‘Negrophilist’ Crusader: John Stuart Mill on the American Civil War and Reconstruction

GEORGIOS VAROUXAKIS*
School of History, Queen Mary, University of London, UK

Summary
The article analyses the extensive and passionate responses that the American Civil War and the issues it raised elicited from John Stuart Mill. While it attempts to offer a brief but comprehensive overall account of Mill's influential involvement in debates on the Civil War both in Britain and in America, it focuses particularly on Mill's defence of racial equality for the American 'negroes' both during the war and in the course of debates on reconstruction after the war. Mill's concerted efforts to contribute to the improvement of Anglo-American relations and to influence both British public opinion and how that opinion was viewed from America are also analysed. Detailed attention is paid to Mill's strong views on reconstruction, which have not received the attention they deserve. A number of Mill's views and 'crotchets' were tested in the debates on reconstruction, and, whenever he had to choose between conflicting principles, his uncompromising hatred of slavery and racial inequality took priority over any other considerations (even ones as important as educational qualifications for voters, and free trade).

Keywords: Mill; American Civil War; race; slavery; emancipation; Anglo-American relations.

Contents
1. Introduction: A Crusading Fanatic? ........................................... 1
2. ‘The Contest in America’ .................................................. 5
3. ‘The Slave Power’ ...................................................... 9
4. Emancipation Proclamation and a ‘Negro Army’ ....................... 11
5. ‘Emancipation is Not Enough’ ........................................... 13
6. Not by the Pen Alone: London Emancipation Society, United States Sanitary Commission, National Freedmen’s-Aid Union ............... 20
7. Mill as Bridge-Maker .................................................. 22
8. Conclusion ........................................................................ 23

1. Introduction: A Crusading Fanatic?
On 23 June 1864, Lord Stanley recorded the following in his diaries:

Breakfast at Gladstone's [...] American war discussed: [...] Gladstone spoke with astonishment of the eagerness of the 'negrophilists' as he called them, their readiness to sacrifice three white lives in order to set free one black man [...]
He could have understood the American feeling of dislike to the breaking up of the Union, but not the fanaticism of English sympathisers. I said that most of them cared little for the slaves, but a great deal for the success of the American form of govt, naming Bright as an instance: in this G. and Mr. Froude agreed.1

Given his passionate activism in the course of the previous three years, there can be no doubt that John Stuart Mill was one of the ‘negrophilists’ Gladstone had in mind.2 But I hope to show, in this article, that he could not be accused of the stance Stanley attributed to people such as John Bright, of ‘car[ing] little for the slaves, but a great deal for the success of the American form of gov[ernmen]t’. Though Mill (despite the serious flaws he had identified)3 cared immensely for the success of the American experiment in democracy, he cared no less for the slaves and for racial equality.4

Gladstone was far from alone in his indignation at the British ‘negrophilists’.5 In an anonymously published article in Fraser’s Magazine for October 1863, James Fitzjames Stephen (of impeccably anti-slavery family stock himself) had written that ‘a small though able minority of our best writers go all lengths with the North’. Stephen was critical of that minority of writers who appeared to view the present war as a crusade for the extermination of a set of robbers and pirates whose victory would involve the establishment of a gigantic power stretching across the continent based on slavery and threatening the liberties of mankind.6

---


2 George Grote had complained in a letter of 12 January 1863 that ‘John Stuart Mill […] is violent against the South in this American struggle; embracing heartily the extreme Abolitionist views, and thinking about little else in regard to the general question’; see Harriet Grote, The Personal Life of George Grote (London, 1873), 264.


5 The term ‘negrophilist’ and its cognates seem to have appeared around the 1840s. The Oxford English Dictionary’s definition of ‘negrophilist’ is ‘A lover or friend of the Negro’; see Oxford English Dictionary, volume X, 306. The use of these terms intensified during the American Civil War. In 1863, the chief ‘negrophilists’ of American politics, according to their Democrat critics, were Horace Greeley, Charles Sumner, and Wendell Phillips; see ‘American Party Nomenclature’, Liverpool Mercury, 07 March 1863. The term was soon to feature in the title of an article written by the staunchly pro-South US correspondent of The Times, attacking those in America and Britain who argued for the granting of the vote to blacks; see [Charles Mackay], ‘The Negro and the Negrophilists’, Blackwoods Edinburgh Magazine, May 1866, 581–97.

Stephen had Mill very much in mind. Stephen’s article had some success, judging from the reaction of a young Cambridge philosopher who had been a supporter of the North until then: ‘I am become less Northern. [...] my slumbering, smothered disgust at “Sentimental Politics” has broken out all at once’, Henry Sidgwick wrote to a friend. ‘In this frame of mind I came across an article in Fraser of October’. Echoing Stephen’s arguments, Sidgwick continued: it would be just as sensible for us to exterminate Brazilian society as for the North to exterminate Carolinian [...] If the war were to end now, I should not regret it. The New Yorkers have cleansed themselves from the guilt of slavery. Let the crusade cease; let us draw a ‘cordon’ round the abnormal society, and let the oligarchs try their experiment.

And Sidgwick concluded by criticising the (pro-North) Spectator, which he wrote ‘represents the sentimentalism I loathe’, and Cairnes, who he described as ‘a sentimentalist in the clothing of a political economist’. Now, Mill had himself used the word ‘crusade’; but he tried to be careful as to how exactly it was put.

In the summer of 1861, the Irish political economist John Elliot Cairnes (by then a staunch admirer of Mill’s) had sent Mill the manuscript of the course of lectures on slavery he had delivered in the spring term of 1861 at Trinity College, Dublin, asking if he judged that they could be published in a periodical review. Mill replied most encouragingly, stressing that such a publication would be ‘particularly wanted at the present time’. He had been ‘very much struck’ by the ignorance displayed in nearly everything that had been written in England about the American conflict, which showed that the authors did not understand ‘the necessary conditions of American slavery’. The English ‘organs of opinion’ were crying out for a recognition of the secession, and ‘for letting slavery alone; but slavery will not let freedom alone’. For as Cairnes had shown, American slavery depended upon ‘a perpetual extension of its field; it must go on barbarizing the world more and more’, and the Southern states would ‘never consent to a peace without half the unoccupied country, and the power which it would give of unlimited conquest toward the south’. Therefore, ‘[i]nstead of calling on the North to subscribe to this, it would be a case for a crusade of all civilized humanity to prevent it’. Mill urged Cairnes to

---

7 The article was a review of the second edition of John Elliot Cairnes’s book on American slavery, and nobody had any doubt as to Mill’s approval of the book, which was dedicated to Mill. Thomas Schneider has cogently argued that it was Mill who Stephen was targeting without naming him; see Schneider, ‘Mill and Stephen on the American Civil War’.


9 Sidgwick to Dakyns, [early] November 1863, in Sidgwick, Memoir, 102. Sidgwick was to rejoice at the eventual Northern victory though; see Sidgwick, Memoir, 129.

10 Sidgwick to Dakyns, [early] November 1863, in Sidgwick, Memoir, 102.


14 Mill to Cairnes, 18 August 1861, in Mill, CW, XV, 738.

15 Mill to Cairnes, 18 August 1861, in Mill, CW, XV, 738.

16 Mill to Cairnes, 18 August 1861, in Mill, CW, XV, 738.

17 Mill to Cairnes, 18 August 1861, in Mill, CW, XV, 738.
connect the published version of the lectures ‘expressly and openly with the present
crisis, and make them, in effect, a pamphlet on that’. He also advised that it should
appear with Cairnes’s name, ‘and be written about in many reviews, instead of being
contributed to one’.

Cairnes assured Mill that he would follow his advice. Two months later he wrote
again that his work would be published in book form. He asked as a favour for Mill
to permit him to introduce the book ‘by a letter to you. In this I should state that I
had been induced to publish the work by your opinion’. Cairnes added:

I should also, if you had no objection, take the opportunity of quoting that
passage in your letter to me, in which you express yourself to the effect, that far
from encouraging the North to compromise the present quarrel, it is rather a
case in which, were they disposed to do so, there should be a crusade of civilized
humanity to prevent it.

The appearance of Mill’s name ‘as sanctioning the publication’ would, Cairnes
thought, ‘give it a chance of being read’, and the extract from Mill’s letter would
‘place before the reader in a single sentence the general result and practical drift of
the work’.

