Review

LOUISE L. STEVENSON

Joseph A. Fry. *Lincoln, Seward, and US Foreign Relations in the Civil War Era*. Studies in Conflict, Diplomacy, and Peace. Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2019. Pp. 241.

Joseph Fry has written several important books on the conduct of American nineteenth- and twentieth-century foreign relations with a focus on the men implementing that policy. This new book promises to revise the contention that Secretary of State Seward formulated and led the diplomatic policy of the Lincoln administration while Abraham Lincoln knew and said little about foreign affairs during his presidency. Instead, Fry shows the achievements of their productive partnership, and forcefully argues that the president was its senior member. The Lincoln-Seward diplomatic team kept European nations, especially France, from interfering in the war through recognition of the seceded states as a nation, humanitarian intervention, and disrespect of the Union blockade. In short, the partnership was an essential ingredient for Union victory. Fry also persuasively contends that Seward followed a strategy based on the belief that the best defense was being offensively offensive. During the first years of the war, the secretary of state blustered warnings to England and France when their leaders threatened aggression or pro-CSA diplomatic moves, such as declarations of neutrality (55–57).

Fry states in his acknowledgments that he intended to produce a synthesis that relies on previously published literature, while his introduction mentions that he intended an audience of college students and general readers. Thus, he lifts all quotations by Lincoln and Seward from secondary works, and not from the primary sources themselves. This book would be more firmly argued and consistently accurate if the author had checked the accuracy of borrowed quotations by consulting the primary sources now available on the internet. In the present day, researchers do not have to be intrepid to consult the letters and speeches of Lincoln and the diplomatic correspondence of

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Seward's State Department in the online editions of *Foreign Relations of the United States (FRUS)*.[1]

Fry's discussion of the purchase of Alaska by the United States from Russia in 1867 provides one example of how research beyond secondary works might have strengthened his narrative. He extends his story of the Lincoln-Seward partnership to the Alaska purchase even though Lincoln died two years before the transaction. This territorial expansion properly belongs in the list of accomplishment of the Lincoln-Seward partnership. After all, Lincoln appointed Seward, and territorial development was indeed part of the administration's agenda. Still, in his discussion of the Alaska purchase, Fry misses an opportunity to connect Alaska directly with presidential actions and not merely with those of his administration. With a quick online search of Lincoln's annual messages to Congress and the online edition of the FRUS, he would have learned that Lincoln and Seward envisioned a telegraph line extending from California through Alaska, across the ocean to Siberia, and on to Moscow. The project never got beyond the planning stages, given completion of the first permanent transatlantic cable in 1866.

Choosing to end his story with the Alaska purchase supports more recent approaches to the history of American foreign relations. Instead of envisioning American imperial expansion as beginning with the country's engagement with Pacific lands in the last third of the nineteenth century, recent historians, such as Robert Kagan and Steven Hahn, among others, conceive of American expansion more holistically as extending from the Louisiana Purchase in 1803 to the present. Thus, Fry joins contemporary historians as seeing both Seward and even Lincoln as imperialists. Because this enlarged frame for United States imperialism will be new to readers who have not kept up with academic trends, Fry would do well to explain his overall view in the introduction rather than hinting at it in several textual references. Thus he would further revise the history of foreign relations in the era of the Civil War.[2]

1. Lincoln's letters and speeches, using Roy P. Basler 8-volume edition (1953–55), are at https://quod.lib.umich.edu/l/lincoln/. The *Foreign Relations of the United States* (1861–1960) are at http://digicoll.library.wisc.edu/cgi-bin/FRUS/FRUS-idx?type=browse&scope=FRUS.FRUS1.

2. Robert Kagan, *Dangerous Nation: America's Place in the World, from It's Earliest Days to the Dawn of the 20th Century* (New York: Knopf, 2006); Steven Hahn, *A Nation Without Borders: The United States and Its World in an Age of Civil Wars, 1830–1910* (New York: Penguin, 2016).

The contention that Lincoln and Seward engaged in imperialism probably will evoke a comment from readers like "huh" or a "whatever do you mean?" The case for Seward as an imperialist is obvious, but Lincoln? Seward, early in his political career, offered speeches and actions promoting territorial expansion. From the 1850s forward, the New Yorker wanted to make his country "a Power of the Pacific Ocean" (27). In response to New York investors in the guano boom of the 1850s, Senator Seward proposed the first law sanctioning non-contiguous territorial acquisition, the Guano Islands Act of 1856, which Fry overlooks. Like Lincoln, Seward backed federal development of the transcontinental railroad. He hoped that it would knit the recently admitted states of California and Oregon into the nation while promoting trade with the Pacific, especially with the guano islands, Hawaii, Japan, and above all China.[3]

