

# A Roundtable on Steven Brady, *Chained to History: Slavery and U.S. Foreign Relations to 1865*

Matthew Mason, Brian Rouleau, Joseph A. Fry, Michael E. Woods, Stacey Smith,  
and Steven Brady

## Introduction to Brady Roundtable

Matthew Mason

At one key moment in my dissertation prospectus defense, my advisor, Ira Berlin, offered a helpful intervention on my behalf. After several of the faculty critics of the prospectus had asked “what about this” or “what about that,” usually trying to push my frame of reference backwards in time, Ira pronounced these questions part of “the Jamestown Phenomenon,” an oddity that all early Americanists are bound to encounter. His response has stuck with me to these many years, not only because he was rescuing little old me, but also because of his insight into the nature of criticism. An author’s job, he said, is to make the parameters of the dissertation (or book or article) clear. A critic’s job is to assess whether those parameters are fair. Critics should not pile up “what abouts” rooted in the manuscript they would like to have seen written.

This experience came to mind when I read the essays in this roundtable on Steven J. Brady’s synthesis of the impact of slavery on U.S. foreign relations from 1776 to 1865. Many of the reviewers express a wish that various themes or groups of people were better represented in the book. As Brady notes in his response to the reviews, such “what abouts” are, at their worst, an exercise in imagining the author had written a different—or at least a much, much longer—book.

As the two most appreciative reviewers note, the book that Brady wrote draws on extensive sources in multiple languages and synthesizes many issues both familiar and novel. Still, if Michael Woods and Brian Rouleau had had their way, the book would have covered a much broader cast of characters (both inside and outside of governments), other forms of servitude (including those inflicted on Native Americans and “coolie” laborers), and new time periods (such as Reconstruction and the Gilded Age). And, picking up on Woods’s excellent point that people rather than “slavery” as a disembodied force drove U.S. foreign relations and that those people were not just in government, I might add antislavery Americans and key nongovernmental foreign actors to the list, were I inclined to pile on.

When “what abouts” proliferate, responding to them all would obscure what the author wishes to highlight. In the case of American foreign policy in this era, for instance, it is hard to escape the impression from Brady’s sources that not all concerns were equal. The transatlantic, and especially matters connected to the British Empire, was first among U.S. policymakers’ and citizens’ concerns far more often than other considerations. To address all the issues at hand in U.S. foreign policy as equally

significant, even if we were to delimit them by their connections to slavery, would be to obscure this ranking in contemporaries’ minds.

No reviewer here raises these questions of significance more pointedly than Joseph Fry, although it must be said that his own criteria for the relative weight we ought to assign issues is somewhat unclear. Given the sheer amounts of ink and energy that American diplomats and politicians lavished on the issue of fugitive slaves taken during wars with Britain and that British diplomats lavished on the issue of cooperation in suppressing the transatlantic slave trade, it seems tendentious to simply dismiss them out of hand. Although these issues may not, as Fry notes, have determined “the international balance of power or involved decisions of war and peace,” they related to questions of sovereignty (especially in the American case with fugitive slaves) and reputation (especially in the British case with slave trade abolition) that obviously weighed heavily on contemporary minds.

However, this roundtable does show that Brady might have done more to establish the exact parameters of this study. In Rouleau’s reading of the book, Brady “purports to tell” the entire “story of ‘slavery and US foreign relations to 1865.’” Woods, on the other hand, finds it refreshing that Brady “eschews any claim to definitiveness.” Whatever may or may not have been going on in the book to lead to such divergent conclusions, Brady’s response in this roundtable is problematic.

First, he argues that his goal in the book was to look at “whatever is necessary, in whatever language, to understand all the factors that had a part in shaping the policies that emerged from complex international interactions.” Yet later he makes this disclaimer: because he had to limit the book’s length if he wanted it to be used in the classroom, “there is much that is not in *Chained to History*.” Additionally, Rouleau’s discussion shows not only how useful a consideration of U.S. foreign policy during Reconstruction and Gilded Age would have been, but also how Brady himself opens the door to an objection about its absence by arguing both that “the issue of slavery had been cleanly resolved” by 1865 and that slavery’s “legacy for American foreign relations did not end with the Thirteenth Amendment.”

“What abouts” can also play constructive roles. Rather than merely dinging the book in question for what it lacks, reviews that ask “what about” can point future scholars to profitable areas of inquiry. Woods’ review is an especially good example of this impulse. Stacey Smith’s review suggests avenues for future research but also provides useful angles of perspective on the book’s significance. She uses the lens of Black agency to draw out some of the importance of what is in Brady’s book.

These at times divergent and certainly diverse reviews of Brady's book are a testament to its power to provoke discussion, as any good monograph—especially one synthetic in nature—should do. They also point up the value of reading and trying to synthesize a range of responses to a book of this nature, rather than just one review.

### Review of Steven J. Brady, *Chained to History: Slavery and US Foreign Relations to 1865*

Brian Rouleau

The conclusion of Steven J. Brady's impressive new book channels the spirit of the *1619 Project*. "To understand America's diplomatic history," he observes, "one must understand the impact and legacy of slavery on America's relations with the world" (184). Such was the fundamental premise of Nikole Hannah-Jones and her fellow contributors' attempt to reorient the master narrative of U.S. history around Black bondage. One could not comprehend the unfolding of past events in this country, they proclaimed, without paying due attention to the shaping influence of unfree labor and its ugly twin, racism. Why should the same supposition not also apply to America's diplomatic history? Hence the insistence of *Chained to History* that from its founding in 1776 until the Civil War, the United States pursued a foreign relations policy unmistakably molded by slaveholding. While not the only factor guiding diplomatic decision-making, it nevertheless helped build the early foreign policy establishment in this country.

As Brady notes in the introduction, examining the knotted histories of slavery and foreign relations can pay rich interpretive dividends. Perhaps the most important of these dividends relates to the question of U.S. unilateralism—or more precisely, to the regularity with which an American desire for disentanglement foundered in the face of slavery's "proclivity . . . to enmesh the nation with the wider world in unwanted ways" (4). Though the nation "would have preferred to keep its relations with the eastern littoral of the Atlantic world largely limited to commerce," slaveholders became "compelled to conduct an active diplomacy with the Old World" (4). Time and time again, a material interest in slavery triggered perceived crises of national security. Those diplomatic predicaments, in turn, required deeper U.S. immersion in the affairs of other countries. Freedom from inter-imperial entanglements, supposedly a bedrock principle of American foreign relations, remained a pipe dream with slaveholders at the policymaking helm.

Subsequent sections explore the slavery issue's impact on early American international affairs in greater detail. The first few chapters in particular are among the book's strongest, because they pinpoint the ways in which U.S. diplomacy was stamped by bondage from the beginning. Indeed, even the 1783 Treaty of Paris, from which American independence derived, featured language meant to protect the property rights of slaveholders. A particularly fascinating discussion covers nearly nonstop Anglo-American wrangling over Article 7 of the Revolutionary War's peace accord. Inserted by South Carolina slaver Henry Laurens, it stipulated that as the British withdrew from the United States, they would not carry away any "Negroes or other Property." Suddenly the status of thousands of slaves who had self-emancipated during the war seemed to hinge on whose interpretation of the evacuation agreement would prevail.

Americans wanted returned to them every slave (or their cash equivalent) lost since the start of hostilities, while Britons insisted that the freedom of Black loyalists was non-negotiable. Brady adroitly tracks the dispute, which festered for years. Demands for compensation on the part of aggrieved slaveholders extended into and beyond the War of 1812, during which, once again, African American slaves flocked to British lines, seeking both freedom and an opportunity to visit vengeance upon their former masters.

The Treaty of Ghent resulted in a similar impasse over

slavery, and the matter eventually went to arbitration. As with any good compromise, both sides were left dissatisfied. Tsar Alexander I's decree ordered a relatively limited compensation of U.S. slaveholders. However, most of them never saw a penny. "Perhaps fittingly for these men, the loss of slaves proved to be the price of their own liberty" (17). In a well-written volume, Brady displays a real knack for the bon mot.