Mill was delighted that such important work was not to be ‘buried in an
anonymous article in a review’. He believed that the abolitionist feelings ‘which
were but lately so strong in England cannot have died out’. And to awaken them
again, well-known authors should explain to the public the facts of the case, to the
effect that what was at stake was the attempted extension of slavery on the part of the
South beyond its then current limits. Mill would be ‘only too happy’ to help and be
quoted. But, he went on, the passage that Cairnes intended to quote, seemed to Mill
‘scarcely fit for the purpose’; it was ‘only suited to the expression of individual
feelings between friends who think alike on the subject’. Mill had been trained in
rhetoric from very early on, and he would have put things differently if writing to
convince the public. If he had been writing for publication he would not have used
‘that expression about a crusade without leading the reader up to it by a gradual
preparation’. He therefore enclosed a rephrased statement, fit for publication in
Cairnes’s forthcoming book. ‘Like yourself’, Mill wrote in that statement, ‘I have felt
ashamed and grieved at the figure which English public opinion exhibits in the face of
mankind at this great crisis of human history’. The fact that most of the leading
organs of English opinion expressed themselves ‘as if there was no distinction

---

18 Mill to Cairnes, 18 August 1861, in Mill, CW, XV, 739.
19 Mill to Cairnes, 18 August 1861, in Mill, CW, XV, 739.
25 Mill to Cairnes, 25 November 1861, in Mill, CW, XV, 750.
26 Mill to Cairnes, 25 November 1861, in Mill, CW, XV, 750. See also Howard Temperley, British
27 Mill to Cairnes, 25 November 1861, in Mill, CW, XV, 750.
28 See Margaret Canovan, ‘The Eloquence of John Stuart Mill’, History of Political Thought, 8 (1987),
505–20.
29 Mill to Cairnes, 25 November 1861, in Mill, CW, XV, 750.
30 Mill to Cairnes, 25 November 1861, in Mill, CW, XV, 752.
between right and wrong on this momentous subject’ could only mean that the English public had ‘not yet realized the vastness of the stake which [was] at issue in the present contest’. He continued:

Had they done so, would our most powerful newspapers be able to argue the question as if the right to rebel in defence of the power to tyrannize, were as sacred as the right of resisting by arms a tyranny practised over ourselves? or as if a community which takes its stand, not upon slavery merely but upon the extension of slavery as the fundamental condition of its existence, and which has broken loose from national ties because it feared lest something might be done to prevent it from carrying this scourge through the whole of the American continent, were a society just like any other—having the same moral rights of every kind, and as fit to take its place in the community of nations, as any body of human beings whatever. It is most deeply to be wished that such a society may be crushed in its commencement, before it has made itself such a pest to the world as to require and justify a general crusade of civilized nations for its suppression.

2. ‘The Contest in America’
But before Cairnes’s book was to appear (May 1862), Mill made his own direct contribution towards enlightening the British public with an article in Fraser’s Magazine for February 1862. He clearly ‘meant to have written a paper on the American question’ much earlier, ‘but the miserable incident of the Trent came in the way’. Once the Trent dispute was resolved by January 1862, Mill set out to deliver his first public contribution on the American question. He later wrote in his Autobiography that he would always feel grateful to his stepdaughter for convincing him to send the article he had written hastily on the American question to Fraser’s Magazine before leaving for some months for their planned visit to Greece and Turkey.

Written and published when it was, the paper helped to encourage those Liberals who had felt overborne by the tide of illiberal opinion, and to form in favour of the good cause a nucleus of opinion which increased gradually, and after the success of the North began to seem probable, rapidly.

Though this may be read as displaying a degree of self-importance, it was arguably an understatement of the significance of Mill’s article in influencing British public opinion and Anglo-American mutual perceptions.

For no matter how hastily written, ‘The Contest in America’ was, as Adelaide Weinberg put it, ‘the most far-seeing and challenging paper that had yet been written by an Englishman on the American question’. Even independently of the complications

---

31 Mill to Cairnes, 25 November 1861, in Mill, CW, XV, 752.
32 Mill to Cairnes, 25 November 1861, in Mill, CW, XV, 752.
33 Mill to George Grote, 10 January 1862, in Mill, CW, XV, 764. See also John Stuart Mill, Autobiography, in CW, I, 267–68. The Trent was a British mail packet, which was stopped on the high seas; two Confederate emissaries to Europe that were on board were arrested and removed on the orders of a Union captain. Britain demanded a disavowal of the illegal seizure and the release of the captives. For a few weeks, a war between Britain and the American Union seemed very likely; see Brian Jenkins, Britain and the War for the Union, 2 vols (Montreal, QC, 1974–1980), I, 181–234.
36 Weinberg, Cairnes and the American Civil War, 22.
caused by the very recent Trent affair and the anti-Northern feelings that it had raised, Mill’s task was very difficult. The British public were told by most of their press (Mill’s worst bêtes noires being the Times and the Saturday Review) and politicians37 that the war was about the South’s resistance to tariffs imposed by the protectionist North, and self-determination—the equivalent of freedom for nationalities in Europe.38 For Lincoln’s government was not formally fighting the war for the abolition of slavery, but for the preservation of the Union.39 Mill had to explain the legal–constitutional and political–tactical reasons why this was inevitable, and also why, despite the official reticence, the war was about slavery and nothing else. He wrote that although Lincoln’s party, the Republicans, were ‘not an Abolitionist party’, they were ‘a Free-soil party. If they have not taken arms against slavery, they have against its extension’.40 And this amounted to the same thing, Mill argued, for ‘[t]he day when slavery can no longer extend itself, is the day of its doom’.41 The slave-owners knew that, hence their fury. Slavery, under the conditions in which it existed in the Southern States, exhausted the soil and needed to expand indefinitely to new territories if it were to continue being profitable. But the Republican leaders could not tell the public openly that the death of slavery would be the ‘almost certain’ result if the North succeeded in the conflict. It was elementary political wisdom for them ‘to inscribe on their banner that part only of their known principles in which their supporters are unanimous’.42 The preservation of the Union was an object about which all in the North were in agreement. They believed that it had many adherents in the South as well. And nearly half the population of the Border Slave States appeared to be in favour of the preservation of the Union, if one were to judge from the fact that they were fighting in its defence. However, it was ‘not probable that they would be willing to fight directly against slavery’.43

And yet, the situation would take on a different dynamic as time went by. ‘But the parties in a protracted civil war almost invariably end by taking more extreme, not to say higher grounds of principle than they began with. Middle parties and friends of compromise are soon left behind’.44 This meant that, if the war lasted long enough, it would become

an abolition war. […] Without the smallest pretension to see further into futurity than other people, I at least have foreseen and foretold from the first,

---

39 For a recent brief analysis of the complex considerations behind Lincoln’s public stance and the—more or less inevitable—misperceptions that resulted in Britain from this stance, see Lawrence Goldman, ‘“A Total Misconception”: Lincoln, the Civil War, and the British, 1860–1865’, in The Global Lincoln, edited by Richard Carwardine and Jay Saxton (Oxford, 2011), 107–22.
41 Mill, ‘Contest in America’, in CW, XXI, 134. As Mill well knew, a thorough economic and sociological analysis of why this was the case would be available to British readers a few months later in the form of Cairnes’s book. For the merits and flaws of Cairnes’s analysis, see Weinberg, Cairnes and the American Civil War, 19–46.
that if the South were not promptly put down, the contest would become distinctly an anti-slavery one.45

Despite his animus against the Times for its pro-Southern coverage of the war, Mill adduced as evidence the letters of its main veteran war correspondent, William Howard Russell, who expected that the war would assume a complete anti-slavery character by the end of the summer of 1862. If that prediction was right, ‘Heaven forbid that the war should cease sooner, for if it lasts till then it is quite possible that it will regenerate the American people’.46

If, on the contrary, the South were allowed to have its way and become independent with half of the ‘Territories’, it would sooner or later—due to the nature of the slavery economy that Mill had elaborated on in the article—have to expand. It would try to expand southwards by conquering more and more of Spanish America, and probably attack the West Indies. It would also want to revive the African slave trade that Britain had done so much to abolish, at enormous cost to itself.47 What all this meant was that the

time may come when the barbarous and barbarizing Power, which we by our moral support had helped into existence, would require a general crusade of civilized Europe, to extinguish the mischief which it had allowed, and we had aided, to rise up in the midst of our civilization.48

Mill’s most significant statement ever on war49 followed:

For these reasons I cannot join with those who cry Peace, peace. I cannot wish that this war should not have been engaged in by the North, or that being engaged in, it should be terminated on any conditions but such as would retain the whole of the Territories as free soil.50

He was, he continued, ‘not blind to the possibility that it may require a long war to lower the arrogance and tame the aggressive ambition of the slave-owners’.51 That being the case, he still thought that

war, in a good cause, is not the greatest evil which a nation can suffer. War is an ugly thing, but not the ugliest of things: the decayed and degraded state of moral and patriotic feeling which thinks nothing worth a war, is worse. [...] As long as justice and injustice have not terminated their ever renewing fight for ascendancy in the affairs of mankind, human beings must be willing, when need is, to battle for the one against the other.52

47 See also the judgement of Hugh Thomas: ‘Had the South won the Civil War, the African trade would indeed have been reopened’; Hugh Thomas, The Slave Trade: The History of the Atlantic Slave Trade 1440–1870 (New York, 1997), 766.
49 For an analysis of Mill’s thought on war, see Georgios Varouxakis, Liberty Abroad: J. S. Mill on International Relations (Cambridge, 2013, forthcoming), chapter 6.
50 Mill, ‘Contest in America’, in CW, XXI, 141.
He concluded by admitting that the war was not yet of this ‘exalted character’, or ‘altogether a war for justice, a war of principle’. But ‘there was from the beginning, and now is, a large infusion of that element in it; and this is increasing, will increase, and if the war lasts, will in the end predominate’. 53

