

Introduction

Civil War, Nation-Building, and Agrarian Unrest in the Confederate South and Southern Italy – A Comparative Perspective

In the early months of 1861, two fortresses, both near a major port-city in the midst of a revolution, but thousands of miles apart from one another – one in America, the other in Italy – were under siege. In April of that year, at Fort Sumter, at the entrance of Charleston harbor, General Robert Anderson's U.S. army contingent was attacked and overwhelmed by the South Carolina militia of the newly formed Confederate States of America under the command of General P. T. Beauregard. Two months earlier and a continent away, in February 1861, at the fortress of Gaeta, close to the bay of Naples, Bourbon King Francis II's soldiers were defeated as a result of ruthless shelling by General Enrico Cialdini's Piedmontese troops, soon to become part of the army of the recently unified Kingdom of Italy. Although happening in two different parts of the world, these two sieges had some important features in common. To begin with, they both occurred in a southern region, one in the American South, the other in southern Italy, or the *Mezzogiorno*. More importantly, they both had enormous symbolic and practical significance as foundational acts for the birth of a new nation-state: the Confederate States of America, or Confederacy, in one case, and the Kingdom of Italy in the other. In America, Beauregard's victory over the U.S. army at Fort Sumter simultaneously eliminated the last significant remnants of Federal presence in the south and strengthened the new Confederate nation, as four Southern states joined the secession movement already underway in seven states in the Lower South and left the American Union as a result of the siege. On the other hand, in Italy, Cialdini's conquest of Gaeta represented the defeat of the last major resistance by the army of the Bourbon Kingdom of the Two Sicilies against the movement for Italian national unification, and resulted

in the exile of Bourbon King Francis II and the annexation of the *Mezzogiorno* to the Italian Kingdom.¹

Even though the siege of Fort Sumter was much shorter than the one at Gaeta, the leadup to the event and the political and military crisis related to it were longer. It all started when the state of South Carolina proclaimed its secession from the Union on December 20, 1860; as a result, all Federal military installations in South Carolina were regarded with hostility. After General Anderson secretly relocated with his 1st U.S. artillery to the still unfinished Fort Sumter on December 26, 1860, South Carolina Governor George Pickens demanded from President Buchanan its immediate evacuation, to no avail. Instead, on January 9, 1861, fire from the Charleston citadel prevented the U.S. steamer *Star of the West* from bringing food and supplies to Anderson and his 127 men, who were by now completely surrounded by the batteries arranged by Beauregard. Stalemate ensued, as Buchanan decided not to act and instead to let president-elect Abraham Lincoln deal with the crisis while Anderson's contingent ran short on supplies. After Lincoln was installed, on March 4, he faced a potentially explosive crisis and decided to notify Pickens of his intention to send a fleet to resupply Fort Sumter, knowing that the Confederates would have taken his decision as an act of war. In fact, this led to Beauregard's ultimatum to Anderson, and, after the latter's refusal to surrender, to the ensuing Confederate attack with heavy artillery bombardment on April 12. By April 14, the Battle of Fort Sumter was over, with the surrender of the U.S. military garrison and the victory of Beauregard's Confederate forces. As a direct consequence of the battle's outcome, Lincoln issued a call for 75,000 volunteers in preparation for the upcoming Civil War, while 4 Upper South states, including Virginia, joined the original 7 seceding states in the Lower South in breaking from the Union and forming the Confederate nation.²

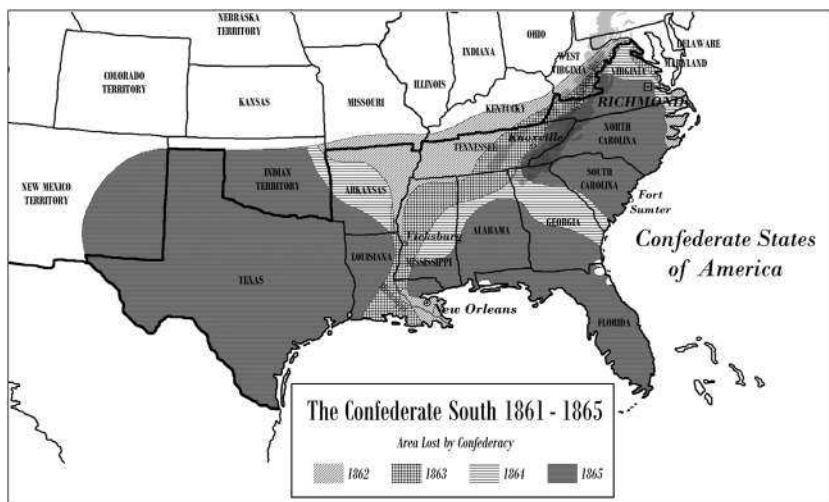
¹ On some of these issues, see Enrico Dal Lago, *The Age of Lincoln and Cavour: Comparative Perspectives on American and Italian Nation-Building* (New York: Palgrave, 2015), pp. 123–40; and Anthony Shugaar, “Italy's Own Lost Cause,” *New York Times*, May 2, 2012.