*Chained to History* also excels at demonstrating how slavery shaped antebellum maritime diplomacy. Most scholarly accounts tend to see debate over the acquisition of Florida, Texas, Cuba, and other territory as the clearest manifestation of slaveholder diplomacy. As Brady suggests, that is not so much wrong as incomplete. I appreciated the breadth of his book's vision, which of course covers more "standard" fare like westward and southward expansion but also wades into the lesser-known and more watery corners of the historiographic map.

For example, surveys of U.S. foreign relations tend to drop the issue of nautical searches and seizures after the impressment crisis ended in 1815. Brady's account, however, explores in impressive depth the regularity with which Britain and the United States clashed over the Royal Navy's efforts to suppress the transatlantic slave trade. America had banned slave imports in 1808, but Congress committed few resources to the law's enforcement. Moreover, one presidential administration after another refused to allow British authorities to inspect U.S. vessels for contraband slaves.

The American position was perfectly summarized by John Quincy Adams, then serving as James Monroe's secretary of state. When asked by his English counterpart if he could imagine a worse evil than the slave trade, Adams replied in the affirmative: "Admitting the right of search by foreign officers of our vessels upon the seas in time of peace, for that would be making slaves of ourselves" (78). Of course, as Brady is quick to point out, in objecting to their own figurative enslavement, Americans "assured that many more Africans would be subjected to slavery of a much more literal kind" (78).

A whole host of issues connected to slavery continued to draw the United States into contentious debate over maritime questions with Britain (and other European powers). Brady does particularly superb work in charting the role that the American Colonization Society played in shaping federal foreign policymaking. In seeking to solve the "problem" of the early republic's free Black population, U.S. agents planted the stars and stripes in Liberia and created a new source for one diplomatic misunderstanding after another with neighboring West African polities.

White terror over the prospect of slave rebellion also created havoc with European nations. Officials in several southern states reacted to these fears by trying to restrict the movement of Black sailors in port. The so-called Negro Seamen Acts, meant to curtail a potential flood of abolitionist influence into U.S. ports, ended up angering those countries whose nonwhite mariners were swept up in slaveholder dragnets. Conflict also arose over the status of shipwrecked and self-emancipated American slaves who turned up in British ports declared free soil by Parliament's 1834 Abolition Act. The *Creole* affair was only the highest profile case among many similar episodes involving Black travel along the "saltwater underground railroad." *Chained to History* helps to transform events that usually appear (if they appear at all) within the pages of highly specialized texts into pivotal moments in early America's diplomatic history.

For this reason, the last two chapters of the book, which cover more familiar topics like antebellum territorial expansion and the Civil War, perhaps lack some of the verve and originality of the first few. This is not to suggest they are without merit. But the annexation of Texas, the quest for Cuba, and the question of "Blue and Gray" diplomacy during the slaveholders' rebellion have of late been the focus of much good academic literature. One cannot help but notice that Brady more often cites the interpretations of others here; as well he should. Walter Johnson, Matthew Karp, Howard Jones, Robert May, Don Doyle, and Piero Gleijeses (among others) have all published seminal scholarship on the

foreign policy of slavery in the past decade or so. Therefore, Brady is surely on firm (but less pathbreaking) interpretive footing in drawing our attention to the role of slaveholders in shaping diplomacy during the decades immediately preceding the sectional split.

Less satisfactory is Brady's questionable decision to end the book in 1865 with the ratification of the Thirteenth Amendment. The abolition of chattel slavery in the United States may have shifted the diplomatic conversation about bound labor, but it did not end the debate in quite as definitive a way as the author implies. It is a stretch, in other words, to say that the issue of slavery had been "cleanly resolved" by the end of the Civil War (182). Emancipation was a signal event, but it did not mean that "one of the most important determinants of US foreign relations since the founding of the nation [had] vanished" (182).

We now have a fair number of studies detailing the ways in which Reconstruction-era and Gilded Age debates over foreign policy ended up relitigating the sectional dispute over slavery. Indeed, the last two chapters of Robert Kagan's *Dangerous Nation* (uncited here—an unfortunate oversight, given Kagan's role as one of the first modern scholars to posit the existence of a systematized "foreign policy of slavery") make a pretty persuasive argument about the ways that postbellum diplomatic disputes channeled older conversations about unfree labor.

In fairness, Brady acknowledges as much by the last sentences of the book. "Slavery was, at last, extirpated in 1865," he concedes, but "its legacy for American foreign relations did not end with the Thirteenth Amendment" (184). What had ceased to matter only a few pages before now transforms into something of enduring influence. This all comes across as a little muddled. It might have been worthwhile for the author to explore in slightly greater detail the lingering effects of the slaveholders' multigenerational dominance over the State Department's policymaking establishment.<sup>1</sup>

The largest part of the problem with Brady's swift exit circa 1865 is conceptual. A question that does not get asked here but probably should be is, How do we define slavery? *Chained to History* presumes an almost a priori definition of unfree labor as exclusive to peoples of African descent. At first glance, this makes sense. Chattel slavery, as well as its toxic corollary, anti-Black racism, was indisputably a major force in the history of American foreign relations. But there were varieties and gradations of slavery in North America (and beyond) that go unmentioned here, and they too shaped U.S. diplomacy.

A long-standing Native American trade in captives—what Andrés Reséndez has called "the other slavery"—structured intra-Indian foreign relations and provoked repeated imperial incursions into the West. Southwestern labor schemes like debt peonage likewise helped trigger a flurry of border disputes and armed conflicts in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. The scourge of "coolie" labor and efforts to stamp out similarly exploitative systems of indenture also shaped relations between East Asia, South Asia, the Caribbean, and the United States. Some Americans participated in (while others decried) a transpacific man-stealing regime known as the "blackbird trade," which saw untold thousands of Natives plucked from their island homes and condemned to lifetimes of immiseration gathering the guano used as fertilizer by U.S. farmers.<sup>2</sup>

Each of these bound labor systems was written and talked about by Americans as slavery or so close an approximation to slavery that there really was no difference. There were others as well, and good histories have recently been written about all of them. My concern about a survey like Brady's, which purports to tell the story of "slavery and US foreign relations to 1865," is that it may misleadingly narrow our field of vision. Many millions of Black Americans were "chained to history," and their fates surely entwined with the choices made by federal diplomats. But I would also like to see a bigger and bolder imagining of what we mean

when we talk about slavery. Other kinds of people experiencing other varieties of slavery were also chained to the history of the United States in the world. Our task now is to assemble the pieces of a much bigger puzzle. The result will be a more comprehensive picture of the multiple levels at which the "land of the free" alternately safeguarded or smashed unfree labor in pursuit of an evolving conception of what constituted the "national interest."

None of this is meant to detract from Steven J. Brady's signal achievement. In fact, there may be no other person more disarmingly and refreshingly forthright about the limitations of a short survey on this topic. In an admirably honest introduction, the author cheerfully acknowledges that his book "makes no claim to being the proverbial 'last word' on its subject" (7). Instead, his hope is that his inquiry "will arouse interest in further scholarship on a highly significant aspect of America's early international relations. If it serves in some degree to re-center slavery as a key element in American foreign relations up through the Civil War, *Chained to History* will have made a worthwhile contribution" (7). On that front (and many others), Brady has entirely succeeded.

This is a *more* than worthwhile contribution to the field that will continue to invigorate debate and inspire new research for years to come.

Notes:

1. Robert Kagan, *Dangerous Nation: America's Foreign Policy from Its Earliest Days to the Dawn of the Twentieth Century* (New York, 2006).
2. On Indian slavery and U.S. policy, see Andrés Reséndez, *The Other Slavery: The Uncovered Story of Indian Enslavement in America* (Boston, MA, 2016); and Brian DeLay, "Indian Politics, Empire, and the History of American Foreign Relations," *Diplomatic History* 39, no. 5 (November 2015): 927–42. On debt peonage, see Andrés Reséndez, "North American Peonage," *Journal of the Civil War Era* 7, no. 4 (December 2017): 597–619. On coolies and imperial policymaking, see Moon-Ho Jung, *Coolies and Cane: Race, Labor, and Sugar in the Age of Emancipation* (Baltimore, MD, 2006); and Manu Karuka, *The Empire's Tracks: Indigenous Nations, Chinese Workers, and the Transcontinental Railroad* (Oakland, CA, 2019). On blackbirding, see Gerald Horne, *The White Pacific: U.S. Imperialism and Black Slavery in the South Seas after the Civil War* (Honolulu, 2007).