Mill was right to expect that ‘The Contest in America’ would be ‘much attacked’, for it was indeed, as he told a friend, ‘in complete opposition to the tone of the press and of English opinion’ up to that point. 54 The conservative daily, the Standard, dedicated two articles to it. 55 It called Mill’s article ‘bitter’ and ‘very intemperate’. Had it been anonymous, no one would have bothered to refute it. But as things were,

the North may well be proud of it, and the Northern partisans in this country may well rejoice in the champion who has come to their rescue in the utmost need; for the article bears a name worth infinitely more than its arguments—the name of Mr. John Stuart Mill. 56

According to the Standard, Mill’s arguments were not based on his usual rigorous logic but on his ‘passionate feeling’. He had merged ‘the philosopher in the partisan, the statesman in the abolitionist fanatic’. 57 Mill was prone to being led astray on some issues about which he felt particularly passionately, such as ‘the position of women’, and slavery was clearly such an issue as well. Where slavery was concerned, it was asserted that Mill ‘assumes the zeal of a crusader and the intolerance of a grand inquisitor’. 58 The South were fighting ‘for hearth and home against a foreign invader’. 59 And if, as Mill predicted, the war were eventually to become, on the part of the North, a crusade against slavery, this would surely encourage insurrection on the part of the slaves. It thus raised the spectrum of the ‘unimaginable horrors’ throughout the South, ‘by a race perhaps the most ignorant, excitable, and licentious on the face of the earth’. 60 The Standard reminded its readers that

the homes doomed to be the scene of such indescribable calamities are the homes of gentlemen of English speech and blood; the destined victims of outrages, the thought of which makes the blood run cold, are English ladies and children. 61

Bagehot’s Economist was critical of Mill too, also in two successive articles. 62 And one of the attacks came from the pages of the same magazine where Mill’s article had

---

54 Mill to William Thomas Thornton, 28 January 1862, in Mill, CW, XV, 774.
56 ‘The Merits, No. I.’, 4. Mill’s intellectual ascendancy by that time gave his contributions to the Civil War debates a major significance. As it was aptly put in an epistolary pamphlet, ‘we all know John Stuart Mill, but who is Spence?’; see [An English Lady], Notes and Letters on the American War (London, 1864), 37.
60 ‘The Merits, No. II.’, 3.
62 J. S. Mill on the American Contest’, The Economist, 08 February 1862, 143–45; ‘Prospects of Slavery, as Affected by the Success of the North and South Respectively’, The Economist, 15 February 1862, 170–72. Cairnes undertook to defend Mill (who was still travelling in Greece) in a letter he wrote to the Economist; see John Elliot Cairnes ‘Negro Slavery and the American Civil War’, The Economist, 01 March 1862, 231–32.
been published, Froude’s *Fraser’s*, in the July 1862 issue.\(^6^3\) Even the pro-Northern *Spectator* thought that Mill was too optimistic about the Union government’s good intentions with regard to slavery.\(^6^4\)

But not all reviews were attacks. The liberal *Daily News* was enthusiastically approving.\(^6^5\) And Cairnes congratulated Mill (then in Greece) for the article, saying that it ‘produced a great sensation here’.\(^6^6\) Henry Fawcett had also reported positively on the article’s impact in Britain.\(^6^7\) Meanwhile, New England Republican Americans were most appreciative and encouraged. They reprinted the article in *Harper’s Monthly* and as a separate pamphlet in Boston (which went through two printings in a year), and praised it widely.\(^6^8\) According to one of them, Mill’s ‘curiously-accurate appreciation of all the delicate distinctions of our system, and the essential differences of our parties, show his peculiar fitness as a teacher of the English nation at this moment’.\(^6^9\) But this was only the beginning.

### 3. ‘The Slave Power’

Three months later Mill wrote to Cairnes from Constantinople that he had received his book and was very pleased with it. It was ‘exactly the thing which was wanted’, and the priority now was ‘to get it read’.\(^7^0\) He offered suggestions as to who it should be sent to for reviewing. Mill also confessed to Cairnes his reaction to their profound agreement: ‘I feel growing in me, what I seldom have, the agreeable feeling of a brotherhood in arms’.\(^7^1\) The ‘brotherhood in arms’ was there for all to notice, and Cairnes’s work was closely associated with Mill by its readers. In a review of the book, Cairnes’s friend Leonard Courtney noted the following:

> When Mr. Mill’s paper appeared in *Fraser’s Magazine* last February, his high authority led many to reconsider, if not to abandon, their preconceived notions of the paltry character of the American war, and the present book, which may be said to appear under Mr. Mill’s auspices, may serve to bring over those who remain uncertain.\(^7^2\)

Mill was prevented from writing immediately himself to help in the promotion of Cairnes’s book because he was travelling in the Levant, but, while on his way back, he was already making arrangements for his contribution.\(^7^3\) He wrote to the historian...
John Lothrop Motley (the American Minister in Austria, whom he had recently met in Vienna) that his forthcoming article was ‘hastily written, and slight, for such a subject, but “every little helps”’.74

Mill was being too modest. His review article, entitled (like the book) ‘The Slave Power’, was a formidable exercise in persuasion. Two months later Cairnes was writing to tell him that it had made a huge difference to sales:

When I wrote to you last I was under the influence of the hopes excited by the first commendatory notices, which produced a certain effect, but after a little the interest in it seemed to subside, and I had begun to despair of its doing any appreciable good, when your article in the October number of the Westminster appeared. [...] Since that time the book has occupied a different position before the public [...]: the rest of the impressions went off rapidly, and a second edition will now appear in a few weeks.75

Mill had highlighted in a magisterial way all the important contributions and arguments of the book. As he noted, Cairnes’s thorough study of the antecedents of the conflict and its deeper causes was badly needed in England, where public opinion was lamentably ignorant of them. What was worse, the ‘ignorance of the pubic was shared by the Foreign Minister [Russell] [...] who did unspeakable mischief by the [...] opinion so often quoted, that the Southern States are in arms for independence, the Northern for dominion’.76 And yet, according to Mill, things were the other way around:

Could we consent to overlook the fact that the South are fighting for, and the North against, the most odious form of unjust dominion which ever existed; could we forget the slaves, and view the question as one between two white populations [...]?

And, he asked, who were fighting for dominion ‘if not those who having always before succeeded in domineering, break off from the Union at the first moment when they find that they can domineer no longer’?77

At the very end of the article, though, the reviewer voiced a disagreement with his brother in arms. Mill wrote that Cairnes had proved that the restriction of slavery west of the Mississippi would lead to the gradual destruction of the ‘peculiar institution’, in either of two possible ways.79 One alternative was ‘the subjugation of the Southern States, and their return to the Union under the Constitution according to its Northern interpretation’.80 The other alternative, which ‘Mr. Cairnes regards as both more practical and more desirable’, was ‘the recognition of their independence, with the Mississippi for their Western boundary’.81 Mill took issue with Cairnes’s

---

74 Mill to John Lothrop Motley, 17 September 1862, in Mill, CW, XV, 797–98.
75 Cairnes to Mill, 08 December 1862, in Mill–Taylor Collection, Vol. LVI, 8/46–48. For further evidence that a month after this letter was written Cairnes’s book was in strikingly great demand, see Brougham Villiers [Frederick John Shaw] and W. H. Chesson, Anglo-American Relations 1861–1865 (London, 1919), 108.
preference of ‘the latter, to the former and more complete issue of the contest’, explaining that Cairnes was ‘alarmed by what he [thought] the impossibility of governing this group of States after reunion, unless in a manner incompatible with free institutions—as conquered countries, and by military law’. 82 But Mill himself was ‘unable to see the impossibility’.83 (The two of them would continue to debate this question for years.84) In a foretaste of his prescriptions on reconstruction, Mill wrote that, if defeated, ‘the Slave States must submit at discretion. They could no longer claim to be dealt with according to the Constitution which they had rebelled against’.85 In that case, ‘the whole slave population might, and probably would, be at once emancipated, with compensation to those masters only who had remained loyal to the Federal Government’.86 If that were done, Mill saw no danger arising from the restoration of the Southern States to their old position in the Union:

It would be a diminished position, because the masters would no longer be allowed representatives in Congress in right of three-fifths of their slaves. The slaves once freed, and enabled to hold property, and the country open to free colonization, in a few years there would be a free population in sympathy with the rest of the Union.87

4. Emancipation Proclamation and a ‘Negro Army’

Already before Mill had sent the final proofs of ‘The Slave Power’ to the Westminster Review in late September, Lincoln had issued the Preliminary Emancipation Proclamation. When word reached Europe two weeks later,88 Mill expressed his ‘exultation at the glorious news of Lincoln’s having made up his mind to propose to Congress to declare all slaves in the insurgent States free’. It had come ‘sooner than I myself ventured to predict, and however little apparent effect it may have at the first moment, it is the death-blow to negro slavery in America’.89

Another development in the course of 1862 that gave Mill great hope was the gradual enlistment of black troops by the North. In the early stages of the Civil War, due to the profound reluctance of white Northerners to arm ‘negroes’ and to serve next to them, the North was (as the black emancipation activist Frederick Douglass put it in August 1861) ‘Fighting Rebels with Only One Hand’.90 But this was to

82 Mill, ‘The Slave Power’, in CW, XXI, 163. Cairnes was far from alone in his apprehension in this respect; see, for example, ‘J. S. Mill on the American Contest’, 143–45.
88 Lincoln issued his preliminary emancipation proclamation on 22 September 1862; see Adam I. P. Smith, The American Civil War (Basingstoke, 2007), 92. The news did not reach Britain before the first week of October; see Daily News, 07 October 1862, 5.
89 Mill to Thomas Hare, 09 October 1862, in Mill, CW, XV, 800. See also Mill to Motley, 31 October 1862, in Mill, CW, XV, 800–01.
change little by little, mainly due to the military setbacks of the early phases of the war and the necessities on the ground.  