² On the siege of Fort Sumter, its background, and its consequences, see especially Adam Goodheart, *1861: The Civil War Awakening* (New York: Vintage, 2011), pp. 135–84; Shearer Davis Bowman, *At the Precipice: Americans North and South during the Secession Crisis* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2010), pp. 261–88; William W. Freehling, *The Road to Disunion*, vol. II: *Secessionists Triumphant, 1854–1861* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), pp. 520–4; David Potter, *The Impending Crisis, 1848–1861* (New York: Harper and Row, 1976), pp. 545–83.

Similar to Fort Sumter, the siege of Gaeta was also a defining act in a process of nation-building; significantly, it was also a major confrontation aiming at crushing the last surviving military presence of a former nation and asserting complete territorial control in the name of a new national government. One important difference, though, is that it occurred on a much larger scale, since the fortress of Gaeta was the last refuge of a large contingent of Bourbon troops – *ca.* 16,000 – which had accompanied King Francis II when he fled from Naples as Giuseppe Garibaldi approached the city in September 1860, in the process that led to Italian national unification. After taking one last stand at the Battle of Volturno, where they were defeated by Garibaldi, on October 1, 1860, the Bourbon troops retreated to Gaeta, where Cialdini and his Piedmontese troops began the siege on November 13, mostly conducting it through continuous shelling with little care for the civilians living in the town. On December 8, Piedmontese and Bourbons reached a temporary truce as a result of pressure from French Emperor Napoleon III, but this only lasted five days, and shortly afterward, a typhus epidemic broke out within the fortress. A new truce followed on January 8, 1861, but ended eleven days later, after Francis II's refusal to surrender. Between January 22 and February 13, Cialdini's shelling intensified, leading to an increasingly large toll of dead and wounded Bourbon soldiers and civilians. Finally, on February 14, the siege concluded with Francis II's surrender and his subsequent exile, and with a final death toll of almost 1,000 dead on the two sides. As a direct result of Cialdini's victory at Gaeta, the last territory ruled by the Bourbon king of the Two Sicilies ceased to exist, and the entirety of the *Mezzogiorno* – aside from the two fortresses of Messina and Civitella del Tronto – was annexed to the Kingdom of Italy.³

In one particularly important respect, the sieges of Fort Sumter and Gaeta are comparable and relate directly to the subject of the present book. They were both events that sparked civil wars, both occurring in the period 1861–5. In fact, while U.S. scholars consider the Confederates' taking Fort Sumter as the first battle in the American Civil War, Italian scholars see a link between the Bourbon defeat at Gaeta and the beginning