## Review of Stephen J. Brady, *Chained to History: Slavery and US Foreign Relations to 1865*

Joseph A. Fry

Stephen J. Brady asserts that slavery was "one of the major determinants" of pre-1865 U.S. foreign relations. Antebellum American policymakers consistently incorporated the peculiar institution into their assessments of the nation's "security, prosperity, and geographical and political reach" (181). Therefore, he argues, slavery should be accorded a more conspicuous role in recounting and analyzing the history of U.S. foreign relations from the American Revolution through the end of the Civil War. Brady asserts that the absence of a "single, synthetic volume" examining slavery's persistent and influential role in the United States' international involvements constitutes a glaring omission in the "scholarly literature," and he seeks to "fill that lacuna" by re-centering slavery as a but not always the "key element in American foreign relations" (6–7).

While tracing and emphasizing slavery's impact on U.S. foreign relations during the nation's first century, Brady advances several subthemes. Slavery, he contends, repeatedly forced the United States to abandon its preferred policy of unilateralism and its primary focus on the North American continent and to become involved with the broader Atlantic World and European powers such as Great Britain, France, and Spain. An account of slavery's connection to U.S. international relations also demonstrates the "sheer messiness" (4) of foreign policy, replete with countervailing national interests and objectives; frustrations and failures

associated with international involvement and limits on national power; and inconsistencies among different U.S. presidential administrations and policymakers. Finally, and certainly most importantly, slavery was an ever-present consideration as the United States expanded westward across the North American continent and southward in attempts to acquire Cuba.

Brady explicates slavery's centrality to U.S. foreign relations and these collateral themes by examining five principal issues: (1) U.S. demands for compensation for the slaves the British "carried away" or freed during the American Revolution, (2) the American refusal to cooperate with British attempts to suppress the Atlantic slave trade and U.S. efforts to colonize African Americans, (3) the U.S. response to the Black slave revolution in Haiti, (4) U.S. territorial expansion, and (5) competing U.S. and Confederate foreign policies during the American Civil War.

In the 1783 Treaty of Paris, Great Britain acknowledged U.S. independence and sovereignty to the Mississippi River and agreed to withdraw from this territory without "carrying away any Negroes or other Property of the American Inhabitants" (9). There followed more than forty years of Anglo-American wrangling over how this language applied to the approximately 5 percent of slaves in southern colonies who had fled to freedom behind British lines. The United States demanded that these slaves be returned to their owners or that the aggrieved slaveholders be afforded fair monetary compensation. The British countered that they had the right to free any slaves who had come under their control during the war. After an indecisive effort at arbitration by Tsar Alexander of Russia in 1822, the matter was settled in 1826, when Great Britain agreed to pay \$1.2 million in compensation for the 3,061 slaves in question.

As Brady notes, this issue was at most a foreign policy "annoyance" for the British, but the United States considered Great Britain's concession a "significant foreign policy achievement" (29). The dogged U.S. pursuit of compensation under four slaveholding presidents and other policymakers, such as Benjamin Franklin and John Quincy Adams, both of whom were ambivalent about the institution, demonstrated the perceived importance of slavery to early American international interests and to the "messiness" engendered by the pursuit of those slavery-related interests. Despite the contemporary U.S. response, this matter hardly qualified as a critical foreign policy issue that decisively compromised the nation's unilateral preferences in the international realm.

The same could be argued about U.S. responses to the persistent British campaign after 1815 to suppress the Atlantic slave trade. Only by securing a multinational coalition could Britain hope to interdict the slave ships transporting Africans to the Western Hemisphere. Until 1862, the United States refused to grant Britain the right to stop and search ships sailing under the American flag. The United States stymied repeated British efforts to construct a cooperative and comprehensive multinational strategy for ending the inhumane transporting of enslaved people to the new world. By the 1830s, the southern political figures and allied northern Democrats who dominated the U.S. presidency and foreign policy until 1861 had also become concerned that British efforts to terminate the slave trade were part of a more general scheme to abolish slavery in the United States.

Colonization, or the U.S. attempt to settle freed Blacks in West Africa, further illustrates the importance of domestic slavery and the slave trade in the conduct of pre-Civil War U.S. foreign relations. Although important southerners such as Thomas Jefferson and James Madison had raised the possibility of resettling freed slaves outside the United States, the formation of the American Colonization Society (ACS) in 1815 seemed to provide an institutional mechanism for realizing this project. With the crucial assistance of the Monroe administration, the ACS launched the colony of Liberia in 1821 and sustained it over the subsequent decade.

While Liberia struggled as a private colony, the House Commerce Committee suggested in 1843 that the United States should more actively protect both Liberia and a neighboring, state-of-Maryland colonization site from encroachments by European merchants. This protection, the report suggested, might include making these entities an official "American colony" (101). No U.S. president took this step, nor was the United States willing to extend diplomatic recognition to Liberia after it declared its national independence in 1847. Liberia was not of sufficient economic or political importance to be made a colony, and no pre-Civil War, southern-dominated administration was prepared to extend recognition to a country populated by free Blacks.

Brady strongly buttresses the case for slavery as an important, ongoing influence on U.S. foreign relations with his informative treatment of the U.S. campaign to secure compensation for slaves freed by Britain during the American Revolution; the response to British initiatives to end the Atlantic slave trade and associated issues such as the *La Amistad* and *Creole* affairs; state laws in the American South restricting the rights and movement of free Afro-British sailors; and U.S. colonization projects. The U.S. response to these primarily Anglo-American disputes also reflected the nation's desire to conduct an independent foreign policy, even as

slavery led to unwelcome international conflicts with European powers and their citizens.

To be sure, these slavery-related issues were sufficiently important to command attention from policymakers and to merit inclusion in a comprehensive history of slavery and U.S. foreign relations, but were they worthy of occupying approximately one-half of Brady's book? While tied to slavery and

perceived as important by southern slaveholders and a U.S. government dominated by southerners and their northern allies, none of these matters threatened the actual existence of the institution within the United States. None imperiled the nation's economic prosperity or territorial expansion and integrity. None involved an outcome that would have altered the U.S. place in the international balance of power or involved decisions of war and peace. In short, they all paled in importance when compared to Brady's final three topics: U.S. policy toward Haiti, U.S. territorial expansion, and the American Civil War.

The revolution in Haiti presented the United States with an especially complex foreign policy challenge. It involved key U.S. commercial interests and balance of power relations with France and Great Britain. Since the Haitian uprising against colonial rule was also a slave rebellion, it rendered the U.S. response even more tortuous. This confluence of concerns, as Brady perceptively notes, yielded a "complicated, convoluted, and at times contradictory" set of U.S. policies (34).

The Washington administration sided with France, while seeking to preserve important trade with the island of Saint-Domingue and to forestall any possibility of this slave rebellion spreading to the United States. France failed to suppress the rebellion, however, and matters became even more muddled when Great Britain invaded the island in 1893, raising U.S. fears that the British might seize control of the colony and its valuable commerce. But by 1898, the Black revolutionaries and yellow fever had defeated the British. In the interim, the Adams administration, which had become embroiled in the Quasi-War with France in 1897, negotiated with Toussaint Louverture, the principal leader of the Black rebels, and provided him and his followers essential economic and military assistance in their battle against the French. U.S. strategic and commercial interests had taken precedence over deeply ingrained racial prejudice and the fear that American slaves might follow this violent Caribbean example.

That President Thomas Jefferson, a southern Republican slaveowner, continued his New England Federalist predecessor's functional alliance with the Black ex-slave rebels appeared even more surprising. Once more, U.S. trade with Saint-Domingue

and the desire to counter French power were decisive. But U.S. pursuit of empire and, as Brady's principal argument indicates, Jefferson's solicitude for slavery's wellbeing, were also crucial, collateral considerations.