Since Fry considers the purchase of Alaska as part of the Lincoln-Seward agenda and emphasizes Seward's advocacy of the railroad and hopes for development of American commerce in the Pacific, he also could have extended his discussion of Lincoln-Seward policies by one more year. In 1868, Seward negotiated a treaty with China affording it most favored nation status and guaranteeing open immigration of Chinese to the United States. The treaty also granted China the right to establish consulates in American port cities. These diplomatic outposts were especially important on the West Coast as they could help immigrants negotiate anti-Chinese state laws and hostile treatment from immigration officials. To negotiate the 1868 treaty, the Chinese foreign office appointed Anson Burlingame to lead its delegation to Washington. After Burlingame had campaigned so extensively for Lincoln in the 1860 campaign that he failed to secure his own reelection to Congress, the president rewarded him with appointment as minister to China in 1862. When Burlingame announced his intention to step down from his diplomatic posting, the Chinese foreign office recruited him to lead its first diplomatic embassy to the United States and Europe. A comprehensive treatment of Lincoln-Seward diplomacy, if it is not going to terminate in 1865 and if it emphasizes the partnership's Pacific initiatives, should include both the Alaska purchase and the Burlingame Treaty.

Casting Lincoln as an imperialist presents greater difficulty. Here Fry's argument would benefit from an explicit definition, in his introduction, of what he considers imperialism. His definition would

3. Fry summarizes Seward's imperial agenda on p. 5 and deals with the details in later chapters.

include territorial acquisition, for which Seward was an advocate. In Lincoln's case, Fry asks readers to consider how his speeches and wartime policies treated Native Americans. Although Fry does not mention it, federal policy-making during the 1860s for Native Americans who lived within the boundaries of the United States, whether on reservations or their own lands, resided in the Department of the Interior and not in the Department of State. Although Seward might have agreed with Lincoln's thinking regarding Native Americans, he did not officially have anything to do with formulating policy affecting their treatment. With regard to the Indian nations, Fry supports his argument by retreating from calling Lincoln a territorial imperialist and instead calling him an expansionist. He grounds his case on the Lincoln administration's attempts to control Indian territories in present-day Oklahoma and to stop the Sioux in the upper Midwest from impeding the western movement of white settlers. After a few sentences, Fry backtracks from the expansionist label and damns Lincoln as an imperialist by saying that the impact of westward expansion on American Indians, which Lincoln promoted with the Homestead Act and transcontinental railroad, "foreshadowed the U.S. colonial system imposed on Hawaiians, Filipinos, and Puerto Ricans at the turn of the twentieth century" (137, 31).

Additionally, Fry considers both Lincoln and Seward political-cultural imperialists, although he never uses the term. Drawing directly on Richard H. Immerman's analysis of Seward's speeches, Fry argues that they foresaw U.S. promotion of "republicanism through the force of example and commerce." Although the president did not predict that increased commerce with Europe would promote republicanism, he shared his secretary's hopes for its spread throughout the western world. Unlike Seward, Lincoln received more inspiration from the failure of recent European revolutions and reform movements. As he said in his 1862 annual message to Congress, the United States republic was "the last best hope of earth," or, as Fry notes, that the "hopes of the world" depended on U.S. victory in the war with the seceded states.[4]

4. Richard H. Immerman, *Empire for Liberty: A History of American Imperialism from Benjamin Franklin to Paul Wolfowitz* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2010), 114–15. Fry, 37 (quoting Lincoln on hope), 27. Basler's *Collected Works* includes the putative Lincoln quotation on p. 14 of volume 6, and dates it in 1862, with several strong cautions. Fry draws the quotation from Robert Kagan's *Dangerous Nation*, p. 266. In the 2007 Vintage books edition of Kagan, this quotation did not appear. Perhaps when libraries re-open after the Covid-19 closures, a more extensive search can be done.

In conclusion, the book deserves a strong recommendation for its argument, although this review (see the notes) suggests that the execution needs some correction. Fry has not been well served by his editors at the University Press of Kentucky. The corrections would not be necessary had they exercised more control of the manuscript's conception and execution. It is surprising that the press recommended for publication a work that eschews going to the primary sources, especially when we live in the age of the internet. As the author hoped, I might consider his book for inclusion in a college course, and nonacademic audiences will certainly find it an informative and manageable read. They will learn how presidents and their department secretaries have worked and can work in tandem after they bracket personal differences and cooperate to enact policies for the national interest. Taking a longer perspective, Fry wants readers to see Civil War–era diplomacy as belonging to the flow of U.S. history. For this author, the Civil War diplomacy is not a four-year blip dividing the nineteenth century. It belongs to the long history of U.S. imperialism, as does the Lincoln-Seward partnership.