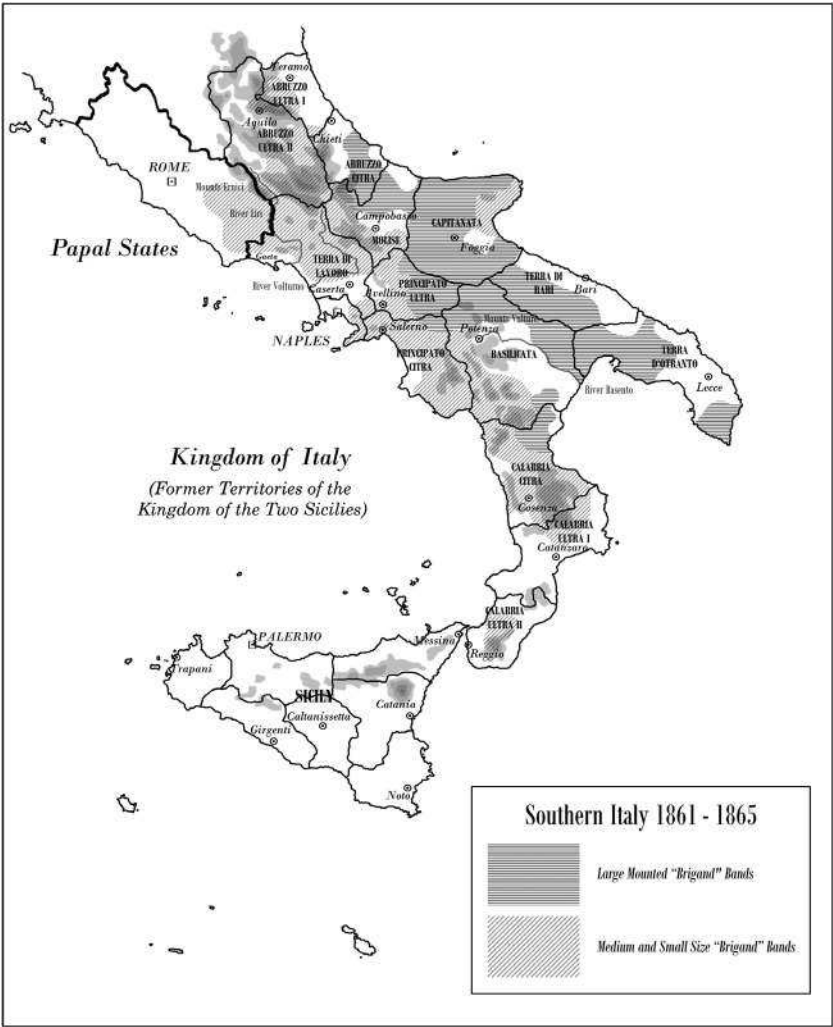
³ On the siege of Gaeta, its background and its consequences, see especially Roberto Martucci, *L'invenzione dell'Italia unita, 1855–1864* (Florence: Sansoni, 1999), pp. 189–201; Simon Sarlin, *Le légitimisme en armes. Histoire d'une mobilisation internationale contre l'unité italienne* (Rome: École Française de Rome, 2013), pp. 194–203; Gigi Di Fiore, *I vinti del Risorgimento. Storia e storie di chi combatté per i Borbone di Napoli* (Turin: UTET, 2004), pp. 167–200; Gigi Di Fiore, *Gli ultimi giorni di Gaeta. L'assedio che condannò l'Italia all'Unità* (Milan: Rizzoli, 2010).



MAP 1: The Confederate South, 1861-1865

of Italy's first civil war, known as the "Great Brigandage." Both civil wars were fought either largely or exclusively on southern soil, and both involved different groups of Southerners with different and conflicting loyalties with regard to national affiliation, so that it is possible to say that in both cases an "inner civil war" occurred between southerners and southerners within a south – in one case, the Confederate South (see Map 1); in the other, southern Italy (see Map 2).⁴ In this respect, thus, the events at Fort Sumter and Gaeta and the reactions to them are emblematic of the internal divisions within the two southern regions that would characterize the two inner civil wars – one between Unionists and Confederates, the other between pro-Bourbons and pro-Italians. At the same time, though, the divisions between opposing and conflicting national affiliations cut across even deeper separations in racial and class terms in the Confederate South, and in class terms in southern Italy. Thus, the nature of the inner civil wars in the two southern regions related also to other, equally important, elements represented by the crucial roles

⁴ On the concept of "inner civil war," see, for the Confederate South, Eric Foner, *Reconstruction: America's Unfinished Revolution* (New York: Harper & Row, 1988), pp. 11-18 and, especially, David Williams, *Bitterly Divided: The South's Inner Civil War* (New York: The New Press, 2013). For a comparable idea with regard to the Italian *Mezzogiorno*, see particularly Salvatore Lupo, *L'unificazione italiana. Mezzogiorno, rivoluzione, guerra civile* (Rome: Donzelli, 2011).



MAP 2: Southern Italy, 1861-1865

played by the exploited agrarian masses – specifically, Southern slaves and southern Italian peasants – in supporting the established national institutions – i.e., the Union and the Bourbon monarchy – in their wars against the newly established nations – the Confederacy in one case, and the Italian Kingdom in the other.⁵

⁵ On these issues, see Dal Lago, *Age of Lincoln and Cavour*, pp. 141-64.

