

Title!

**Research Question :3**

Meow

Word Count :3

# Contents

|                                            |          |
|--------------------------------------------|----------|
| <b>Contents</b>                            | <b>i</b> |
| <b>Section A</b>                           | <b>1</b> |
| <b>Section B</b>                           | <b>2</b> |
| B.1 The Lancashire Cotton Famine . . . . . | 4        |
| <b>Section C</b>                           | <b>5</b> |

## Section A

This paper seeks to investigate the question: *How did the Export of Southern Raw Cotton to Great Britain Influence Its Willingness to Recognize the Confederate States of America as a Sovereign Nation?*. It is well-known that the southern United States is a largely agrarian region of the nation, and further that the economy of these states has, since the colonial era, been heavily dependent on the exportation of various <cash crops>. Cotton, the crop with which the 19th century south is most associated, became the staple export of the region, and indeed may be argued to have kick-started or at least supported the lucrative textile industry of Great Britain. In this paper I examine the economic codependency of the Antebellum South (and subsequently the of the Confederate States of America [CSA]) with Great Britain, and the effects of this relationship on the prospect of the British Parliament's diplomatic recognition of the CSA as a sovereign nation. To do this, I shall rely on the vast contemporary records of exports and manufactures, the body of post- contemporary literature regarding the relations of both nations, and the large base of correspondences and personal records of those involved.

A source that shall be relied upon heavily in assessing the economic reliance of the Antebellum South on cotton in the decades leading up to the war is Douglass C. North's *The Economic Growth of the United States 1790 - 1860* (1966). In this book, North argues that the critical period of economic development in the United States, contrary to the accepted narrative at the time, which supposed it to have taken place in the reconstruction era or later, in fact occurred between the years 1790 and 1860. Though this argument is outside the scope of this paper, it should be noted that this source is far from modern, and is likely to include some outdated information or analysis, as is the nature of the field. The work has, however, maintained relevance into recent years through the fact that it provides vast quantities of data, compiled from various other sources, regarding the economic state of the nation, and specifically the South, which are readily available for analysis and interpretation.

For contemporary reference on the diplomatic affairs of the CSA with Great Britain during the Civil War, I have found *The Messages and Papers of Jefferson Davis and the Confederacy, Including Diplomatic Correspondence, 1861-1865* to be an excellent primary account of the Confederate perception of diplomatic prospects in Great Britain. This source provides a near-comprehensive record of the reports sent from the ambassadors of the CSA in Britain and received by the officials of the nation. The value of this source is difficult to understate, as it provides ample contemporary evidence for the state of affairs between the two parties on which this paper shall focus, and further contains much reference to the role of cotton in these

affairs. The obvious limitation of this source comes from the fact that, though skilled diplomats, the authors of the letters and reports contained within the source were heavily biased towards the Confederacy, and as such their perception of the prospect of British intervention often failed to reflect the truth of the matter.

## Section B

<sup>1</sup> On the eve of the American Civil War, U.S. cotton accounted for over 88% of the cotton imported into Great Britain.<sup>2</sup> This cotton was, as noted by Joseph Inikori, the key to the English economy in the mid-19th century:

Indeed, «the Industrial Revolution» in England, in the strict sense of the phrase, is little more than a revolution in [...] cotton textile production.<sup>3</sup>

On the other side of the Atlantic, in the continental United States, in the time leading up to the war, the amount and value of exported goods skyrocketed, and, though by 1860 the percentage of the total value of exports that cotton represented was lower than it had been in 1851, it was at an all-time high in terms of dollar-value (Figure B.i). The importance of this economic relationship for the Confederate cause was not lost on the rebelling sates, and unquestionably played a significant role in their foreign policy towards England throughout the course of the war. However, the extent to which this was an effective diplomatic strategy is not comparably evident, and is the central focus of this investigation.

In terms of end goals, the CSA had two when it came to diplomacy with the English: (1) an official recognition of the sovereignty of the nation, with the understanding that this would lead to mediation of the conflict by Britain, and (2) the removal of the Union naval blockade on Southern ports.<sup>4</sup> It is the latter issue's nature terms of international law, and effects on the cotton exports of the south, that would play the most significant role in the Anglo-Confederate relations during the early war, as it presented a goal which was «much more likely to be obtained within a reasonable time» than recognition.<sup>5</sup> Though this issue does

---

1. Data in Figure B.i: Total exports: U.S. Congress House of Representatives, *H. Misc. Doc. no. 49* (48th Cong., 1st. sess., 1884), Part 2, Table 2; Cotton exports: Douglass Cecil North, *The Economic Growth of the United States 1790 - 1860*, The Norton Library 346 (New York: Norton, 1966), Table A-III, ISBN: 978-0-393-00346-8.