Although the Caribbean example of a successful Black slave rebellion led by the impressive Louverture caused Jefferson great discomfort, the president was even more fearful of Napoleon Bonaparte's campaign to restore French control over Saint-Domingue and to link the island with Louisiana in a French imperial project. If successful, Napoleon's venture would have devastated the lucrative U.S. trade with the island and left a major European power in control of the Mississippi River and New Orleans. U.S. national security, economic prosperity, and the institution of slavery would have been imperiled.

To forestall these potential outcomes, the Jefferson administration continued U.S. trade with Louverture and his successor, Jean-Jacques Dessalines. This trade served as "the arsenal for the formerly enslaved Blacks" (59) and their successful war with France. National security, U.S. commerce, and imperial aspiration once again trumped race and slavery. Only after Black resistance and yellow fever had prevailed over the French, as they had the British, and Jefferson had successfully purchased Louisiana in 1803 did the United States resume its anti-Black, unambiguously proslavery position by refusing to recognize Haiti after the new nation adopted a new name and declared its status as an independent country in 1804. Although American slavery had influenced U.S. foreign policy responses in diverse ways, the institution had unquestionably been in the forefront of U.S. foreign policy regarding Haiti from 1791 through 1804 and would remain relevant through 1862.

The Louisiana Purchase exemplified Brady's fourth major theme—that the "desire to preserve and expand" (122) slavery was repeatedly tied to antebellum U.S. territorial expansion. After the Louisiana Purchase, the acquisition of Florida eliminated a refuge for runaway U.S. slaves. The annexation of Texas, the foremost achievement of what Matthew Karp has characterized as the "foreign policy of slavery," was partially motivated by apprehensions within the Tyler and Polk administrations that Britain sought to promote an independent, free territory and an alternative source of cotton on the U.S. border. This free-labor, cotton-producing nation would have threatened both the institution of slavery and the U.S. economy.

Brady also appropriately places slavery at the center of U.S.-Cuban policies after 1820. To avoid a British-dominated or independent, non-slave Cuba, U.S. leaders unsuccessfully sought to acquire the island from Spain via purchase or diplomatic pressure and acquiesced in violent, private filibustering expeditions originating in the United States. Slaveholders also coveted Cuba as an additional slave state that would have helped to preserve the South's influence in the Senate, as Florida and Texas had done.

Brady contends that the proslavery goal of expanding U.S. territory south into the Caribbean perished as the North-South battle over the New West intensified in the mid-1850s. "In pursuing expansion of slavery westward," he writes, southerners "thwarted their best chance for American expansion to the South," thereby losing a "golden opportunity" (150). Brady has also missed a golden opportunity by not including U.S.-Native American interactions in his analysis of U.S. foreign relations and by not examining how the imperial seizure of Indian lands was inextricably tied to the expansion of slavery, to the construction of the "Cotton Kingdom" across the Deep South, and to the globalization of the pre-Civil War American economy.

After 1787, white Americans built an empire by expanding westward, and the South was "the most imperialistically minded U.S. region." This imperial process led to foreign policy conflicts with Britain, France, and Spain, but it especially victimized

Mexicans and Native Americans. Brian DeLay has argued persuasively that "U.S. relations with native polities was more than a dark prelude to or a formative context for U.S. empire. This was U.S. empire." Those relations, he added, should certainly be included as a part of U.S. foreign relations. More than twice as many American Indians lived in the South as in the North in 1815, and southern seizure of Indian lands via force and treaties over the ensuing five decades set the tone for U.S.-Indian relations. Indian removal, in which Andrew Jackson, a southerner, played a central role, cleared the way for the construction of the slavery-based Cotton Kingdom in the Deep South and therefore deserves greater attention.

The cotton economy and the region's "sectionally defined economic agenda" were dependent upon continually acquiring additional territory and additional slaves for cotton cultivation. Exporting raw cotton was the engine of the pre-Civil War economy, and the search for markets drove a free-trade agenda, propelled U.S. global commercial involvement, and led slaveholders to demand the resumption of the international slave trade in the 1850s—a demand that Brady fails to address.

Until the 1850s, additions to this burgeoning U.S. empire consistently benefited the South and its slave-based political economy. The northern opposition to this pro-South, pro-slavery imperial dynamic after 1846, the rise of the free-soil, anti-slave Republican Party, Lincoln's election in 1860, and the South's loss of control over U.S. foreign relations and the power to protect slavery led to the Civil War, Brady's final area of emphasis.

Brady skillfully draws on an extensive literature to trace the role of slavery in Civil War foreign relations. He concludes that "slavery . . . was not the primary determinant" (179) of the Union's decisive campaign to forestall European diplomatic or military intervention in the American conflict. Still, fighting a war to defend slavery left the South at a distinct foreign policy disadvantage, one that the Confederacy could never overcome. As Brady demonstrates, President Lincoln and Secretary of State William H. Seward were slow to employ the North's opposition to slavery as a foreign policy asset. For the first year of the war, they emphasized that the North fought to preserve the Union rather than to abolish slavery. This allowed the South to argue that it had seceded in search of liberty and independence instead of battling to preserve an institution that most Europeans deemed inhumane and evil.

Lincoln and Seward realigned this foreign policy stance in 1862 by signing an anti-slave trade treaty with Great Britain, extending diplomatic recognition to Haiti and Liberia, and, most importantly, issuing the Emancipation Proclamation. Although the foreign policy impact of the proclamation did not become fully clear until early 1863, European policymakers could no longer deny that the North sought to end slavery and the South to preserve it. This realization, and the recognition that there was no way to reconcile the North and South on the fate of slavery, were critical considerations when Britain and France declined to intervene in the American conflict in the fall of 1862. Brady has amplified this assessment of slavery's role in Civil War diplomacy with provocative sections examining the opinions of Russian liberal intellectuals regarding slavery and the war and Lincoln's ongoing interest in the colonization of freed Blacks.

I have no quarrel with the contention that Lincoln and Seward were dilatory in moving the abolish of slavery to the forefront of U.S. foreign policy; however, there remain opportunities for greater explanation and clarity. Once more, Union and Confederate diplomatic overtures to Native Americans, especially the South's offer to help Indians reclaim their lands and to retain slavery, warrant at least a brief examination. Similarly, the inclusion of U.S.-Indian relations during the Gilded Age would buttress Brady's discussion of race and American empire in the postwar era.

Brady concludes his chapter on the Civil War by asserting that the “edge” the Lincoln administration gained from its opposition to slavery “was less a result of its own skillful diplomacy than it was an unforced error” (179) on the part of the Confederacy. Some scholars would give Lincoln and Seward much greater credit for their successful foreign policies. Moreover, what was the South’s “unforced error”? Was it the Confederacy’s defense of and persistent effort to expand slavery, which the region considered essential to its honor, economy, and political viability, and could hardly have been expected to abandon? Or did Jefferson Davis and his government commit other more specific foreign policy missteps?

In summary, Brady’s well-researched examination of slavery’s relation to antebellum U.S. foreign relations is a valuable contribution to our understanding of the history of pre-Civil War U.S. foreign relations, and he has unquestionably achieved his objective of writing an informative, accessible synthesis of this topic. His primary arguments and conclusions are sound and useful, and his narrative promotes our understanding of the relation of slavery to complicated and controversial issues such as the Haitian Revolution, the international slave trade, U.S. westward expansion, and the American Civil War. That said, his book could be improved by the inclusion of U.S.-Indian relations, by a more nuanced view of the South’s and slavery’s role in the forging of the nation’s imperial expansion across the continent, and by more clearly linking the subsequent relationship of the Cotton Kingdom and slavery to U.S. trade policy, commercial globalization, and demands for resumption of the international slave trade.

#### Notes:

1. Matthew Karp, *This Vast Southern Empire: Slaveholders at the Helm of American Foreign Policy* (Cambridge, UK, 2016), 7, 100.

2. Robert E. May, “The Irony of Confederate Diplomacy: Visions of Empire, the Monroe Doctrine, and the Quest for Nationhood,” *Journal of Southern History* 83 (February 2017): 100.