In December 1862 Cairnes was impressed by an article in the *Spectator* which proposed the systematic creation of an auxiliary negro army by the North as a solution to several problems at once—military, social and political. He wrote to Mill recommending the article and Mill thought equally highly of it. Cairnes also sent the article to his American friend George William Curtis, who wrote back explaining that the plan had no chance of being accepted by the white population of the North, given that most of them sadly hated ‘the colored race’ even more than they hated the Southern rebels. Cairnes sent Curtis’s reply to Mill, who commented that: ‘Mr Curtis’ letter gives one a very favourable impression of his own sentiments, though in some respects a painful one of those of his countrymen’. But Mill would not be daunted. What Curtis had written was ‘no worse than was to be expected, and the worse it is the more searching and the more prolific of good is the present crisis likely to be’. His rationale is revealing: ‘The danger of American democracy was stagnation—a general settling into a dead level of low morality and feeling’. But that might be changing:

The strenuous antagonism now springing up in the better Americans against the tone of mind of the worse, is the most hopeful feature of the present struggle, and the battle against the devil could not be fought on a more advantageous field than that of slavery.

Some months later, things had improved with regard to the recruitment of black troops and Mill saw some very encouraging signs. In the summer of 1863 he was buoyed up by what he read in a letter from America in which Leslie Stephen had reported on ‘the manifestations in Massachusetts on the setting out of a negro regiment’. Mill also remarked:

But nothing that has come from America has so strongly impressed me, as the manifesto of the Committee of negroes to induce their fellow negroes to enlist [...] I was not at all prepared for anything so admirable in tone and feeling. Degraded and looked down upon as these people are said to be, their strongest feelings were not as negroes but as citizens and republicans—what they expected to tell on the negroes of the north and make them give their lives

---

95 Mill to Cairnes, 07 February 1863, in Mill, *CW*, XV, 835.
for the cause was not the interests or the wrongs of their race; it was the idea that they were to fight for liberty, and humanity, and civilization, and that the improvement of the world would go back if the North did not prevail. Is not this noble?\textsuperscript{100}

5. ‘Emancipation is Not Enough’

Emancipation seemed to Mill certain to follow an eventual Northern victory. But much more was needed for the black Americans to be allowed to become equal ‘citizens and republicans’.\textsuperscript{101} Mill was already eagerly discussing his views on reconstruction in January 1863. He wanted the Union to ‘set free the slaves with compensation to loyal owners [and] [. . .] settle the freed slaves as free proprietors on the unoccupied land’.\textsuperscript{102} Mill again volunteered his prescription for the forthcoming reconstruction in September 1863. He could not look forward to ‘any settlement but complete emancipation—land given to every negro family [. . .]—the schoolmaster set to work in every village and the tide of free immigration turned on in those fertile regions from which slavery has hitherto excluded it’.\textsuperscript{103} If these things were done, the proof that the blacks were giving of their fighting powers would ‘do more in a year than all other things in a century to make the whites respect them and consent to their being politically and socially equals’. ‘Such benefits’, he argued, were ‘more than equivalent for a far longer and more destructive war than this is likely to prove’.\textsuperscript{104}

For these reasons Mill was not regretting military setbacks such as the Northern defeat at the battle of Chickamauga\textsuperscript{105} in September 1863: ‘The tidings from America may be considered good. It is a question if Rosencranz’s [sic]\textsuperscript{106} check is to be regretted, since if the war ends too soon, it may end without the complete emancipation of the slaves’.\textsuperscript{107} On the other hand:

but if it is ended by the aid of 40 or 50,000 negro soldiers, and after another year’s experience of enfranchised negroes growing cotton and sugar for wages [then] not only slavery will be extinguished, but the South will probably settle down into a free country much more easily than is supposed, and the anti negro feeling in the free states will have, in a great measure, disappeared.\textsuperscript{108}

All of course depended on whether Lincoln would be re-elected, and Mill could not help being uneasy until the election.\textsuperscript{109} Once it happened, he wrote that ‘Lincoln’s triumphant re-election [was] a grand event’.\textsuperscript{110} But what was ‘perhaps a still greater’ event was ‘that there is now the majority in Congress necessary for the Anti Slavery amendment of the Federal Constitution’.\textsuperscript{111} The value of the latter victory could not

\textsuperscript{100} Mill to Fawcett, 24 August 1863, in Mill, \textit{CW}, XV, 877.
\textsuperscript{101} Mill to Fawcett, 24 August 1863, in Mill, \textit{CW}, XV, 877.
\textsuperscript{102} Mill to Motley, 26 January 1863, in Mill, \textit{CW}, XV, 831.
\textsuperscript{103} Mill to John Appleton, 24 September 1863, in Mill, \textit{CW}, XV, 886.
\textsuperscript{104} Mill to John Appleton, 24 September 1863, in Mill, \textit{CW}, XV, 886.
\textsuperscript{105} See Keegan, \textit{American Civil War}, 223–27.
\textsuperscript{106} Mill meant the Northern Major General William Rosencrans.
\textsuperscript{108} Mill to Fawcett, 14 October 1863, in Mill, \textit{CW}, XV, 890.
\textsuperscript{109} Mill to Cairnes, 03 October 1864, in Mill, \textit{CW}, XV, 957–58.
\textsuperscript{110} Mill to Cairnes, 01 December 1864, in Mill, \textit{CW}, XV, 968.
\textsuperscript{111} Mill to Cairnes, 01 December 1864, in Mill, \textit{CW}, XV, 968.
be overstated, Mill thought, for it would ensure not only that there would be ‘no reunion retaining slavery’, but ‘that after reunion the Federal Courts will have a right to set aside any tricky legislation in the Southern States intended to re-establish Slavery under another name’.\footnote{Mill to Cairnes, 01 December 1864, in Mill, \textit{CW}, XV, 968–69.} It would, moreover, make it possible ‘to readmit the seceding States with the same constitutional rights as formerly in every other respect’.\footnote{Mill to Fawcett, 02 December 1864, in Mill, \textit{CW}, XV, 974. This and other statements by Mill should go some way towards qualifying the claim that ‘The Constitution, even “according to its Northern interpretation”, turns out to play a small part in Mill’s thinking’; see Schneider, ‘Mill and Stephen on the American Civil War’, 299. Mill was to write in 1869: ‘I have always admired Lincoln, among other reasons, because even for so great an end as the abolition of slavery he did not set aside the Constitution but waited till he could bring what he wanted to do (by a little straining perhaps) within the license allowed by the Constitution for military necessities’; see Mill to Peter Alfred Taylor, 28 May 1869, in Mill, \textit{CW}, XVII, 1608. But already in ‘The Contest in America’ (February 1862), Mill had envisaged how he hoped things would develop towards emancipation without damaging legality and the authority of the Constitution; see Mill, ‘Contest in America’, in \textit{CW}, XXI, 140.}

