

2012

Review of: Wayne H. Bowen, *Spain and the American Civil War*

Sean Perrone  
Perrone@fake.com

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digitalcommons.asphs.net/bsphs>

---

**Recommended Citation**

Perrone, Sean (2012) "Review of: Wayne H. Bowen, *Spain and the American Civil War*," *Bulletin for Spanish and Portuguese Historical Studies*: Vol. 37 : Iss. 1 , Article 30.

<https://doi.org/10.26431/0739-182X.1110>

Available at: <https://digitalcommons.asphs.net/bsphs/vol37/iss1/30>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by Association for Spanish and Portuguese Historical Studies. It has been accepted for inclusion in *Bulletin for Spanish and Portuguese Historical Studies* by an authorized editor of Association for Spanish and Portuguese Historical Studies. For more information, please contact [jesus@udel.edu](mailto:jesus@udel.edu).

Wayne H. Bowen, *Spain and the American Civil War*. Shades of Blue and Gray Series. Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 2011. 188 pp.

The American Civil War's sesquicentennial has led to many new publications, including several on the international context of the conflict (e.g., Amanda Foreman's *A World on Fire: Britain's Crucial Role in the American Civil War* [2011]). Many of these studies understandably focus on Britain and France given that intervention by either country on the side of the Confederacy might have turned the tide of war. Less attention has been paid to Spain, which the *Richmond Dispatch* called "the natural ally of the South" in 1862 (p.1).

In this volume, Wayne H. Bowen begins to fill that gap in the historiography of the American Civil War. In seven chapters, Bowen addresses developments in nineteenth-century Spain, Spanish-American relations prior to and during the war, and the global context of the war. Although the book covers lots of ground, it succinctly describes the entanglement of the two nations at mid-century in an accessible and easy to read text.

Given that most readers of this series will be unfamiliar with nineteenth-century Spain, Bowen briefly sketches that history. He discusses how the return of internal stability under Prime Minister Leopoldo O'Donnell (1858-1863) seemed to herald the restoration of Spanish power after nearly 50 years of turmoil. Despite the strides that Spain made to reform its military and economy at mid-century, the country still lagged significantly behind the other great powers. For instance, its foreign policy was not truly independent. Spain still needed to act in concert with or with the approval of either Britain or France. Nonetheless, diplomats in both the Union and the Confederacy recognized that Spain could potentially play a pivotal role in the war.

To set the context for wartime diplomacy, Bowen summarizes pre-war tensions between the United States and Spain. He describes the various filibuster efforts (such as that of Narisco López) setting out from the United States as well as American efforts to annex Cuba. In the process, he underlines how Southern politicians' calls for the annexation of Cuba prior to the war made Spain leery of the Confederacy. Despite the fact that Spain shared the Confederacy's pro-slavery policies and its animosity toward the Union, the Confederacy needed to

ally significant Spanish distrust of its intentions before Spain would ever consider joining forces with the rebels.

Next, Bowen considers wartime diplomacy. He outlines the basic diplomatic aims of the Confederacy (with special attention given to “King Cotton” diplomacy) to gain foreign recognition and the Union to maintain foreign neutrality in the conflict. He spends considerable time rehashing British and French policies, most notably, their reluctance to intervene until the South achieved significant military victories. He also emphasizes Spain’s preference to act only in accordance with France or Britain. So despite any shared affinity between the South and Spain, the South’s only diplomatic success was Spain’s declaration of neutrality on June 17, 1861 and the subsequent extension of belligerent right to the South. Again, Spain was in no position to act on its own, and Bowen rightly spends a fair amount of time discussing Spanish policy in light of British and French decisions. However, at times, he spends so much time discussing British and French policies that the Spanish policy toward the American belligerents almost seems ancillary.

Even had Spain wanted to intervene in the war, it did not have the resources to do so. In 1861, Spain annexed the Dominican Republic. This foreign adventure quickly became the most important foreign policy issues for Spain and consumed most of its resources by 1863. Yet, Spanish annexation of the Dominican Republic cannot be understood outside of the context of the American Civil War, and Bowen adroitly weaves these narratives together. For instance, the Union opposed the Spanish occupation of the Dominican Republic, but President Lincoln hesitated to support Dominican rebels fearing that such actions might spur Spain to recognize the South or even enter the Civil War on the side of the South. The international context of the war then allows us not only to address bilateral relations but also to see how the war created new foreign policy opportunities in the western hemisphere for America’s rivals (i.e., Spanish intervention in the Dominican Republic or Napoleon III’s intervention in Mexico). That is, it places the history of the United States into a global narrative.

Although the book provides an important overview of Spain and the American Civil War, I wish that Bowen would have delved more deeply into the actions of Spanish military observers and diplomatic representatives in both the Union and Confederacy. Nonetheless, Bowen has provided a useful starting place for further research on Spanish involvement in the American Civil War. His study makes it clear that Spain was in no position to take an active role in the war. At the time, however, Spain appeared to be a resurgent power, and both the Union and the Confederacy needed to include Spain in their diplomatic calculations.

This book ably addresses that aspect of the conflict. General readers and specialists interested in the American Civil War and its global significance will enjoy reading this book.

Sean T. Perrone  
Saint Anselm College