2. Ronald Bailey, «The Other Side of Slavery: Black Labor, Cotton, and Textile Industrialization in Great Britain and the United States», *Agricultural History* 68, no. 2 (1994): 40, ISSN: 00021482, 15338290, accessed November 1, 2024, JSTOR: 3744401, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3744401>.

3. Joseph Inikori, *The Slave Trade and Revolution in Cotton Textile Production in England*, quoted in Bailey, 40.

4. James McPherson, *Battle Cry of Freedom: The Civil War Era* (Oxford University Press, 1988), 383; W.L. Yancey and A. Dudley Mann to Secretary of State R. Toombs, July 15, 1861, in: Allan Nevins and James D. Richardson, eds., *The Messages and Papers of Jefferson Davis and the Confederacy, Including Diplomatic Correspondence, 1861-1865*, vol. II (New York, Chelsea House-R. Hector, 1966), 45, <http://archive.org/details/messagespapersof02conf>.

5. John Slidell to Secretary of State R.M.T. Hunter, September 26, 1862, in: Nevins and Richardson, *The Messages and Papers of Jefferson Davis and the Confederacy, Including Diplomatic Correspondence, 1861-1865*, 187.

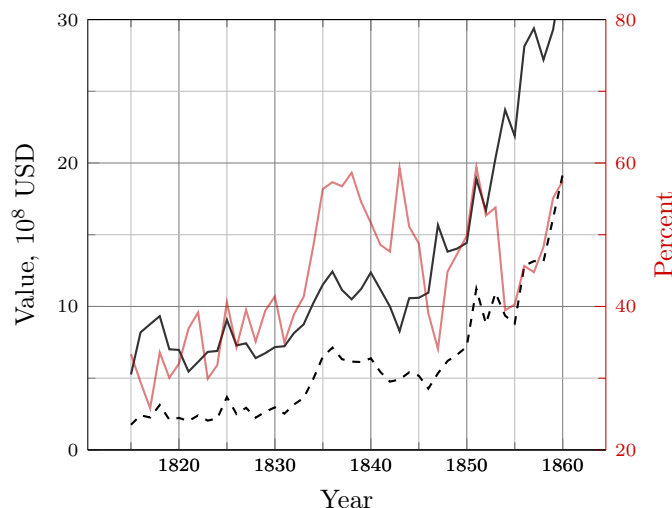


Figure B.i: Total value of exports from the United States (—) and total value of raw cotton exports (- -); Percentage of total value of U.S. exports coming from cotton (—).

not directly relate of the answer of the question regarding the role of cotton in the recognition of the CSA as sovereign by the English, it does shed light on a crucial, yet heretofore non-established, piece of this investigation: the importance of cotton in Anglo-Confederate diplomacy.

Indeed, the main tactic employed by southern diplomats in attempting to secure British condemnation of the blockade was a stressing of the English dependence on the south's cotton exports. This emphasis was reciprocated by some members of the Parliament, the most influential of whom was the Lord John Russell, although during the time of the blockade issue he did not yet firmly hold that an interventionist policy should be that of Whitehall: «It will not do for England and France to break a blockade for the sake of getting cotton».<sup>6</sup> The discourse regarding intervention in the blockade during these years developed a precedent for the relations of the two powers, made explicit by Prime Minister Palmerston in his response to Russell,

[...] the want for cotton would not justify such a proceeding, unless, indeed, the distress created by that want was far more serious than it is likely to be.<sup>7</sup>

6. Russell to Palmerston, quoted in Ephraim Douglass Adams, *Great Britain and the American Civil War*, II vols. (Longmans, Green & Co. Ltd., 1925), Vol.I, p.199. There are two possible readings of what Russell said here, resting on one's interpretation of the phrase "It will not do". I have chosen to understand it, as I believe fits most reasonably within the context of the quote, as indicative of Russell's reservations regarding the breaking of the blockade, rather than a feeling that this action does not go far enough.