Mill’s optimism was not based purely on wishful thinking. He was following events in America closely and was a subscriber to (Northern) American magazines.\footnote{See Mill to Charles Eliot Norton, 24 November 1865, in Mill, \textit{CW}, XVI, 1119; Mill to Edwin L. Godkin, 24 May 1865, in Mill, \textit{CW}, XVI, 1056; Mill to Norton, 04 October 1868, in Mill, \textit{CW}, XVI, 1455.} Besides, he was sent a huge amount of books, pamphlets, magazines, newspapers and other written material, more than he could house in fact.\footnote{See Mill to the Earl of Clarendon, 15 April 1866, in Mill, \textit{CW}, XVI, 1158; Mill to Appleton, 24 September 1863, in Mill, \textit{CW}, XV, 886.} Not least, he was engaged in extensive correspondence with a great number of Americans. An example of a letter from one of these Americans that reinforced Mill in his hopes was the one he received from Charles Loring Brace (founder of The Children’s Aid Society) in Avignon in 1864, and which he made sure was published in the \textit{Daily News} so that people in Britain could read the encouraging news.\footnote{See Mill to Cairnes, 20 December 1864, in Mill, \textit{CW}, XV, 983–84; Mill to Cairnes, 05 January 1865, in Mill, \textit{CW}, XVI, 987.} Brace wrote that the war, with all its desolation, was ‘producing some good effects on the nation’.\footnote{\[Charles Loring Brace\], ‘America’, \textit{Daily News}, 28 December 1864, 5.} Even the pursuit of wealth was ‘quieted a little, and heroism [had] become an acting principle’. As for the ‘great questions’ that were ‘soon to come up’, he thought that amnesty would be offered to all but the leaders, and freed labour and immigration would ‘re-people and restore the South’.\footnote{\[Brace\], ‘America’, 5.} Also, ‘A grand effort will be made before long to give the freed negroes suffrage, in order to counterbalance the combined Northern democratic and Southern votes, which will be dangerous to us’. Brace added: ‘If this is conditioned on an intelligence or property test it will suit us better, as we cannot introduce your plan of two votes to the [lettered] classes’.\footnote{\[Brace\], ‘America’, 5.} According to Brace, ‘Most of us feel, with all our losses and sorrows, that the nation was never healthier, or in a better moral condition than now’\footnote{\[Brace\], ‘America’, 5.} Also, he thought that, if the North were to succeed, ‘we shall not have an Ireland or Poland, because this has...
been essentially a class war, and the peasantry (the slaves) are with the conquerors. The South will soon be almost stripped of its ruling classes.121 The letter concluded as follows:

P.S.—I need not tell you that all our experience of the emancipated slave, thus far, has been the most favourable; industrious, respectful, moral, and brave, his only fault (for our interest) has been, that more of the Anglo-Saxon tiger had not been in his goodnatured blood.122

Cairnes, who made sure the letter was published in the Daily News, conceded to Mill: ‘You have indeed reason to congratulate yourself on the more than fulfilment of your prediction’.123

Once the war was over and the North had won, reconstruction was of course even more urgently discussed. And Mill continued to volunteer advice to the Americans. In a letter to the editor of the New York Evening Post Mill noted that his main worry was lest the North were to be ‘too gentle’ with the defeated slaveowners.124 He should be ‘very sorry to see any life taken after the war is over (except those of the assassins)125 or any evil inflicted in mere vengeance’.126 But it was ‘absolutely necessary’ to ‘break altogether the power of the slaveholding caste’. Unless this was done, ‘the abolition of slavery [would] be merely nominal’.127 If an ‘aristocracy of ex-slaveholders’ were to continue to dominate the State legislatures in the South, they would be able ‘effectually to nullify’ most of the results that had been ‘so dearly bought by the […] Free States’. They and their dependants ‘must be effectually outnumbered at the polling-places’.128 And that could only be achieved by granting ‘full equality of political rights to negroes’ and by allowing ‘a large immigration of settlers from the North’, while making both of these groups ‘independent by the ownership of land’.129 Mill concluded that

With these things in addition to the constitutional amendment130 (which will enable the Supreme Court to set aside any State legislation tending to bring back slavery by disguise) the cause of freedom is safe and the opening words of the Declaration of Independence will cease to be a reproach to the nation founded by its authors.131

---

121 [Brace], ‘America’, 5.
122 [Brace], ‘America’, 5.
124 Mill to Parke Godwin, 15 May 1865, in Mill, CW, XVI, 1051–52 (1052). The letter was also published in: The Liberator, 30 June 1865, 101; Reynold’s Newspaper, 02 July 1865, 2.
125 Lincoln had recently been assassinated.
126 Mill to Godwin, 15 May 1865, in Mill, CW, XVI, 1052.
127 Mill to Godwin, 15 May 1865, in Mill, CW, XVI, 1052.
128 Mill to Godwin, 15 May 1865, in Mill, CW, XVI, 1052.
129 Mill to Godwin, 15 May 1865, in Mill, CW, XVI, 1052.
130 The Thirteenth Amendment abolishing slavery had been passed by Congress on 31 January 1865, and was ratified by the States before the end of that year.
131 Mill to Godwin, 15 May 1865, in Mill, CW, XVI, 1052.
The letter was published and discussed widely on both sides of the Atlantic, and, unsurprisingly, the Saturday Review was very critical of Mill’s advice to the Americans.\textsuperscript{132}

To another American correspondent Mill wrote that ‘Emancipation is not enough, without making the freed negroes electors and landholders, nor without reinforcing them by a large migration of northern people into the southern states’.\textsuperscript{133} Otherwise the freedmen would ‘remain in a state of dependence on their old masters approaching to slavery, and both they and the mean whites\textsuperscript{134} will be kept ignorant and brutish as they have been kept hitherto’.\textsuperscript{135} In order to achieve the elevation of blacks into landholders, Mill clarified that he ‘would not shrink from extensive confiscation if it were necessary for these purposes’.\textsuperscript{136} He hoped that the indignation of the ‘whole people’ of the North at ‘the atrocious crime which robbed the world of [their] noble President’ might ‘tend to diminish the risk of any undue indulgence being shown to those who, like dethroned despots, will be always hankering after their lost power’.\textsuperscript{137} In several other letters Mill wrote that Lincoln’s assassination, which profoundly pained him as a personal loss, might end up having the beneficial effect of preventing the North from being ‘too soft-hearted to the ex-slaveholders’ and leaving them ‘too much power of mischief’.\textsuperscript{138}

The fullest exposition of Mill’s views and rationale on reconstruction came in a letter of September 1865, which he knew was going to be published extensively in the United States. Mill’s advice to the North was introduced with a rhetorical question:

\begin{quote}
Instead of restoring to the States lately in rebellion a nominal self-government which, unless you are willing to sacrifice all that has been gained by four years of civil war, cannot be suffered to be real, would it not be better to make the self-government real, but to grant it only to a mixed community, in which the population who have been corrupted by vicious institutions will be neutralized by black citizens and white immigrants from the North?\textsuperscript{139}
\end{quote}

The question continued: ‘And what is the hindrance to this in the minds of the President and his cabinet? Is it scruples about legality?’\textsuperscript{140} Mill’s reply displayed his rhetorical skills once more, combined with the use of some classic arguments from the history of political thought and the law of nations: ‘To be scrupulous about exceeding his lawful powers, well becomes the first magistrate of a free people’, but in the case in question, the scruple seemed ‘wholly out of place’.\textsuperscript{141} The argument of

\textsuperscript{132} ‘Mr. Mill on America’, Saturday Review, 01 July 1865, 3–4.

\textsuperscript{133} Mill to Rowland G. Hazard, 07 June 1865, in Mill, \textit{CW}, XVI, 1066.


\textsuperscript{135} Mill to Hazard, 07 June 1865, in Mill, \textit{CW}, XVI, 1066.

\textsuperscript{136} Mill to Hazard, 07 June 1865, in Mill, \textit{CW}, XVI, 1066.

\textsuperscript{137} Mill to Hazard, 07 June 1865, in Mill, \textit{CW}, XVI, 1066. He added that it would be ‘only the next generation of them who can possibly become true citizens of a free nation’; see Mill to Hazard, 07 June 1865, in Mill, \textit{CW}, XVI, 1066.

\textsuperscript{138} Mill to John Plummer, 01 May 1865, in Mill, \textit{CW}, XVI, 1042. See also Mill to Edwin Chadwick, 28 April 1865, in Mill, \textit{CW}, XVI, 1038–39; Mill to William E. Hickson, 03 May 1865, in Mill, \textit{CW}, XVI, 1044; Mill to Cairnes, 28 May 1865, in Mill, \textit{CW}, XVI, 1057; Mill to Max Kyllmann, 30 May 1865, in Mill, \textit{CW}, XVI, 1063.

\textsuperscript{139} Mill to William Martin Dickson, 01 September 1865, in Mill, \textit{CW}, XVI, 1098–1101 (1099–1100).

\textsuperscript{140} Mill to Dickson, 01 September 1865, in Mill, \textit{CW}, XVI, 1100.