3. Brian DeLay, “Indian Politics, Empire, and the History of American Foreign Relations,” *Diplomatic History* 39, no. 5 (November 2015): 927–42 (quote on p. 935). See also Arthur N. Gilbert, “The American Indian and United States Diplomatic History,” *History Teacher* 8 (February 1975): 229–41.

4. For a succinct account of the South’s central role in Indian removal from 1815 through 1875, see Joseph A. Fry, *Dixie Looks Abroad: The South and U.S. Foreign Relations, 1789–1973* (Baton Rouge, LA, 2003), 44–49.

5. Brian Schoen, *Fragile Fabric of Union: Cotton, Federal Politics, and the Global Origins of the Civil War* (Baltimore, 2009), 178 (quote). See also Walter Johnson, *River of Dark Dreams: Slavery and Empire in the Cotton South* (Cambridge, UK, 2013); Adam Rothman, *Slave Country: American Expansion and the Origins of the Deep South* (Cambridge, UK, 2005); and Steven Hahn, *A Nation Without Borders: The United States and Its World in an Age of Civil Wars, 1830–1910* (New York, 2015).

6. Howard Jones, *Blue and Gray Diplomacy: A History of Union and Confederate Foreign Relations* (Chapel Hill, NC, 2010); Kevin Perno, *Lincoln in the World: The Making of a Statesman and the Dawn of American Power* (New York, 2013); Walter Stahr, *Seward: Lincoln’s Indispensable Man* (New York, 2012).

#### Review of Steven J. Brady, *Chained to History: Slavery and US Foreign Relations to 1865*

Michael E. Woods

In his epic history of America’s slaveholding class, Senator Henry Wilson explained “the key to the mysteries of American diplomacy.” Torn between the noble ideals of the Declaration of Independence and the demands of a formidable southern oligarchy, the country’s foreign policy veered wildly. “The nation attempted the impossible feat of moving at once in opposite directions,” argued the Massachusetts Republican, “personating on the same stage, at the same time, the angel of liberty and the demon of slavery.”<sup>1</sup>

Writing a century and a half later, Steven J. Brady offers

an accessible overview of slavery and U.S. foreign policy that resonates with Wilson’s analysis. Brady, who has published extensively on the full sweep of U.S. diplomatic history, moves briskly from the Treaty of Paris (1783) to the end of the Civil War in 1865. The first two chapters cover Anglo-American conflict over enslaved people emancipated during the Revolutionary War and the War of 1812, U.S. wrangling with Spain over Florida as a haven for self-liberated freedpeople, and the multilateral diplomacy surrounding the Haitian Revolution. Chapters 3 and 4 focus on issues of movement and mobility, including Atlantic slave trade suppression, Liberian colonization, South Carolina’s infamous Negro Seamen Act, and controversies over transnational slave escapes, including the Creole case of 1841. The final two chapters pivot into the late antebellum and war years: chapter 5 analyzes U.S. expansion schemes in Texas and Cuba, while chapter 6 surveys U.S. and Confederate diplomacy during the Civil War.

Brady covers a lot of ground in 184 pages of text, but he never loses sight of the book’s main theses. At the most basic level, *Chained to History* argues that slavery decisively shaped pre-1865 U.S. foreign policy—an important point, but not one likely to spark much debate. More striking are Brady’s arguments about the nature of slavery’s effects on American diplomacy. First, he posits that slavery drew American policymakers into recurrent overseas entanglements that thwarted their desire to limit engagement with Europe and maintain a unilateralist stance. Second, he links slavery to several foreign policy failures. Far more than a litany of victories by belligerently cosmopolitan proslavery diplomats, Brady’s narrative emphasizes uneasy commitments, uncertain maneuvers, and unfinished business.

From its vacillating relations with Haiti, to its halting cooperation with Britain’s campaign to quell the slave trade, to the decidedly mixed results of its expansionist adventures in Texas and Cuba, the U.S. foreign policy establishment presented here resembles the Janus-faced creature described by Senator Wilson. Were American policymakers determined to defend slavery as a national priority? Absolutely. Did they have the luxury of ignoring other issues, choosing all their battles, or bending the world to their will? Certainly not.

Brady offers *Chained to History* as both a synthesis of previous scholarship and a call for more research. Refreshingly, he eschews any claim to definitiveness, and I share his hope for a flurry of new works in the field. I am less convinced, however, that the extant literature on slavery and U.S. diplomacy is quite as “meager” (219) as Brady suggests. Indeed, the need for a good synthesis—like this book—is evidence of the field’s vibrancy. Slavery and foreign policy scholarship might shrink in comparison to the mountain of material on the Cold War, but even a glance at Brady’s footnotes reveals the robustness of a literature that he knows well, cites generously, and quotes often.

Specialists will readily identify the key works integrated into Brady’s analysis: Deborah A. Rosen and Matthew J. Clavin on Florida; Tim Matthewson and Ashli White on the Haitian Revolution; Eric Burin on colonization; Matthew Karp on the expansionist moment of the early 1840s; Frederick Merk, Randolph B. Campbell, and Donald M. Pletcher on Texas annexation; Robert E. May on Caribbean filibustering; and Howard Jones and Don H. Doyle on Civil War diplomacy, to name just a few. Thus, *Chained to History* is a noteworthy achievement less for breaking new ground than for crisply synthesizing a flourishing literature.

Every synthesis becomes a new thesis, and Brady offers much to ponder in his thoughtful engagement with other scholars. He questions previous depictions of proslavery American diplomats as supremely confident, arguing that they were driven at least as much by fear as by feelings of global mastery (3). And he weighs in on several important debates, including the one on U.S. relations with Haiti. Brady stresses the importance of trade as well as slavery in shaping American policy, and for significant continuity between the John Adams and Thomas Jefferson administrations’ handling of Haitian affairs (40–41, 51–60). Brady’s critically engaged synthesis reminds us that one need not fill a yawning historiographical void in order to make a

meaningful contribution.

*Chained to History* materially advances the field by flagging topics for further study, identifying areas for productive debate, and developing emerging themes. One strength is the multilingual source base of Brady's original research. Particularly noteworthy is the use of Dutch and Russian documents that enable his analysis of Civil War diplomacy to transcend the usual focus on Britain and France. Another highlight is Brady's careful attention to the limits of U.S. power. Undoubtedly informed by current events—U.S. global clout looked very different in, say, August 2021 than in March 2003 or December 1991—this theme appears in other recent studies, most notably Daniel J. Burge's reinterpretation of the failures of Manifest Destiny.<sup>2</sup>

Brady traces several types of connections between slavery and foreign policy failure. One category includes overtly proslavery endeavors, such as the effort to acquire Cuba, which fizzled out. Another encompasses policies, including some antislavery measures, which faltered in the face of hostility from American officials who worried about destabilizing slavery at home. Belated participation in the Panama Congress and the severely circumscribed naval campaign against Atlantic slave trading, among others, belong to this group. Brady's nuanced analysis, therefore, shows how slavery stifled some of the nation's best impulses, even as some of its most brazen proslavery adventures also fell short of their intended mark.

Brady's attention to how slavery intertwined with other concerns adds additional depth to the analysis. Of course, he emphasizes slavery's significance, particularly in cases where American officials tried to downplay it, as some did with Texas annexation. But American leaders could not afford to be single-minded about slavery. Nowhere is this more strikingly clear than in Brady's intriguing account of early U.S. relations with Haiti. Haunted by the specter of Black revolt and harboring racism that crossed sectional lines, U.S. policymakers also knew that Sainte Domingue had been their country's second-largest trading partner before 1791 (35). Thus, apprehensions of losing a lucrative market mingled with more obvious anxieties to produce the shifting U.S. response to the complex geopolitics of the Haitian revolutionary era. This response included Adams's armed support for Toussaint Louverture's attack on Jacmel (51) and Jefferson's decision to help sustain Haitian resistance to Napoleonic invasion (59).

Incidentally, while Brady focuses on the Washington, Adams, and Jefferson years, racist dread and material desire continued to perplex U.S. policymakers throughout the long decades of official non-recognition. In 1835, for instance, commercial agent William Miles wrote gingerly to warn that Haiti's discriminatory tariff duties, imposed in retaliation for non-recognition, would soon drive American merchants out of the market. "I am perfectly aware of the delicacy of the question," Miles insisted, but he feared that "the entire trade will be soon lost."<sup>3</sup> In the age of Jackson and beyond, American diplomats saw in Haiti both a nation of Nat Turners and a pool of potential customers.