7. Adams, Vol.I, p.199.

## B.1 The Lancashire Cotton Famine

The Prime Minister’s assertion of the relatively low want for cotton caused by the blockade would, in the late months of 1862, be challenged. Around this time, what is referred to as the ‘Lancashire cotton famine’ was beginning to take hold, and this event is to be the arena in which any serious evaluation of the role of cotton in British recognition of the CSA is to be truly tested. The famine (referred to as such due to the lack of cotton supply, rather than any true mass starvation event) has been extensively covered by numerous works, and there exists a large corpus addressing its origins and implications for the economy, but the interpretation of these seems to greatly differ across sources.

An accepted view of the cotton famine may be found in Arnold, *The History of the Cotton Famine, From the Fall of Sumter to the Passing of the Public Works Act*, a generally accepted work detailing the event, and which presents a picture of a rapidly stagnating goods market in Lancashire.<sup>8</sup> The all-time highs reached by cotton imports in the 1859-60 fiscal years, which were an attempt to correct for the lack of production by the English textile manufacturing industries caused by the mild economic depression in the mid 1850s (reflected in the dip in exports in the same period of Figure B.i), were, in many respects, an overcompensation. The demand for the goods produced by these mills, mostly coming from the far-eastern markets, was vastly overestimated, and as a result the start of the war saw a record surplus of cotton sitting idle in British harbors.

The great surplus of cotton was quickly turned into a great surplus of cotton-derived goods, which would not be released onto the market until the eventual increase in demand in 1863. The period of frantic production and establishment of new mills was, by late 1861, at an end, and this naturally led to a contraction of the Lancashire operative population (500-600 thousand<sup>9</sup>). This contraction of the operative labor force led to a sharp increase of people in need of social safety, through ‘poor relief’,<sup>10</sup> as well as to a large mass of former industrial workers migrating to non-industrial districts.<sup>11</sup> Moreover, an increased rate of mortality in the districts affected by the cotton famine, as reported by Arthi, Beach, and Hanlon, “Recessions, mortality, and migration bias: Evidence from the Lancashire cotton famine,” added more attention to the war, due to the (somewhat erroneous) English attribution of much of the blame for the downturn on the Union<sup>12</sup> —If there were any time in which the Parliament were to feel a great enough pressure from the English

8. Arnold, *The History of the Cotton Famine, From the Fall of Sumter to the Passing of the Public Works Act*, 78.

9. Adams, *Great Britain and the American Civil War*, Vol.II, p.13.

10. Adams, Vol.II, p.12.

11. Vellore Arthi, Brian Beach, and W Walker Hanlon, “Recessions, mortality, and migration bias: Evidence from the Lancashire cotton famine,” *American Economic Journal: Applied Economics* 14, no. 2 (2022): 228–255.

12. Arnold, *The History of the Cotton Famine, From the Fall of Sumter to the Passing of the Public Works Act*, 229.

working-class to prompt their willingness to intervene in the American Civil War, it would have been this stage in the cotton famine.

## Section C

### References

- Adams, Ephraim Douglass. *Great Britain and the American Civil War*. II vols. Longmans, Green & Co. Ltd., 1925.
- Arnold, R. Arthur. *The History of the Cotton Famine, From the Fall of Sumter to the Passing of the Public Works Act*. London, Saunders, Otley, and Co., 1864.
- Arthi, Vellore, Brian Beach, and W Walker Hanlon. “Recessions, mortality, and migration bias: Evidence from the Lancashire cotton famine.” *American Economic Journal: Applied Economics* 14, no. 2 (2022): 228–255.
- Bailey, Ronald. “The Other Side of Slavery: Black Labor, Cotton, and Textile Industrialization in Great Britain and the United States.” *Agricultural History* 68, no. 2 (1994): 35–50. ISSN: 00021482, 15338290, accessed November 1, 2024. JSTOR: [3744401](https://www.jstor.org/stable/3744401). <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3744401>.
- House of Representatives, U.S. Congress. *H. Misc. Doc. no. 49*. 48th Cong., 1st. sess., 1884.
- McPherson, James. *Battle Cry of Freedom: The Civil War Era*. Oxford University Press, 1988.
- Nevins, Allan, and James D. Richardson, eds. *The Messages and Papers of Jefferson Davis and the Confederacy, Including Diplomatic Correspondence, 1861-1865*. Vol. II. New York, Chelsea House-R. Hector, 1966. <http://archive.org/details/messagespapersof02conf>.
- North, Douglass Cecil. *The Economic Growth of the United States 1790 - 1860*. The Norton Library 346. New York: Norton, 1966. ISBN: 978-0-393-00346-8.