed. It would have been easy, like Mary Ellison did, to categorize that the educated and philosophical South –the areas around London and its government- supported Lincoln, while the rural and industrial North supported Davis. Indeed, this does work to some extent, but as my research has shown, Manchester stands apart from the other major cities in Lancashire and disrupts this notion that Ellison put forth. Northern England indeed did not toe the line and follow the Crown’s position of neutrality. However, not all of Northern England threw their support behind Davis. It cannot, nor should it, be said that Manchester was ‘loyal’ to the rest of Britain and followed the ‘right’, because that places inherent value judgements on those who supported the other and makes the Union seem like it is the morally superior choice, when it did not always act in such a way.

For the purposes of this paper, actions represent motivation. In the case with Liverpool, the men who took most responsibility for financing the Confederate Navy did have personal ties to the confederate government, but also too had an invested interest in the South winning the war or at least gaining oceanic control. Cotton not only fed the mills, but was shipped to Liverpool as raw materials that profited the city. A lack of cotton meant cotton shortages, cotton shortages meant less labor for the workers and potential or eventual mill closures. The latter would most certainly mean financial ruin for the owners and those that profited from the finished goods, but this also could mean an uprising in the workers and another round of riots like those in the 1840's. Manchester, however, was not as motivated by self-interest as Liverpool. The working class used their political voice – gained in some part by these riots- to openly and peacefully gather, expressing their opinions. They aligned themselves with Lincoln's cause and simultaneously remove themselves from their fellows in Liverpool.

However, the actions taken by Manchester and Liverpool does not necessitate that they are ideologically one with the Union or The Confederacy. As stated by Dubrulle, the Civil War and the 1865 Jamaican Revolution are key places where some argue that British attitudes towards race seem to mimic American ones. By the time of the American Civil War, the abolition movement

was much weaker across the Atlantic. For some this might be the point where they begin to equate Northern England with the American South and make ideological comparisons. That would of course be erroneous and is not a subject with which this paper will not deal. American and British views on race are inherently different and the two cannot be conflated. The British never developed the extreme segregation the Americans had, even in Northern cities. Also, the refining of this question down to the point that race or racial prejudice is the motivating principle for the American Civil War is not only hard to prove, but once again placing modern value judgments on 19th century events.

In the end, this paper brings back the importance that Owsley and Beckert see in King Cotton Diplomacy but tempers it. The impending crisis had political as well as economic impact for the people of Britain. Politically, the conflict represented a test of democratic values and the global struggles for human rights. Economically, the war presented a potential immediate peril. This economic struggle was felt more strongly in the north due to their high dependence on the staple of American cotton. Dependency on foreign grown cotton, along with the shifting sentiments over abolition, distance from London, in tandem with connections to the Confederate Government pushed Liverpoolians to action. But these views are not homogeneous, for Manchester acted on its own accord to support Lincoln. Even though the abolition movement was a 60 year-old issue by the time the Civil War broke out, the working class of Manchester still had strong

feelings of fraternity towards all mankind and threw their moral support to not just Lincoln but his endeavor to free the slaves. In the end, King Cotton was not as strong as the Confederate's might have hoped to win over all of Britain. Even with strong sentiments towards human rights swaying many, the Crown decided, perhaps wisely, to keep officially neutral in the conflict - even when her subjects acted otherwise.

In the future, other avenues of study into this complex relationship between the British and the American Civil War could be opened and prompt further research. In the Union Army and among Irish Americans there is a proud history of those who fought for Lincoln. Many Civil War songs were in fact based on Irish shanties and other tunes. Just as *Roll, Alabama, Roll* marks the journey of a Confederate ship, their lyrics might hold clues to the motivation and rationale for the Irish immigrants or Irish Americans to take up arms and join Lincoln's Army.

Just as the Trenholme family was connected to the Southern government, other individuals in England might also have found themselves similarly motivated to help either cause. This could potentially be as high reaching as the owner of a company, or an Irish immigrant telling his family on the Old Country about his time in the Union or Confederate army. Diplomats like Lord Lyons, of course, were not the only people sending back correspondence to England, and

the letters of these individuals might shed light on some questions historians still have about the American Civil War.

Another venture this paper did not have time to deeply explore was a name that often popped up due to his connections with Liverpool; James Spence. Spence was responsible for his own Pro-Confederate propaganda circle based out of Liverpool and due to the narrow subject of this paper careful analysis of his life and works, as well as many others who had periphery connections to the Frasier Trenholme Company, were omitted from its main body. Given more time and access to personal records, the actions and motivations of those individuals could prove to deepen or challenge American understanding of the Civil War.

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