\textsuperscript{141} Mill to Dickson, 01 September 1865, in Mill, \textit{CW}, XVI, 1100.
those (such as the new President Johnson, as it turned out)\textsuperscript{142} who wanted to readmit
the Southern States to their former rights immediately was that ‘the rebel States must
be assumed never to have been out of the Union, and therefore to be unconditionally
entitled to all their original liberties and powers the moment they condescended to
accept them’.\textsuperscript{143} Mill begged to differ. By declaring themselves independent of the
Union, the states had ‘forfeited [their] privileges’.\textsuperscript{144} A state of civil war ‘suspends all
legals rights, and all social compacts, between the combatants’. As a result, ‘[e]xcept
under the terms of a capitulation, defeated rebels have no rights but the universal
ones of humanity’.\textsuperscript{145} This meant that the Southern people, ‘their lives, bodies, and
estates, were by the issue of the war, placed at the discretion of their conquerors’.\textsuperscript{146}
But the conquerors in this case were a people whose principles would and should
prevent them from exercising ‘permanent dominion over any human beings as
subjects, or on any other footing than that of equal citizenship’.\textsuperscript{147} On the other
hand, though, it would be ‘a generosity partaking of silliness’,\textsuperscript{148} were the Free States
of the North to
give back to their bitter enemies not only power to govern themselves, and the
negroes within their limits, but (through representatives in Congress,) to govern
the Free States too, without first exacting such changes in the structure of
Southern society as will render such a relation between them and the Free
States rational and safe.\textsuperscript{149}

Mill thought that ‘[m]igration from the North will do this in time and in part, but
only negro suffrage can do it sufficiently’, adding ‘I have no objection to requiring, as
a condition of the suffrage, education up to the point of reading and writing; but on
condition that this shall be required equally from the whites’, because the poor whites
of the South needed education ‘quite as much as the negroes, and [were] certainly
quite as unfit for the exercise of the suffrage without it’.\textsuperscript{150}

This was the first time that Mill talked of any qualification for the vote in relation
to reconstruction. This concession was an adaptation on his part to the way the
debate in America had been developing. Such qualifications to the vote were very
widely demanded even by many of the staunch supporters of emancipation.\textsuperscript{151} What

---

\textsuperscript{142} On the frustrating failure of reconstruction under Andrew Jackson, see Eric Foner, *A Short History of
Reconstruction 1863–1877* (New York, 1990), 82–103; James M. McPherson, *Ordeal by Fire: The Civil War
and Reconstruction* (New York, 1982), 493–539.

\textsuperscript{143} Mill to Dickson, 01 September 1865, in Mill, *CW*, XVI, 1100. See how Johnson’s policies on
reconstruction were reported in Britain a few weeks earlier on the basis of his recent speeches: ‘He will not
admit that any State has ever yet been out of the Union, and therefore it is not “reconstruction” he has to
consider, but “restoration”;’ see ‘The United States’, *The Times*, 24 July 1865, 9.

\textsuperscript{144} Mill to Dickson, 01 September 1865, in Mill, *CW*, XVI, 1100.

\textsuperscript{145} Mill to Dickson, 01 September 1865, in Mill, *CW*, XVI, 1100.

\textsuperscript{146} Mill to Dickson, 01 September 1865, in Mill, *CW*, XVI, 1100. The Southern General Jeff Thompson,
in a farewell speech to his soldiers, was reported as having told them: ‘We are conquered, subjugated; we have
no rights, but must accept such privileges and favours as the Government may see proper to bestow on us’;
see ‘The United States’, 9.

\textsuperscript{147} Mill to Dickson, 01 September 1865, in Mill, *CW*, XVI, 1100.

\textsuperscript{148} Mill to Dickson, 01 September 1865, in Mill, *CW*, XVI, 1100.

\textsuperscript{149} Mill to Dickson, 01 September 1865, in Mill, *CW*, XVI, 1101.

\textsuperscript{150} We saw above what Brace had written about ‘an intelligence or property test’ in the letter he sent to Mill
near the end of 1864. For a more recent example (appearing in a review article occasioned by new American
editions of Mill’s *Considerations on Representative Government* and Henry Maine’s *Ancient Law*), see [E. L.
should also be noted is that Mill was prepared to allow only an educational qualification as a potential concession to objectors, but not a property qualification. American abolitionists, including black activists, had openly been accepting the option of a property qualification as well, provided it applied impartially to both blacks and whites.152 Mill, however, preferred no qualification at all, given the overwhelming need to safeguard the defence of freed slaves’ rights against their former masters. But if even American radical Republicans and abolitionists were prepared to accept qualifications to the vote, Mill would condone, as a compromise, only an educational qualification (for which presumably the freed blacks would become qualified through another of the measures he strongly recommended, education), but not a property qualification. The most revealing statement comes from a letter written a few weeks later. Mill thanked Moncure Conway for sending him ‘Mr Wendell Phillips’ admirable speeches’ and was very pleased with the leading American abolitionist’s support for ‘personal representation’ in agreement with Mill’s Considerations on Representative Government.153 However, in one of those recent speeches, Phillips had taken issue with Mill’s advocacy of an educational qualification in Considerations.154 While Mill held his ground on the theoretical question, he also stressed that the American case at the moment had to be an exception. Thus he wrote that he had not been convinced ‘by Mr Phillips’ argument against an educational qualification’.155 Mill conceded that it was very true that, as Phillips had argued, ‘intelligence, and even a high order of it, may be formed by other means than reading’. This did not prove what Phillips claimed, however: ‘but not, I think, intelligence of public affairs, or the power of judging of public men, save perhaps in exceptional cases, too few to affect the practical conclusion’.156 And yet, having said as much, Mill added: ‘At the present crisis, however, the securing of equal political rights to the negro is paramount to all other considerations respecting the suffrage’.157 For that reason, he concluded:

I should be glad to think that you are strong enough to reject a compromise admitting negroes on an educational qualification common to them with the whites. As things look now, it seems as if even that would be a thing to be thankful for.158

certainly read articles such as this, given that he was a subscriber and assiduous reader of the North American Review (earlier Mill had congratulated Godkin on another article in the same review; see Mill to Godkin, 24 May 1865, in Mill, CW, XVI, 1055–56). On the reluctance of mainstream Northern opinion to embrace black suffrage, see Butler, Critical Americans, 113. On Godkin, see Butler, Critical Americans, 66–67, 79, 98, 112–16 and passim.
152 McPherson, The Negro’s Civil War, 275.
153 Mill to Moncure Daniel Conway, 23 October 1865, in Mill, CW, XVI, 1105–06.
154 In a speech delivered on 09 May 1865, Phillips had said: ‘I am surprised, and marvel greatly, that so masterly a mind as Stuart Mill should proclaim that in his theory a man must read before he votes. Does he not remember that for four men out of five, education does not come from books? Does he suppose there was no education in the world before printing was invented? […] The mass of men have their faculties educated by work, not by reading […]’; see Wendell Phillips The Liberator, 19 May 1865. Quoted in Mill, CW, XVI, 1106, fn. 3.
155 Mill to Conway, 23 October 1865, in Mill, CW, XVI, 1106.
156 Mill to Conway, 23 October 1865, in Mill, CW, XVI, 1106. Mill was adamantly insistent on the importance of ‘a reading and writing qualification’ for the vote as far as Britain was concerned at that same time; see Mill to John Boyd Kinnear, 19 August 1865, in Mill, CW, XVI, 1094.
157 Mill to Conway, 23 October 1865, in Mill, CW, XVI, 1106. Emphasis added.
158 Mill to Conway, 23 October 1865, in Mill, CW, XVI, 1106. Mill’s pessimism in this letter must have been influenced by the result of the recent state referendum in Connecticut (02 October 1865), which had rejected (by fifty-five per cent) the proposed constitutional amendment that would have enfranchised the few black men in the state. Two more such referenda were soon to result in similar rejections of a black vote in Wisconsin and Minnesota (07 November 1865); see McPherson, Ordeal by Fire, 501–02.
Mill’s rationale can be fully understood through the arguments deployed by his comrade in arms, who fully shared Mill’s recommendations. Cairnes had recently contributed a powerful article on the subject. He had insisted that the question of a literacy test had to wait until the blacks, having received education, would be enabled to claim the vote according to such a criterion on an impartial basis. But meanwhile, if given the vote immediately, the decisions which blacks would be allowed to decide upon in the first instance concerned elementary questions on which they could judge without any need for reading and writing—and to that extent there would be no danger in admitting them to the franchise. These were questions such as:

Shall the negroes be allowed to live and maintain themselves in the States where they have been born and reared? Shall they be permitted to enter into legal marriage: Shall negro parents be allowed the same rights over their children as are enjoyed by other people? Shall negroes have access to the public schools? Shall the evidence of negroes be received in the courts of justice? Shall they be permitted to make their contracts for the commodity in which they deal—their labour—with the same freedom as is accorded to other men?  

As soon as he heard of them, Mill connected the troubles that broke out in Jamaica in late 1865 with the question of reconstruction in the American South and used the Jamaican experience as one more example proving ‘the necessity of giving equality of political rights to the negroes’. What had just taken place in Jamaica, he wrote to an American acquaintance, ‘might be used as a very strong argument against leaving the freedmen to be legislated for by their former masters’. England would probably ‘have to make a clean sweep of the institutions of Jamaica, and suspend the power of local legislation altogether, until the necessary internal reforms [had] been effected by the authority of the mother country’. Therefore,

[h]ow much more needful [. . .] [was] it that America should refrain from giving back to the rebel states the rights already forfeited by them, except on such conditions as will secure equal laws and an impartial administration of justice between colour and colour.