Starting from these premises, my aim in the present book is to provide a sustained comparative study of the inner civil wars that occurred in the Confederate South and southern Italy in 1861–5 along the lines just described. As modern scholarship on nationalism has shown, nineteenth-century nations were steeped in an “invention of tradition,” and they were mostly born in war and revolution.⁶ As new nations, both formed in 1861, the Confederacy and the Italian Kingdom were no exception to this pattern: They both forged their “invented tradition” of nationality in the midst of military events that accelerated the process of nation building by rallying against a common enemy, while they also risked being torn apart if that enemy proved to be stronger. Clearly, there is a great deal of difference between, on one hand, the Confederacy’s war on a continental scale against the stronger and more industrialized Union, and also its simultaneous efforts to deal with opposition from within, and on the other, the Italian Kingdom’s regional war – conducted within its territories in the south, and from a far stronger position than that of its internal enemy, though with little difference between northern and southern Italy in terms of industrialization. Yet, at the heart of my study are two parallel and comparable phenomena of internal dissent, which, regardless of differences in terms of scale and coexistence with, or absence of, large pitched battles, proved to be the ultimate defining tests for the survival of two newly formed nations. It is important to reflect on the odds that allowed the survival of new national institutions in the nineteenth century, since, despite the fact that the nineteenth century was the “age of nationalism,” not all nineteenth-century nationalist experiments survived. At the same time, virtually all the nations that came into being during that period – whether they disappeared after a short time, or managed to adapt and live on through structural transformations – were plagued by one form or another of internal dissent. Therefore, investigating internal dissent in newly formed nineteenth-century nations such as the Confederacy and the Italian Kingdom is equivalent to trying to understand why certain nineteenth-century nations survived and others did not.⁷

⁶ On the “invention of tradition,” see Eric J. Hobsbawm, “Introduction: Inventing traditions” in Eric J. Hobsbawm and Terence N. Ranger (eds.), *The Invention of Tradition* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), pp. 1–14.

⁷ On modern scholarship on nineteenth-century nationalism, see especially Hobsbawm, “Introduction,” pp. 1–14; Ernest Gellner, *Nations and Nationalism* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1983); Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origins and Spread of Nationalism* (London: Verso, 1983); Eric J. Hobsbawm, *Nations and Nationalism since 1780: Programme, Myth, Reality* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990); John

In short, the central question I have investigated in writing the present book is the following: How did nineteenth-century newly formed nations cope with internal dissent, and how crucial was the role played by the latter in threatening the survival of those new nations, to the point of bringing about their collapse? To answer this question, I have focused on the Confederate South and southern Italy in the civil war years 1861–5, because the Confederacy and the Italian Kingdom provide a perfect example of what Theda Skocpol and Margaret Somers have termed a “contrast of contexts.” In practice, the two nations’ different contextual histories, the different processes of nation-building, and, above all, their completely opposite historical trajectories – one of disappearance, in the case of the Confederacy, and the other of survival, in the case of the Italian Kingdom – render them particularly intriguing case studies for a historical comparison, with each therefore liable to shed new light on the other’s case. Thus, while in previous studies I have at times attempted to adopt a mixed comparative/transnational approach to historical investigation, in the present book I have opted for an exclusively comparative historical methodology, since I believe that, by engaging in a sustained comparison of the different varieties of internal dissent that generated “inner civil wars” in the Confederate South during the American Civil War and in southern Italy in the years of the Great Brigandage, it is possible to offer an important contribution toward answering the reasons for the survival or disappearance of new nations in the course of the nineteenth century. At the same time, in contributing to this particular historical problem, I have also sought to provide, through this specific comparison, a possible model for future studies that might focus on comparing the reasons for the divergent historical trajectories of other newly formed nation states in the nineteenth-century Euro-American world.⁸

Methodologically, for the most part, in the present book I have used a “rigorous” approach to the comparative history of the Confederate South in the American Civil War and southern Italy at the time of the Great Brigandage. According to Peter Kolchin, “rigorous comparative analysis” is a historical method in which two or more cases are the object of a

Breuilly, *Nationalism and the State* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1993); Lloyd Kramer, *Nationalism in Europe and America: Politics, Culture, and Identity since 1775* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2011).