Finally, Brady offers keen insight into the tension between early policymakers' unilateralist instincts and the pressures, stemming from slavery, to engage in the international arena. From the precarious plantation society perched just offshore in Cuba, to the colonizationist outpost planted in Liberia, slavery pulled American diplomats deeper into a world dominated by the same European powers that Washington and Jefferson exhorted them to keep at arm's length. Some of the stated aversion to entangling alliances was likely a matter of rhetorical habit, but Brady shows how, particularly in the earliest years of the early republic, slavery intensified Americans' involvement overseas while simultaneously setting limits on what they could achieve. It has become a truism that U.S. enslavers were more cosmopolitan than scholars once believed; Brady shows that their encounters with the wider world were not always optional, comfortable, or

successful.

Future scholars might sharpen these insights by framing their analysis more precisely around the people who drew the U.S. diplomatic corps into world affairs. In *Chained to History*, "slavery" exerts a vital influence, but this institutional focus can obscure human agency and limit opportunities to explore in greater depth how different groups of people actually shaped diplomacy as they navigated the treacherous waters of the Atlantic world. Brady's coverage of the Creole case and the protracted Anglo-American disputes over wartime emancipation, for instance, could be recast as an analysis of enslaved people's ability to influence foreign affairs by taking flight and forging transnational communities.

This is hardly an unexplored issue. Scholars like Alice Baumgartner, Elena Abbott, and dann J. Brody, among others, have shown that enslaved people influenced international politics by escaping toward all points of the compass.<sup>4</sup> But greater attention to this dynamic would strengthen Brady's synthesis and perhaps inspire more research. Several generations of scholars have shown how enslaved people's resistance influenced politics within the United States. As we learn more about the diplomatic ramifications of such resistance, it is time to take stock of what we know and where we need to look next.

Similarly, more attention to pressure from U.S. enslavers who did not hold public office would also help flesh out the human agency that made slavery such a vexing issue in American foreign

policy. Like many scholars before him, Brady shows how the prevalence of enslavers among U.S. officials, from Washington and Jefferson to Tyler and Upshur and beyond, kept the interests of their class at the forefront of American policymaking. Yet the influence of domestic politics and enslavers' insidious sway over internal political discourse, agenda-setting, and electoral arithmetic is not always clear here. When it does appear, Brady's analysis is excellent, as in his coverage of how John Quincy Adams, a secretary of state engaged in a fierce battle for the presidency in 1824, backed away from an Anglo-American anti-slave trade agreement that included the mutual right of search on the high seas (77). Future research should investigate how enslavers and their allies organized and mobilized at all levels to promote specific policies designed to safeguard slavery against perceived international threats.

Historians typically interpret the "slave power" as a horizontal network of officeholders, and thanks to scholars like William Dustinberre, we know how their material and ideological interests informed their politics.<sup>5</sup> But what about the vertical networks of power and pressure through which enslavers, particularly in places like Texas and Florida, on the South's exposed flanks, sought to influence policy at the highest levels of government? The politics of enslavers and enslaved alike were forged in the gritty struggles over subsistence, labor, and mobility that they waged in fields, forests, and swamps across the South. We are beginning to learn how those struggles impinged on the highest levels of international politics. The best way to access those diplomatic histories is to focus on the people who had the most at stake in the outcome.

In *Chained to History*, Steven J. Brady offers a valuable synthesis of a flourishing field whose future is bright. Attuned to slavery's central role in shaping the modern world and accustomed to tracing stories that cross international lines, scholars are poised to expand the vibrant literature on slavery and U.S. diplomacy that Brady has woven into this volume. Additional work on the themes Brady has highlighted, and productive debate over the arguments he has presented, will sustain the field's vitality and enhance our insights into the diplomatic history of the nineteenth century's largest slaveholding republic.

Notes:

1. Henry Wilson, *History of the Rise and Fall of the Slave Power in America*, 3 vols. (Boston, 1872), 1:111.
2. Daniel J. Burge, *A Failed Vision of Empire: The Collapse of Manifest Destiny*,

1845–1872 (Lincoln, NE, 2022).

3. William Miles to John Forsyth, December 9, 1835, RG 59, *Despatches from U.S. Consuls in Aux Cayes, Haiti, 1797–1874*, National Archives and Records Administration, Washington, DC (T330-1).

4. Alice Baumgartner, *South to Freedom: Runaway Slaves to Mexico and the Road to the Civil War* (New York, 2020); Elena K. Abbott, *Beacons of Liberty: International Free Soil and the Fight for Racial Justice in Antebellum America* (Cambridge, UK, 2021); dann J. Broyles, *Borderland Blacks: Two Cities in the Niagara Region during the Final Decades of Slavery* (Baton Rouge, LA, 2022).

5. William Dusing, *Slavemaster President: The Double Career of James Polk* (Oxford, UK, 2003).

## Review of Steven J. Brady, *Chained to History: Slavery and US Foreign Relations to 1865*

Stacey Smith

In *Chained to History*, Steven J. Brady presents a detailed account of how the institution of slavery and the international slave trade shaped U.S. foreign relations with Europe in the Atlantic World from the end of the American Revolution to the end of the U.S. Civil War. As a historian of slavery and enslaved people in the United States, I likely approached his work from a perspective different from that of U.S. foreign relations scholars. I came to the book hoping to get a better understanding of how enslaved and formerly enslaved people themselves influenced the course of American diplomacy.

In the realm of nineteenth-century U.S. political and legal history, scholars have been increasingly interested in the role that enslaved people, not just the institution of slavery, played in pushing the nation toward sectional division and war. As Scott Hancock has eloquently argued in an article on the Underground Railroad's impact on the Civil War, it is essential "to recenter agency by seeing slaves themselves—not just the institution of slavery—as a critical causal force." Hancock concludes that by escaping north to the free states, and thereby constantly pressing the issue of slavery into public discourse and into the state and federal courts, "Black people, not simply slavery, pushed the nation to war."<sup>1</sup>

Could a similar argument be made for understanding the origin of the United States' tense diplomatic relationships with Europe, especially Great Britain, before the Civil War? To what extent did enslaved people—men, women, and children who pursued their own visions of freedom—drive U.S. relationships with the rest of the world in the first critical century of the nation's existence? While older literature on U.S. foreign relations rarely addressed the enslaved, the field's more recent emphasis on non-state actors as important participants in the making of international diplomacy seems to open the way for exploring these questions.

Overall, *Chained to History* presents some tantalizing arguments about how enslaved people shaped U.S. foreign relations, but it also leaves some important avenues unexamined. It is clear from Brady's narrative that enslaved people's resistance was a driving force behind many of the issues that vexed American and European diplomats in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. The first chapter demonstrates how enslaved African Americans' decisions to run away to the British, both during the American Revolution and during the War of 1812, forced the two nations into tense wrangling over the fate of freedom seekers. As Brady's expert retelling shows, the question of whether Britain would have to return enslaved fugitives "carried off" by British forces or at least compensate American slaveholders for their losses emerged as one of "the most refractory and unsettled issues" (9) at the negotiations over the Treaty of Paris in 1783. Similarly, the status of escaped slaves "posed a seemingly insoluble irritant in postwar Anglo-American

relations" after the War of 1812 (18).

Brady's second chapter on the Haitian Revolution goes the farthest in incorporating enslaved people as central actors in the diplomatic history of the Atlantic World. Brady deftly analyzes how "self-emancipated" slaves, including the Haitian general Toussaint Louverture, reshaped global relationships by playing the Adams and Jefferson administrations off against European governments in London, Paris, and Madrid. One of Brady's most interesting insights is that the Jefferson administration, though led by a slaveholder, built an unexpectedly cooperative relationship with Black Haitians in order to stave off French influence in the Caribbean. The power dynamics behind the Louisiana Purchase take on new meaning when it becomes clear that Thomas Jefferson, rather than enjoying an unexpected political windfall from the Haitian Revolution, deliberately aided Black Haitian rebels in resisting French rule.