This ‘[would] not and [could not] be the case unless the Negroes [could] serve on juries, and, through the electoral suffrage, have an equal voice in choosing or controlling the judges, or those who appoint them’. Mill warned the Northern Americans to ‘take care not to be forgiving at the Negroes’ expense’. Mill insisted in several other letters that society in the Southern States had to be ‘democratized in law and in fact, on the principles of the Declaration of Independence’. And he wrote to Motley in 1866 that in the new struggle in which Americans were then engaged, that of reconstruction, ‘the real desideratum

---


160 Mill to Hazard, 15 November 1865, in Mill, *CW*, XVI, 1117.

161 Mill to Hazard, 15 November 1865, in Mill, *CW*, XVI, 1117.

162 Mill to Hazard, 15 November 1865, in Mill, *CW*, XVI, 1117–18.

163 Mill to Hazard, 15 November 1865, in Mill, *CW*, XVI, 1118.

164 Mill to Hazard, 15 November 1865, in Mill, *CW*, XVI, 1118. The same conclusions regarding the lessons of Jamaica for Southern reconstruction were to be drawn by New England liberals in the next few months; see Butler, *Critical Americans*, 104–05.

165 Mill to Norton, 24 November 1865, in Mill, *CW*, XVI, 1119.
(in addition to colonization from the North) is the Homestead law which you propose for the negroes. I cannot express too strongly the completeness of my agreement with all you say on that point.\textsuperscript{166} Significantly, Mill went on to say that

\[\textit{[c]ompared with these great questions, free trade is but a secondary matter; but it is a good sign that this also has benefited by the general impulse given to the national mind, and that the free traders are raising themselves for vigorous efforts.}\textsuperscript{167}\]

But Mill stressed

I am not anxious that this question should be forced on while the others are pending; for anything which might detach the Western from the Eastern States, and place them in even partial sympathy with the South, would at present be a great calamity.\textsuperscript{168}

None of this meant that Mill did not value free trade and did not want it promoted in America. In fact he tried, on several occasions, to help the efforts of American free traders.\textsuperscript{169} But the explicit statement that even free trade had to wait, given what was at stake, shows how strongly he felt the urgency for full political and social equality for blacks in America.\textsuperscript{170}

\textit{6. Not by the Pen Alone: London Emancipation Society, United States Sanitary Commission, National Freedmen’s-Aid Union}

The London Emancipation Society was formed in November 1862 to promote better understanding of the Northern cause in Britain.\textsuperscript{171} Its co-founder, F. W. Chesson, was proudly announcing to the American leading abolitionist, W. L. Garrison, on 09 January 1863: ‘The Emancipation Society includes […] some of the best men in the country […] The name of John Stuart Mill – one of the greatest in England – stands at the head of the list.’\textsuperscript{172} And though Marx could not help dubbing it ‘the Bourgeois Emancipation Society’,\textsuperscript{173} Mill had no class prejudices as to which societies and events to support, providing they fought for what he kept referring to as ‘the cause’. Marx himself witnessed the meeting at St. James’s Hall on 26 March

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{enumerate}
\item[166] Mill to Motley, 06 May 1866, in Mill, \textit{CW}, XVI, 1165.
\item[168] Mill to Motley, 06 May 1866, in Mill, \textit{CW}, XVI, 1165.
\item[170] The contrast between the main preoccupations with regard to reconstruction in Mill’s letters with what mainly concerned Richard Cobden in his letters from the time that Union victory seemed probable until his death is instructive. See Richard Cobden, \textit{The Letters of Richard Cobden}, edited by Anthony Howe, Simon Morgan and Gordon Bannerman, 4 vols (Oxford, 2007–), IV (forthcoming).
\end{enumerate}
\end{footnotesize}
1863, called by the London Trades Union Council, where Mill was ‘present on the platform’. A young Austrian guest that Mill had taken to the meeting would ‘never forget the venerable man, as he sat there like a youth, deeply agitated, applauding the speeches not only of John Bright and Professor Beesly, but also the simple words of an Irish workman’. Mill was also in close cooperation with (and a subscriber to) the Manchester-based Union and Emancipation Society, and encouraged—as well as was most encouraged by—working-class support for the North.

On 03 April 1865, the Daily News was informing its readers that John Stuart Mill, ‘who has all along been a good friend of the United States, has directed that whatever copyright may be allowed by the American publishers of his works shall be given to the Sanitary Commission or some similar object of national charity’. The United States Sanitary Commission was a voluntary organisation that supplied medical aid and other relief to soldiers and sailors of the Union forces during the Civil War. Mill had responded to its call for support earlier and had recommended its activities to others. (He was some years later to adduce its example as telling in favour of granting the suffrage to women, calling it ‘one of the most striking facts of modern times’, showing ‘what women’s powers of organisation can accomplish in public life.’)

But Mill’s activism and financial assistance to the ‘cause’ did not cease with the end of hostilities. He was one of the vice-presidents of the National Freedmens-Aid Union of Great Britain and Ireland. The Union had been formed in 1866 in order to aid the freed negroes in the United States; it ‘sent out large sums of money to help [the Negro]’ and ‘directed how these should be used’. Leading anti-slavery activists and supporters of the North during the Civil War were involved in it. The activities of the Union were closely linked (and much of its personnel

---

174 See The Times, 27 March 1863, 12. See also Mill to Cairnes, 25 March 1863, in Mill, CW, XV, 851; Marx to Engels, 09 April 1863, in Marx and Engels, Collected Works, XLI, 468. See also Adelaide Weinberg, Theodor Gomperz and John Stuart Mill (Geneva, 1965), 33–34.


176 See, for example, The Final Report of the National Freedmen’s-Aid Union of Great Britain and Ireland (London, 1868), 3.

177 Daily News, 03 April 1865, 3. For more on the Sanitary Commission, see McPherson, Ordeal by Fire, 385–87.


179 See John Stuart Mill, ‘The Civil War in the United States’, Our Daily Fare [Philadelphia], 21 June 1864, 95–96, in CW, XXV, 1204–05; Mill to Chadwick, 15 April 1864, in Mill, CW, XV, 938; Mill to Chadwick, 28 October 1864, in Mill, CW, XV, 961.

180 John Stuart Mill, ‘Women’s Suffrage [3]’, speech given on 12 January 1871, in CW, XXIX, 406. On women’s role in the Sanitary Commission, see A. Smith, American Civil War, 180–82.


overlapped) with the Jamaica Committee, in which Mill’s leading role is well known.\footnote{See Bolt, \textit{Anti-Slavery Movement and Reconstruction}, 69–70 and passim. On Mill and the Eyre controversy, see Bruce L. Kinzer, Ann P. Robson and John M. Robson, \textit{A Moralist In and Out of Parliament: John Stuart Mill at Westminster 1865–1868} (Toronto, ON, 1992), 184–217.}

\section{Mill as Bridge-Maker}

Such activism for causes he felt strongly about was typical of Mill, as were his relentless efforts to mediate between the public opinion of his own country and that of another with which tensions were threatened. He had given himself such a role in the 1830s and 1840s with regard to Britain’s relations with France, and now, in the 1860s, it was the turn of America. In his \textit{Autobiography}, Mill wrote that

\begin{quote}
England is paying the penalty, in many uncomfortable ways, of the durable resentment which her ruling classes stirred up in the United States by their ostentatious wishes for the ruin of America as a nation. […] they have reason to be thankful that a few, if only a few known writers and speakers, standing firmly by the Americans in the time of their greatest difficulty, effected a partial diversion of these bitter feelings, and made Great Britain not altogether odious to the Americans.\footnote{Mill, \textit{Autobiography}, in \textit{CW}, I, 268.}
\end{quote}

The first sentence of the next paragraph (‘This duty having been performed […]’\footnote{Mill, \textit{Autobiography}, in \textit{CW}, I, 268.}) indicates that Mill included himself as one of these ‘few known writers and speakers’. There was no trace of exaggeration in this statement. His reputation in America just before the Civil War was extraordinary, and it became even more so thanks to his frantic efforts during the four years of the Civil War, when Mill was indisputably ‘the most prominent British friend of the Union during the Civil War’.\footnote{Butler, \textit{Critical Americans}, 5. See also Butler, \textit{Critical Americans}, 8–10, 13–14, 71, 79–81, 88, 116–19, 126–29; Louis Menand, \textit{The Metaphysical Club} (London, 2001), 205, 221, 369.} He was aware, just after the end of the war, that he had ‘the ear’ of America.\footnote{Mill to Kyllmann, 30 May 1865, in Mill, \textit{CW}, XVI, 1063 note 4.} He kept extensive contacts with many Unionist Americans, trying assiduously to convince them that not all of his compatriots were against the North, and that the best of England were on their side (while trying hard back home to make sure this became more true than it actually was).\footnote{For some characteristic examples—among many more—see Mill to Motley, 31 October 1862, in Mill, \textit{CW}, XV, 801–04; Mill to Motley, 26 January 1863, in Mill, \textit{CW}, XV, 826–31; Mill to Appleton, 24 September 1863 in Mill, \textit{CW}, XV, 885–86; Mill to Maurice Wakeman, 25 October 1865, in Mill, \textit{CW}, XVI, 1108–09.} The attempt (shared by others, but mainly understood as headed by Mill) certainly had its effects on Northern American intellectuals and journalists, who started speaking of ‘two Englands’.\footnote{See, for example, [George William Curtis], ‘Our Friends in England’, \textit{Harper’s Weekly}, 07 November 1863, 706; Butler, \textit{Critical Americans}, 84.} And, again as he had done in earlier times in the case of Franco-British disputes, Mill was anxious to explain the point of view of the other side to his own compatriots. He thus undertook a campaign to promote pamphlets by American authors and exchanged long letters with cabinet members (including Gladstone, then Chancellor of the Exchequer) in order to enlighten the British
political elites on how the Alabama dispute was seen by educated Americans.\footnote{190} Following his electoral defeat in 1868, Mill implied that the tense state of Anglo-American relations in 1865 had been one of his reasons for accepting the invitation to enter parliament that year.\footnote{191} He certainly did his bit in the House of Commons when the opportunity arose by trying to ease tensions and propose a friendly solution to the Anglo-American disputes over the Alabama claims.\footnote{192}