⁸ See Theda Skocpol and Margaret Somers, “The use of comparative history in macro-social enquiry,” *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, 22 (1980), 174–97; Peter Kolchin, *A Sphinx on the American Land: The Nineteenth-Century South in Comparative Perspective* (Baton Rouge, LA: Louisiana State University Press, 2003), pp. 4–5.

systematic and sustained comparison aiming at highlighting their similarities and differences.⁹ There are currently relatively few examples of this methodological approach, mainly because of its difficulties; a great deal of them have been produced by scholars of comparative slavery, mostly in the Americas – a field recently revitalized by the important nuances coming from the scholarship on the “second slavery,” the collective name for the profit-oriented and capitalist-based slave systems that characterized the nineteenth-century U.S. South, Brazil, and Cuba, following Dale Tomich and others.¹⁰ Fewer “rigorous” comparative monographs have dealt with slave emancipation in the American South in comparative perspective; among those which have, especially notable are those by Eric Foner, Frederick Cooper, Thomas Holt, and Rebecca Scott.¹¹ There are also few “rigorous” comparative studies that have focused on comparison between economic, social, and political features of the American South and of specific regions of Europe, specifically slavery vs. free or unfree labor; those that exist include monographs by Peter Kolchin and Shearer Davis Bowman, and also my own work.¹² However, none of these studies has dealt specifically with the American South during the Civil War and other regions of the world at the same time, while only a very limited number have dealt with the American Civil War and a conflict in another country by employing a “rigorous” comparative perspective.¹³ At the

⁹ Kolchin, *A Sphinx on the American Land*, p. 75.

¹⁰ See especially Dale Tomich, *Through the Prism of Slavery: Labor, Capital, and the World Economy* (Lanham, MD: Rowan & Littlefield, 2004), pp. 56–74; Anthony Kaye, “The second slavery: modernity in the nineteenth-century South and the Atlantic world,” *Journal of Southern History*, 75(3) (2009), 627–50; Dale Tomich (ed.) *Slavery and Historical Capitalism during the Nineteenth Century* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2017).

¹¹ See Eric Foner, *Nothing but Freedom: Emancipation and Its Legacies* (Baton Rouge, LA: Louisiana State University Press, 1983); Frederick Cooper, Thomas Holt, and Rebecca Scott, *Beyond Slavery: Explorations of Race, Labor, and Citizenship in Postemancipation Societies* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2014); Rebecca Scott, *Degrees of Freedom: Louisiana and Cuba after Slavery* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2005). See also Sally Ann Stocksdale, “In the Midst of Liberation: A Comparison of a Russian Estate and a Southern Plantation at the Moment of Emancipation,” unpublished PhD thesis, University of Delaware (2016).

¹² Peter Kolchin, *Unfree Labor: American Slavery and Russian Serfdom* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press, 1987); Shearer Davis Bowman, *Masters and Lords: Mid-Nineteenth-Century U.S. Planters and Prussian Junkers* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993); Enrico Dal Lago, *Agrarian Elites: American Slaveholders and Southern Italian Landowners, 1815–1861* (Baton Rouge, LA: Louisiana State University Press, 2005).

¹³ For sustained comparative studies of the American Civil War and wars in other countries, see, most recently, Rajmoan Gandhi, *A Tale of Two Revolts: India's Mutiny and the American Civil War* (London: Haus, 2011); Paul D. Escott, *Uncommonly Savage: Civil*

same time, there is no comparative study that has focused on the Italian *Mezzogiorno* at the time of the Great Brigandage.

Thus, the present book is the first study of the American Civil War and Italy's Great Brigandage that utilizes a "rigorous" comparative approach throughout.¹⁴ In short, my methodological approach is focused specifically on the analysis of similarities and differences between the different factors involved in the two parallel processes of challenge to national consolidation that occurred in the inner civil wars that characterized the Confederate South and the Italian *Mezzogiorno* in the years 1861–5. In undertaking this analysis, I have relied specifically on the already cited comparative method of the "contrast of contexts" – a method whose aim is "to bring out the unique features of each particular case . . . and to show how these unique features affect the working out of putatively general social processes."¹⁵ I believe that investigating and understanding the specific challenges to nation building in the Confederate South during the American Civil War and in southern Italy at the time of the Great Brigandage is an exercise in the application of the methodology of "contrast of contexts" as Skocpol and Somers have defined it. This methodology is particularly apt for clarifying through a comparative perspective the actual meaning of concepts such as "civil war" and "agrarian rebellion," and the significance of their use in relation to the Confederate South and southern Italy in the years 1861–5, as will become evident in the course of the present book.¹⁶

War and Remembrance in Spain and the United States (Gainesville, FL: University of Florida Press, 2014); Vitor Izecksohn, *Slavery and War in the Americas: Race, Citizenship, and State Building in the United States and Brazil, 1861–1870* (Charlottesville, VA: University of Virginia Press, 2014).