While not often explicitly focused on the actions of people of African descent, Brady's chapters on the suppression of the African slave trade suggest the importance of enslaved Black resistance to reordering international relations in the Atlantic World. Building on the work of Irvin D.S. Winsboro and Joe Knetsch, Brady illuminates the diplomatic significance of the "Saltwater Railroad," a clandestine network of Black freedom seekers who fled Florida by sailing to the British Bahamas, where slavery was abolished in 1834.<sup>2</sup>

British authorities refused to return individual African American refugees who sailed to freedom, even when these people were escapees from the U.S. domestic slave trade. In 1841, slave traders shipped 135 enslaved people from Virginia to New Orleans on *The Creole*. Nineteen people mutinied, killed a slaveholding passenger, overpowered the crew, and forced the ship to sail to freedom in the Bahamas. Americans demanded the extradition of the enslaved people so that they could be tried for murder and insurrection, but British authorities resisted all such demands.

Brady convincingly argues that the *Creole* incident and escape via the Saltwater Railroad were "a testament to the compelling appeal of freedom and the ingenuity of slave resistance" (93) and had both national and international significance. British refusal to return freedom seekers to bondage deepened sectional divides in the United States, as Southern slaveholders clamored for the federal government to extract compensation for lost "property." Meanwhile, white Americans' outrage over the *Creole* incident threatened to undermine delicate Anglo-American diplomatic negotiations leading up to the Webster-Ashburton Treaty of 1842. Much like enslaved people who ran to the northern states via the Underground Railroad, those along the Saltwater Railroad forced a confrontation between the British and American legal systems that threatened to unravel diplomatic relations between the nations.

In short, there is much that is suggestive about Brady's book for our understanding of how enslaved people reshaped and even undermined American diplomacy through their own acts of resistance. At the same time, there are two areas where inattention to enslaved people, especially to freedom seekers, obscures important threads of U.S. foreign policy on slavery. These areas include diplomatic relations between nations located in continental North America and the diplomatic crisis over Confederate nationhood.

One important blind spot in *Chained to History* stems from Brady's fairly exclusive focus on transatlantic foreign policy and relations among diplomats in Washington, DC, London, Paris, Madrid, and (occasionally) the British West Indies. Foreign policy in continental North America gets far less attention, which in turn leads Brady to overlook some of the key ways that fugitives from slavery shaped American diplomacy.

Long before the 1841 *Creole* incident, thousands of refugees

from slavery sought freedom in British Canada. At least as early as the 1814 Treaty of Ghent, which ended the War of 1812, British colonial officials in Canada refused to extradite fugitive slaves on the grounds that the 1772 *Somerset* decision liberated them once they touched free British soil. British courts and diplomats persisted in this policy for decades, even as escapes along the Underground Railroad increased and Southern slaveholders demanded that the U.S. federal government press Britain for reparations.

As Gordon S. Barker has shown, free and formerly enslaved African Americans were important participants in this diplomatic rivalry, not only as refugees from slavery and rescuers of those refugees but as vocal proponents of British interests in North America against the United States.<sup>3</sup> Moreover, the tense negotiations over the Webster-Ashburton Treaty emerged in part because of escapes via the Saltwater Railroad but also, more significantly, because of the highly publicized cases of thousands of Black people who fled slavery for freedom in Canada. More attention to the diplomatic impacts of freedom seekers as North American border crossers would allow for a more complete rendering of Anglo-American international relations in this period. It would also highlight the importance of enslaved people's resistance to this story.

Similarly, the role of enslaved people as southern border crossers, as refugees seeking freedom in the Republic of Mexico, could illuminate new dimensions of slavery diplomacy. Scholars such as Alice Baumgartner and Sarah Cornell have documented how the escape of between three and five thousand enslaved people from the United States to Mexico in the first half of the nineteenth century had profound consequences for American foreign policy.<sup>4</sup>

In her book, *South to Freedom: Runaway Slaves to Mexico and the Road to Civil War*, Baumgartner finds that Mexico, despite its internal political instability and territorial losses to the United States, was not a weak national power. Mexico's abolition of slavery starting in the 1820s, and later, its policy of liberating all slaves who reached Mexican soil, gave it the moral upper hand in continental affairs. In fact, the abolition of slavery in Mexico, including the territories that the United States seized in the U.S.-Mexico War, frustrated later proslavery efforts to establish African American bondage in the West and also fueled the Free Soil movement.

In all fairness, Baumgardner's compelling account of enslaved people's role in U.S.-Mexico diplomacy was probably published too recently (in 2020) for her insights to be incorporated into Brady's 2022 book. Still, her findings suggest that more attention to Mexico and southbound fugitives from slavery would have rounded out the mostly transatlantic and often Anglo-centric analysis in *Chained to History*.

The second area where attending more to the role of freedom seekers would improve the analysis is the final chapter on Civil War diplomacy. Here the omission of enslaved people seems a major oversight, because virtually all Civil War historians now put refugees from slavery at the heart of the story of U.S. wartime politics. The liberation and arming of enslaved Black Southerners repeated patterns established by the British during the American Revolution and the War of 1812. This time, too, enslaved people pushed themselves and their desires for freedom onto the agendas of world powers.

It is well established that the massive flight of around half a million slaves drove congressional and presidential policy toward slavery, from the Confiscation Acts to the Emancipation Proclamation to the Thirteenth Amendment. It is hard to imagine U.S. diplomacy with Europe having the outcome that it did—non-recognition of the Confederacy—without the pressures that hundreds of thousands of self-liberated slaves placed on the Lincoln administration, the U.S. military, and the federal legal system. The focus on high-ranking politicians and diplomats, with barely a nod to the grassroots African American freedom movement that made national emancipation possible in the first place, makes this last chapter the least satisfying in the book.

Ultimately, *Chained to History* is a useful and thought-

provoking source for historians of slavery who want to understand the role of enslaved people in world affairs. While Brady rarely elevates enslaved people to their rightful place as important players on the world stage alongside American and European diplomats, his analysis hints at the ways in which Black people themselves—as refugees from slavery, plantation rebels, slave-ship mutineers, and soldiers in liberating armies—remade the diplomatic landscape of the Atlantic World in the nineteenth century.

Notes:

1. Scott Hancock, "Crossing Freedom's Fault Line: The Underground Railroad and Recentring African Americans in Civil War Causality," *Civil War History* 59 (June 2013): 173–74.
2. Irvin D.S. Winsboro and Joe Knetsch, "Florida Slaves, the 'Saltwater Railroad' to the Bahamas, and Anglo-American Diplomacy," *Journal of Southern History* 79 (February 2013): 51–78.
3. Gordon S. Barker, "Revisiting 'British Principle Talk': Antebellum Black Expectations and Racism in Early Ontario," in *Fugitive Slaves and Spaces of Freedom in North America*, ed. Damian Alan Pargas (Gainesville, FL, 2018), 34–69.
4. Alice L. Baumgartner, *South to Freedom: Runaway Slaves to Mexico and the Road to the Civil War* (New York, 2020); and Sarah Cornell, "Citizens of Nowhere: Fugitive Slaves and Free African Americans in Mexico, 1833–1857," *Journal of American History* 100 (September 2013): 351–74.

## Author's Response

Steven Brady

I would like to start by thanking Joseph A. Fry, Brian Rouleau, Michael E. Woods, and Stacey Smith for their insightful reviews of *Chained to History*. Having contributed reviews to roundtables myself, I know very well how much effort is involved in the process, and I am truly grateful that these scholars have undertaken such heavy lifting in the case of my book. I would also like to express my gratitude to Andrew Johns for choosing *Chained to History* for a roundtable discussion. I find these exchanges highly valuable, and I look forward eagerly to finding *Passport* in my departmental mailbox each quarter. Many and sincere thanks to all.