Mill’s concerted efforts led to an overwhelming degree of gratitude, honours, and recognition from Unionist America.\footnote{193} (Unreconstructed Southerners were, of course, less appreciative.\footnote{194}) His earnest endeavours to salvage as much as possible of the honour of his country by going out of his way to show solidarity with the Unionists and to convince Northern Americans that not all in England had adopted the cause of the ‘slaveholding conspiracy’\footnote{195} did pay some dividends. A typical example is the American abolitionist Samuel J. May (very critical of mainstream British reactions in his letters) writing to the Dublin Quaker Richard D. Webb in 1863, noting a recent change in the tone of British attitudes to the Civil War and remarking:

We, here, are inclined to attribute a good deal of influence to J. S. Mill’s article in Fraser’s Magazine on ‘The Contest in America’ […] and think that he and Mr. Bright and George Thompson (with others doubtless) may fairly divide the honour of saving England from rushing blindfold upon a career which, however harmful to us it had been, must have in the long run been very much more to her own loss and dishonour.\footnote{196}

8. Conclusion

In attempting to provide as thoroughly contextualised an account of Mill’s response to the American Civil War and reconstruction as is possible in an article, this paper
can help to rectify a number of misunderstandings that have arisen with regard to that response. For instance, given what we saw in section 5, it is curious to read that ‘[e]ven British Radicals like Bright and Mill tended to regard the concession of the vote to freedmen with disapproval’.

197 There were indeed staunchly pro-North British radicals who were against granting the vote to the freedmen. Goldwin Smith was prominent among those. He thought that there could be no real political equality without ‘social fusion’: ‘And how can there be social fusion while the difference of colour and the physical antipathy remain?’.

198 Smith’s solution was ‘negro emigration on a large scale’: ‘And happily our West India dependencies under a really paternal government [...] lie close at hand.’

199 But Mill would have no truck with such ideas. In fact, nowhere in the extant evidence did he refer to Lincoln’s earlier plans ‘for the expatriation of people of colour’, the idea of sending blacks to colonise some Central American country.

200 Yet, such plans were reported in the press, including the press Mill was reading. However, we can guess that he was against the idea, as he did categorically dismiss the proposal of another American politician, after Lincoln’s assassination, to create a separate enclave for the freed slaves.

In the most recent study on Mill on the American Civil War, Brent Kinser finds a number of ‘inconsistencies’ in Mill’s stance. First, he criticises Mill’s argument that the loyal slave-owners should be compensated, judging it inconsistent with his strong feelings against American slavery.

204 But Mill was being consistent with his long-held principles. Security of expectation was an extremely important consideration for the utilitarians. An application of that principle was Mill’s statement in his Principles of Political Economy (1848), where he had spoken of ‘subjects of property, in which no proprietary rights ought to exist at all’.

205 At the head of those, he stressed, was ‘property in human beings’. Mill was adamant that it ‘is almost superfluous to observe, that this institution can have no place in any society even pretending to be founded on justice, or on fellowship between human creatures’.

206 There was another consideration to take into account, however:

But iniquitous as it is, yet when the state has expressly legalized it, and human beings, for generations, have been bought, sold, and inherited under sanction of

---


199 Smith to Norton, 18 October 1865, quoted in Semmel, ‘The Issue of “Race”’, 3. Much later Smith was to write: ‘The anti-slavery and negrophilist leaders in the United States, Charles Sumner especially, were impetuous, and their passions had been kindled by the war. They might otherwise have refrained from investing the negro at once with political power, to the use of which he was absolutely a stranger, and thus bringing on Carpet-bagging, the Ku Klux, and in some measure this unhappy and ominous state of things; see Goldwin Smith, ‘Party Government’, North American Review, November 1908, 647–48.


201 See Daily News, 24 September 1862, 4.

203 See Mill to Dickson, 01 September 1865, in Mill, CW, XVI, 1099. The proposal had come from General Jacob Dolson Cox, in 1865.

204 Kinser, American Civil War, 151, 154, 161.


law, it is another wrong, in abolishing the property, not to make full compensation.207

The second inconsistency Kinser claims to find in Mill’s attitude is what he calls his ‘legalistic’ reaction to the Alabama dispute.208 But in the ‘legalistic’ letter that Kinser refers to,209 Mill was trying to persuade the British government to see the point of view of the Americans who were convinced that Britain had violated obligations under international law by allowing the Alabama and other ships to be built and equipped in Britain. Mill knew enough of Gladstone’s ambivalent position on the Civil War to have no hope of convincing him on the moral grounds Kinser would have liked Mill to have used. There was no inconsistency whatsoever between trying to argue the moral case as strongly as one could in public (as Mill did), and simultaneously trying to convince wavering members of the cabinet to understand the legal implications of Britain’s official behaviour and how it was perceived in America. Mill had information about where Gladstone stood on the matter, and that he would be open to conviction on legal grounds. The exercise was all the more justified and well targeted, as it seems to have had some concrete results.210 International-law arguments with regard to the disputes between Britain and the US went into bewildering detail, but they were deadly serious in Anglo-American relations between 1861 and 1872, and Mill was fully aware of this.211

A third ‘inconsistency’ according to Kinser is that Mill did not advocate British intervention in favour of the North, but approved the British government’s policy of neutrality.212 Again, both the realities of British public opinion attitudes and the international law issues involved were such that intervention in favour of the North was not an option anyone could take seriously. In fact, we now know—more than Mill knew at the time—that the British cabinet had seriously contemplated intervention to separate the two sides and recognise the independence of the South.213 Asking the British government to stick to its proclaimed strict neutrality without recognising Southern independence was all the friends of the North could do and hope for.214

I have argued in the past that, despite what many recent commentators would have us believe, Mill was not a ‘racist’.215 I hope this article might contribute to that

208 Kinser, American Civil War, 154–55.
209 See Mill to Gladstone, 22 January 1864, in Mill, CW, XV, 915–16.
210 See Varouxakis, Liberty Abroad, chapter 2, section 2.
211 See one of his many explicit statements to this effect in Mill to Cairnes, 05 March 1865, in Mill, CW, XVI, 1002. I have argued that the issues raised by the Civil War influenced decisively Mill’s attitude towards international law and significantly increased his interest in, and familiarity with, its details; see Varouxakis, Liberty Abroad, chapter 2.
212 Kinser, American Civil War, 145–49.
215 See Georgios Varouxakis, ‘John Stuart Mill on Race’, Utilitas, 10 (1998), 17–32; Georgios Varouxakis, ‘Empire, Race, Euro-centrism: John Stuart Mill and his Critics’, in Utilitarianism and Empire, Schultz and Varouxakis, 137–53. For a similar understanding of Mill as a non-racist, see Peter Mandler, “Race” and
debate as well. Some very important issues that have been raised in the existing literature on Mill and the Civil War include the changes the latter brought to Mill’s attitude towards democracy in general and American democracy in particular (and not least his reflections on how the devastating experience affected the American people and ‘mind’),216 his thought on progress,217 and his thought on war and peace.218 These topics have received some of the attention they deserve. But in the midst of commentary about all of these other significant questions, the main issue of the American Civil War and its importance for Mill was in danger of being underappreciated. For this reason, I have focused here on what his responses to the American Civil War reveal about the intensity of Mill’s rejection of slavery and of inequality based on racial grounds.

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank Richard Whatmore, the journal’s anonymous referees, and the staff of the LSE archive. I am also very grateful to Anthony Howe for allowing me access to the letters to be included in the fourth volume of The Letters of Richard Cobden long before publication. I am of course solely responsible for the shortcomings of this article.

216 For an excellent analysis, see Compton, ‘Emancipation of the American Mind’.
218 See Varouxakis, Liberty Abroad, chapter 6.