¹⁴ A few scholars have hinted at a possible comparison along these lines. See Don H. Doyle, *Nations Divided: America, Italy, and the Southern Question* (Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 2002), p. 66; Salvatore Lupo, "Il Grande Brigantaggio. Interpretazione e memoria di una guerra civile" in Walter Barberis (ed.), *Storia d'Italia, Annali 18: Guerra e Pace* (Turin: Einaudi, 2002), pp. 465–504; Tiziano Bonazzi, "The USA, Italy, and the tribulations of the liberal nation" in Jörg Nagler, Don H. Doyle, and Marcus Gräser (eds.), *The Transnational Significance of the American Civil War* (New York: Palgrave, 2017), pp. 151–68. For studies that have looked more generally at Civil War America and nineteenth-century Italy in transnational and/or comparative perspective, see especially Paola Gemme, *Domesticating Foreign Struggles: The Italian Risorgimento and Antebellum American Identity* (Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 2005); Dal Lago, *The Age of Lincoln and Cavour*; and Axel Körner, *America in Italy: The United States in the Political Thought and Imagination of the Risorgimento, 1763–1865* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2017).

¹⁵ Skocpol and Somers, "The use of comparative history," 178.

¹⁶ For the most widely accepted definition of the concept of "civil war," see Stathis N. Kalyvas, "Civil wars" in Charles Boix and Susan C. Stokes (eds.), *The Oxford Handbook*

Looking at the period during which the American Civil War and the Great Brigandage took place from a broader perspective, we can clearly see that the decade of the 1860s was one of intense warfare in the entire Euro-American world, and often a type of warfare associated with processes of nation building. In their seminal 1996 study on “Global Violence and Nationalizing Wars in Eurasia and America,” Michael Geyer and Charles Bright dispelled the once popular notion of a peaceful nineteenth century following the catastrophic Napoleonic conflicts, and showed that, across the world, 112 wars were fought in the period 1840–80. A number of these wars were fought in Europe and the American hemisphere in the 1860s, and among the eight most costly wars of that forty-year period, three – the American Civil War (1861–5) and the War of the Triple Alliance (1864–70), recently compared by Vitor Izecksohn,¹⁷ and the Ten Years’ War between Cuba and Spain (1868–78) – were fought in the New World, the latter with the full involvement of a major European nation. Moreover, either national consolidation or nation-building were the prime causes behind those three wars, and this was also the case with other, smaller conflicts that occurred in the 1860s. These included, in Europe, the Wars of Italian National Unification (1859–70), the 1863–4 Polish Uprising, the Second Schleswig-Holstein War (1864), and the Prussian-Austrian War (1866) – the latter two both parts of the process of German National Unification – and in the Americas, the Franco-Mexican War (1862–7).¹⁸ Warfare in the 1860s Euro-American world,

of Comparative Politics (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), p. 417: “an armed combat taking place within the boundaries of a recognized sovereign entity between parties subject to a common authority at the outset of hostilities.” See also Stathis N. Kalyvas, *The Logic of Violence in Civil War* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006); David Armitage, *Civil Wars: A History in Ideas* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2017).

¹⁷ See Izecksohn, *Slavery and War in the Americas*, especially pp. 163–76.

¹⁸ See Michael Geyer and Charles Bright, “Global violence and nationalizing wars in Eurasia and America: the geopolitics of war in the mid-nineteenth century,” *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, 38(4) (1996), 619–57. On the wider context, see Jurgen Osterhammel, *The Transformation of the World: A Global History of the Nineteenth Century* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2014). Several recent edited collections, pioneered by Don Doyle, have placed the American Civil War within the transnational context of mid-nineteenth-century global warfare. See especially David T. Gleeson and Simon Lewis (eds.), *The Civil War as a Global Conflict: Transnational Meanings of the American Civil War* (Columbia, SC: University of South Carolina Press, 2014); Peter N. Stearns (ed.), *The American Civil War in a Global Context* (Richmond, VA: Virginia Sesquicentennial of the American Civil War Commission, 2014); Nagler, Doyle, and Gräser (eds.), *The Transnational Significance of the American Civil War*; Don H. Doyle (ed.), *American Civil Wars: The United States, Latin America, Europe, and the*