In order to respond to the most significant question that arises in the reviews—to wit, the contribution of the book to the scholarship—I should first give some background on how I came to the topic of slavery and U.S. foreign relations. As with much of my scholarly work these days, the genesis of *Chained to History* can be found in my experiences teaching undergraduates. I have for many years offered a course on American foreign policy from the American Revolution to the Cold War. It struck me early on that slavery was such a major factor in so much of America's domestic history that it must also have been a factor in U.S. relations with the world. Naturally I decided that I needed to add something on slavery and U.S. foreign relations to my syllabus.

However, in seeking readings to assign, I was struck by the absence of a single synthetic work on the topic. I distinctly recall thinking to myself that "someone ought to write a book on this!" And then I promptly moved on to other projects. When Don Fehrenbacher's magisterial study of the U.S. government and slavery appeared in 2001, his chapter on foreign policy finally gave me a very useful, short reading to assign to my students. But Fehrenbacher's book made me even more convinced that a book-length study was necessary, so important did he make the issue of slavery and U.S. foreign relations seem. I still thought that the hypothetical "someone" ought to write that book.

After a couple of other projects I had planned to work on were "scooped" by other scholars, I finally alighted on the idea that perhaps I should take on this (rather daunting) task. I started by going back to Fehrenbacher. My approach to diplomatic history has always relied on an internationalist methodology. Inspired early in my career by such luminaries as Robert Ferrell, Michael Hunt, and Christopher Thorne, as well as a host of German international historians, I have approached American foreign policy by placing it in a broader international context, looking at whatever is necessary, in whatever language, to understand all the factors that had a part in shaping the policies that emerged from complex international interactions.

In looking again at Fehrenbacher, and then others, what struck me was the tendency to explain the foreign relations of American slavery largely by addressing factors in domestic U.S. history that led to policy developments. My plan was thus to internationalize the study of slavery and U.S. foreign relations: to look at the ways in which the interests, power, and actions of other nations shaped and constrained the results of policy decisions taken by the United States.

The book certainly contributes discrete new knowledge. For instance, I believe the discussion of the Russian reaction to emancipation in chapter 6 is a new addition to the scholarship. But the framing is a unique intervention. Internationalizing the subject, to my mind, makes a significant contribution to the debate (*pace* some of the reviewers in this roundtable). I believe that I make this point early and clearly in the book; I certainly made no effort to hide it. In the introduction, I state that “an international history . . . serves significantly to illustrate the reasons for the inability of the slaveholders who so frequently directed American foreign relations to implement some of their cherished policies, and to impose their will on the world beyond America’s borders” (4).

In the epilogue, I make the case for the book’s contribution at least as strongly, noting that “the international relations that emerged [from the foreign relations of slavery] cannot be understood merely by looking at the prejudices, interests and assumptions of a certain set of policymakers. Rather, the international context significantly conditioned the American policies that emerged from a complex set of Atlantic interrelations” (181–82). In the pages between the introduction and the epilogue, I sought to demonstrate the ways in which international relations, and not just U.S. foreign policy, are key to understanding the history addressed in the book.

This theme serves as more than a mere leitmotif in *Chained to History*. It is in fact at the very heart of the book. Whether the book is convincing in its effort to internationalize its subject I must leave to its readers. But whether it succeeds or fails, *Chained to History* analyses the foreign relations of U.S. slavery from a perspective broader than the domestic determinants of those relations and thus helps to clarify the actual *results* of American attempts to conduct a foreign policy of slavery. This point is almost completely passed over in the reviews, though I am grateful to Woods for pointing out the multilingual source base of my research and the contributions that it enabled me to make. Because I am hopeful that *Chained to History* will inspire further scholarship, I end this section of my response with an adjuration to other scholars to keep the international context in mind: there is still much work to be done.

The second thrust of the reviews centers not on the book that I have written, but on a book that I have not. I will stipulate at the start of my response to this point that there is much that is not in *Chained to History*. One of the goals of the book was to keep it at a length that would make it a candidate for course adoption. That obliged me to make decisions about what to include in the book and what to leave out. Any decision for additional inclusions would require cutting other sections down or indeed, out. My sense when I finished the manuscript was that I had been largely successful in weighing this matter. I understand, however, that scholars approaching the issue of slavery and U.S. foreign relations from perspectives different from mine would have made different choices. Such is book writing.

Since Smith focuses her review on what is not in the book, I begin with a response to her review. Her primary concern is “how enslaved and formerly enslaved people themselves influenced the course of American diplomacy.” She grants that the book does address this issue in some cases and gives its treatment of the Saltwater Railroad and Haiti as examples. I agree with her suggestion that a treatment of escapees to Canada “would allow for a more complete rendering of Anglo-American international relations in this period.”

Similarly, Smith writes that an examination of slaves who escaped to Mexico would have added to the treatment of their agency. She is, alas, correct in her suspicion that Alice Baumgartner’s impressive book on this topic appeared too late for inclusion in the final manuscript. I grant that if I had had access to Baumgartner’s book prior to completing

the manuscript, I no doubt would have made more of the matter. As it is, I sought to address this issue in my treatment of the annexation of Texas. No doubt I could have done more. But as interesting as additional discussion of Mexico would have been, it is difficult to see how it would have altered the book’s thrust and conclusions in any significant way. In the end, an author with a word limit must make decisions. Again, I concede that mine would not be everyone else’s.

My response to Fry’s suggestions falls along the same lines. According to him, I missed a “golden opportunity” by failing to address the issue of Native Americans and Southern expansionism. I agree that this is indeed a terrific topic. But I believe that it is one for a different book—one that has as its primary theme the question of American expansion and its interrelations with the issue of American slavery. I would eagerly read such a book, but I didn’t seek to write it. It is a massive subject that goes beyond the scope of a book that focuses—for weal or woe—primarily on Atlantic history. In any event, as I noted about Smith’s suggestions, I don’t see how inclusion of this topic would have altered the book’s main arguments or conclusions.

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Rouleau raises a key—and fascinating—question about the definition of slavery itself. Regrettably, there were indeed bonded labor systems beyond those I address. But selecting a topic for a scholarly book necessarily raises the question of what to focus on. Obviously, I chose to look at the chattel enslavement of people of African descent. I don’t consider this a bad definition to work with.

chose to look at the chattel enslavement of people of African descent. I don’t consider this a bad definition to work with. As Rouleau observes at the very beginning of his review, *Chained to History* “channels the spirit of the 1619 Project.” Of course, I began working on the book several years before I became aware of that project. But I was thrilled when Nikole Hannah-Jones and company produced a work that attempted, in Rouleau’s words, to “reorient the master narrative of U.S. history around Black bondage.” It was clear to me that my project and theirs were intellectual

cousins.

My scope and argument are, of course, more limited than the 1619 Project’s, since I address only foreign relations and seek to portray slavery as a highly significant but not always dominant determinant of American policy. I fear that I repeat myself when I say that I would eagerly anticipate a book that addresses bonded labor more broadly as an aspect of U.S. diplomatic history. But this seems a massive topic to address in a book about Black slavery.

As I noted, Rouleau begins his review with a very apt mention of the 1619 Project. Woods starts off with an equally relevant quotation, unfamiliar to me until now, from Henry Wilson. Wilson’s analysis indeed reflects much of what I sought to do in *Chained to History*. I take Woods’s recommendations for future directions in the scholarship seriously, and I think they are excellent. Especially intriguing is the idea of investigating “vertical networks of power and pressure” that influenced slaveholders and their northern allies “at the highest levels of power.” Likewise, and relating back to Smith’s comments, more study of the agency of the enslaved will contribute to our understanding of slavery’s connection with U.S. diplomatic history. In other words, I agree with Woods that a “focus on the *people* who had the most at stake in the outcome” of policy decisions is warranted.

I should mention a final point on what could be added and thus what future scholars might consider rich fields to plow. The reviewers have suggested further *domestic* U.S. avenues of investigation. If I had had a greater word limit for the book, I would have liked to include even more about policies, and policymaking, in those countries that, interacting with the United States, influenced, constrained, and impelled the American foreign policy of slavery. It strikes me that there is more to be done by scholars possessing appropriate language skills, as well as training in, say, the history of Russia or Latin America. In this, I am of course admitting another limitation of *Chained to History*, though I believe that the book does a rather good job of internationalizing the story as it is.